

A new era

Minister pays tribute to ESB for commitment to economy at West Offaly Power opening

By Bernie Healy

THE new West Offaly power plant was officially opened by Minister for Finance, Brian Cowen, TD, on Friday July 8th last at Shannonbridge, Co. Offaly. The 150MW peat powered plant was commissioned in February and is already producing electricity on the national grid.

41 staff are employed at the new state of the art facility which replaces the 40-year-old Shannonbridge station. The plant was built at a cost of €240M and is more environmentally friendly producing fewer emissions than the previous plant.

Station Manager, Pat Treanor welcomed the guests, many of whom had been involved in the project. "Most of you here contributed to a large extent to bring this to fruition. It has the most up to date practices and the full support and driving force of the board and management of ESB. It represents a total investment of almost €5 Billion in the midland region, running at 150 megawatts it is the second of these plants to come on line," he said.

ESB Chairman, Tadhg O'Donoghue, thanked the various external bodies who had supported the project and in particular Senator Mary O'Rourke who signed the document that gave the approval for the station to go ahead. "This station will be of great value not just to the midlands but to the citizens of Ireland," he stated. "Today is a wonderful day for West Offaly and ESB. We are renewing the whole electricity infrastructure in Ireland, spending €3M every day and almost €1BN annually. This networks project is now almost completed together with the opening of four generating plants, Lough Ree Power in Lanesboro, Coolkeeragh in Derry, the plant here at West Offaly Power and later in the year, Amorebieta in Spain. Part of the process that ESB is going through is to give us what the country and ESB needs."

The Chairman also thanked the staff who had gone from old 'people-based' technology to new plant with more up to date technology and less staff. The negotiations for best practice were delivered locally in Shannonbridge, he said. "It is a quite traumatic time for staff when a plant is closing and I want to thank all who supported us. It is a wonderful day for a modern Ireland that depends on security of supply."

Bud Cherry, CEO of main contractor Foster Wheeler said the plant was now one of the largest peat burning facilities in the world dedicated to burning peat only. It is of substantial economic value to the Irish economy. "It displays outstanding judgement to the people who lead the country and have the commitment to this very strong renewable industry," he told the gathering. Cherry said it was a very challenging project for Foster Wheeler. "West Offaly Power, together with Lough Ree Power, is the largest single contract ever executed by Foster Wheeler Contracting on its own." He applauded all the people who worked on the plant and thanked the community who were so hospitable and understanding of the disruptive effect that the construction caused. "I want to thank the ESB and ESB team who were the most professional



(l-r) Paddy Stapelton, Group Manager, Power Generation, Pat Treanor, Station Manager, Tadhg O'Donoghue, ESB Chairman, Brian Cowen, T.D. Minister for Finance, Bud Cherry, CEO Foster Wheeler and Padraig McManus, ESB Chief Executive. Photographs by Alan Murphy.

and constructive customer I have had the pleasure to deal with," he concluded.

Minister for Finance, Brian Cowen T.D., in his address said that in 1984 when he started his career in politics "we were starting what appeared to be the decline of the peat energy business". Thankfully through efforts of so many people in this organisation ESB has remained for us down here in the midlands. The sister companies of ESB and Bord na Mona are co-dependent and the two companies are the driving force of huge employment in the whole midlands area spanning many parts of the country. Without them we would not be in the position we enjoy today. In many ways the viability of some communities was dependent on these two companies. Thankfully we found a strategy and way forward with the corporate efficiency of both companies."

The Minister said that huge changes had to be brought about and implemented which had to comply with regulatory requirements which are EU wide. "Some people here today have given their lifetime and I want to thank you for your contribution. Certain decisions were taken and negotiated and successfully concluded to meet best practice. It is typical of people in the area and in ESB to take that level of change to ensure we had a peat fired future. It has been a great privilege for me to be asked to open both plants."

Minister Cowen thanked the chairman, chief executive and board of ESB together with politicians of all political persuasions who saw the benefit for the community they serve. "I want to pay tribute to Senator Mary O'Rourke who ensured the public service obligation (PSO) was put in place, opened doors, listened to concerns and was a willing ear to all of us. Producing 30 per cent more electricity than previously, with a

reduction of emissions, ESB found the technology to ensure we could raise the environmental standards as required and meet the growth in demand. Investment in infrastructure is central to the economy and I want to thank ESB. Challenge of change continues no matter what business we're in and we need to keep ahead of the posse. Native fuel has played a huge part in making this economical particularly with the fluctuating price of oil. Peat is a natural native resource and Ireland is open to challenges so we must be ready to take up opportunities that will make us successful."

"Without people who have been creative and willing to change we wouldn't be here today," said the Minister. "It gives me great pleasure to work with people who look forward. This secures a future for the communities we represent, secures the future of Ireland and means our people no longer have to go abroad to make a living."



Minister Tom Parlon with Padraig McManus.



Bud Cherry and Senator Mary O'Rourke.



Tom Moloney Technical Services, Team Leader and John Lyons, Environmental Manager.



Ex Offaly hurlers and ESB staff Joe Dooley and Sean Lowry.



Eanna O'Conghaile and Jenny O'Hara, Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources with Declan O'Brien, (second from left) and Frank Scott (far right), ESB Power Generation.



(l-r) Michael Airey, Michael Corrigan and Brendan McGrath.



(l-r) Jimmy Corrigan, Joe Lyons and Paddy Martin.



(l-r) Cormac Talbot, Maurice Flynn, retired Station Manager, Shannonbridge and Dan Hogan.



Sinead Moylan Ryan, Billy Duffy and Senator Pat Moylan.

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-Minister Brian Cowen.



Radio 103 Midlands puts Joe Lyons under the spotlight at the event.



(l-r) Christy King, ESB Networks, Niall Sweeney, Declan Conlon and Paddy Stapleton.



(l-r) Enjoying the function are Pat Greene, Joe Daly and John Kelly.



(l-r) Cllr Fergus McDonnell, Eamonn Connolly, ESB Worker Director, Cllr Eddie Fitzpatrick and Cllr Tom Feighery.

Meet the staff at the West Offaly Power Plant



David Corbett, Liam Mellia, Ronan O'Flynn, Brendan Murray, Brendan Bennett and Darragh Doyle.



The Minister and other VIPs on a tour of the West Offaly Power Station.



Bertie Gulnan, Patsy McGarvey and David Kenny.



Liam Cullinan, Teresa McTigue and Jimmy Farrell, the WOP Commercial Financial Team.



Pat Kenny, John Wall and Michael Finn.



WOP Staff members with the cheque for Bothar.

Pictured right Liam Boland, John Conniffe and Michale Coen, Members of the WOP Operations Team in the Control Room.