



# Ecolab Inc. (ECL)

Updated February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023 by Aristofanis Papadatos

## Key Metrics

<b>Current Price:</b>	\$162	<b>5 Year CAGR Estimate:</b>	5.4%	<b>Market Cap:</b>	\$46.7 B
<b>Fair Value Price:</b>	\$98	<b>5 Year Growth Estimate:</b>	15.0%	<b>Ex-Dividend Date:</b>	3/13/2023 <sup>1</sup>
<b>% Fair Value:</b>	165%	<b>5 Year Valuation Multiple Estimate:</b>	-9.6%	<b>Dividend Payment Date:</b>	4/14/2023
<b>Dividend Yield:</b>	1.3%	<b>5 Year Price Target</b>	\$197	<b>Years Of Dividend Growth:</b>	31
<b>Dividend Risk Score:</b>	A	<b>Retirement Suitability Score:</b>	C	<b>Rating:</b>	Hold

## Overview & Current Events

Ecolab Inc. is the global leader in water, hygiene, and energy technologies and services. The company operates in three major business segments: Global Industrial, Global Institutional, and Global Energy. Ecolab was founded in 1923 and has grown to a market capitalization of \$46.7 billion with annual revenue of \$14 billion. With 31 years of consecutive dividend increases, Ecolab is a member of the Dividend Aristocrats Index.

In mid-February, Ecolab reported (2/14/23) financial results for the fourth quarter of fiscal 2022. Organic sales grew 12% over the prior year's quarter, but the company was once again hurt by high-cost inflation, which greatly increased product costs. Despite material price hikes, adjusted earnings-per-share dipped -1%, partly due to a strong dollar. On the bright side, thanks to strong price hikes, management provided guidance for double-digit growth of adjusted operating income in 2023. As a result, the stock rallied 4% on the day after the earnings release. Given the bright outlook provided by management but also the lackluster business performance of Ecolab since the advent of inflation, we expect earnings-per-share around \$4.90 this year.

## Growth on a Per-Share Basis

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2028
<b>EPS</b>	\$3.54	\$4.18	\$4.37	\$4.37	\$4.69	\$5.25	\$5.82	\$4.02	\$4.69	\$4.49	<b>\$4.90</b>	<b>\$9.86</b>
<b>DPS</b>	\$0.97	\$1.16	\$1.34	\$1.42	\$1.52	\$1.64	\$1.84	\$1.88	\$1.92	\$2.06	<b>\$2.12</b>	<b>\$3.31</b>
<b>Shares<sup>2</sup></b>	300.8	299.9	296.0	291.8	293.6	292.2	292.6	288.7	289.5	285.8	<b>284.0</b>	<b>280.0</b>

Ecolab has significantly grown its earnings-per-share in the last decade, apart from the flat year in 2016, 2020 due to the pandemic and 2022 due to high inflation. This consistent growth record proves the strength of the business model and execution and reveals that the company is on a reliable growth trajectory. Ecolab grew its earnings-per-share by 10.9% per year during 2011-2019. It incurred a decline in 2020 due to the pandemic and in 2022 due to high inflation. We view these headwinds as temporary and expect 15% average annual growth of earnings-per-share over the next five years.

Ecolab's growth will largely come from bolt-on acquisitions. The company has historically implemented a strategy of acquiring smaller household products companies and scaling their products through its impressive supply chain. In late 2021, Ecolab acquired PuroLite for \$3.7 billion in cash. PuroLite sells high-end ion exchange resins for the separation of solutions in over 30 countries. It generates annual sales of approximately \$0.4 billion. We expect more tuck-in acquisitions to materialize for Ecolab moving forward.

## Valuation Analysis

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Now	2028
<b>Avg. P/E</b>	25.4	26.0	25.9	26.3	27.5	27.6	31.8	49.2	46.7	36.9	<b>33.1</b>	<b>20.0</b>
<b>Avg. Yld.</b>	1.1%	1.1%	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	1.1%	1.0%	1.0%	0.9%	1.2%	<b>1.3%</b>	<b>1.7%</b>

<sup>1</sup> Estimated date.

<sup>2</sup> In millions.

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Ecolab is trading at a price-to-earnings ratio of 33.1, which is a markedly rich valuation level. Although the stock has traded at an average price-to-earnings ratio of 32.3 over the last decade, we believe that a fair earnings multiple for Ecolab is closer to 20. If the valuation approaches this level over the next five years, it will cause a -9.6% headwind to the annualized returns.

## Safety, Quality, Competitive Advantage, & Recession Resiliency

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2028
Payout	27.4%	27.8%	30.5%	32.5%	32.4%	31.2%	31.6%	46.8%	40.9%	45.9%	<b>43.3%</b>	<b>33.6%</b>

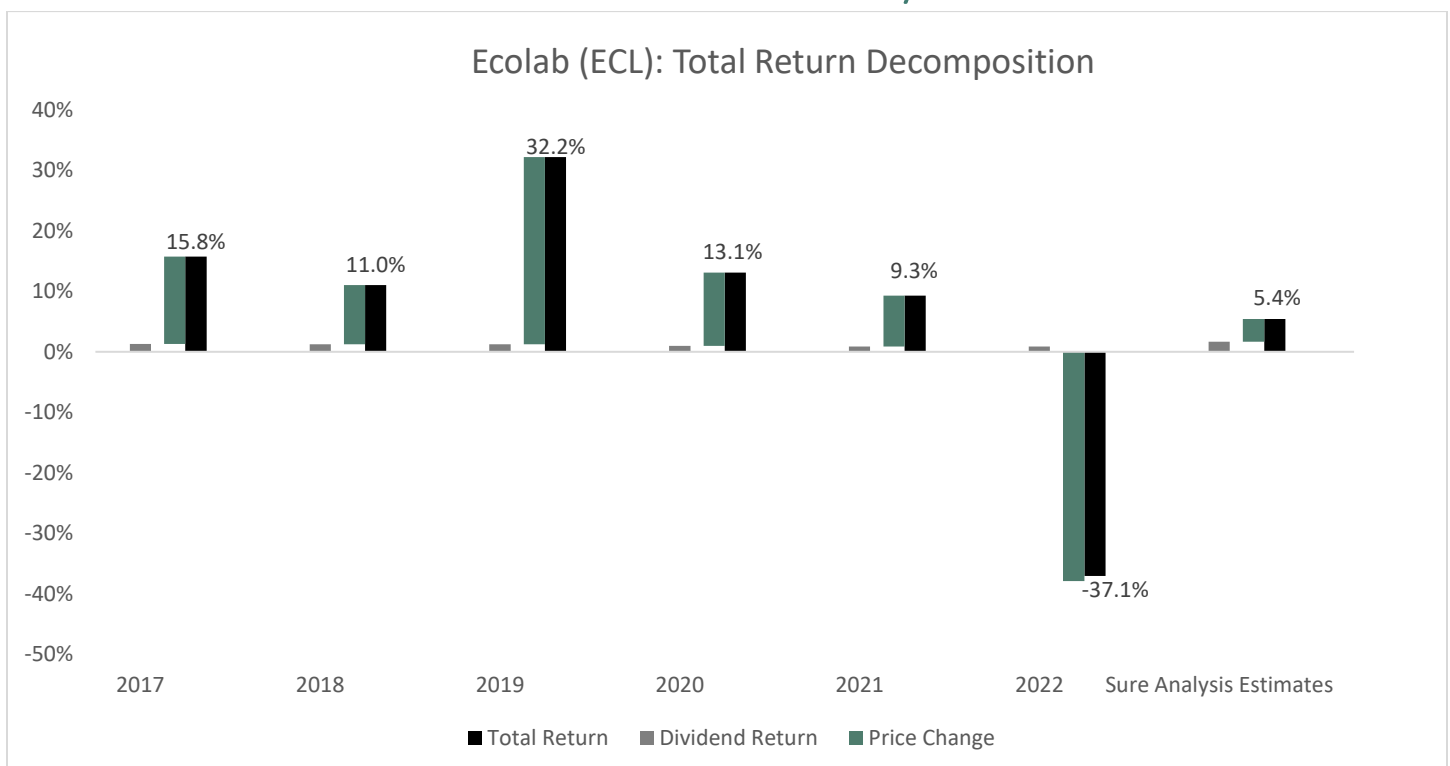
Thanks to its strong business performance and its relatively low shareholder distributions, Ecolab has a remarkably strong balance sheet, and its interest expense consumes just 14% of its operating income.

Ecolab's most compelling competitive strength is its scale, which allows it to aggressively invest in marketing, advertising, and research and development. Ecolab spends more than \$1 billion on research and development each year, which has allowed it to create an intellectual property portfolio that contains more than 9,000 patents. All said, the company's size, scale, and research focus lead us to believe that many years of dividend growth are yet to come for this high-quality Dividend Aristocrat.

## Final Thoughts & Recommendation

Ecolab has a remarkably consistent growth record, which is one of the most important features for investors. However, it is now facing a strong headwind from nearly 40-year high cost inflation. Thanks to an expected recovery, Ecolab can offer a 5.4% average annual return over the next five years thanks to 15.0% earnings growth and its 1.3% dividend, partly offset by a -9.6% annualized valuation drag. We rate the stock as a hold and note that Ecolab may finally become attractive if it revisits its recent lows, after many years of being highly overvalued.

## Total Return Breakdown by Year



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## Income Statement Metrics

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Revenue</b>	13,253	14,281	13,545	13,152	13,836	12,222	12,562	11,790	12,733	14,188
<b>Gross Profit</b>	6,092	6,601	6,322	5,618	5,772	5,347	5,516	4,884	5,117	5,357
<b>Gross Margin</b>	46.0%	46.2%	46.7%	42.7%	41.7%	43.7%	43.9%	41.4%	40.2%	37.8%
<b>SG&amp;A Exp.</b>	4,360	4,578	4,346	3,708	3,825	3,506	3,551	3,309	3,416	3,654
<b>D&amp;A Exp.</b>	816	872	860	851	893	730	775	813	843	---
<b>Operating Profit</b>	1,732	2,024	1,976	1,910	1,946	1,841	1,965	1,575	1,701	1,703
<b>Operating Margin</b>	13.1%	14.2%	14.6%	14.5%	14.1%	15.1%	15.6%	13.4%	13.4%	12.0%
<b>Net Profit</b>	968	1,203	1,002	1,229	1,505	1,429	1,559	(1,205)	1,130	1,092
<b>Net Margin</b>	7.3%	8.4%	7.4%	9.3%	10.9%	11.7%	12.4%	-10.2%	8.9%	7.7%
<b>Free Cash Flow</b>	898	1,022	1,185	1,183	1,223	1,499	1,689	1,371	1,419	---
<b>Income Tax</b>	325	476	301	403	244	321	289	177	270	235

## Balance Sheet Metrics

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Total Assets</b>	19,637	19,427	18,642	18,330	19,964	20,075	20,869	18,126	21,206	21,464
<b>Cash &amp; Equivalents</b>	339	210	93	327	211	115	119	1,260	360	599
<b>Accounts Receivable</b>	2,568	2,627	2,390	2,341	2,571	2,663	2,382	2,274	2,478	2,698
<b>Inventories</b>	1,322	1,467	1,388	1,319	1,447	1,546	1,082	1,285	1,492	1,793
<b>Goodwill &amp; Int. Ass.</b>	11,648	11,174	10,600	10,201	11,185	10,876	8,497	8,984	12,288	11,693
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	12,227	12,045	11,661	11,359	12,310	12,021	12,143	11,925	13,953	14,206
<b>Accounts Payable</b>	1,022	1,162	1,050	983	1,177	1,256	1,075	1,161	1,384	1,728
<b>Long-Term Debt</b>	6,905	6,548	6,466	6,687	7,323	7,045	6,354	6,687	8,758	8,580
<b>Shareholder's Equity</b>	7,344	7,316	6,910	6,901	7,584	8,003	8,685	6,167	7,224	7,236
<b>D/E Ratio</b>	0.94	0.90	0.94	0.97	0.97	0.88	0.73	1.08	1.21	1.19

## Profitability & Per Share Metrics

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Return on Assets</b>	5.2%	6.2%	5.3%	6.6%	7.9%	7.1%	7.6%	-6.2%	5.7%	5.1%
<b>Return on Equity</b>	14.4%	16.4%	14.1%	17.8%	20.8%	18.3%	18.7%	-16.2%	16.9%	15.1%
<b>ROIC</b>	7.2%	8.5%	7.3%	9.1%	10.5%	9.5%	10.3%	-8.6%	7.8%	6.9%
<b>Shares Out.</b>	300.8	299.9	296.0	291.8	293.6	292.2	292.6	288.7	289.5	286.6
<b>Revenue/Share</b>	43.33	46.68	44.94	44.33	47.06	41.74	42.95	40.61	44.04	49.50
<b>FCF/Share</b>	2.93	3.34	3.93	3.99	4.16	5.12	5.78	4.72	4.91	---

Note: All figures in millions of U.S. Dollars unless per share or indicated otherwise.

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