

22 October 2025

NESC Conference 2025 Energising the Transition

Radisson Blu Royal Hotel,
Golden Lane, Dublin

Programme

08.30 - 09.30	Registration Open
09.30 - 10.00	Delivering Ireland's Energy System For the economy, society, and the environment - it's time to change the conversation. Welcome and Chair: Ms Elizabeth Canavan, Department of An Taoiseach and Deputy Chair of NESC Conference Opened by Minister Darragh O'Brien, TD Opening Address: Dr Brian Motherway, IEA
10.00 - 11.15	Map, Milestones and Destination How can we reinforce confidence in Ireland's model for transition to a decarbonised power system? Keynote Address: Mr Kevin O'Donovan, Statkraft. Panel (Chaired by Prof. Lisa Ryan, UCD): Mr Kevin O'Sullivan, Journalist and Author Dr Val Cummins, Simply Blue Group Mr Dave Linehan, Wind Energy Ireland Mr Ronan Power, Solar Ireland
11.15 - 11.45	Break
11.45 - 12.45	Parts, Puzzles and Possibilities How do we ensure that the diverse parts of the energy transition align and work cohesively to deliver economic, social, and environmental gains? Keynote Address: Dr Lewis Akenji, Hot or Cool Institute. Panel (Chaired by Mr Jim Scheer, SEAI) Ms Pauline O'Reilly, Irish District Energy Association Prof. Geraint Ellis, Queen's University Belfast Mr David Noronha, Eirgrid Group Mr Conor Minogue, IBEC
12.45 - 13.30	Networking Lunch
13.30 - 14.30	People and Energy - Inclusion and Opportunities What are the benefits and opportunities for households and communities in the energy transition? What is needed to support their participation? Keynote Address: Prof. Frances Fahy, University of Galway. Panel (Chaired by Dr Diarmuid Torney, DCU): Mr Cormac Walsh, Energy Co-operatives Ireland Ms Jeanne Spillane, UCC / Maharees Conservation Association Ms Anabel O'Hora, TCD / Children's and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss Ms Ali Sheridan, Just Transition Commission
14.30 - 15.30	Action Now, Next and Later What are the key steps that need to be taken to breathe more life into the energy transition? Keynote Address: Dr. Paul Deane, University College Cork. Panel (Chaired by Ms Marie Donnelly, Climate Change Advisory Council): Dr Muireann Lynch, ESRI Mr Paul Phare, Energy4All Dr Paul Saunders, NTMA / ISIF Ms Rachel Minch, Phillip Lee LLP
15.30 - 15.45	Follow-on, Next Steps and Commitment Closing Remarks: Ms Oonagh Buckley, Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment. Conference Close: Dr Larry O'Connell, NESC



Speaker Biographies



Dr. Lewis Akenji, Hot or Cool Institute

Dr. Lewis Akenji is Executive Director of Hot or Cool Institute, and co-chair of the Club of Rome's Materials and Consumption Taskforce. Lewis served as Executive Director of the UN partnership SEED promoting entrepreneurship for sustainable development. He has an MSc Sustainable Resource Management (Technical University Munich, Germany) and a PhD Political Economy (University of Helsinki, Finland).



Ms. Oonagh Buckley, Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment

Ms. Oonagh Buckley is the Secretary General of the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment. Prior to taking up that role, Oonagh served as Interim Chair of An Bord Pleanála, on secondment from her role as Deputy Secretary General in the Department of Justice with responsibility for civil justice matters, including immigration, courts and civil and family law. She had previously held the position of Director General in the Workplace Relations Commission. Before that she worked at a senior level in a number of Government Departments, including the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform; Environment; and Foreign Affairs.



Ms. Elizabeth Canavan, Department of An Taoiseach and Deputy Chair of NESC

Ms. Elizabeth Canavan is the Assistant Secretary General of the Social Policy and Public Service Reform Division in the Department of the Taoiseach. She is the Secretary to several Cabinet Sub-Committees, namely Health, Disability, Children & Education and Justice, Migration & Social Affairs. She is Chair of the associated Senior Officials Groups. She is Deputy Chair of the National Economic and Social Council, Secretary to the Civil Service Management Board and a member of the Public Service Leadership Board.



Ms. Val Cummins, Simply Blue Group

Ms. Val Cummins Chief Impact Officer (CIO) and Ireland Portfolio Director in Simply Blue Group. In her capacity as CIO, she is responsible for the environmental and societal impact of Simply Blue's projects globally. Val spent 21 years in academia prior to joining industry in 2020, working in the field of coastal and marine resource management. She won the President's Award in University College Cork for her leadership in building research capacity in marine science. She played a leading role in the establishment of the MaREI Centre; and was the Director of the Irish Maritime and Energy Resource Cluster.



Dr. Paul Deane, University College Cork

Dr. Paul Deane is a Senior Lecturer in Clean Energy Futures in UCC and a fellow at the Colorado School of Mines. His research looks at how society can move away from polluting fuels to cleaner and safer alternatives. He is a board member of Rethink Ireland, who support innovative non-profit organisations in communities across Ireland on social and environmental issues.



Ms. Marie Donnelly, Climate Change Advisory Committee

Ms. Marie Donnelly is Chairperson of the Climate Change Advisory Council. She spent thirty years with the European Commission, ultimately as Director for Renewables, Energy Efficiency and Innovation, and was a leading advocate of future oriented policies and strategies; providing a fair deal for consumers; putting energy efficiency first; and achieving global leadership in renewable energies. She is a member of the Governance Committee of MaREI, and an advisory board member of the UCD Energy Institute. Marie was the first Chairperson of Renewable Energy Ireland. She is a Senior Advisor in Brussels to Penta, a global communications agency.



Prof. Geraint Ellis, Queen's University Belfast

Prof. Geraint Ellis has research interests in spatial planning and sustainability with a particular emphasis on renewable energy, marine planning, planning governance and healthy urban planning. He has secured funding for over 17 UKRI grants, while also led projects funded by the EU, Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency and philanthropic bodies. He was the Lead Coordinator on the EU-Funded MISTRAL project, a Europe-wide doctoral network on energy transition, and is currently engaged on projects funded by the RWJ Foundation (Change Stories), Horizon Europe (PERMAGOV, C-NEWTRAL) and MRC (Groundswell).



Prof. Frances Fahy, University of Galway

Prof. Frances Fahy is Director of the Ryan Institute at the University of Galway. A leading environmental geographer, she has published more than 100 publications including four books (Methods of Sustainability Research in the Social Sciences (2013), Challenging Consumption (2014), Energy Demand Challenges in Europe (2019), and Energy Citizenship Across Europe (2025). Professor Fahy has coordinated over 20 funded research projects and obtained competitive large research funding, including funding from Horizon Europe, H2020, JPI-Climate, Interreg, Marine Institute, NESC, and the EPA.



Mr. Dave Linehan, Wind Energy Ireland

Mr Dave Linehan is Head of Policy & Research for Wind Energy Ireland, responsible for policy development and advocacy, stakeholder engagement, and strategic research. He works across both the onshore and offshore wind sectors to help accelerate Ireland's transition to a zero-carbon energy system. He sits on the board of Energy Cloud, and chairs the Energy, Environment, and Climate Action division at Engineers Ireland. Prior to Wind Energy Ireland, he spent eight years at EirGrid, working across grid delivery, network planning, power system operations, and energy markets. Dave is a Chartered Engineer and a certified Project Management Professional accredited by the PMI.



Dr. Muireann Lynch, ESRI

Dr Muireann Lynch is a Senior Research Officer with the Economic and Social Research Institute. She holds a degree in Mathematics and Economics from Trinity College Dublin and a PhD from the School of Electronic and Electrical Engineering in UCD. She has published numerous research articles in diverse areas of energy economics and has co-authored submissions to various public consultations and Government Departments. She is Research Area Coordinator for Energy in the ESRI, a funded investigator with the MaREI SFI Research Centre, affiliate with the Electric Power Innovation for a Carbon-free Society (EPICS) Center and is Deputy Director of the SFI-funded NexSys Partnership.



Ms. Rachel Minch, Philip Lee LLP

Ms Rachel Minch is a partner in the Planning and Environment Team in Philip Lee LLP. She was appointed Senior Counsel in 2021. Rachel is also Chair of the Law Society Planning and Environmental Law Practice Committee and former Chair of the Irish Environmental Law Association. The team advises public and private Clients across a broad range of issues, including strategic infrastructure consenting, with Rachel's practice focussing on advising public bodies and judicial review litigation.



Mr. Conor Minogue, IBEC

Mr Conor Minogue is the energy and climate policy lead for the business group Ibec. He works with members to shape and promote policies that deliver a competitive and sustainable transition to a net-zero economy. He also provides guidance to industry on climate action and sustainability reporting. He was the lead author of Ibec's policy paper Reducing Electricity Costs in Ireland (2024), Ibec's Climate Action Toolkit for Business (2023), and Ibec's Low Carbon Roadmap (2019). He is a board member of Chapter Zero Ireland and a member of Ireland's Just Transition Commission.



Dr. Brian Motherway, International Energy Agency

Dr. Brian Motherway is Head of the Office of Energy Efficiency and Inclusive Transitions in the International Energy Agency (IEA). He oversees analytical and outreach programmes supporting energy efficiency globally. He also leads IEA's work with governments ensuring all clean energy transitions are people-centred and inclusive, covering analysis and best practice on topics such as skills, inclusion, and fairness in clean energy policies. Prior to joining the IEA, Brain was Chief Executive of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. Brian holds a Bachelors and Masters degrees in engineering and a PhD in Sociology.



Dr. David Noronha, Eirgrid

Dr David Noronha is the Head of Future Networks and Strategic Offshore Planning, in the Innovation and Planning directorate at EirGrid. Prior to David's role in EirGrid, he was the Senior Director for Project Delivery at Smart Wires Inc in Europe, responsible for end-to-end delivery of Power Flow Control devices on transmission networks. Before that, he was the Director of SSE Airtricity Distributed Energy Ltd where he led major smart energy infrastructure projects. David has led projects in demand side management, solar and battery storage, electrification of transport, and optimisation of wind generation forecasts.



Minister Darragh O'Brien TD, Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment and Minister for Transport

Minister Darragh O'Brien TD was appointed Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment and Minister for Transport in January 2025. He previously served as Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2020-2025). He is an elected TD for the constituency of Dublin Fingal East. Prior to his election to the 30th Dáil in 2007, he worked mainly in Financial Services and was elected to Fingal County Council in 2004. He was elected to Seanad Éireann in 2011.



Dr. Larry O'Connell, NESC

Dr. Larry O'Connell is the Director of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). He leads an inter-disciplinary team in the Secretariat of Ireland's NESC. Current work is focused on Ireland's energy transition and achieving independence from fossil fuels by 2050; the implications of demographic change; Artificial Intelligence and housing affordability and compact growth. In addition, the Council is working on social cohesion which will form part of the Council's contribution to the programme for Ireland's Presidency of the European Council in 2026.



Mr. Kevin O'Donovan, Statkraft

Mr Kevin O'Donovan is a Senior Vice President with Statkraft and as Country Manager for Ireland and the UK, he heads up the wind, solar, battery and grid services activities for both countries. Sitting on Statkraft's European Management Team, Kevin is responsible for driving the growth of wind and solar development and operations in both markets. Kevin studied Engineering in University College Cork and holds a Master's Degree in Renewable Energy.



Ms. Anabel O'Hora, Trinity College Dublin (TCD), Children's and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss

Ms. Anabel O'Hora is a studying European Studies in TCD. She was a member of the Education for Sustainable Development working group of the Irish Second Levels Students Union, Dublin City Comhairle na n'Og, ECO UNESCO and the inaugural National Youth Assembly of Ireland (NYAI). Here, she was selected as a youth advisor for the Climate Assembly. She has represented the NYAI as a speaker at several high-level conferences. She was selected as a member of the Youth Advisory Group for the Children's and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss (CYPABL) and worked with the Citizens Assembly on Biodiversity Loss. Over the past summer, Anabel completed an internship with the Sustainability Department of TCD and will soon be publishing a report analysing the level of ESD in Trinity.



Ms. Pauline O'Reilly, Irish District Energy Association

Ms Pauline O'Reilly is the CEO of the Irish District Energy Association, which represents the emerging district heating sector in Ireland. A Galwegian, she has been a Senator and Chair of the Green Party, as well as a solicitor.



Mr. Kevin O'Sullivan, Author and Journalist, The Irish Times

Mr Kevin O' Sullivan is Environment & Science Editor with The Irish Times. He served as Editor of The Irish Times from 2011 to 2017. He joined The Irish Times in 1997 as Environmental and Food Science Correspondent. In his current role, he has responsibility for coverage of climate change, renewable energy and sustainability issues including the UN Sustainable Development Goals. He is a regular attendee at UN climate COPs. He is co-author with renewable energy developer Eddie O'Connor of the book *Supergrid Super Solution* - the case for a supergrid in Europe. Its second edition was published earlier this year.



Mr. Paul Phare, Energy4All

Mr Paul Phare studied engineering at UWE in Bristol and has been working in the community energy sector since 2003. He was involved with the first community owned wind farm in Scotland on the Isle of Gigha which won the prestigious Ashden Award. Paul continued to support the development of charitable community energy projects in Scotland until 2008 when he joined Energy4All as Development Manager. Paul first delivered shared ownership co-operatives in Scotland and then, after moving to Edinburgh in 2012, he became a founding member of the Edinburgh Community Solar Co-op, a partnership with City of Edinburgh Council.



Mr. Ronan Power, Solar Ireland

Mr Ronan Power is a recognised energy leader with over two decades' experience driving sustainable infrastructure and policy. As CEO of Solar Ireland, Ronan brings deep expertise in energy regulation, stakeholder engagement, and market development. He is passionate about unlocking Ireland's solar potential and creating the conditions for long-term, equitable decarbonisation.



Prof. Lisa Ryan, University College Dublin

Prof. Lisa Ryan is a professor in energy economics in UCD School of Economics and the UCD Energy Institute. Her research is in clean energy technology adoption, energy markets, and climate change economics and related policy. She is deputy director of UCD Energy Institute. Lisa has a PhD in environmental economics from University College Dublin (UCD), and other postgraduate and undergraduate degrees in economics and engineering from UCD and Colorado School of Mines, USA.



Dr. Paul Saunders, NTMA and ISIF

Dr. Paul Saunders is Senior Investment Director and Head of Climate and Energy Transition with the Irish Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) – Ireland's €9bn Sovereign Development Fund. Paul leads ISIF's climate investment agenda, focused on a broad range of investments, from Venture Capital to Infrastructure, that will support and catalyse the transition of Ireland's economy to Net Zero. Paul holds a PhD in Physics from University of Cambridge, and an MBA from INSEAD.



Mr. Jim Scheer, SEAI

Mr Jim Scheer has over 25 years experience working in policy analysis and development related to environmental issues. He joined the SEAI in 2007 and is Head of Department (Data and Insights) with responsibility for energy statistics, energy modelling, behavioural economics, and programme evaluation. He has worked with the Government of South Australia in natural resource management and open space planning. He holds a Professional Diploma in Advanced Management Performance (Smurfit Business School), MSc. Economic Policy Studies (Trinity College Dublin), BSc. Environmental Science (Flinders University, South Australia).



Ms. Ali Sheridan, Just Transition Commission

Ms. Ali Sheridan has spent almost 20 years working across sectors at both domestic and international levels with a key focus on mobilising diverse societal actors towards ambitious and fair climate action. In 2024, Ali was appointed Chair of the newly established Just Transition Commission of Ireland. As Lead with the UN High Level Climate Champions, Ali oversees the world's largest climate coalition working to halve global emissions by 2030. Ali holds a MSc in Business Sustainability from UCD, a MSc in Sustainable Development from DCU, and a BSc in Environmental Management from TU Dublin.



Ms. Jeanne Spillane, UCC / Maharees Conservation Association

Ms. Jeanne Spillane is currently doing a PhD in Sociology in UCC/MaREI with a focus on energy and climate. Her PhD project is exploring key questions around who is benefiting from the rollout of solar PV in Ireland and whether certain people or groups are being left behind. Prior to starting her PhD, Jeanne was policy lead with the Scottish Government on Home Energy Scotland, their flagship energy advice service for citizens. She holds a MSc in Development Practice and a Mphil in International Peace Studies and has previously worked with UN WFP in communications, and DFA Ireland on foreign policy and the SDG negotiation process. In 2025, she completed a research study on energy and households, commissioned by NESC.



Dr. Diarmuid Torney, Dublin City University

Dr Diarmuid Torney is an associate professor in the School of Law and Government at Dublin City University. He holds an MPhil and DPhil (PhD) in International Relations from the University of Oxford. His research focuses on climate change politics, policy, and governance. He is co-director of the DCU Centre for Climate and Society and a lead author on Ireland's first Climate Change Assessment, commissioned by the Environmental Protection Agency.



Mr. Cormac Walsh, Energy Co-operatives Ireland

Mr Cormac Walsh is a founder member of Energy Co-operatives Ireland (ECI). Since 2013, he has overseen its growth from a single energy co-operative to playing a central role in the independent community energy sustainability sector. He has been instrumental to the establishment of all seven existing energy co-ops in Ireland, and is a powerful policy advocate and business expert, both promoting and steering the development of each of these community-led initiatives. He is ECI's lead in the GECOMM, HUGE, and GreenHysland Hydrogen projects. He also co-ordinates ECIs community led 1GW Valentia Island Energy and the 2GW Aran Islands Energy ORE projects.



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