

Energy Transition Summit

Speeding up the change from fossil fuels to renewable energy

Second Energy Transition Summit highlighted significant progress, but much more needs to be done

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The sign that showed the second annual Energy Transition Summit's importance was how quickly attendees engaged with the talks.

It was a full house that gathered in Croke Park on September 19, one hungry for knowledge and learning, reflected in the engagement with speakers and exhibitors.

Welcoming everyone to the summit as chair, Ivan Yates, entrepreneur and broadcaster, said that with 14 months between the inaugural summit, the 33 speakers across panels, keynote speeches and more was a sign that the issue is more pertinent than ever.

After some opening words from Shay Cloherly, managing director of iQuest & Business Post LIVE, who said that "revolution was definitely needed" to solve the energy crisis, the summit got under way with a ministerial address from Ossian Smyth, TD, Minister of State, Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, who gave a wide-ranging overview of the government's recent efforts and gave a pathway for all to follow.

"The public sector has to lead by example," he said. "Everything we're telling people to do are things we're doing ourselves... and by doing them, we gain the knowledge and know in practice what this costs, and how we build our laws and frameworks for how society operates."

Following was an international keynote address delivered by Laura Cozzi, director of sustainability, technology and outlooks for the International Energy Agency.

Speaking from Paris, she highlighted how many of the efforts are turbocharged, yet pointed to the challenges, such as the mismatch between zero carbon aims and implementing these policies.

She spoke about the building blocks that will keep the planet safe, such as combining energy efficiency, increasing investment, and lowering the costs of adopting green energy initiatives. While there is a long way to go, there is cause for optimism that the Paris Agreement has helped the globe progress.

"Since Paris, the good news is that the temperature increase has shifted down; we've already shaved off 1°C of warming," she said. "Mostly because we saw progress in green energy technologies, which shaved off the demand for fossil fuels."

What followed was the first panel discussion of the day. Colm O'Connell, energy attaché of Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU; Dara Lynott, chief executive, Electricity Association of Ireland; Margie McCarthy, director of policy and insights for Sustainable Energy Association of Ireland; and Nikki Flanders, group managing director, Energy Customer Solutions GB (Energy Solutions) & IRL (SSE Airtricity), all spoke about the challenges around energy transition.

During it, McCarthy mentioned a philosophy that would pop up throughout the summit: that behavioural change is critical, and all changes should factor in the protection of the most vulnerable.

Following this was the European keynote address delivered by Ciarán Cuffe, MEP, Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, European Parliament, who went through the various measures taken and challenges faced, as well as the importance of bringing people along on the journey.

Following was a presentation from Siobhán O'Halloran, future networks manager for Gas Networks Ireland, who spoke about decarbonising Ireland's gas supply, highlighting the appetite for these changes and the opportunities to develop a bio-methane industry at scale.

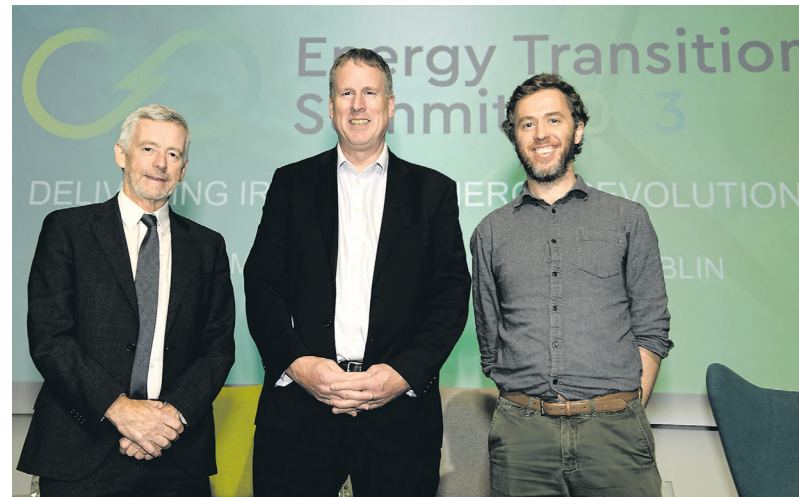
Before the audience had their coffee break, there was one more panel on scaling up renewables attended by Chris Collins, country president of Schneider Electric; Joe Duignan, reg-



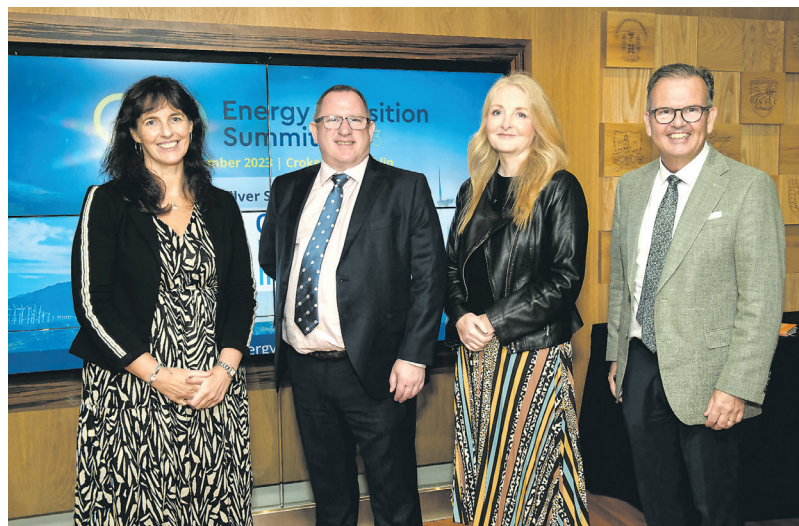
Caroline Gorman, digital manager, Bord na Móna Renewable Energy; Eimear Christian, head of sustainability and innovation, Uisce Éireann and Caoimhe Donnelly, chief sustainability officer, CIÉ Group



Niall Goodwin, head of policy, Wind Energy Ireland; Stephen Treacy, senior manager, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); Conall Bolger, chief executive officer, Irish Solar Energy Association



Dr Philip Crowley, national director for quality improvement, HSE; Ciarán Murphy, executive manager - research, development and innovation, Codema, Dublin's Energy Agency; John Dolan, technical manager, planning and building Unit, Department of Education



Margie McCarthy, director of policy and insights, Sustainable Energy Association of Ireland; Colm O'Connell, energy attaché, Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU; Nikki Flanders, group managing director, energy customer solutions GB (Energy solutions) and Ireland (SSE Airtricity); Dara Lynott, chief executive, Electricity Association of Ireland



Liam Ryan, chief innovation and planning officer, EirGrid; Siobhán O'Halloran, future networks manager, Gas Networks Ireland; Joe Duignan, regulation and commercial manager, ESB Networks; Nikki Flanders, group managing director, energy customer solutions GB (Energy solutions) and Ireland (SSE Airtricity); Ivan Yates, broadcaster and entrepreneur; Klair Neenan, managing director, SSE Airtricity; Chris Collins, country president, Schneider Electric and Dr. Ellen Diskin, head of the national network, local connections programme, ESB Networks

ulation and commercial manager for ESB Networks; Leo Clancy, chief executive, Enterprise Ireland; and Liam Ryan, chief innovation and planning officer for EirGrid.

When asked what they'd like the audience to take away from this session, Collins mentioned knowing your energy consumption and working with the data to find ways to reduce it. Duignan underlined the continued importance of collaboration between industry, partners and stakeholders to deliver on net zero.

Public and private challenges

After the break, the summit split into two streams: delivering national climate targets, and delivering the climate action agenda in the business sector.

The first stream dealing with national targets began with a presentation from Dr Ellen Diskin, head of the National Network, Local Connections Programme for ESB Networks, who reiterated how people need incentives and information to change and the power of the

community in aiding that. Next was a case study on Warrington Borough Council and how it took a commercial approach to public sector clean energy investment, delivered by Daniel Mather, its head of corporate finance.

The stream's first panel discussion was straight after, on leading change in the state sector. It involved Caoimhe Donnelly, chief security officer for



We can't lose sight of the elephant in the room: the amount of fossil fuels we continue to consume

engagement on the journey to net zero and made clear how crucial it was to hit this point.

"The challenge is greater now than at any point in the last decade," she said. "We've seen the effect of global macro effects for both energy security and affordability, and the urgency of climate change is absolutely clear and only intensifying."

Following this was a case study on harnessing Ireland's natural resources, delivered by Sian Young, director of sustainable business for Britvic Ireland, who covered how it was using 100 per cent renewable energy harvested from wind to create a more sustainable footprint.

Next up was a panel discussion on leading the energy revolution in the private sector. It featured Conor Minogue, senior executive for the Irish Business and Employers Confederation; Marie Gleeson, external affairs & stakeholder liaison at Simply Blue Group; and Orla Coyle, head of energy & sustainability at Savills.

The stream concluded with a talk from Dr Jennifer Keenahan, assistant professor in civil engineering at University College Dublin, who spoke about de-risking offshore renewable energy development using computational modelling, and a conversation with Michael Quirk, farmer and owner of Crocane Wind Farm and Lurrig Solar Farm, about the journey through wind and solar development in Ireland.

Addressing the climate emergency

After lunchtime, the audience reunited before launching into the afternoon keynote from Sadhbh O'Neill, climate campaign coordinator for Friends of the Earth Ireland.

In a straight-talking keynote, O'Neill laid bare the challenges and what's at stake if the world doesn't adequately address the climate crisis and implored the audience to make their voices heard and address it collectively.

"We need to move beyond incrementalism," she said. "We need policy consistency and coherence and strong political consensus across the board, but most importantly, we need to make sure we don't sacrifice social cohesion and leave people behind."

"There are people who can't afford to keep their homes heated or forced to own cars because there's no public transport. It's not just someone else's problem; the market won't solve it. The state must step in and we must do everything we can to make sure nobody is left behind as we make this transition."

Following was the final panel discussion of the day, looking at what needs to be done, featuring Conall Bolger, chief executive at ISEA; Niall Goodwin, head of policy at Wind Energy Ireland; and Stephen Treacy, senior manager at the Environmental Protection Agency.

The positives included the rapid rise of solar and wind, yet elements like a protracted planning process, failure of leadership and reluctance to engage with big decisions mean the transition to renewable energy isn't as fast as it could be.

It means the country could exceed its 60 million tonne carbon budget for the electricity sector in three or four years' time, making it a critical area of focus.

Related to that was Brian Ó Galachóir, professor of energy engineering at UCC and director of SFI MaREI Centre, who concluded the summit with a locknote addressing how best to increase the pace of energy transition. There are positives, yet he warned not to lose sight of the areas that need work and to face the challenges.

"We need to focus on areas we're doing well in, like renewable electricity, electric vehicles and retrofitting," he said. "But we can't get caught looking at progress in those areas and lose sight of the elephant in the room: the amount of fossil fuels we continue to consume."

"The challenge is that we're not doing things fast enough, and part of the reason is how growth continues to keep that dominance of fossil fuels."

Concluding the summit, Yates thanked everyone who attended and praised the audience for their attention before highlighting the key takeaway: change is happening but needs to be faster.



Dr Ellen Diskin, head of the national network, local connections programme, ESB Networks

Stream two dealt with the business sector and was similarly busy, chaired by Conall Bolger, chief executive of the Irish Solar Energy Association (ISEA).

To kick things off, Klair Neenan, managing director of SSE Airtricity, spoke about the critical drivers for