International Sustainability Resource and Technology Conference
Programmed by Economist Impact
Dates: May 18th and 19th 2026
Location: Oman Exhibition Centre, Oman

2026 theme | Delivering progress: advances towards sustainable future in the Middle East

May 18th 2026

11.50am | Opening remarks from The Economist Group

12pm | From innovation to execution: hard-to-abate sectors and net-zero progress in 2026
Panel discussion (35 minutes)

The industrial transition has reached a decisive phase. From renewables to carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS), technologies to decarbonise heavy industries—including cement, aviation, shipping and steel—have been proved to work. But scaling them cost-effectively and at speed remains a challenge. The session will explore how bankable projects, shared infrastructure and aligned policy can enable countries in the Middle East to make progress towards hard-to-abate sectors while maintaining competitiveness, energy security and growth. How can organisations move from innovation to execution amid rising costs and infrastructure gaps?

Speakers:

- Mohd Najwani, vice president Wells MENA, **BP Oman**
- Mike Enskat, director of Innovation and Technology Centre (IITC), **IRENA**
- **Moderator:** Pat Thaker, regional director, MEA, **Economist Intelligence**

12.35pm |Connecting deserts to grids: powering the GCC's next renewable phase
Panel discussion (35 minutes)

Vast desert landscapes in the region offer some of the world's most cost-effective solar potential, turning underutilised land into high-value energy real estate and accelerating renewable capacity. Projects such as Xlinks, alongside expanded GCC interconnection and potential links to Europe, illustrate how long-distance transmission can monetise surplus renewable generation while enhancing energy security. But unlocking this value at scale depends on robust transmission infrastructure capable of moving power from resource-rich areas to demand centres, both domestically and internationally. Streamlined government approvals, coordinated regional frameworks and the development of cross-border grid interconnectors are becoming defining areas for the region's next phase of growth. How can the GCC align to turn deserts into engines of export revenue, grid resilience and long-term economic diversification?

1.10pm I Green hydrogen: the economics of ambition
Panel discussion (35 minutes)

The Middle East is seeking to leverage its renewable resources and strategic location to become a leader in green hydrogen production and trade. But turning ambition into durable advantage will require more than resources. Costs remain high, demand is uncertain and the infrastructure required for large-scale hydrogen production, transport and export is capital-intensive and complex. In a region with scarce spare water, questions around resource use and environmental integrity are also central. As global standards, subsidies and trade frameworks evolve the region faces strategic choices: how quickly to scale, which markets to prioritise and how to ensure projects are viable.

1.45pm | Lunch (50 minutes)

2.35pm | Beyond landfill: building the waste-to-energy value chain
Panel discussion (35 minutes)

More than 2bn tonnes of municipal solid waste are generated annually worldwide. As countries confront rising waste volumes and increasing electricity demand many are looking to waste-to-energy as a solution. It is also viewed as an important component of a broader circular economy and net-zero strategies. Modern waste-to-energy plants offer a dual solution: they reduce landfill use and methane emissions while providing reliable power to the grid. But their successful deployment depends on robust regulation, secure waste supply chains and reliable long-term financing structures. What is required to ensure projects are economically viable and environmentally credible?

3.10pm | Building the CCUS economy: policy, infrastructure and technology
Panel discussion (35 minutes)

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that meeting current climate goals will require approximately 7–9 gigatonnes (Gt) CO_2 removal will be required each year by 2050. Only ~2 gigatonnes removal per year is happening currently, placing unprecedented pressure on technologies capable of delivering emissions reductions at scale. Carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) is recognised as an essential pathway for decarbonising heavy industries. But progress remains slow. High capital costs, uncertain policies, long-term storage liabilities and the absence of shared carbon dioxide transport and storage infrastructure continue to constrain deployment. Can CCUS realistically deliver the scale and permanence required for climate goals? How companies prevent CCUS from becoming a distraction from direct emissions reductions in industrial processes? How can policy ensure CCUS complements, rather than substitutes for, real decarbonisation?

3.45pm | Convergence between compliance and voluntary carbon markets: shaping the next era of climate finance?
Panel discussion (35 minutes)

Carbon markets are at a pivotal moment, as voluntary and compliance systems begin to converge into a more integrated global framework. Hybrid systems, where entities can use voluntary credits to meet part of their compliance obligations, are gaining traction. This convergence could reshape how climate finance flows globally, improving liquidity and transparency. But risks remain: policy misalignment, uneven quality standards and geopolitical fragmentation could undermine trust and slow progress. Can carbon market convergence truly unlock the scale of private capital needed for the net-zero transition? How can policymakers and companies ensure integrity and avoid greenwashing as markets expand? Will convergence deliver equitable finance flows to emerging economies or reinforce existing imbalances in global climate investment?

4.20pm | Closing remarks from The Economist Group (5 minutes)

4.25pm | Close of day one programme

May 19th 2026

9.20am | Opening remarks from The Economist Group

9.30am | AI at scale: driving growth while managing energy, cost and climate risk
Panel discussion (35 minutes)

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly embedded in daily operations across the private and public sectors. While it has the potential to optimise energy systems, reduce emissions and strengthen climate resilience, scaling AI brings significant commercial and sustainability implications, particularly around energy consumption, water use, infrastructure costs and exposure to regulatory and investor scrutiny. The rapid expansion of data centres and demand for power and critical minerals are increasing pressure on companies to align AI growth with net-zero targets and broader environmental commitments. How can companies deploy AI in ways that enhance both profitability and environmental performance?

10.05am | Redesigning supply chains for a circular economy
Panel discussion (35 minutes)

The adoption of circular practices, particularly in plastics recycling, waste management and sustainable product design, is gaining momentum across the Middle East. Yet circularity is not simply an environmental ambition. It requires the redesign of supply chains, procurement models and industrial systems. Delivering circular outcomes at scale depends on reliable feedstock streams, reverse logistics networks, transparent material tracking and collaboration across value chains—from producers and retailers to waste operators and recyclers. In many sectors, fragmented supply chains, limited secondary material markets and inconsistent standards remain significant barriers. How can businesses implement circular supply chains that have both environmental benefits and economic value?

10.40am | Trade for sustainability: expanding access, accelerating transition
Panel discussion (35 minutes)

Trade remains an underutilised tool in climate action. The global production and distribution of goods contribute to about a quarter of all carbon dioxide emissions and a significant share of biodiversity loss and global pollution. But trade can also enhance access to energy-efficient goods and the technologies needed for the energy transition, adaptation and mitigation of climate change. New sustainability-linked trade measures—such as the EU's

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR)—are reshaping global commerce. While designed to level the playing field and prevent carbon leakage, these policies affect the export competitiveness of developing economies, prompting shifts in supply chains and trade flows. How can governments ensure that environmental standards strengthen rather than fragment global markets?What support is needed to help developing countries adapt, remain competitive and capture new opportunities in sustainable trade?

11.15am | Coffee break (15 minutes)

11.30 am |Water security at scale: desalination, data and regional co-operation
Panel discussion (35 minutes)

Water scarcity in the Middle East is intensifying due to climate change, population growth and overuse. Desalination currently accounts for 70% of Saudi Arabia's water supply and contributes to 55% of global brine production in conjunction with the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar. While sustainable desalination and large-scale water reuse are indispensable for water security in arid regions, their long-term viability depends on integration with renewable energy and circular water systems as well as robust environmental safeguards. Innovation in technology, finance and data can help optimise resource use and strengthen resilience in the sector. This panel explores how these solutions can be scaled. How can regional co-operation support better management of shared water resources and data based decision-making? What innovation could make desalination more sustainable and cost-competitive at scale?

12.05pm| The business of biodiversity
Panel discussion (35 minutes)

Biodiversity and ecosystems in the Middle East face unprecedented threats. These are driven by changes in land use, climate change, pollution, natural resource use and invasive species. This is also a major risk for businesses, threatening operations, supply chains and overall sustainability. Besides relying on ecosystems, every business also impacts natural capital. And taking action to address biodiversity loss can be a major business opportunity. According to the World Economic Forum, protecting nature worldwide could generate $10trn in business opportunities annually by 2030 and create nearly 400m new jobs. What dedicated strategies are businesses developing to protect and restore natural ecosystems and to create value and stay resilient in the long term?

12.40pm|From commitments to capital: financing the net-zero transition
Panel discussion (35 minutes)

The financial services industry is expected to play a critical role in achieving net zero targets. Green bonds, environmental, social and governance investments and other financial tools are essential for scaling up clean energy, resilient infrastructure and resource efficiency. This panel will explore how sustainable finance can integrate financial mechanisms into climate policy design and mobilise capital. Panelists will examine the tools, regulations and data capabilities needed to turn climate commitments into measurable impact.

1.15pm | Closing remarks from The Economist Group

1.20pm | Lunch and close of ISRTC 2026