ESG Summit 2025



Mary Cronin, circular economy, climate/ESG and digital innovation expert, INED; Kevork Arslanian, director, CCaSS, EY; Anne Moore, sustainability manager, Gas Networks Ireland; and Lis Dare, business working responsibly mark manager, BITCI



Chisom Ekomaru, sustainability manager, Ecocem Global; Aoife O'Donnell, head of sustainability, Jones Engineering; Laura Mora, managing director, EcoVerify; and Caroline Ashe Brady, director, KORE Insulation & KORE Retrofit



PJ Harris, sustainable product innovation lead, Bank of Ireland Group; Stefanie O'Gorman, head of sustainable economics, Ramboll UK; Rory McElligott, head of climate change, Central Bank of Ireland; and Ian Dickie, director, Economics for the Environment Consultancy ltd, UK

Proactive stance key to ESG targets

There are encouraging signs that organisations are becoming more hands-on in tackling the biggest global issues, writes **Quinton O'Reilly**

Six months after its last outing, the latest edition of the ESG Summit continued the discussion and collaboration around tackling some of the biggest issues faced globally.

While the Spring session focused on conveying the benefits of ESG, this edition emphasised implementation, with the theme Putting Sustainability at the Core of your Business Strategy.

With a full room gathering in Croke Park on Thursday, November 20, summit chair Ivan Yates welcomed them before making way for the first speaker, Derarca Dennis, partner and sustainability services lead at EY, whom he described as having "her finger on the pulse".

Dennis provided a comprehensive overview of the EU's post-omnibus regulatory environment. She stressed the importance of all organisations preparing for a future in which such regulation will affect them.

"When it comes to risk management, I'm keen to emphasise that while today you're not regulated, tomorrow another form of regulation might come at you," she said. "Therefore, you need to be prepared in understanding what will set you up for success in the long term.

She concluded by showing images of adverse weather events in Ireland, revealing that each occurred this year.

"This is why sustainability is so important, and why we have to act now as the impact is being felt now," she concluded.

The next keynote was from David Carlin, founder of DA Carlin and Company and former UNEP FI head of risk, who spoke about a new chapter for ESG. Delivering his talk via video, he updated the audience on where the geopolitical winds are blowing.

Adaptation

One of the key points he hit upon was the importance of adaptation.

"Now, we really need to be moving finance and infrastructure deals to get this done," he said. "Adaptation is a now problem, not a future problem, and that means we have to take action today.

"That critical work between public and private is continuing... [but] we really need to see that grow and scale."

The first panel session of the day looked at EU sustainability regulations and compliance challenges. It featured Brian O'Kennedy, managing director of Goodbody Clearstream; David McKenna, head of sustainability at John Paul Construction; Eilis Griffin, vice-chair of the sustainability working group at Compliance Institute; and Matt Shirley, sustainability solutions at Kinto Zero.

Griffin stated that compliance isn't a tick-box exercise but about embodying the spirit and intention of what it's seeking to achieve.

"The role of compliance is not just complying with the letter of the law but with the spirit and intention," she said. "And the motto of the Compliance Institute is ethics. We're all about the ethical approach as well."

Shirley mentioned the scale of keeping track of regulation as a public sector organisation, saying that the important focus is to help "large-scale organisations simplify the process and give [them] the right tools to keep hold of all this complex data".

There was one more panel before the networking break, this time looking at how businesses can benefit from sustainability.



Laura Mora, managing director, EcoVerify; Derarca Dennis, partner & sustainability services lead, EY; Les O'Reilly, managed services lead & sustainability champion, HP Technology Ireland; Ivan Yates, broadcaster & the evening's chair; Caroline Geoghegan, founder & chief executive, CG Business Consulting; and Maria Kelly, director, Skillnet Climate Ready Academy and head of policy, 20Fifty Partners

All pictures: Maura Hickey



Danielle Hurley, global sustainability program lead, Linesight; Guy Burleton, commercial account executive, Position Green; Caoimhe Buckley, chief corporate affairs officer, Fyffes; and Pieter Weijerman, associate manager, Position Green



Cathal Ryan, head of fleet sales, Toyota Ireland; Addi Colgan, sustainable solutions manager, Kinto Zero; Matt Shirley, sustainability solutions, Kinto Zero; and Patrizia Niehaus, chief executive, Kinto Zero

This featured Alan Duffy, managing director and head of sustainable finance Europe for HSBC and chair of Chapter Zero Ireland; Fiacre O'Donnell, sustainability director for Encirc and climate champion for Business in the Community NI; Les O'Reilly, managed services lead and sustainability champion at HP Technology Ireland, and Noelle O'Connor, founder and director of The Kind Brand Company.

O'Reilly mentioned just how much the term ESG has evolved over the past few years.

"We found, working with public and private organisations, that the subject around sustainability or ESG in particular has evolved over the years, with many businesses and organisations using their resources and influence to bring social value to many," he explained.

"When it comes to social values within ESG, it's definitely moving forward within specific industries," he said. "We see a level of maturity in that space where it evolves and grows.

"You can drive a partnership with your supply chain and customers... [by] bringing those members of expertise into their business, suppliers, or community where they're based."



Garrett Quinn, chief sustainability officer, Smurfit Westrock Plc, Leontia Fannin, chief sustainability & corporate affairs officer, PTSB and John Curran, managing director of Blue Planet Consulting Limited

Deep dives

When the audience returned from their coffee break, they had the opportunity to attend one of several deep dive sessions on offer.

The first portion included three deep dives. The first was on how VSME can help SMEs meet their sustainability demands. This was moderated by Aidan Clifford, FCCA, FCA, advisory services and public affairs manager for ACCA Ireland, and featured Caroline Geoghegan, founder and chief executive of CG Business Consulting, and Maria Kelly, director of Skillnet Climate Ready Academy and head of policy for 20Fifty Partners.

The second deep dive was on fleet decarbonisation helping ESG results. Addi Colgan, sustainable solutions manager for Kinto Zero, moderated the discussion, which was joined by Cathal Ryan, head of fleet sales for Toyota Ireland; Matt Shirley, sustainability solutions for Kinto Zero; and Patrizia Niehaus, chief executive of Kinto Zero.

The third deep dive looked at the business cases for a nature-positive future. This had two moderators: Dr Catherine Farrell, CIEEM, business programme lead for Business for Biodiversity Ireland, and John Barcroft, sustainability consultant for The Environmental Edge.

Both were joined by Dr Shane McGuinness, FRGS, assistant professor in sustainability in the School of Geography at UCD, and Paul Kennedy, chief commercial officer at Proveye.

The second portion of discussions before the lunch break ranged from governance to circular economies.

The fourth deep dive covered ESG governance and ethics, moderated by Lis Dare, manager of Business Working Responsibly Mark at BITCI.

She was joined by Anne Moore, sustainability manager at Gas Networks Ireland, Kevork Arslanian, director of CCaSS at EY, and Mary Cronin, circular economy and climate/ESG and digital innovation expert at INED.

The fifth deep dive was on supply chains and how to ensure they're sustainable and meet Scope 3 challenges. Guy Burleton, commercial account executive at Position Green, moderated this discussion, which featured Caoimhe Buckley, chief corporate affairs officer at Fyffes; Danielle Hurley, global sustainability program lead at Linesight; and Pieter Weijerman, associate manager at Position Green.

The sixth and final deep dive looked at circular start-ups and SMEs and how they did it.

With Valentina Tarasco, circularity assessment and metrics lead at Irish Manufacturing Research (IMR), as the moderator, she was accompanied by Katelyn O'Riordan, co-chief executive of Kinset, Michelle Lee, head of innovation and sustainability at General Paints Group, and Richard Brennan, chief executive of Evolve.

Evolving transitions

With Yates welcoming everyone back from lunch, the afternoon sessions featured a trio of panels. After a video from Trócaire highlighting their work, the discussion swiftly moved to the first topic: building a robust climate transition plan.

Joining Yates were Aoife O'Donnell, head of sustainability at Jones Engineering; Caroline Ashe Brady, director of KORE Insulation and KORE Retrofit; Chisom Ekomaru, sustainability manager at Ecocem Global; and Laura Mora, managing director of EcoVerify.

Mora emphasised that a transition plan should be based on science and urged all organisations to act now.

"A good transition plan has to be based on science, and we have to remember why we're doing it. It's because the planet's temperature is increasing due to our business models. The way we're developing business and growth is causing this.

"We have to act now and be ambitious."

The second discussion was on climate finance and how to use it to accelerate firms' decarbonisation efforts.

Involved in this panel were Ian Dickie, director of Economics for the Environment Consultancy Ltd, UK; PJ Harris, sustainable product innovation lead at Bank of Ireland Group; Rory McElligott, head of climate change at Central Bank of Ireland; and Stefanie O'Gorman, head of sustainable economics at Ramboll UK.

When asked for the most important takeaway from this session, Dickie said to use economics to solve these problems, as there are complex tradeoffs. Harris mentioned the importance of focusing on nature and closing the financing gap through a coherent strategy.

To conclude this edition of the ESG Summit, the final discussion was on the evolving role of the Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO). Involved in this panel were Garrett Quinn, chief sustainability officer at Smurfit Westrock Plc; John Curran, managing director of Blue Planet Consulting Limited; and Leontia Fannin, chief sustainability and corporate affairs officer at PTSB.

Fannin mentioned the importance of breaking down those requirements in a way people can understand, so the business benefits of sustainability are clear.

"If I'm working here in a silo talking about SEIA or climate adoption, which are all very important, it's not going to connect with the goals that they need," she stated. "So how do I talk the language of the commercial director or the chief product officer, and translate the sustainability needs into how we can provide value for our customers and provide value for businesses?"

Quinn echoed this warning to avoid the "alphabet soup" associated with regulations, saying: "Try to avoid that, as the minute you start talking about CSRD and the like, you've lost the audience."

With Yates closing the summit for another year, he commented that the standard remains high and that there's no other place where you can access different levels of expertise in the same place.

"There's a high level of talking and ambition, and while targets are wobbling a bit, I feel that on the ground among companies, there is real work being done. It's now less about obligations and more about action," he concluded.