

ADSW ADVISORY COMMITTEE INSIGHTS REPORT

NATURE AND BIODIVERSITY

2025

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Foreword

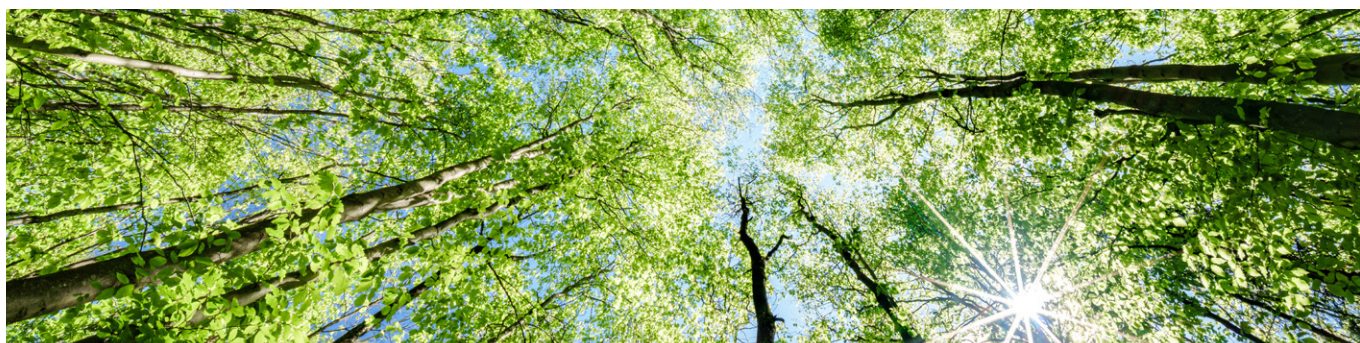
COP28, the 28th annual United Nations Climate Change Conference, advanced the climate–nature nexus and reinforced links with biodiversity-focused COPs. For too long, efforts to address climate change and protect ecosystems were pursued on parallel tracks. But there is growing recognition that these goals are deeply interconnected, with progress in one often reinforcing the other. Advocates are increasingly highlighting that protecting nature also supports climate action, and vice versa.

Alignment on purpose, however, does not always lead to alignment on action. According to the London School of Economics, a 69% average loss in the abundance of mammal, bird, reptile, fish, and amphibian species has occurred globally between 1970 and 2022.¹ Reversing the damage done will be a long, expensive and hard-fought campaign. Fortunately, appetite for action and direct investment appears to be returning to the political landscape. In February 2025 at the 16th United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP16) in Rome, over 140 countries reached a landmark agreement to mobilize \$200 billion annually by 2030 to halt and reverse the destruction of the natural world.² Such funds would be invaluable in financing tactical interventions in some of the most at-risk natural environments on the planet, along with broader strategic efforts to build nature-based solutions into global climate action. Reaching this \$200 billion target would be a significant step up from the efforts of recent years. Even with a \$700 billion annual biodiversity funding gap, reports the Biodiversity Finance Trends Dashboard,³ only \$15.4 billion of international biodiversity finance was disbursed in 2022.⁴

Despite this gap and the long history of shared environmental degradation, governments, businesses, and financial institutions are all collectively coming forward to address the potential crisis of nature and biodiversity loss. Calls for quantifying nature's value to economies (not just the environment) are growing louder, and the need to protect lives and livelihoods from ecological disasters has inspired a scaled-up global response.

With this renewed focus in mind, the 2025 series of Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW) Advisory Committees included, for the first time, a session on nature and biodiversity. ADSW Advisory Committees gather leaders from across business, academia, government, and civil society for open, transparent dialogue about what is happening on the ground, the progress or challenges they are witnessing, and what they believe should happen next. The committee on nature and biodiversity brought together experts from around the world to exchange insights on safeguarding the planet's natural capital while advancing sustainable development.

This insights report delves into the committee's discussion with key themes and observations – from standardized frameworks for measuring nature impacts and integrating nature and climate goals to mobilizing private-sector finance, implementing nature-based solutions, emerging biodiversity markets, the regulatory enablers needed, and the importance of global alignment. The goal is to provide a candid assessment of the world's collective progress and future direction on the journey toward a nature-positive future.



Building Standardized Frameworks

In the current context of nature and biodiversity protection, companies, governments, and NGOs want to do more, but are in many cases stymied by the complexity of measuring and reporting systems. According to the Advisory Committee on Nature and Biodiversity, greater clarity and standardization are essential for galvanizing action on reversing nature loss. Unlike carbon emissions – which have well-established protocols for accounting and disclosure – biodiversity impacts are measured in diverse ways without a single unifying scheme having been imposed or mandated anywhere in the world.

The UAE can set the global tone with the clarity needed to accurately measure and report the impact of its activity on nature, as well as the efficacy of its response. Entities across the public and private sectors working with the same measurements would “foster deeper trust in nature-based efforts, while minimizing confusion and giving a clearer picture of the overall challenges and appropriate solutions,” according to one committee member.



We really need a standard template for reporting on biodiversity, something backed as a baseline by the government, otherwise it's just too cumbersome, with too much duplication of effort.



Progress toward common frameworks is being made, albeit in a voluntary manner. The Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD), launched in 2021 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP FI), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and Global Canopy, published its final recommendations in late 2023, outlining 14 recommended disclosures for nature-related risks and opportunities.⁵ Together, these recommendations give organizations a structured approach (built around the LEAP process – Locate, Evaluate, Assess, Prepare) to accurately assess their dependencies and impacts on nature. Early adoption is underway – around 1,700 organizations are members of the TNFD Forum, and 520 companies and financial institutions worldwide have committed to nature-related corporate reporting, based on the TNFD recommendations.⁶

However, voluntary frameworks should be considered a useful stepping stone to align reporting and actions but not a long-term substitute for mandated regulatory statutes. “Voluntary sustainability actions can showcase goodwill and a willingness to act,” said one committee member, “but compliance is what you have to do by law. That’s what will get companies to commit resources to nature efforts.” Without that, corporate biodiversity efforts will be limited to signaling or marketing initiatives that don’t go far enough to protect nature and biodiversity.

Tackling the illegal wildlife trade – now widely cited as the world’s fourth-largest illicit market – must become a core plank of corporate biodiversity action. Several UAE-based firms in transportation and finance are already embedding end-to-end management systems to detect contraband species, training staff, running public-awareness campaigns, and partnering with enforcement authorities and regional coalitions such as the United for Wildlife MENA chapter. These programs show how businesses can address biodiversity threats that sit outside their direct operational footprints yet critically undermine global conservation goals. Capturing and recognizing such efforts within TNFD-aligned disclosures would send a strong market signal, incentivizing other high-risk sectors to invest in similar measures and helping to close a trade that erodes ecosystems, livelihoods, and security across the Global South.

Establishing a common language and baseline for measuring nature impacts through widely adopted

frameworks and eventually regulation is an essential early step for encouraging, unifying, and scaling up action. Its inherent value is in establishing transparency that will then lead to accountability. Companies should take the initiative in voluntarily reporting their nature impacts now, even if regulators are still catching up, so that they are prepared for potential mandatory disclosure.

Nature-Climate Integration

Nature and climate agendas must be integrated, not siloed. In many corporate and policy strategies, climate conservation has started to receive dedicated attention and resources, but nature conservation is often a separate, lagging conversation. This separation is a mistake because the two are fundamentally interdependent. Climate change is one of the greatest threats to biodiversity, and healthy ecosystems are indispensable for climate mitigation and adaptation.

The UAE exemplifies this dichotomy. The nation has set ambitious climate goals – including a net-zero emissions target by 2050 – but it does not yet have a comparable set of nature targets or a national biodiversity strategy. “In this case, we don’t have a nature goal yet for the UAE specifically, but we do have climate goals, and we know that they are interdependent ... a key point is how they’re dovetailing together,” one committee member remarked. Their interdependence means progress (or setbacks) on one front inevitably affects the other. For example, restoring mangroves or conserving wetlands can sequester carbon and help meet climate targets, while a climate-related event like extreme heat or drought can degrade ecosystems if they’re not sufficiently resilient.

Integrating climate and nature is conceptually important, as well as practical, with policy alignment being essential. In the UAE, environmental regulation is handled by multiple bodies – federal ministries, emirate-level authorities, free zone regulators – which can lead to fragmented approaches. The UAE Sustainable Finance Working Group is an encouraging example of coordination, as it brings together central bank and capital market regulators to promote more unified ESG standards.

From a strategic perspective, the Middle East has an opportunity to leapfrog more established markets by designing integrated climate-nature policies from the outset. In regions where climate policy is more mature, businesses now face a new learning curve to add biodiversity into their established reporting and operations. Meanwhile, the UAE and its neighbors could create policies that address climate and nature at the same time, underscoring the importance of making regulatory frameworks fit for the purpose of a national sustainability drive that tackles the problems holistically.

Upcoming climate- and nature-focused summits are expected to accelerate this integration agenda. ADSW 2026 will convene shortly after COP30 in Brazil – where, as at COP28, biodiversity is set to feature prominently alongside decarbonization. Committee members highlighted how COP28 deliberately elevated nature issues within the climate discourse, signaling a shift that is likely to intensify in the run-up to COP30. This evolution mirrors the converging ambitions of the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, underscoring the need for policies and investments that deliver simultaneous gains for climate and nature.



Think of it like this – biodiversity is climate infrastructure. If you strengthen nature and biodiversity, you cannot help but strengthen your response to climate change. That’s the power of natural systems. If we consider nature-based solutions as being interlinked with climate solutions – in terms of financing, regulatory frameworks, and so on – we can fast-track our progress on both fronts.



Unlocking Private Sector Financing

Across the entire nature and biodiversity conversation, a scaled up and integrated response to nature loss will require massive injections of funding at levels that have not yet materialized despite the subject's raised profile in COPs and other top-tier climate conferences.

Currently, the lion's share of funding for biodiversity conservation comes from governments or philanthropy. 70-80% of nature conservation funding globally is provided by public sources, meaning private capital makes up only a small fraction. Hitting the \$200 billion mark by 2030 (and addressing the overall \$700 billion financing gap) will inevitably mean drawing in billions of dollars from private investment and equity⁶.

Until very recently, the private sector has remained cautious about throwing meaningful capital flows behind projects and investment vehicles that remain relatively untested, and whose impact can often be difficult to gauge. The tangential experience of carbon markets is typical of this attitude – carbon credits have failed to get off the ground as a global green finance vehicle due to a litany of confused regulatory signals, cynical profiteering, and fiscal sleight of hand to the point where markets have lost faith in their value and overall purpose. Only the clear-cut signals of government-backed standards and oversight, secured at COP29, have managed to resurrect carbon credits as a serious prospect for supporting green financing in the future. This is just one among numerous examples where private investors remain skittish around the overall “bankability” of purposefully green investments outside of thoroughly established markets such as renewable energy.



We see limited interest from banks and the investment sector to really focus on nature rather than the climate-related projects. Generally, a solar farm or an electric vehicle venture holds more appeal than a wetland restoration or a wildlife corridor project, because the risks and returns are better understood. We need to change that perception to unlock the capital behind those investment decisions.



The issue of investor hesitancy is often due to the perception that nature projects lack clear revenue streams. Renewable energy plants generate and sell clean energy, but what revenue can be expected from a mangrove restoration project? The benefits – flood protection, carbon sequestration, support for fishing industries – are mostly public goods or long-term gains that are not easily captured by a single project sponsor.

However, innovative examples suggest this hurdle can be overcome. A pioneering project in Southeast Asia where private capital was successfully raised for forest conservation blended public and private funds. The partnership involving a corporation, a bank, and the UN helped structure a bond to protect 400,000 hectares of forest. The first tranche of \$95 million was raised on capital markets at interest rates below the host country's sovereign borrowing cost – effectively unlocking cheaper finance by packaging the project attractively. “We got a range of diverse stakeholders together,” a committee member involved in the project explained, “we proved the business case and the benefits, we shared the risks and the rewards – that's how you move the needle.”

Policy incentives also have a role in nudging private finance further towards nature. Clear signals “from the top” can make a big difference. These can include tax breaks or credits for companies investing in conservation, government procurement favoring nature-positive projects, or even a



national fund that matches private investments in biodiversity, similar to climate finance institutions. While waiting for formal regulations, even voluntary encouragement from government can be welcome. For instance, authorities could publicly recognize companies that adopt TNFD reporting or set up nature-based projects, creating a reputational incentive. Public-private partnerships were highlighted as a pragmatic way forward – much like infrastructure PPPs, conservation PPPs could leverage the efficiency of the private sector with the mandate and support of the public sector. Despite the historically low levels of private capital flows going towards the sector, recent performance levels inspire hope. Private finance for nature-based investment has surged elevenfold in the past four years, from \$9.4 billion to over \$102 billion, according to new research shared at the 3rd World Biodiversity Forum in Davos.⁷ Bloomberg also reports that biodiversity-focused funds have doubled in both size and number over the past three years. Major asset managers collectively managing over \$20 trillion in assets are now publicly advocating for faster assessment of nature-related risks, in order to accurately rate the risks of nature-based investment and mobilize private capital to unprecedented levels.

There is no shortage of private capital available for nature, but structural barriers prevent it from being mobilized at scale. If the lack of revenue models, risk perception, and unclear metrics are addressed, the capital will become available. “Banks are not inherently averse to nature,” one financier on the committee commented. “Their appetite will grow if the right projects are there, backed by the right signals from governments and other key stakeholders.”

The task ahead is to develop the projects and financial frameworks that can absorb this influx of private capital. With the right innovation and support, the coming years could see a transformation where investing in ecosystems becomes as routine as investing in real estate or technology – a key piece of the sustainability puzzle falling into place.

Nature-Based Solutions

When it comes to on-the-ground action, the power of nature-based solutions (NbS) should not be underestimated. A single well-designed NbS project can sequester carbon, safeguard biodiversity, buffer communities from extreme weather, and even support livelihoods. In an era when governments and businesses are seeking cost-effective ways to build climate resilience, NbS stand out as “no-regrets” options, provided they are done in the right way for the right location.

NbS relevant to the Middle East context include mangrove restoration along coastlines, which has gained traction in the UAE. Mangroves are often cited as a quintessential NbS because they store CO₂ (up to four times more carbon per hectare than tropical forests), protect shores from storm surges and erosion, provide nursery habitat for fisheries, and enhance coastal water quality. The UAE has pledged to plant 100 million mangroves by 2030 and is leading the Mangrove Alliance for Climate, an international initiative to scale up mangrove conservation.⁸ With efforts like these, momentum is building – mangroves have received “a lot of the spotlight in the region,” the committee noted, with extensive planting and research underway.

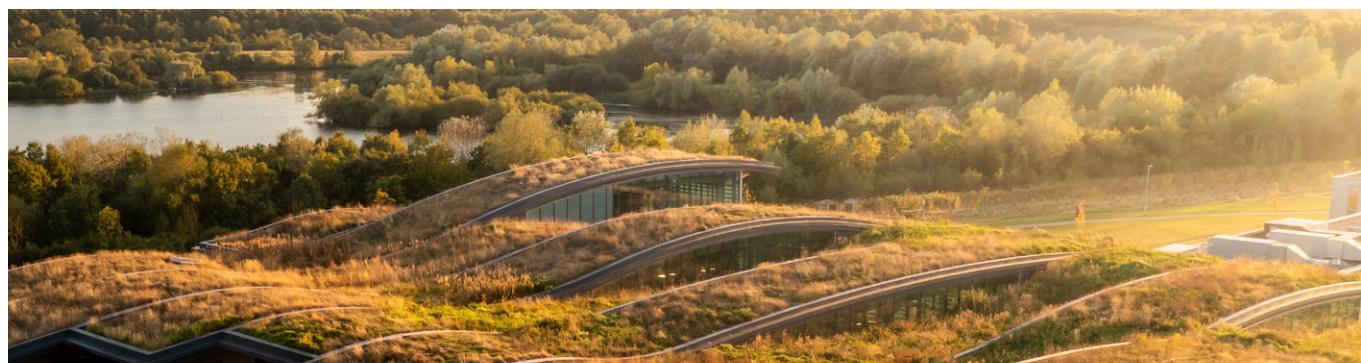


We’re finally getting to the point where everyone is on the same page. It’s not only about climate mitigation and carbon; nature-based solutions can also drive local economies. When we look at ways to protect whole ecosystems, not just single habitats, we are well placed to secure socio-economic gains alongside environmental ones.



However, other coastal and terrestrial ecosystems deserve attention too. “We need to be aware that in this region’s coastal areas, we have many other habitats – seagrasses, salt marshes, sand dunes – and they all play an important role,” commented one expert. While the upsurge in planting mangroves is encouraging, a holistic approach to coastal ecosystems would yield greater overall benefits. Nature-based solutions are not a one-size-fits-all equation; they must be customized to local ecology. In the UAE’s case, that means employing regionally appropriate technologies, such as drip irrigation and hydrogel soil additives.

More rigorous documentation of NbS outcomes would help build trust and attract investment. If a company or city implements a nature-based solution, measuring its benefits and publicizing these results can spark further interest while creating a knowledge base for others to replicate. By championing nature-based solutions and demonstrating their effectiveness in an arid context, governments can inspire broader global adoption of nature and biodiversity conservation as a core strategy for sustainability and climate adaptation.



Biodiversity Markets

Creating tradeable credits or offsets for biodiversity gains, much like carbon credits can mobilize private funding for NbS, but that promise comes with pitfalls.

Carbon markets have provided a template – albeit an imperfect one – for how environmental credits might work. In carbon trading, one tonne of CO₂ reduced or removed in one place can offset emissions elsewhere, enabling a market to put a price on carbon. Unlike carbon, which is fungible (a tonne of CO₂ has the same effect regardless of where or how it's reduced), biodiversity is highly location-specific and multidimensional. The value of a hectare of rainforest versus a coral reef versus a grassland cannot be easily equated. Any attempt to create biodiversity credits or offsets must be approached very carefully, learning from the challenges carbon markets have faced regarding transparency, valuation, multiple usage, and verification gaps.

The UK's Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) policy is a real-world example. New development projects in the UK are now required by law to leave biodiversity in a better state than before, mandating at least a 10% net gain.⁹ This has effectively created a national market for biodiversity units – developers who can't achieve gains onsite can purchase credits from offsite habitat projects that generate biodiversity improvements. As “a sort of example of a national offset market,” a committee member noted, it enforces the mitigation hierarchy (first avoid or minimize damage, then offset as a last resort). The UK model encourages developers to invest in habitat banks or conservation areas within the country to compensate for their impacts. The committee viewed this approach as a potentially workable blueprint: keeping biodiversity offsets local or national ensures that the ecological context is similar (you're not trading a wetland in one country for a forest in another, for instance) and that regulators can tightly oversee the quality of credits.

By contrast, a global biodiversity credit market, where for example, a company destroying habitat in Asia buys a biodiversity credit from a project in Latin America, is less effective. “If you had an international one where you allow trade in, it could be a complete disaster,” one expert cautioned bluntly. The reasons are manifold: risk of greenwashing, difficulty of ensuring equivalence (protecting one tiger does truly replace losing one elephant, for example), and potential negative outcomes for communities, such as land grabs for conservation projects.

For now, biodiversity markets remain firmly in frontier concept territory, warranting exploration as well as an eyes-wide-open approach. If carbon trading – an inherently simpler idea – is still experiencing such ingrained issues around trust and transparency decades after their inception, then nature or biodiversity credits will inevitably struggle to gain widespread acceptance in international investment markets unless they are very carefully introduced and regulated.



We're cautious about heading straight into biodiversity credits, since the hierarchy of actions isn't very clear. If it isn't done carefully, corporates will just see it as another way to do offsets while carrying on with environmentally harmful practices in their main operations. There are layers of complexity involved that suggest a more limited, targeted approach at least initially.



Key Takeaways

Nature is rising on the corporate agenda, but clear metrics and standards are essential: Companies are increasingly aware of biodiversity risks, yet many struggle with how to accurately measure and report them. The adoption of a standard template on reporting and disclosure will be essential in driving participation. Progress on voluntary initiatives is promising, but a clear-cut, compliance-based regulatory framework will make the difference between mere corporate signalling and meaningful action on nature.

Climate and biodiversity goals must go hand in hand: Climate change and ecosystem health are deeply interlinked; treating them in silos leads to blind spots and missed opportunities. Whether in national policy or corporate strategy, aligning nature-positive targets with net zero targets will yield a widening range of societal, environmental, and economic benefits.

Mobilizing private finance for nature is the next big hurdle: Public funding alone is insufficient to meet conservation needs. Unlocking private capital requires making the business case for nature. Innovative finance models – blended funds, green bonds, payments for ecosystem services – can help create revenue streams from restoration and protection. Banks and investors are willing to invest if projects are structured appropriately. Demonstration projects in the region that show reliable returns will be vital to overcome investor skepticism. Natural capital needs to be seen as an investable asset class, not just an ESG effort.

Nature-based solutions offer multi-solving value: From mangrove forests to urban green spaces, working with nature was repeatedly highlighted as a “win-win” approach. These solutions can simultaneously sequester carbon, buffer climate impacts, enhance biodiversity, and support livelihoods. The committee urged scaling up NbS in both rural and urban contexts – restoring ecosystems like wetlands, reefs, and forests, and incorporating green infrastructure into city design. Members emphasized that NbS should move to the mainstream of infrastructure and climate adaptation planning, rather than being seen as niche projects.

Biodiversity markets should be approached with caution and strong safeguards: There is growing interest in developing mechanisms akin to carbon markets for biodiversity credits or offsets. The group agreed such tools could channel funds to conservation but warned against rushing in. Quality and integrity must come first – any credit system should follow strict mitigation hierarchies and likely remain within local/national boundaries to ensure ecological relevance. Poorly designed global trading of biodiversity was seen as potentially doing more harm than good.

About the ADSW Advisory Committees

The committees are designed to foster candid discussions that break down silos between sectors and regions. Participants include CEOs and senior executives of international companies, government policymakers, leading researchers, and technology innovators. This diversity ensures a wide range of perspectives. In closed-door sessions, members share insights, highlight key challenges, and propose actionable solutions and areas for collaboration. Discussions are held under the Chatham House Rule, allowing participants to speak openly about successes and setbacks, learn from one another, and identify common ground. The dialogue is intentionally forward-looking and focused on practical outcomes.

Insights from the committees help shape ADSW’s content, direction, and related initiatives. Recommendations are distilled into official reports such as this one and shared with a broader audience to inspire continued dialogue and action. These findings often inform the agendas of ADSW summits, panels, and workshops, and may guide Masdar and its partners in developing new initiatives or advancing policy advocacy aligned with the committee’s conclusions. In past years, the committees have contributed to meaningful outcomes, from catalyzing cross-border partnerships to introducing new topics into global forums such as the World Future Energy Summit.

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About Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week

Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW) is a global platform supported by the UAE and its clean energy leader, Masdar, to address the world's most pressing sustainability challenges through crucial conversations accelerating responsible development and fostering inclusive economic, social and environmental progress.

For more than 15 years, ADSW has convened decision-makers from governments, the private sector and civil society to advance the global sustainability agenda through dialogue, cross-sector collaboration and impactful solutions. Throughout the year, ADSW conversations and initiatives facilitate knowledge sharing and collective action that will ensure a sustainable world for future generations.

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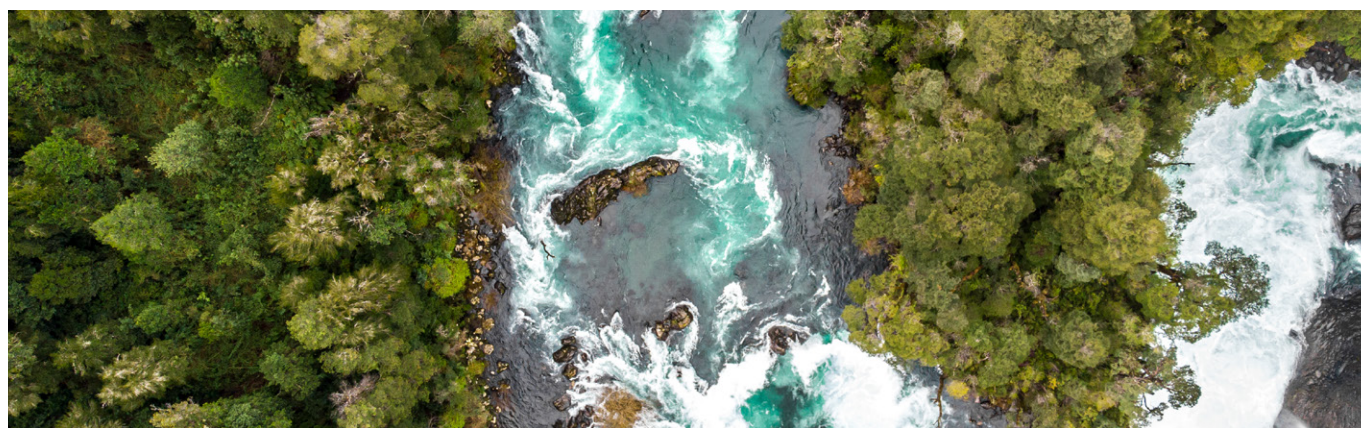
About the World Future Energy Summit

The World Future Energy Summit is the leading global event for clean energy and sustainability, bringing together innovators, business leaders, policymakers, and investors to turn ambition into action.

Over three days, the international exhibition and conference addresses the most pressing challenges of our time—clean energy, climate change, sustainable cities, water security, waste management, green finance, and the transformative power of artificial intelligence.

By uniting almost 42,000 attendees from public, private, and non-profit sectors, it serves as a critical bridge between bold policy and real-world solutions.

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