

Gulf region primed to unlock massive green energy gains, says EU Commission on opening day of WFES

ABU DHABI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, January 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The 18th World Future Energy Summit, part of Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week and hosted by Masdar, opened today (January 13) at the ADNEC Centre Abu Dhabi, and saw a number of key discussions around investment, clean energy adoption and cross-border collaborations take shape, with announcements worth billions of US dollars set to take place across the three-day event.

Opening the Summit, Ditte Jørgensen, Director General of Directorate-General for Energy (DG ENER) at the European Commission, delivered a keynote speech highlighting Europe's commitment to hydrogen as a critical component in its energy transition. Emphasising the EU's role in decarbonisation, she said the legal framework established to support global and low-carbon hydrogen production means there are significant opportunities within the GCC.

The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) for Energy, the EU funding programme to implement the Trans-European Networks for Energy policy, will increase fivefold to eventually reach €30 billion, she said. As negotiations with Gulf Cooperative Council countries proceed, Jørgensen called the opportunity to collaborate "essential for both sides".



Groundbreaking announcements dominate opening day of the Summit



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“A stable and ambitious trade and investment framework between the European Union and countries in the GCC will unlock further private investment, including in energy-critical raw materials, which are key to building the supply chains of the future, green technologies, and help bring innovation, affordability, competitiveness, and security,” Jørgensen added.

UAE is EU’s leading investment partner, with mutual investments exceeding €320 billion

On the same stage, Lucie Berger, the ambassador for the EU Delegation to the UAE, revealed the Emirates is the EU’s leading investment partner, with mutual investments reaching approximately €328 billion (US\$383bn). Emphasising the potential benefits, she said future strategic partnership agreements with individual Gulf states and free trade agreements would “unlock even greater shared gains in the energy sector, focusing on renewable energy, hydrogen, and cleantech”.

Organised in partnership with the EU-GCC Cooperation on Green Transition Project, Mohammad Abdelqader El-

Ramahi, Chief Hydrogen Officer at Abu Dhabi’s Masdar, also took to the stage, telling delegates he believes mutual investments between the UAE and EU could, in time, reach trillions given international banks have projected global investment in green hydrogen alone to exceed US\$11 trillion by the year 2040.

Groundbreaking announcements dominate opening day of the Summit

Trevor Ducharme, President at Global CMX, is attending this week’s Summit and took part in a fireside chat with journalist and broadcaster Richard Dean to discuss a groundbreaking UAE-Australia economic energy partnership. Speaking during his session, Ducharme referred to the



Opening day of World Future Energy Summit



Opening Day MASDAR WFES 2026

Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the two countries as “a game-changer for the UAE-Australia energy corridor, creating fertile ground for multi-billion-dollar investments that will redefine sustainable development.” As the CEPA was only ratified in November 2025, the World Future Energy Summit is the first global event where the industry can engage directly with the partnership stakeholders.



“The UAE-Australia CEPA is a catalyst to unlock billions in renewable energy deals, and it is starting at World Future Energy Summit 2026,” added Ducharme.

His Excellency Engineer Ahmed Al Falasi, Energy Efficiency Sector Executive Director at Abu Dhabi Department of Energy, opened the embedded Clean Energy Conference with a keynote highlighting the importance of integrated system design to accelerate the energy transition while safeguarding reliability and energy security.

“Abu Dhabi’s clean energy journey has taught us that the energy transition does not succeed because of a single technology, but when entire systems are designed to work together,” he said. “Today, solar is no longer an emerging option – it is infrastructure, and we have moved decisively from pilot projects to utility-scale deployment. As solar and storage expand, the real test is reliability when the sun is not shining – and this is where system design becomes critical.

“Solar provides scale and cost efficiency, storage provides flexibility, and nuclear provides clean, stable baseload power. Hydrogen further strengthens dispatchable low-carbon options. Together, these technologies form a balanced load system that supports economic growth while maintaining energy security. Digital transformation must sit at the centre of this evolution. AI-enabled platforms that integrate electricity, water, cooling, and operational data into a single trusted view can shift us from reactive management to predictive decision-making – improving forecasting, optimising dispatch, and identifying inefficiencies before they become system risks.”

Almost half of global GDP relies on nature and biodiversity, hears Pathway to 1.5°C stage
On the Pathway to 1.5°C stage, senior representatives from finance, academia, and sustainability discussed nature-based outcomes and their business implications. Omar Shaikh, Managing Director at the Global Ethical Finance Initiative, warned that ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss now pose real risks to global economies and supply chains. He underscored the scale of the challenge, noting that “according to the World Economic Forum, nearly 50 per cent of global GDP relies on nature and biodiversity, yet we do not value this on our financial statements

or our balance sheets and often take it for granted.”

Shaikh also highlighted the complexity of making nature investable, drawing on work with UNDP to examine how nature, biodiversity, and sustainable agriculture can be structured as viable asset classes capable of attracting private sector capital. With 90 per cent of the UAE’s population and critical infrastructure concentrated on the coastline alongside mangroves, coral reefs, and seagrass, Professor John Burt, Head of Environmental Studies at NYUAD, later argued these ecosystems must be viewed as national infrastructure, emphasising their economic value and vulnerability.

Gulf cities should ‘create something new’ rather than try to replicate New York or London. During a panel discussion held as part of a two-day Sustainable Cities and EMobility Conference, Ellora-Julie Parekh, Chief Sustainability Officer at Al-Futtaim, noted a recent company whitepaper found 33 per cent of UAE residents use public transport due to accessibility issues as she advocated for an integrated mobility approach. Marina Antonopoulou, Chief Climate and Conservation Officer at Emirates Nature WWF, meanwhile stressed the importance of green corridors and biodiversity initiatives for climate adaptation and human well-being.

While previous centuries saw New York and London resist the temptation to develop on huge plots of urban land, retaining sprawling green spaces at Central Park and Hyde Park, Antonopoulou says the climate in the GCC demands something different. “The region now has a chance to do something similar, but that looks different. We have a chance to define what that equivalent is. The workout Abu Dhabi is doing with mangroves is fantastic, so maybe that’s a piece of the answer, while Dubai is on the migratory route for a number of birds so maybe that’s another option. It’s not a single bullet; it’s not copying something that is nice – it’s an opportunity for us to create something new.”

IRENA Innovation Day brings together renewable energy ecosystem

As part of the IRENA Innovation Day, a panel discussion titled ‘Renewable Integration for Competitive Industries’ discussed the expansion of renewable energy projects in Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco, focusing on methanol production from wind and solar energy. By 2030, the goal is to achieve cost parity with fossil fuels. The panel also addressed the strategic importance of corporate Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) in enabling the growth of renewable energy for industrial sectors. Marina Sergeeva, Senior Consultant Corporate PPA and Green Energy Procurement, DNV, emphasised that PPAs typically last 12–15 years and that shortening their duration can reduce price competitiveness for industrial customers.

“Longer-term PPAs, conversely, improve bankability for project developers and attract large, financially robust industrial partners such as those in mining and cement,” said Sergeeva. “These agreements ensure a stable revenue stream and support greater investment confidence from both energy suppliers and financiers. The profitability and financial security that PPAs offer are essential to scaling renewable energy projects and providing the industry with affordable, reliable green electricity.”

“We are absolutely thrilled with the Summit’s opening day across all our major metrics,” said

Gareth Rapley, Portfolio Director - Energy and Marine at RX Global. "We've seen fantastic footfall across nine show halls, packed conference sessions tackling some of the industry's most pressing challenges, and high-levels of industry-wide collaborations – in the form of exciting investment announcements and fledgling collaborations – being finalised and explored by like-minded businesses from every corner of the world. The World Future Energy Summit continues to connect the international renewable energy ecosystem in Abu Dhabi, while also propelling the emirate's standing as a respected global connector and enabler."

For more information, please visit - <https://www.worldfutureenergysummit.com/>

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