

**Energy Transitions Commission
Commissioners Meeting (Virtual)
Summary Note
Thursday, 19th March 2026**

Thursday 19th March, 11.00 – 15.30pm UKT

| Time (UK) | Agenda |
|------------------|--|
| 11.00 – 11.10 | Welcome |
| 11.10 – 12.40 | The energy transition in 2026: recent developments and how to respond (1/2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflections on how COP30, the IEA, US and EU policy and the shifting media landscape risks polarising energy transition debates |
| 12.40 – 13:10 | Break |
| 13.10 – 14.30 | The energy transition in 2026: recent developments and how to respond (2/2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking ahead this year: COP31 and electrification vs. fossil fuels • ETC work programme for 2026: a key focus on Protecting Paris and electrification • Proposal for communications strategy evolution to best respond to shifting climate debates |
| 14.30 – 15.30 | ETC emerging insights: The role of firm low-carbon power – nuclear and geothermal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging conclusions from the analysis • Key messages that respond to live debates happening today |
| 15.30 | Conclusion and wrap-up |

Key discussion takeaways

The ETC would like to thank its Commissioners for their active participation at the meeting and the rich discussion. This note captures the main takeaways from the discussions and all materials from the meeting are available for download on ETC Member portal [here](#). These are internal documents not to be shared beyond your organisation.

Please note that as member newsletter *ETC Insider* is now issued on a bimonthly basis, the summary notes will be made available earlier via the member portal under the relevant meeting folders.

I. The energy transition in 2026: recent developments and how to respond

Geopolitical context and regional dynamics

The ETC team presented an overview of the current geopolitical and economic context shaping the energy transition at the start of 2026. Recent fossil fuel price volatility has further highlighted both the risks of continued dependence and the political sensitivity of transition costs and while progress continues in key areas, including rapid renewable deployment, accelerating EV uptake,

and signs of coal peaking in China's power sector, momentum remains uneven across regions. In the US, energy security and domestic industrial priorities are driving the agenda; in Europe, affordability and competitiveness concerns are constraining progress; and in Asia, particularly China and India, even if peaking, coal continues to play a central role due to cost and development needs. The presentation also noted growing uncertainty around the role of shared reference scenarios such as the IEA's scenarios, with concerns that the agency may no longer publish a Net Zero scenario under current pressure of US administration, creating a vacuum for corporates and governments that have relied on this as a benchmark for target-setting and strategic planning.

In discussion, ETC Commissioners reflected on the increasing divergence in regional pathways and the implications for global coordination. There was recognition that while the transition is advancing, it is doing so in a more fragmented and politically constrained environment. Several participants highlighted the challenge of balancing decarbonisation with competitiveness and affordability, particularly in Europe, while others noted the continued importance of coal in emerging economies. Overall, the discussion underscored the need to better reflect regional realities in both analysis and engagement.

Multilateralism, private action and public debate

The ETC team presented perspectives on the evolving role of multilateralism, private sector action, and public debate in shaping the transition. It highlighted weakening momentum in international coordination, alongside continued progress driven by market forces favouring clean lower-cost technologies. However, important gaps remain, these include: limited progress on methane reductions, continued deforestation, carbon removals far below required scale, and the absence of scalable solutions for the early phase-out of coal generation. At the same time, corporate and financial institutions are facing increasing challenges, with difficulties in implementing near-term action in some sectors due to slower-than-expected policy support and rising perceived risks. The presentation also emphasised the growing polarization on climate debate in the media with public narratives being deliberately flooded by misinformation.

ETC Commissioners noted that geopolitical tensions risk undermining effective collaboration, particularly where narratives reinforce divisions between major economies. There was strong consensus that public debate on the costs and benefits of net-zero is centred around false extremes, with misinformation becoming more prominent. Commissioners further emphasised the need to shift towards clearer, more tangible messaging focused on energy security, costs of living and real economy benefits, while also recognising the continued importance of private sector leadership in sustaining progress.

Implications and ETC 2026 work programme

The ETC team presented its perspective on the way forward, emphasising that rapid progress towards Paris goals remains possible, but is not guaranteed. There is a need to actively counter the growing normalisation of lower ambition and higher temperature outcomes, and to re-anchor action around a well-below 2°C pathway. Electrification was highlighted as a central lever to accelerate progress across sectors, alongside the need for a step change in the hard to electrify industries, methane emissions and LULUCF, as well as scaling removals. ETC also invited Molly Walton (Energy Director at the We Mean Business Coalition – a key partner) to outline the *Electric Advantage* programme which aims at accelerating electrification via corporate action and policy support, starting in 2026 with a focus on direct electrification and coalition-building.

In response to this evolving context, ETC highlighted how its 2026 work programme centred around the "Protecting Paris" initiative, which combines analysis and engagement, alongside

participation in global electrification campaign, positioning nuclear and geothermal in a net zero pathway, pushing discussions of carbon pricing, AgriPV potential in India and further work on clean power, molecules and regions.

ETC Commissioners welcomed the dual focus on analysis and engagement and emphasised the importance of a strong communication with a particular focus on measuring progress and success on actionable indicators instead of global temperature variations. This reiterates the importance of grounding the work in real economy constraints, such as physical climate risks and costs of inaction, as well as to better connect financial frameworks with investment needs. Several Commissioners also highlighted the importance of building partnerships and coalitions to support implementation, and of ensuring that ETC's work reflects the increasing complexity and fragmentation of the global landscape.

Evolving ETC communications strategy

The ETC team presented an emerging strategy to refresh its communications programme in response to the politicised and fragmented climate debate, which was well received from the Commission. While the 2023–2025 approach i.e. amplifying evidence, repeating core messages, and extending audience reach, strengthened ETC influence, the context has shifted. Previously unifying terms such as “net-zero” have become contested, media ecosystems are more polarised, and AI is reshaping how information is produced and consumed.

This strategy refresh will address key strategic questions: how to frame messages in a contested environment; how to equip a broader group of credible messengers; how to operate effectively in an AI-shaped information landscape; how to respond more rapidly to live debates; and how to balance global analysis with local relevance. It will also consider practical implications, including resource allocation and partnerships to extend the ETC's reach.

The strategy evolution will proceed in three phases: discovery, strategy definition, and implementation design. ETC are seeking to arrange a number of bilaterals with interested members to refine our emerging strategy, please contact Ros Hunt, Interim Communications Director, at Rosalie.hunt@systemiq.earth to arrange a discussion.

II. ETC emerging insights: The role of firm low-carbon power – nuclear and geothermal

The ETC team presented emerging conclusions from the nuclear and geothermal workstream, structured around the seven most common claims in public debate. Both technologies have gained renewed attention due to rising power demand (including from data centres), innovation in SMRs, next-generation geothermal and beyond, and growing political support in some countries. However, ETC analysis suggests that while there could be absolute growth in the scale of nuclear and geothermal technologies, they are likely to remain at low shares of the future global energy mix.

In most geographies, new-build nuclear and geothermal remain slower and higher cost than wind and solar, and next-generation technologies present no cost reduction and no improvements in deployment time in the near term. Wind and solar-dominated systems with balancing and storage can deliver electricity at or below the cost of current fossil-based systems; adding beyond 10–20% of firm low-carbon generation to the system would increase costs. Even maintaining nuclear at the current levels of 10% of global generation by 2050 would require an 8-fold increase in deployment pace. The most credible role for both technologies is complementary within renewables-led systems, at limited shares, with relevance in specific contexts. For geothermal, the strongest near-term value may lie in heat and storage applications rather than power generation, which are already cost-competitive and highly scalable.

In the discussion, ETC Commissioners emphasised the importance of developing technology-specific narratives with two distinct outputs: one focused on nuclear and one on geothermal. The "addressing topical debates" format used in the presentation was well-received and could feed into communications outputs, however must be framed objectively to avoid sounding too optimistic or pessimistic. There were calls to emphasise in which countries would nuclear have a clear role versus where nuclear might not be the right path; country's suitability for nuclear and geothermal was the focus of a specific ETC [workshop](#) the following week. The supply chain concentration of enriched uranium, with a significant share in Russia, was flagged as an underappreciated point by policymakers. ETC Commissioners also recommended for a deeper analysis of the nuclear's potential role in China (including for heat networks) and broader exploration of geothermal's storage and heat technologies. The importance of maintaining strict factual rigour throughout the workstream was stressed, alongside several technical nuances around SMR deployment and grid connections. The ETC team in response propose the delivery of a full report for nuclear, reflecting its scale and complexity, alongside a shorter insights briefing for geothermal, tailored to its earlier stage of deployment and more targeted roles.