

MNI Research: Key Themes from the Energy Intelligence Forum 2025

By Lawrence Toye (17/10/2025)

Executive Summary:

- Industry leaders see no end in sight to oil demand, calling for an **energy addition rather than transition**.
- **Gas producers** highlighted the fuel's reliability and **shrugged off concerns for a looming surplus**.
- A more **practical policy approach to net zero** was called for as current targets look unachievable.
- As the global security structures upend, **energy sovereignty is taking on greater importance**.

At the 2025 Energy Intelligence Forum in London, industry leaders hammered home their view that, despite net zero pledges and a decarbonisation agenda, oil and gas is here to stay.

Energy Addition Not Transition: Oil Here for the Long Haul

The conference commenced with a speech from Aramco's CEO Amin Nasser, who labelled the evolution of the industry an "energy addition rather than an energy transition," calling for "smart ways" to meet the forecasted rise in global energy demand by a third by 2030.

- "Much of the promised progress on energy transition hasn't been delivered, with hydrocarbons to be the backbone of the global economy for decades to come," Nasser said, adding that despite growth in renewable energy, oil, gas, and coal consumption are breaking new records.
- This outlook was echoed by Patrick Pouyanne, CEO of TotalEnergies, who went as far as saying that there is no peak oil demand on the horizon, even if consumption growth does slow.
- Petrochemical and jet fuel appear to be the main growth drivers for oil into the future, with most speakers acknowledging the slowdown in conventional motor fuels such as gasoline and diesel.
- Consequently, Aramco is making the liquid to chemical sector a key focus area for investment, estimating that it alone will comprise 30-40% of future oil demand growth.

Upstream Investment Urgency

With oil here to stay, leaders called for appropriate investment in E&P to prevent supply squeezes.

- Current concern of an oversupplied market is a very short-term issue, Exxon CEO Darren Woods said, explaining that "medium- to long-term markets are short of supply and there's not enough investment in the pipeline."
- Aramco's CEO Amin Nasser said that global investment in upstream has declined by 4% on the year; to hold global supply steady this needed to increase due to inflation.
- Natural decline rates also became a recurring topic for speakers. As shale takes an ever-larger share in the global oil mix, decline rates will rise due to the faster annual depletion of unconventional oil.
- Aramco forecasts that 6m b/d is needed annually to maintain current global output, while Total's Pouyanne added that a shift to shale has boosted annual decline rates to 6% compared to 4-5% previously.
- Exxon's depletion forecast was even more extreme, declaring that it sees an annual 15% decline rate in oil without new upstream production. However, additional investments in tech can cut that to 5%, Exxon added.

- The overall narrative for upstream players strongly emphasised that a greater emphasis must be placed on extraction, without which supply will fail to meet demand in the years to come.
- “We have gaps to fill [in upstream]. Replacement has been forgotten as a KPI,” Petronas CEO Tengku Muhammad Taufik said.

Gas as the Baseload for Power

In the gas market, producers commended the fuel’s reliability and how it can complement the growth in renewable energy.

- “Renewables have a role [in global energy demand] but don’t have the energy intensity [of hydrocarbons]. Gas has the energy intensity of hydrocarbon’s but with half the emissions of coal,” Woodside’s CEO Meg O’Neil said.
- Petronas’ Taufik, said that “LNG ticks all the boxes,” in the need for a baseload energy source.
- In a Q&A with Total’s Patrick Pouyanne, a similar point was touched upon, with gas and LNG able to offset the intermittency of renewables.
- “No customer wants an intermittent electron. There is no value in that,” Pouyanne said. “The market wants reliable electricity, and that requires gas-fired plants.”

LNG Producers Shrug of Supply Glut Concerns

In contrast to concerns of future scarcity of oil supplies and lagging production investment, industry leaders were trying to assuage concerns for a looming gas glut.

- Total’s CEO Patrick Pouyanne said at the Energy Intelligence conference that he is optimistic that the LNG market will absorb additional supply coming online, a belief echoed by Woodside Energy who emphasised the resilience of the LNG market.
- Pouyanne also questioned whether all planned US projects will reach FID and be financed. He pointed to US tariffs impacting steel prices and driving up Capex for such projects. Supply forecasts would naturally begin to fall were some projects not to reach completion.
- Furthermore, the supply surplus from rising LNG production - even if all projects begin producing - is expected to be a short-lived phenomenon, especially given that investment timelines are measured in decades.
- “Gas oversupply coming in 2-3 years doesn’t matter, we are investing for 20 years,” Ryan Lance, CEO of ConocoPhillips said.

Practical Approach to Net Zero

Regarding regulations, speakers argued that resilience of future oil demand necessitates a more pragmatic and practical approach from policy makers towards the challenge of net zero targets.

- ExxonMobil’s CEO Darren Woods declared that with existing technologies, the Paris Climate Accord’s goals are unachievable.
- Woods, along with many of his peers, took the opportunity to criticise the narrow focus from policymakers of limiting the transition to EVs, solar energy, and wind. “The objective statement is to get rid of CO2, not oil and gas,” Woods said.

Micromanaged Legislation

Rather than criticise the ambition to tackle climate change, industry leaders directed their criticisms towards unintended consequences of poorly designed legislation.

- “The current energy transition plan has dug the world into quite a hole it is not easy to escape from,” Aramco’s CEO said, lamenting that legislation is failing to bring down emissions, while simultaneously driving up energy costs.
- Receiving repeated criticism was the EU, considered overly prescriptive and hobbling competitiveness.
- Exxon’s Woods said that the goal of EU decarbonisation is not the issue, but the challenge is that regulators and policy makers are too prescriptive on the means, rather than focusing on the end.
- Woods called the EU’s Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) the “most irresponsible piece of legislation” he has ever seen and added that those shaping legislation in the world today cannot assess the cost of their policies.
- Meg O’Neil, CEO of Woodside took a similar view, calling for EU lawmakers to consider the unintended consequences of its decarbonisation regulation.
- “Europe’s intent is to be a global leader in tackling climate change. I have no issues with the intent,” O’Neil said. “Where the EU has fallen short is the overcomplex approach it has taken, and second the financial penalties.”
- She warned that penalties on buying within the bloc are going to drive up prices for consumers and destroy domestic European industry.

Politicians Waking Up to Reality

Within the criticism of policy, there was also repeated acknowledgement that politicians are not oblivious to the unintended consequences of legislation.

- Aramco spoke of the “quiet U-turns on energy transition regulations in the global north,” while Exxon’s Darren Woods said that European leaders behind closed doors are aware of the challenge in decarbonising, although have publicly backed themselves into a corner.
- Czech foreign minister Vaslav Batuska acknowledged a need to shift focus in the EU, especially with defence of the bloc becoming a key priority since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.
- “If new ideas about decarbonisation are too expensive, they won’t be implemented,” Batuska said.
- Industry leaders also called for more input from end users on the energy transition. Aramco’s Nasser emphasised that renewable energy growth needs to be both sustainable and affordable, while Total’s Pouyanne stressed that if the transition is not affordable, customers will reject it.

Energy Sovereignty: Securing Supply in a Multipolar World

As speakers covered topics such as trade protectionism, political insecurity, disruptive technologies, and climate change goals, the theme of energy sovereignty – whereby nations maximise control of their energy supplies – took growing importance.

- Petronas’ Taufik said that IOCs and NOCs have “strategic schizophrenia with energy security now front and centre, while the Carlyle Group’s Jeff Currie said that energy security is going to become a key focus, given the current political environment and global security challenges.
- “Wars are won by supply chains and at the core of that is energy,” Currie said.
- Trading houses highlighted how geopolitical risks continue to hang over the oil market, even if current prices have largely discarded a related risk premium.

- “Whether it’s Iran, Russia, or Venezuela, they are big producers,” Russel Hardy, CEO of Vitol warned.
- Consequently, there is an even greater need for countries to insulate supplies against external events.

Reliable Suppliers Key for the Future

One strategy in achieving secure supply for the future, especially for resource poor nations, is to maximise the diversity of providers.

- India’s Secretary for Ministry of Petroleum and Natgas said that the country does not have a geopolitical choke point for supply as it now imports oil from 40 countries. New Delhi’s refineries are also versatile enough to run on almost any crude grade.
- Producers were also advertising themselves as reliable partners. Aramco heralded its low production costs (oil breakeven of \$2/b), significant spare capacity, and ability to hold output at 12m b/d for a full year without adding rigs.
- India lauded its refineries which are geared up for product exports, while Egypt’s ambitions to become a hub for exporting East Mediterranean gas were on full display. Among IOCs, Italy’s ENI outlined its strategy for an expanded gas footprint in Asia and Latin America.

Plenty of Room For Renewables

While speakers called for policymakers to accept the interminable role of hydrocarbons in the energy mix, renewables still have a key role to play, especially within the concept of energy sovereignty.

- The Carlyle Group’s Jeff Currie said that, contrary to some rhetoric, renewables are at the forefront of a diversified energy portfolio.
- The benefit of renewables, speakers noted, is that they reduce over-reliance on imports of hydrocarbons with volatile prices.
- “If you are going to be a dominant political force, you need to have energy security at its core. Electrification provides that diversity,” Currie said.
- Maarten Wetselarr, CEO of Moeve (formerly CEPESA), echoed this point, arguing that Europe has limited advantages with natural gas: a lack of local supply reduces its affordability compared to competitors.
- On the affordability point, Wetselarr warned that by the time the gas is purchased from US pipelines, liquefied, transported, and regasified in Europe, the price has tripled compared to US Henry Hub levels of around \$3/MMBtu
- Consequently, Europe’s energy policy must look beyond just gas and see what can be produced via other means such as renewables and hydrogen, he argued.
- To achieve the trio of energy security, affordability, and environmental progress, a mindset shift is required, according to Carlyle Group’s Jeff Currie.
- Currie compared France and Germany, with the former having a lower carbon footprint, not through elevating the environmental concerns, but through energy security. Conversely, Germany’s more ‘environment first’ strategy has produced uneconomic results.
- “Security over affordability and affordability over the environment gives better outcomes,” he said.