CLIMATE GROUP

Opportunity Summit

It’s time to reframe the
‘net-zero’ debate – but how?

SE ADVISORY SERVICES

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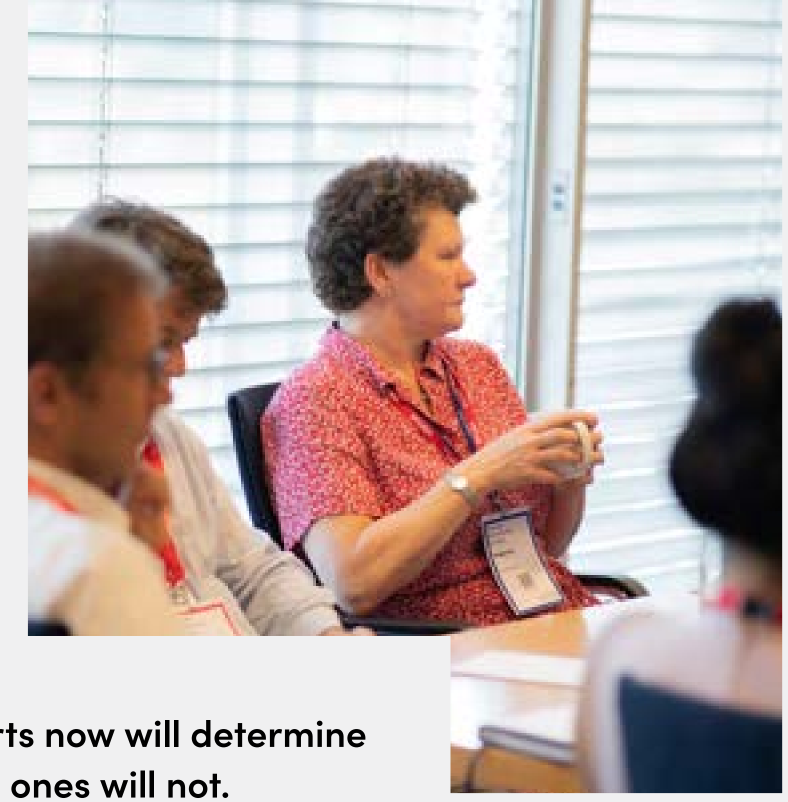
Explaining the value



We're facing critical tipping points, and the outcomes from our efforts now will determine which of these tipping points will prove to be irreversible, and which ones will not.

As we held our Opportunity Summit in sweltering London, the city broke a heat record - only for it to be broken again a day later. As we sat discussing climate action, schools closed and people were advised to work from home and avoid travel.

Undeniably, our climate is heating up, and it's changing our natural environment. But, in parallel, the global renewables roll-out is taking place at pace and scale; battery storage costs are plummeting, and electrification is rapidly increasing.

The question is: how can companies keep on track, in a time in which public commitments to net zero and climate action have lost priority or even become tainted? One straightforward answer: by clearly demonstrating the positive financial value of their corporate action on sustainability.

So, I'd like to thank SE Advisory Services, for convening this timely and important roundtable at the Opportunity Summit. It focused on how businesses can accelerate climate progress and drive us towards climate positive change, by identifying and better explaining that value. Through a reframing of climate action in business language and financial metrics, we can help unlock a vital shift in how sustainability is discussed at board level, how decisions are made, and their impact ultimately felt at a business' bottom line.

We're now in the hard yards of climate action and time is short. That is why convening businesses leaders today, hearing their insights and facilitating the sharing of challenges and solutions with trusted peers, is so critical.

As we look ahead to Climate Week NYC 2026, I hope insights gathered in this session can help to reframe boardroom conversations and priorities and continue to accelerate vital business action on climate.

"We're now in the hard yards of climate action and time is short.

Emma Cox, Board of Trustees, Climate Group.

An extremely rich discussion

Over the past year, we've been focussing on one key question: how much financial value from sustainability are businesses leaving on the table? The answer is: a lot.

There's a wide consensus among businesses that sustainability pays. But many companies are not truly able to capture that value where it matters: at the bottom line. Sustainability often fails to reach the tables where decisions are made. So how can you convince the Board to fully appreciate the value of sustainability? No doubt there's ambition in many companies. But how do we reframe 'sustainability' to ensure it gets noticed at Board level?

To get a better idea of why companies are struggling to better inform their decision makers and stakeholders, we worked with IESE Business School Institute for Sustainability Leadership. We gathered 1,100 client case studies and interviewed businesses, including from leading Fortune500 companies, across a wide range of sectors.

We were proud to launch the findings of our report during one of the Implementation Rooms at Climate Group's Opportunity Summit, with a dedicated and eager group of businesses and civil society, to understand the conversations they are having on this issue – and how they overcome challenges. It was an extremely rich discussion that led to some many clear insights – some of which you'll find below.

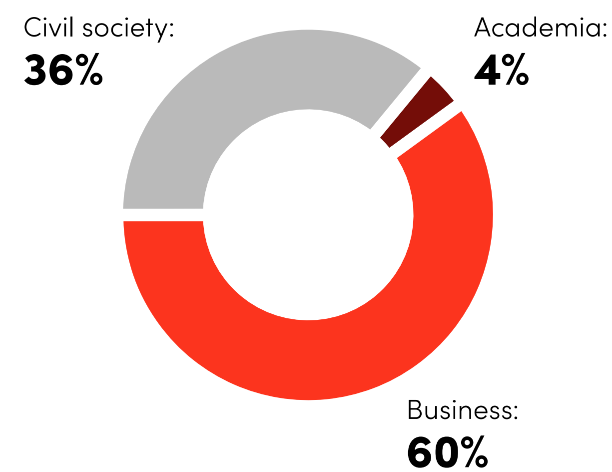
Thank you all.

Audience overview:

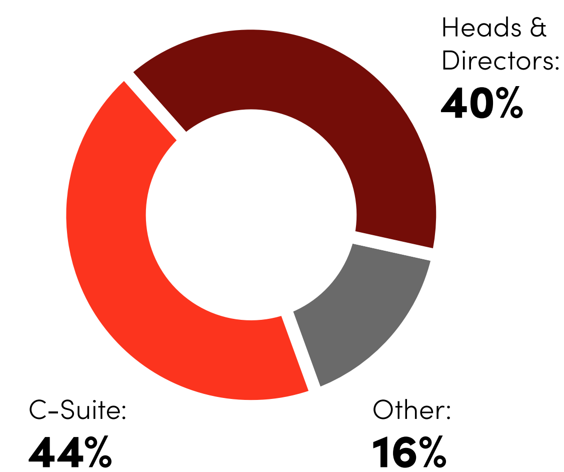
Delegates: **25**

Organisations: **23**

Attendee split by sector



Attendee split by seniority



> **"There's ambition in many companies. But how do we reframe 'sustainability' to ensure it gets noticed?**
>
> **Stuart Lemmon,** Head of Global Practices, Sustainability, SE Advisory Services

Making the case

To truly make the business case for sustainability, this report points out companies need to have a few basics in place; reporting, measurement of (climate and other) risks, how to manage those, and how to capture and quantify all relevant data to come to a decision.

But during the discussions in the room, three other conditions came to the fore that will help companies build a clear business case for sustainability: **language, breaking siloes,** and **CapEx-realities.**

Firstly, **switching the language** used internally would help to reframe the business case. As one person mentioned: 'Away with net zero, as no organisation can truly get to 'zero'. Others also found the use of 'net zero' not helpful, as it's often misunderstood, it's not an optimistic framing, and it hide interconnectedness between issues. Instead, there's a need to **break siloes** across teams so sustainability becomes a shared responsibility. Speaking the language that Board members use when talking to the shareholders will get you further, so consider framing it in terms of energy security and risk mitigation.

Secondly, there are ways to change the narrative around **CapEx** for sustainability. One of the companies in the room had managed to change the payback time on sustainability CapEx. Instead of the usual payback time of 2 to 3 years, their company agreed to have a longer payback time for sustainability investment of 8 to 9 years. Because of the buy-in of the Board, investment in sustainability became an easier discussion to have internally.

Practical approach

Getting more value out of sustainability is not just about better reporting, governance, better data-measurement, and breaking down siloes. In the Implementation Room, participants came with several practical ways to align sustainability strategy with business objectives.

Currently, there are siloes between companies and the SMEs up and down their supply chain. Involving these SMEs by explaining strategy and thinking, and highlighting the vital role they play in larger companies achieving their goals, will help businesses deliver on the value of their sustainability strategies. SMEs can innovate quickly, yet 75% are not doing anything yet as they're waiting for their corporate clients to give them justification.

1

Moving beyond sustainability as a box-ticking exercise is key. Working across the organisation (sustainability teams in partnership with product or innovation teams for example) to identify and measure customer demand for sustainable products, energy wastage and the ultimate cost of inaction. Once this data is gathered, with strong internal comms on potential efficiency gains, reduced downtime, and risk mitigation, new revenue streams for new products can shift sustainability from a "nice to have" to a pillar of competitiveness.

2

Look for collaborative action to drive more impactful change. Build collective momentum in your sector by working and advocating in partnership with industry groups; form industry coalitions to align shared priorities, create benchmarks, and amplify leadership beyond individual companies. This may even lead to a new 'north star' for sustainability. Use these platforms to challenge outdated targets, advocate for enabling regulation, and establish a more ambitious, positive vision for progress.

3

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20-27 September 2026

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We hope you can join us at these upcoming events.

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Opportunity Summit

See you next year

The Opportunity Summit returns to London in June 2027.

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