Reconnoitre Energies

ENERGY UNWRAPPED

Five Eyes

Five energy topics to keep a close eye on in 2026

By Chris Sladen

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Introduction

Here are my five energy topics to keep a close eye on in 2026. Each has both everyday relevance and global reach:

1. Renewables & Clean Energy Infrastructure

Renewables will continue to be deployed at scale and pace. The addition of new supply, particularly solar and wind, will provide headline-grabbing numbers. Nuclear will continue to be attractive for its proven reliability and technology, whilst geothermal maintains its long march towards creating diversity of secure base load. Green hydrogen, ammonia, and tidal power will continue searching for a breakthrough moment. But the area needing urgent attention is demand – upgrading electricity infrastructure, adding grid connections, new battery storage at both grid & home scale, stabilising grid distribution networks, transformers, developing heat networks, and bringing much needed lower costs to consumers.

2. Oil & Natural Gas Supply and Demand

Oil and natural gas supply & demand have proven to be resilient throughout 2025. But 2026 brings renewed challenges with supply running above demand creating downward pressure on prices. Adherence to OPEC+ quotas will receive greater scrutiny. Oil prices appear more fragile than natural gas prices. Be alert for any significant drop below US$ 60/barrel. Natural gas and LNG will continue to be the bridging ‘fuel of choice’ for the energy transition; expect to see more storage capacity added. Solutions to long-running conflicts, especially Russia/Ukraine, could see markets flooded with supply, driving prices still lower. More M&A and industry consolidation is likely; JVs for operating cost efficiencies, as well as many focussed E&P bid rounds designed to add new reserves.

3. Critical Minerals & Battery Materials

The long-running saga of access to critical minerals for battery materials will not end anytime soon. This is not only about lithium but also cobalt, copper, and tin too. Expect much jostling and positioning between governments, resource owners, mining & processing companies, suppliers, and the battery manufacturers who need guaranteed supply. Attempts at direct lithium extraction from geothermal fluids are accelerating, notably Germany, France, USA, and UK; these pilot projects can be a game changer.

4. AI, Datacentres & Energy Security

AI and datacentres, and the need for rapid construction of secure 24/7/365 power supplies, stole much of the energy news in 2025. Every new AI/datacentre typically needs 100–500 MW of power permanently available. This was just the start – in 2026 many projects will enter the construction and operation phase – so the issues of energy security, grid reliability and deliverability will become real. This is the year when fast-moving big tech comes face-to-face with slower-moving big energy. This might include a clash of investment cultures, approach to Capex management, values & behaviours, and contract style.

5. Energy Politics & Political Risk

And lastly, don't expect energy politics to get any easier or simpler. Energy has become much more deeply entwined with politics – whether it's energy security, energy independence, prices, an increasingly patchy energy transition that lacks coordinated actions, decarbonisation projects, or as a soft target for taxes, tariffs & royalties. Expect volatile politics, fierce debates, arguments, and controversy about public versus private ownership of energy systems. New dangers include rapid policy changes and U-turns, alterations to regulations & rules, variations in subsidies and the introduction of new taxes. Be ready to respond quickly to the consequences and energy opportunities caused by election results and regime changes. Good intelligence and reconnaissance are key. A well-informed appreciation of energy politics, and political risk will be essential for all energy investments, be they large, medium, or small.

I wish all my readers the very best for 2026. The world of energy is about to get even more controversial and intriguing. Energy Unwrapped! remains committed to sharing insights and ensuring you are aware of the big issues.

About the Author

Chris writes an occasional series of topical articles on energy for ANZMEX. Between 2019 and 2024 he authored a series of 50 widely read ANZMEX 'Energy Matters' op-eds that tackled big energy issues using real-life personal experiences, and extensive research. Chris runs an award-winning advisory service, Reconnoitre Energies, offering insights to inform, shape a decision, policy & regulation, and guide the next steps for energy ventures; he is also a non-resident fellow at the Institute of Americas. Chris has worked in over 40 countries and published extensively over five decades.

Chris has an energy career of over 40 years, living in Mexico (2001–2018), Russia, Vietnam, Mongolia, China & UK. His contributions to the energy and education sectors have been recognised by the UK Government with both an MBE and CBE, and also the Aztec Eagle from the Mexican Government — the first foreigner in the energy sector to achieve this award. Chris' articles for ANZMEX reflect his experience and enthusiasm and are often also later published to a global audience in the USA, UK and Singapore. They are not paid for in any way.

Send your feedback to:

chris.sladen@reconnoitre.ltd