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- 4** From the Editor
- 5** Business News
- 23** New Appointments
- 24** Mining & Energy Update
- 30** Business Services Directory
- 31** Funny Business

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From the Editor



As the year draws to a close, we look towards 2025 with some optimism but are also aware of a number of potential storm clouds.

Inflation appears to be on a steady downward trajectory, but underlying inflation is not as low as the RBA would prefer, so it would seem an interest rate is unlikely until at least May.

The economy is not strong, with confidence remaining in the negative territory, but not terrible. The somewhat surprising figure has been how strong the labour market remains. In October,

the Hunter's unemployment was just 3.4% and well under the NSW state average of 4.0%. This is good news for workers, but not for businesses looking for labour.

Next year is also a Federal election year, with the poll to take place in May at the latest, so be prepared for electioneering ratcheting up early in the new year.

The electorate is not overly keen on either of the major parties, with polls showing primary support for each side stuck in the 30 percent decile, so it may well be a win by default. It is hoped that there may be some constructive debate on real issues in the election campaign, but I am not holding my breath.

The global situation remains unstable, with Ukraine and the Middle East wars continuing and with the ever-present potential to spread.

The election of Donald Trump in the US brings the spectre of a trade war. Tariffs have already been announced for China, Canada and Mexico, with more expected to follow. One would expect that

at least some of the targeted countries will follow with tariffs of their own on US goods. Any major trade war has the potential to have a significant impact on Australian exports, particularly to China whose economy is already facing major challenges.

So it certainly looks like it will be an interesting year and provide challenges to local businesses, but as always, we can make the best of the situation, guarding against business threats, but also being aware of new opportunities when they appear.

We wish all our readers, advertisers and article providers best wishes for the festive season and a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.

We look forward to continuing to serve the Hunter business community in 2025.

Garry Hardie
Editor and Publisher

ON THIS MONTH'S COVER

Balloon Aloft was a major winner at the 2024 NSW Tourism Awards, picking up the Gold and Hall of Fame in Adventure Tourism as well as Gold in Excellence in Accessible Tourism. See page 16 for further information on the awards.



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Designs unveiled for new Maitland Mental Health facility

Artist's impression images of the Maitland Mental Health Rehabilitation facility have now been released, providing the community with a detailed look at the new, purpose-built facility.

Located on the Maitland Hospital campus in Metford and due to be completed by 2027, the facility will provide a range of rehabilitation and forensic mental health care services.

The design previews a modern facility that has been specifically designed to support a rehabilitation model of care. It will include three inpatient units, including low and medium secure forensic units, and a rehabilitation and recovery unit.

All units will provide single bedrooms featuring ensuites and shared kitchen, dining and living areas, as well as contemporary indoor and outdoor therapy spaces.

The project also includes additional parking spaces for the new service to ensure that staff, visitors, consumer transport and emergency service vehicles have easy access to the facility.

Once completed, some services currently located at the Morisset Hospital campus will be relocated to the new Maitland Mental Health Rehabilitation facility.

The facility's design has been shaped by extensive consultation with staff, consumers, and community members through various forums including Project User Groups, Connecting with Country working group, and the Arts in Health program.

Feedback gathered during community consultation sessions earlier this year has also been incorporated into the design, ensuring the facility meets the needs of patients and the wider community.

The Maitland Mental Health Rehabilitation facility is being delivered under the NSW Government's \$700 million Statewide Mental Health Infrastructure Program.



Artist impression - Maitland Mental Health Rehabilitation facility - entrance



Artist impression - Aerial of Maitland Mental Health Rehabilitation facility



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Hunter Water launches refreshed water conservation campaign

Hunter Water has launched a refreshed water conservation campaign to encourage the Lower Hunter community to save the precious resource in any weather and to help ensure water security for the Lower Hunter region.

Hunter Water Executive Manager Strategy and Engagement, Emma Berry, recognises the importance of acting now.

"Water is life. As the Bureau of Meteorology and the CSIRO have highlighted in their recent 'State of the Climate Report', we're facing unprecedented pressures from climate change, population growth, and evolving community needs. That's why we're encouraging everyone to take water-saving action," Ms Berry said.

"Our community knows the importance of conserving water but to help achieve even more water saving throughout our community we've launched a refreshed water conservation campaign - just in time for summer.

"We're excited to launch our new water conservation campaign to inspire and encourage the community to take up water-saving



behaviours all year round, no matter what's going on outside with the weather.

"As we have seen over recent years, our climate is becoming more unpredictable. Our campaign draws on the popular Australian pastime of talking about the weather to promote how every day is a good day to save water.

"We want to ensure our community has the tools and knowledge to save water in any weather, whether that's by watering the garden before 10am or after 4pm to avoid the heat of the day or having a 4-minute shower. From households to industries, everyone has a role to play," said Ms Berry.

The new campaign will work to complement Hunter Water's continued efforts to safeguard future water supply.

"We developed the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan with the NSW Government to ensure the region has a resilient and sustainable water future. Alongside this, we recently welcomed planning approval for the construction of a permanent desalination plant in Belmont. Once complete, this will provide up to 30 million litres per day of rainfall-independent drinking water capacity to Hunter Water's system, or about 15 per cent of the region's average daily needs.

"Investing in infrastructure that can produce safe and reliable drinking water regardless of changes in weather or climate will build a more resilient water system that can adapt to the pressures of a changing climate," Ms Berry said.

Hunter Water also continues to invest in reducing water leaks throughout our water supply system and explore leak detection technologies to evolve the way it delivers services to the region.

These investments are underpinned by Hunter Water's engagement with the community on the importance of water conservation.

"We continue to engage and collaborate with local businesses to promote the importance of saving water through reducing leaks and deploying water-efficient technologies.

"Looking to the younger generations, our education programs in schools focus on inspiring young people to be water warriors. Engagement at all levels—households, schools, and businesses—is key to creating real change.

"At Hunter Water, we're committed to doing our part, and we encourage the community to work with us to ensure a secure water future for our region," Ms Berry said.

Join Hunter Water in forging a sustainable water future by learning simple water-saving tips at www.hunterwater.com.au/savewater

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Aurizn Group acquires PAC Australia

Defence technology specialist Aurizn has announced the acquisition of Pacific Aerospace Consulting (PAC) Australia, marking another step forward in its ambition to be a leading defence technology provider in Australia and internationally.

"Aurizn has always had a strong vision for growth in the defence sector, filling the space between the primes and the smaller but often highly capable end of the market," says Aurizn Group CEO Brett Sangster.

"The acquisition of PAC Australia means Aurizn is now firmly established as a Tier 2 defence technology business, with market leading expertise and 300+ capable people.

"Given the strong demand for sovereign capability, we're excited at how our growth will deliver both service and scale to answer that need."

With an aerospace and operational focus, PAC Australia has built a strong reputation for its services, including systems integration, certification, mission planning, simulation, and tactical data link capabilities, in addition to providing specialist operational services that meet the unique needs of their clients.

Brett Sangster says PAC Australia will provide depth and new expertise to Aurizn's service offering.

"The mission enablement space is, for example, one area where together we can build out our holistic offering. Aurizn's existing science & technology focus will be strengthened by PAC's operational capabilities, and further supported by McR Defence's strategic expertise.

"Likewise, we are excited about how PAC's operational expertise in Defence & Aerospace will enable new innovations in Aurizn's market-leading simulation and training services."

PAC CEO and co-founder, Eric Rambow will join Aurizn's Ganen Ganeswaran and Bjorn Wharff as executive directors of Aurizn Group.

Eric Rambow said the opportunity for PAC Australia to join



Brett Sangster and Eric Rambow

Aurizn was compelling. The combined Aurizn, McR Defence and PAC team brings highly specialised capabilities together to solve significantly larger and more complex problems confronting defence.

"PAC Australia has been a leading provider of operational solutions in the Defence & Aerospace sector for two decades, assisting the transfer of capability between the US and Australia.

"Aurizn are market leaders for advanced STEM, simulation and technology. Together, the companies provide a significant uplift in sovereign Australian capability, while leveraging the coalition knowledge needed in the current threat environment."

"Joining Aurizn will allow us to become integrated as part of a broader defence technology business and future-proof the longevity of the company in a tightly contested market. We're excited about how this will enable us to use our skills to deliver solutions for a diverse client base."

Brett Sangster said that Aurizn Group, backed by Pemba Capital Partners, would continue pursuing its ambitious vision for growth, which includes discussions to bring PAC's US business into the Aurizn fold.

"There are currently targetable opportunities within the Defence and Critical Infrastructure sectors. We're confident that our 'build & grow' approach is providing us with the requisite technology expertise, financial backing and the agility to capitalise on our cutting-edge capabilities and solutions."

The acquisition of PAC Australia follows Aurizn's earlier purchase this year of defence commercial specialist McR Defence, with Kain Lawyers acting as the Australian counsel on both acquisitions.

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NSW Government to operate new Swansea Channel dredge

The NSW Government will operate new permanent sand bypass equipment at the Swansea channel to keep the waterway safe and navigable.

This follows an announcement from the Commonwealth Government that they will provide a \$10 million grant to the Lake Macquarie City Council to fund the construction of new dredging infrastructure, including a dredge, permanent pipes and sand transfer infrastructure, that will be put in place over the next two years.

Once the dredge and sand bypass infrastructure are built, the NSW Government has committed an additional \$6 million to allow NSW Maritime to operate and maintain the equipment, moving sand from the waterway to nourish nearby beaches.

It follows a successful two-stage dredging process funded by the NSW Government that returned vessel access to Lake Macquarie, supporting the recreational boating community and serving as a gateway to the region's famous lakes, rivers and beaches.

During the first stage of dredging, 16,690 cubic metres of sand were removed from three areas to create a 30-metre-wide channel, extending from the Dog Leg southeast of Elizabeth Island, up to the Drop Over northwest of the Swan Bay Entrance.

The second and final stage of the operation successfully removed an additional 13,000 cubic metres of sediment from key points.

This initiative is in addition to the Government's new Boating Infrastructure and Dredging Scheme (BIDS), which will include funding for a statewide program of proactive dredging in priority locations.

Whiteley is NSW Business of the Year

Whiteley Corporation were very proud winners of the NSW Business of the Year Award in addition to Excellence in International Business at the Business NSW Awards held on 30 October.

Whiteley has been a proud member of the Business Chamber for more than 60 years and this accolade marks Whiteley's most successful year at Business NSW Awards to date.

The Excellence in International Business Award recognises outstanding business in global medical supply and innovative manufacturing. Both awards were accepted by Executive Chairman, Associate Professor Greg Whiteley who recognised the work of all the team at Whiteley and the business' ongoing commitment to research and development.

Dr Greg Whiteley, Executive Chairman of Whiteley commented on the awards, "This is a major affirmation for our company and the enormous work effort from all of our team. It is also a major acknowledgement for the Hunter which is now the powerhouse of manufacturing in the state of NSW."

Dr Whiteley continued, "Our efforts to develop our export business has been over many years, and has involved being away from home often, some jet lag and sleep deprivation. This award is accepted with grateful thanks, and we will be back to work tomorrow and at it all again."

Whiteley exports to more the 35 markets globally and recently obtained Medical Device Single Audit Program (MDSAP) certification that will allow it to directly export Medical Devices into both the USA and Canada. Whiteley's products are now certified to leave from their hunter-based manufacturing location of Tomago in the Hunter Region of NSW, directly to the US and Canadian Healthcare markets. This will allow Whiteley to expand and grow hunter-made products globally, while still providing demand nationally.

Managing Director, Darran Leyden commented – "The Team at Whiteley have been humbled to win the 2024 NSW Business "Business of The Year" Award in addition to the "Excellence in International Business" Award. It is a wonderful acknowledgement and accolade for all of our staff who are the backbone of our business. We are a proud Hunter based manufacturing business and Whiteley are delighted to represent the Hunter with these prestigious awards."

Executive Chairman, Associate Professor Greg Whiteley said "We are terrifically thrilled to receive this award. It's an achievement on behalf of all our team for their efforts. We have been in business for 92 years and members of the chamber for nearly 60 years. I



Angela Leyden, Darran Leyden, Michelle Whiteley, Dr Greg Whiteley, Brooke Cavanagh, Matt Cavanagh.

wish to acknowledge Daniel Hunter and entire team at Business NSW and Bob Hawes and the team at Hunter Business. We are continuing to work as hard as we can, in growing our business and increasing local employment and contributing to our communities."

Dr Whiteley concluded saying, "We are still investing heavily both in our Hunter location and more broadly in Research and Innovation. We have a new Human Therapeutics Plant for Over The Counter medicines coming on line in early 2025, and we will also be looking to establish a permanent manufacturing site in the USA. We have an exciting future, and this award encourages us to push on and succeed for the business, for the Hunter, and for all of Australia."

The NSW State Business Awards celebrates the pinnacle of business excellence across 11 regions in New South Wales. The awards celebrate leading businesses, innovators, and entrepreneurs from across the state, recognising their outstanding achievements in a range of categories including innovation, sustainability, leadership and community impact.

Whiteley is a recognised manufacturing leader in the field of infection prevention, medical device reprocessing and professional cleaning technologies.



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Housing Taskforce a win for the Hunter

The Property Council of Australia welcomed the NSW Government's announcement of a new Housing Taskforce designed to streamline development approvals (DAs) and cut through bureaucratic roadblocks in the planning system.

The Taskforce has reportedly worked to unlock more than 13,000 homes since its inception in September, including two key housing developments in Greater Newcastle and the Upper Hunter where unresolved heritage issues had brought the projects to a standstill.

Hunter and Central Coast Regional Director Amy De Lore said the move responded to the Property Council's calls for dedicated work to tackle the backlog of residential DAs stuck in the system.

"This is a positive step toward meeting critical housing supply targets for the region," Ms De Lore said.

"Our region has faced significant challenges in housing delivery, and it's encouraging to see the NSW Government recognising and addressing these local issues. The early success of the Housing Taskforce in unblocking long-delayed developments in Greater Newcastle and the Upper Hunter shows a strong focus on delivering homes where they are needed most.

"It's a win for the city and for those who are struggling to find affordable housing options – and it will ultimately lead to more homes and jobs for the Hunter community," she said.

Ms De Lore said the Property Council's Pre-Budget submission and Release the Pressure research series into development costs highlighted the need for a more coordinated approach to resolve blockages, reduce cost and delay, and prevent projects from stalling.

"We've advocated consistently for the urgent need to address the growing backlog of residential developments stuck in the NSW planning pipeline and this new, permanent Housing Taskforce will help towards a more efficient and responsive planning system," she said.

"This Taskforce is a great first step, but the region's needs extend beyond individual projects. We look forward to continued government focus on improving the entire planning process, ensuring that Newcastle and the Hunter can thrive with the housing and infrastructure we need."

New board announced at Business Hunter AGM

Business Hunter, the peak body representing businesses across the Hunter region, introduced its new Board at their Annual General Meeting.

Reflecting the organisation's commitment to driving growth and supporting a dynamic business environment, the newly appointed Board brings together a diverse range of leaders from industries vital to the region's future.

The 2024-2026 Board welcomes three new members alongside seven returning directors, all of whom bring extensive experience and insight.

Glenn Thornton, previously the Senior Vice President, has been appointed President after four years of service on the board. Mr Thornton's appointment marks a unique return to leadership within the organisation, as he also served as CEO of the Hunter Business Chamber (Business Hunter's former iteration) from 2001 to 2006.

Mr Thornton also continues as Chair of Business Hunter's Regional Infrastructure Committee. He expressed his enthusiasm for continuing to build on Business Hunter's successes and influence in the region and beyond.

"It's an honour to step into the role of President at such a pivotal time for our region. As we continue to navigate major challenges and opportunities, my focus will be on ensuring that Business Hunter remains the leading voice for businesses," said Mr Thornton.

"I'm excited to build on the strong foundation that's been established under Lauren and Bob's leadership, and I look forward to working with our members and stakeholders to achieve even greater outcomes for the Hunter."

"With a strong and diverse board in place, we are well-positioned to tackle key issues such as energy transition, regional infrastructure, and workforce development. Our focus will be on maintaining momentum and ensuring the Hunter continues to thrive."

The new board, which will serve two years, also includes: Holly Martin, Senior Vice President; Aaron Johansen, Vice President; and Lauren Eyles, Immediate Past President. Other directors are Ashleigh John, Seamus Burke, Tony Rhodes, Judith Field, Steve Wait and Michael Huggett.

BAE Systems secures Electronic Warfare contract for Joint Strike Missile

BAE Systems Australia has secured a \$160 million contract for the delivery of its Passive Radio Frequency Sensor (PRS) into KONGSBERG Defence and Aerospace's global Joint Strike Missile (JSM) program.

The contract award will see BAE Systems' Edinburgh Parks facility triple current production to over 1000 PRS units over the next six years as KONGSBERG delivers Joint Strike Missiles to Australia, the US Air Force, Japan and a growing number of partner nations.

KONGSBERG is establishing an \$850 million facility at Williamstown to manufacture and service missiles.

BAE Systems is Australia's specialist manufacturer of missile control and guidance systems with a heritage in Electronic Warfare (EW) dating back decades. KONGSBERG's JSM is highly effective against maritime and land targets and is the only anti-ship cruise missile that can be carried internally within the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

The partnership between BAE Systems and KONGSBERG to develop the PRS dates back to 2009 when the two companies conducted a study into EW applications and products for the JSM. This was followed by sponsored studies assessing feasibility, power and weight, as well as investment by Commonwealth of Australia and the Norwegian Ministry of Defence.

The supply agreement is underscored by a long-term commitment from both BAE Systems and KONGSBERG to sign a longer-term cooperative agreement out to 2040.

Andrew Gresham, Managing Director of Defence Delivery at BAE Systems Australia, said "The Passive Radio Frequency Sensor is highly innovative technology designed, developed, and built in Australia. It is a world leading capability and a critical enhancing component of the Joint Strike Missile.

"This is a significant achievement for our manufacturing teams at Edinburgh Parks and an innovation success story that has required more than a decade of commitment from our employees and our partner KONGSBERG.

"The contract illustrates our company's focus on investing in Research & Development and turning the outcomes into real cutting-edge technology for use on the battlefield."

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Decades of digital wins

This anniversary reflects Redback's track record in producing tangible results, and impactful work across a seriously diverse range of industries.

For example, their work for The Clooney Foundation for Justice earned a nomination for 'Best Visual Design – Function' at the 28th Annual Webby Awards, hailed by The New York Times as the "Internet's highest honour."

The brains behind it all

Redback's 25-year journey is built on the skill and dedication of its team. By investing in passionate professionals who take pride in their work, the agency combines creativity, technical expertise, and strategic insight to meet the unique goals of each client. In the Redback office, it's all about working smarter and having fun while they're at it.

Employees also adopt the "be excellent to each other" ethos, with people genuinely enjoying what they do, where they do it and who they do it with.

Meanwhile, remote team members were flown in from as far as the UK for their 25th celebrations; a 90s-themed birthday bash!

This supportive company culture has been central to the agency's high staff retention rates, with the majority of full-timers being part of their team for over five years. That includes five people in the 10-year club and three who have been proud Redbackers for more than 15 years.

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Four years of the four-day work week

Redback made headlines in 2020 when it braved the four-day work week with the introduction of an optional "No Work Wednesdays" policy.

The extra day off has not only fueled steep business growth, but also cements Redback's reputation as a modern, forward-thinking employer – making it a magnet for top talent.

What's next for Redback?

Although Redback's roots will always be in Newcastle, around 75% of their new clients now come from outside the Hunter region.

Looking ahead, Redback's focus revolves around achieving meaningful results for its clients, continually adapting and innovating to stay ahead in changing markets.

Having just celebrated 25 years of client, team and company wins, Redback is ready to take on the exciting opportunities ahead!



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2025 Newcastle Architecture Awards

The Australian Institute of Architects New South Wales chapter has announced the winners of the 2025 Newcastle Architecture Awards.

Held at Newcastle City Hall on 15 November, the awards highlighted a focus on sustainability and community across the region's winning residential, commercial and public projects.

This year's jury comprised Sarah Lawlor, government architect NSW, as chair, Matthew Travis of Matte Architecture and Dean Williams of Architect George.

On behalf of the jury, Lawlor commented, "Each project showcased a profound commitment to the local context. The ability to respond to the unique needs of a given space and its community is a testament to this year's winners."

"As our world undergoes rapid transformation, the role of regional architects has never been more critical. Newcastle, a city steeped in history and industry, is now emerging as a hub of innovation and creativity. By embracing sustainable practice and honouring the region's heritage, our local architects are shaping a brighter future for those to come," she said.

New Castle by Anthony St John Parsons, a new home within Newcastle, was awarded the highest honour, the Newcastle Medal.

Elsewhere in the awards, Derive Architecture amassed awards in the Public Architecture and Steel Architecture categories with their Murrook project (with Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council), and a commendation for Flotilla x Vecina in the Interior Architecture category.

EJE Architecture was a winner again this year for their excellent work on the Beach Hotel at Merewether.

The full list of winners were:

Newcastle Medallion: New Castle – Anthony St John Parsons

Public Architecture Award: Murrook – Derive Architecture and Design with Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council



EJE Architecture was a winner again at the 2025 Newcastle Architecture Awards, taking out the Interior Architecture Award for their work at The Beach Hotel in Merewether

Interior Architecture Awards: The Beach Hotel – EJE
New Castle – Anthony St John Parsons

Commendation: Flotilla x Vecina – Derive Architecture and Design

Residential Architecture – Houses (New) Awards: New Castle –

Anthony St John Parsons and Throsby House – Curious Practice

Commendations: Speers Point House – OVDA Studio and Killcare

Heights Escarpment House – Matt Thitchener Architect

Residential Architecture – Houses (Alterations and Additions)

Award: Window, window, window – Panov Scott

Commendation: Stockton Link House – Sarah Truscott Architect

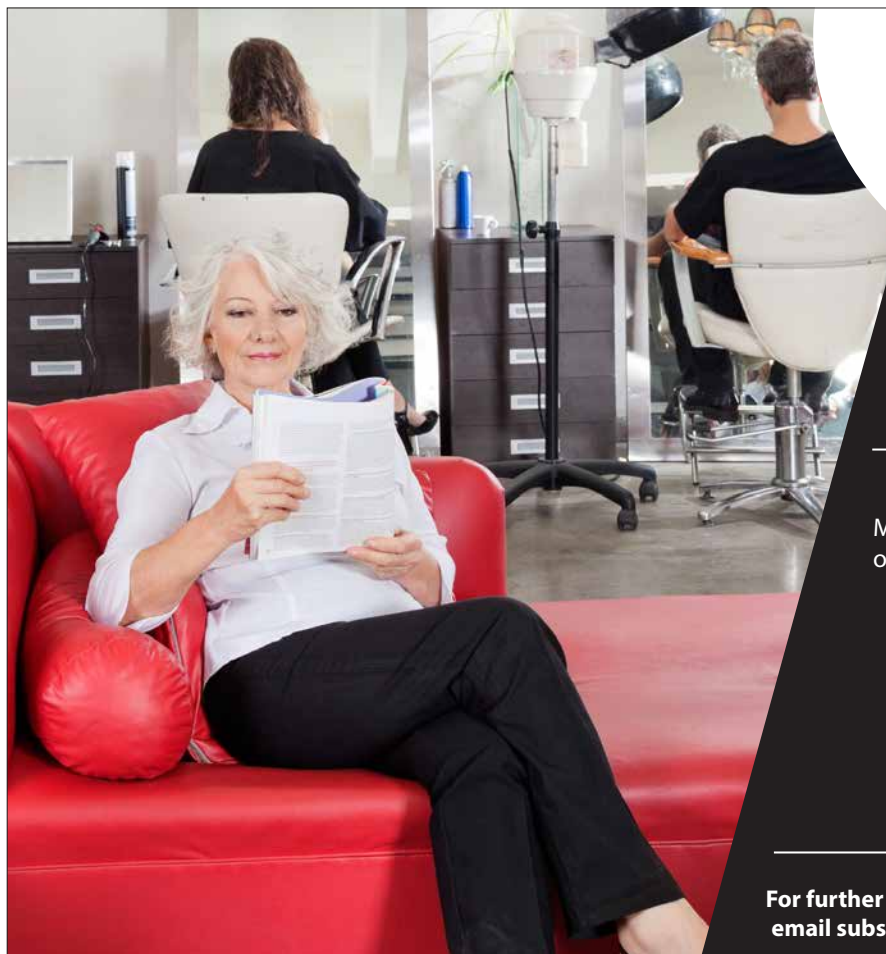
Colorbond Award for Steel Architecture: Murrook – Derive

Architecture and Design with Worimi Local Aboriginal Land

Council

Commendation: Killcare Heights Escarpment House – Matt Thitchener Architect

Winners are eligible to progress to the 2025 NSW Architecture Awards which will be presented on 20 June 2025.



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EJE Architecture: *Designing Spaces for People, Inspired by People*

Since 1976, **EJE** Architecture has been a leader in creating human-centered spaces across architecture, interior design, heritage, and urban planning. From its humble beginnings, the firm has grown into one of the largest in the region, with over 100 professionals across offices in Sydney, Newcastle, and the Gold Coast.

This year marks a pivotal moment in **EJE**'s journey as the team celebrates the retirement of long-standing Director Doug White. With a career spanning 44 years, Doug's contributions to **EJE** and the architectural industry are beyond profound. As Doug steps into retirement to spend more time with his family, his influence on **EJE**'s culture and projects will endure, as the company looks ahead with gratitude, honouring his legacy by continuing to craft spaces that inspire and connect communities.

Among **EJE**'s highlighted projects, **EJE** Architecture has transformed the iconic Beach Hotel in Merewether, situated on Awabakal land with stunning views

of Merewether Beach. This 18-month renovation honoured the venue's heritage with restored 1940s tile floors, a revitalised saloon bar, and community-donated memorabilia, blending history with modern functionality. The project's success earned accolades, including the AIA Awards and the 2024 Eat Drink Design Awards, re-establishing the venue as a coastal landmark. Another notable project is the Residential Eating Disorder Centre in Charlestown, designed in collaboration with Jodie Dixon. This state-of-the-art facility provides a supportive environment for individuals recovering from eating disorders.

EJE luxurious designs carry over to international projects as well; highlighted is Vatu Talei in Fiji, a luxury resort featuring 175 rooms and suites, the South Pacific's largest pool complex, and sustainable design elements inspired by Fiji's natural beauty. While the majority of **EJE**'s projects remain in the Hunter and NSW, **EJE**'s design reputation is resulting in a growing number of international projects.



The Beach Hotel, Merewether



Doug White



Residential Eating Disorder Recovery Centre, Charlestown



Vatu Talei, Fiji

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Innovation
Inspiration

Nominated Architect: Bernard Collins
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Commercial Collective acquires Maitland agency

Locally owned real estate agency Commercial Collective has acquired Maitland based agency Starr Partners as it continues to grow its market share in the Hunter Region.

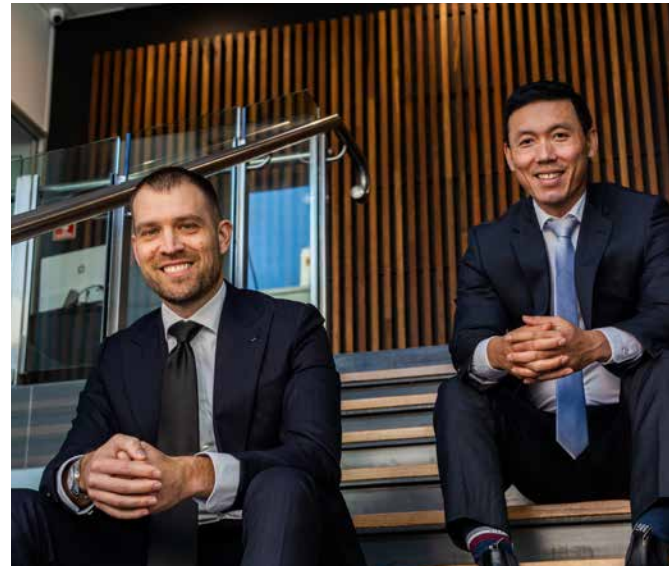
Since its founding just five years ago, Commercial Collective has rapidly grown to become a leading player in the Newcastle and Hunter commercial real estate sectors. With the acquisition of Starr Partners Maitland, Commercial Collective continues to expand its specialised services and market reach. The firm now boasts the largest sales and leasing team in the region, offering expertise and resources to clients across the area.

The acquisition is particularly significant as Commercial Collective is the only commercial real estate agency in the Hunter Region with a dedicated office in Maitland, allowing the company to better serve the local market. This strategic move enhances their presence in Maitland and the surrounding areas, making it easier for clients to access high-quality services with a local touch.

The deal came after a longstanding relationship with Andrew Cant, the previous owner, who took over the Managing Director role from his father, Tony Cant, in 2000.

"This is a multi-generational business, so when Andrew informed us of his plans to sell, we were thrilled to facilitate the transition and ensure his clients continued to receive the same level of professionalism and care that had built such a solid reputation for the Cant family," said Dane Crawford, CEO and Co-Founder of Commercial Collective.

Byrne Tran, Co-Founder and Head of Sales & Leasing, added, "Being in business locally for 50 years is a remarkable achievement. The experience, honesty, and commitment to



quality service shown by Starr Partners align perfectly with our own values of Integrity, Innovation, and Synergy. This strong alignment was a key reason Andrew had the confidence to trust us with his clients and legacy."

As one of the largest privately owned independent commercial real estate firms in the Hunter Region, Commercial Collective remains committed to providing opportunities for local businesses and clients. The acquisition of Starr Partners Maitland is an important step forward, allowing the agency to broaden its offerings, further cementing its role as the go-to commercial real estate provider in the region.

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Women on Water program

Port of Newcastle (PON) has joined forces with Svitzer, Port Authority of NSW and Keolis Downer to make a St Pius X student initiative aimed at attracting more women to the maritime workforce a reality.

The Women on Water (WoW) program is the winning project of St Pius X year 10 students – part of the Sustainnovation Challenge, which was centred on the transformation of the Port of Newcastle's role in Australia's maritime trade and emerging renewable energy sectors. Nineteen students from four schools across the Hunter Region have toured the port, participated in hands-on experiences, and heard from women in Newcastle's maritime industry who shared their decades of experiences across various roles.

Chief People and Information Officer, Marie Omark, said Port of Newcastle was keen to bring the program to life after students first presented it to the organisation and broader industry in August.

"Raising awareness and interest among young women in our industry is critical to developing the maritime workforce required to keep up with the growing economy and the port's diversified future.

"We are proud to be an employer of choice for all women by Work 180, which ranks us in the top 101 Employers for Women in Australia, but there's more work to do. Port of Newcastle has a target in place to reach 40% women in the workforce by 2031, and the WoW program is a wonderful initiative to proactively work towards these targets and raise awareness of career opportunities with emerging talent," she said.

Students from St Pius X, Saint Francis Xavier, Catherine McAuley College, and Callaghan College attended Port of Newcastle headquarters where they heard from PON CEO, Craig Carmody, female dredge engineers and crew, wharf officers, followed by a



Q&A with Svitzer's Lauren Munro, Port Authority's Cat Young, and Keolis Downer's Jess Plumsted. Keolis Downer then transported students to a tour of PON's West Basin and dredge vessel, Svitzer's tugs and simulator, and Port Authority's Vessel Traffic Control centre.

"I'm proud of our team for making this happen so quickly, and I thank all the schools involved, and Svitzer, Port Authority, and Keolis Downer for their partnership in bringing the St Pius X students' vision to life," Ms Omark said.

According to the INPEX Maritime Workforce Position Paper, the maritime industry has grown strongly over the last two decades. In 2020-21, the industry's contribution to GDP was \$105.3 billion in value added and it supported 462,000 full time jobs.

Representing Svitzer, Lauren Munro, Newcastle Port Manager, was one of the event's speakers, and said workforce diversity was key for the maritime industry.

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Hunter winners at NSW Tourism Awards

The Hunter was again well represented in the list of winners at the 2024 NSW Tourism Awards.

More than 500 industry stakeholders gathered at The Star Sydney on 28 November to celebrate the tourism and hospitality sectors in NSW, with winners awarded with gold, silver and bronze accolades for their commitment to tourism excellence.

The NSW Tourism Awards program is managed by the NSW Tourism Association and recognises visitor economy businesses that are delivering world-class visitor experiences.

Category winners will represent the state at the Australian Tourism Awards in March 2025.

Balloon Aloft, which has its head office at Pokolbin, was a big winner, taking out the Gold Award and Hall of Fame Award in the



Balloon Aloft won Gold in Excellence in Accessible Tourism, as well as Gold and Hall of Fame in Adventure Tourism

Adventure Tourism category as well as the Gold in the Excellence in Accessible Tourism category.

A regular winner at the NSW Tourism Awards in recent years, Balloon Aloft offered the very first passenger balloon rides in 1980 and remains a market leader. It now operates from five locations across NSW.

Cedars Mount View was also a Gold winner, taking out the Self Contained Accommodation category. Cedars Mount View, a luxurious retreat, is an adults-only accommodation, perfect for couples looking to escape and enjoy some privacy.

Port Stephens Koala Sanctuary took out Silver in the hotly contested category of Tourist Attractions. Since opening in September 2020, Port Stephens Koala Sanctuary has attracted acclaim for its care, research and education of the marsupials. It provides a unique experience for visitors to view koalas in their natural habitat via the Newcastle Airport SKYwalk and elevated viewing platform. It also features the immersive educational Sanctuary Story Walk, Fat Possum café and deluxe 4-star guest glamping accommodation.

Other local Silver winners included Moonshadow - TQC Cruises, Nelson Bay in the category of Major Tour & Transport Operators and MidCoast Council: Barrington Coast for Visitor Information Services.

The list of Bronze winners included Sails Holiday Park, Belmont for Excellence in Accessible Tourism and City of Newcastle for Tourism Marketing & Campaigns.

NSW Tourism Association CEO Natalie Godward said: "The benchmark for the NSW Tourism Awards this year was high, so to be recognised as a finalist or one of our winners is a huge achievement.

"The tourism industry can at times be incredibly tough so well done to everyone who has gone above and beyond to deliver whether that be experiences, food, or amazing venues.

"We're lucky in NSW to have such diversity with our tourism from unique country events to immersive ocean adventures, and here Sydney experiences. These awards are a chance to celebrate the strength, pride and passion of our industry, as well as the small to large businesses who offer these unique opportunities to have memorable experiences."



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Port of Newcastle supports STEM students in world's largest hydrogen competition

In a first for the Hunter Region, Port of Newcastle will give high school students from five local schools the opportunity to race in the international Hydrogen Grand Prix (H2GP), gearing them up for a future in the clean energy technology industry alongside 8,000 students from 25 countries worldwide.

The school-based program, supported by Port of Newcastle and run by Horizon Education, will see students design, build, and race their own hydrogen-powered remote-controlled cars in a test of endurance, while fostering an interest in sustainability and renewable energy career pathways.

Port of Newcastle CEO, Craig Carmody, said the Port was inspired to bring the global competition to the Hunter while attending the World Hydrogen Summit 2024 in Rotterdam.

"The work we are doing to develop a dedicated Clean Energy Precinct (CEP) will not only position Port of Newcastle as the largest energy export port in the country but will also drive the Hunter Region's diversification. This work can't be done in a vacuum," Mr Carmody said.

"The Port of the future will need a workforce of the future, and, by bringing internationally renowned programs like H2GP to the Hunter with the support of local schools and the University of Newcastle, we hope to inspire and nurture the next generation of clean energy engineers, designers, technicians, leaders, and thinkers."

As part of the program, students will learn about alternative fuels, renewable energy, and environmental sustainability, while working collaboratively to bring their designs to life.

Their hard work will culminate in a four-hour endurance race, with the winning school going on to compete in state, national and international races.

State Member for Newcastle, Tim Crakanthorp MP, said, "This is a wonderful way to support our next generation of thinkers as they engage with clean energy leaders. This will provide a platform for our local students to contribute to Newcastle's vision for a sustainable future."

University of Newcastle Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alex Zelinsky AO, said the program was a great opportunity to show the next generation what their future careers could look like and have some fun.

"Our University is critical to our region's energy transformation – we'll be helping to build the workforce needed for our new industries and jobs of the future," Professor Zelinsky said.

"It's incredibly rewarding for our academics to be involved in such a meaningful initiative. By sharing their expertise and mentoring these students, they will help demonstrate the exciting potential of a career in the clean energy sector. These early experiences can really shape a student's trajectory and show them what's possible."

Participating schools include Warners Bay High School, Rutherford Technology High School, Merewether High School, Irrawang High School and Callaghan College Waratah Campus.



Eraring battery to become largest in the Southern Hemisphere

Origin Energy has approved the third stage of its large-scale battery at Eraring Power Station, adding further storage capacity to the project already underway and delivering the largest total dispatch duration of an operating battery or project under construction in the Southern Hemisphere.

The third stage of the Eraring battery will add 700 MWh to the 460 MW / 1,070 MWh first stage already under construction, increasing its dispatch duration to approximately four-hours. With the 240 MW / 1030 MWh second stage of the project also under construction, the combined energy storage of the Eraring battery will be 700 MW / 2,800 MWh, making it one of the largest battery energy storage systems in the world.

This latest investment in the battery at the Eraring Power Station site represents a further acceleration in Origin's strategy to grow storage in its portfolio to help keep the grid stable as it supports increasing growth in variable renewable energy.

Origin has committed to 1.0 GW of large-scale battery capacity across its projects at Eraring and Mortlake Power Station in Victoria, along with tolling agreements for the offtake from Queensland's 500 MW Supernode battery, which will begin to come online in the first half of the 2026 calendar year.

Origin's head of energy supply and operations, Greg Jarvis said, "Construction of the third stage of the Eraring battery further increases our energy storage footprint and represents another significant step in our ambition to lead the energy transition through cleaner energy and customer solutions."

"The scale of this project is impressive. The site, at more than 17 hectares, is equivalent in area to 24 soccer fields and once complete, it will host more than 2,000 individual battery enclosures and some 180 kilometres of cabling. At 2,800 MWh, when cycled once a day, the Eraring battery will dispatch enough energy to power more than 150,000 NSW households annually, helping to firm variable supply from wind and solar."

"Transforming the Eraring site to play an important role in contributing to the reliability and security of electricity supply as we progress through the energy transition is a priority for Origin. Upon completion, Australia's largest power station will be host to the nation's largest approved battery storage system, cementing Eraring as a critical piece infrastructure at the heart of Australia's energy system for decades to come."

"The global scale of the battery storage system under construction and the incredible work our highly skilled teams and contractors are undertaking is something the region can be incredibly proud of," Mr Jarvis said.

Stage three is anticipated to come online alongside Stage one at the end of calendar 2025. Stage two is anticipated to come online in the first quarter of the 2027 calendar year.

Battery equipment will be supplied by Finnish technology group Wärtsilä and design and construction services will be provided by Enerven, consistent with the rest of the project.

Alongside the large-scale battery under construction at Mortlake Power Station in south-west Victoria, this third stage takes Origin's committed investment in owned storage in the portfolio to approximately \$1.7 billion. The grid-forming battery at Mortlake, adjacent to the largest gas-fired power station in Victoria, is expected to come online in late 2026.

Eraring delivers up to a quarter of electricity supply in New South Wales. The 40-year-old plant is scheduled to close in August 2027, as part of an agreement with the NSW Government to support security of supply through the transition and while there remains uncertainty regarding the timing of transmission, renewables and firming infrastructure coming online.

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HMRI Research Excellence Awards

The Hunter Medical Research Institute (HMRI) gathered on 22 November to celebrate the dedication, innovation, and contributions of its researchers, staff, and partners, all working to take healthy further.

The annual awards night marks the high point of the year for many of HMRI's researchers. It's time to celebrate the life-changing work of the dedicated scientists and clinicians that live and work in the Hunter New England community; all working to take healthy further by creating the healthiest one million people on the planet.

"HMRI and our wider community asks a lot of our researchers and our clinicians. We ask them to invest their time, their brilliance and their ideas to help us solve the biggest healthcare challenges of our time. And so, for us, these awards are HMRI's chance to give back to our research community and to recognise them for their effort and contribution," said HMRI Institute Director and CEO, Professor Frances Kay-Lambkin, HMRI's 2019 Research Excellence Award recipient.

Professor Kay-Lambkin is enthusiastic about the collaborative culture that enables the excellence on display at the awards.

"The Awards are a chance to celebrate the strong partnerships with the University of Newcastle, Hunter New England Local Health District, and the Hunter New England community – our 1 million people. It's also an opportunity to thank the amazing donors and supporters who make medical research possible."

During her annual awards address to nearly 300 guests, Professor Kay-Lambkin reflected on HMRI's past and how it will shape the future.

"As we stand here tonight at the intersection of our past achievements and future possibilities, let us recommit ourselves to the values and principles that have guided us. Let's celebrate our achievements, our resilience, and our hope for the future. May our HMRI continue to be a beacon of innovation, a fortress of resilience, and a catalyst for positive change in the landscape

of health and medical research. Let tonight be a reminder that, in the pursuit of knowledge, we have the power to change the world, and we can, and indeed have, used it."

The 2024 HMRI Research Excellence Awards winners were:

- **HMRI's Researcher of the Year**, University of Newcastle Conjoint Professor Jeannette Lechner-Scott from HMRI's Immune Health Research Program.
- **HMRI Mid-Career Researcher of the Year**, University of Newcastle Associate Professor Vanessa Murphy from HMRI's Asthma and Breathing Research Program.
- **HMRI Early Career Researcher of the Year**, Hunter New England Local Health District's Dr Carlos Garcia-Esperon from HMRI's Heart and Stroke Research Program.
- **Newcastle Permanent Emerging Innovator Award Winner**, postdoctoral researcher at the University of Newcastle, Dr Joshua Fisher from HMRI's Mothers and Babies Research Program.
- **HMRI Research Team of the Year**, Telestroke Team from HMRI's Heart and Stroke Research Program.

Maitland City Council funds \$900,000 to improve Maitland's sports facilities

Maitland City Council is undertaking close to \$900,000 in maintenance at outdoor sports facilities across the region, following consultation with local sports and user groups.

This will benefit some 43 outdoor sports facilities in Maitland, including:

- \$106,000 for fencing, field and minor grandstand repairs at Coronation Oval and Hartcher Field, Telarah
- \$67,150 for new playing wickets and goal posts at Morpeth Oval, Morpeth
- \$52,500 for court repairs and new spotlights at Maitland Netball Courts
- \$51,000 for new court lighting and the removal of old footpaths at Bolwarra Tennis Courts
- \$30,000 for roof and gutter repairs at Thornton Oval, Thornton.

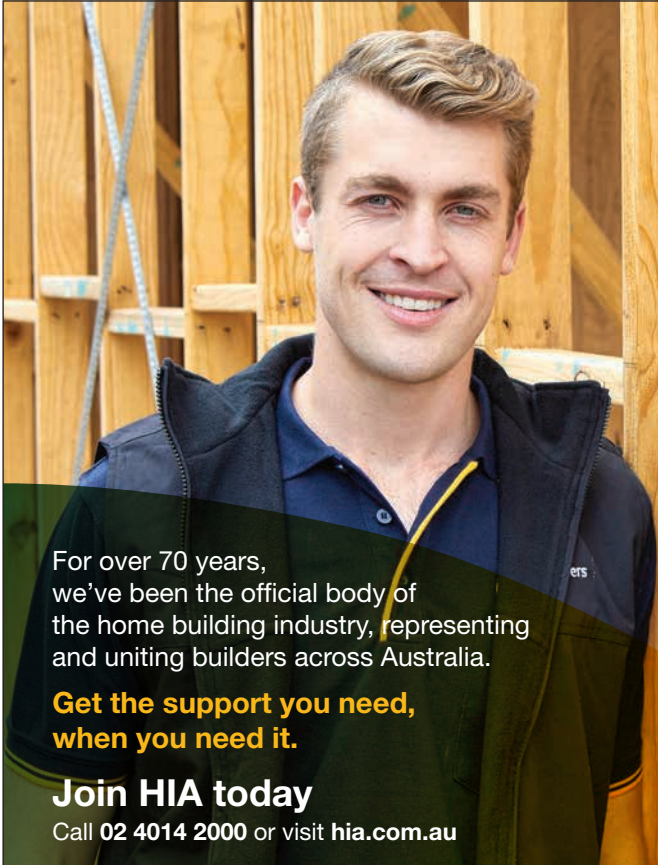
It comes after Maitland City Council engaged local user groups earlier this year, before conducting a series of audits on outdoor facilities.

Work at the 43 facilities will take place over the next six months, while Council continues planning for significant infrastructure upgrades as part of capital expenditure works for 2025-26.

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Co-founder buyout and major award for Hyphen Health

It has been a busy time for health innovator Hyphen Health, with a co-founder buyout announced on 29 October followed by a major win at the NSW State Business Awards on 30 October.

Hyphen Health has pioneered the new way people access sexual health services in Australia.

The group encompasses three virtual health clinics - Stigma Health, PrEP Health, and Roidsafe, delivering care to over 4,000 Australians a month and diagnosing 1 in 20 STI cases nationwide.

The amicable buy-out of co-founder Dr Mitchell Tanner marks the beginning of an exciting new phase for Hyphen Health. This transition streamlines leadership and refocuses the company on accelerating its mission to deliver accessible, stigma-free healthcare solutions for all Australians.

"This is an important milestone as we restructure our cap table to position Hyphen Health for growth and agility," said James Sneddon, CEO and co-founder of Hyphen Health.

"I deeply appreciate Dr Tanner's foundational contributions and look forward to leading Hyphen Health into its next phase, with an intensified focus on innovation, strategic partnerships, and expanding access to sexual health for all."

As part of its refreshed vision, Hyphen Health is poised to embark on its first M&A opportunities, with a restructured cap table designed to enhance the team's capabilities and scale rapidly. This evolution aims to support Hyphen Health's ambitious journey as Australia's largest sexual health service, offering nationwide accessibility to STI testing, sexual health services and comprehensive online support.

Reflecting on Hyphen Health's roots, Sneddon commented, "It's been a wild decade, and Mitchell has been an amazing partner. While this transition is the best thing for Mitchell, the business, and myself, I'm deeply grateful for our partnership and friendship".



James Sneddon

"We pioneered an industry, set standards, turned heads, sparked conversations, and made an impact. We've overcome many challenges to reach where we are today, and I couldn't be prouder of what we've built together," Sneddon explained.

At the prestigious Business NSW State Business Awards, Hyphen Health was awarded Excellence in Innovation.

"It was an incredible honour to stand up on stage and accept this trophy for Hyphen Health," said James Sneddon.

"It's almost 10 years since we started this journey and I'm so proud of what our team has achieved - their passion for the cause is infectious" Sneddon continued.

Sneddon couldn't resist giving what is becoming known as his trademark speech, asking for a show of hands in the room if they've had an STI test recently.

"1 in 2 sexually active Australians will contract a sexually transmitted infection at some point so when I have a captive audience of 1000 people, I'm going to be asking the awkward questions." Sneddon said "My challenge to you all: over the next few days, tell someone they need an STI test. Trust me, odds are they do!" Sneddon explained.



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Hunter TAFE Foundation Scholarships and Awards

The Hunter TAFE Foundation has recognised 38 outstanding TAFE NSW students who received \$37,000 worth of scholarships and awards to support their educational and career journey. The awards ceremony, held on 27 November 2024 at TAFE NSW Kurri Kurri, celebrated the achievements and resilience of these exceptional individuals who have demonstrated remarkable determination to further their studies despite the challenges faced.

The scholarships and awards, provided through the Hunter TAFE Foundation, aim to support students pursuing vocational education and training (VET) across a range of industries, including Information Technology, Early Childhood, Aviation, Industrial Electronics, Accounting, Health, Music, Fine Arts, Real Estate and Community Services. The recipients, hailing from diverse backgrounds and communities, have shown exceptional perseverance in their pursuit of education, navigating the complexities of work, study, and the current cost-of-living pressures.

Melanie Cameron received the Kay Peno Encouragement Award for her dedication and resilience whilst studying the Diploma of Community Services and Case Management at TAFE NSW Hamilton Campus. The Kay Peno Encouragement Award was established earlier this year, in memory of long-term Hunter TAFE Foundation Board Director, Kay Peno. The Encouragement Award supports students in their chosen career path, encouraging future female leaders into the workforce.

"Studying with TAFE NSW was the turning point in my life. Receiving this award will allow me to purchase a new laptop to pursue my educational goals. The support of the Foundation has given me the confidence and resolve that I am on the right path to achieving my career goal in social work", Melanie said.



New Planning Framework to support NSW's clean energy future

The NSW Government has developed a new Renewable Energy Planning Framework to promote faster planning decisions, provide investment certainty for industry and host communities, and boost economic benefits for regional communities.

The Framework includes a suite of guidelines and tools that will play an important role in supporting the NSW Government's legislated Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap and emissions reduction targets.

While there is broad support for renewable energy across the state, there have increasingly been calls from local communities for greater certainty and transparency from Government on how renewable projects will be assessed and managed over their lifecycle.

In response to these calls and the recommendations of the Electricity Supply and Reliability Check Up, the new Renewable

Energy Planning Framework includes five new and updated guidelines:

Wind Energy Guidelines – provides advice on planning considerations relevant to wind energy development, including visual impacts, site selection and decommissioning.

Transmission Guidelines – addresses route selection, community consultation expectations and visual impact assessment.

Solar Energy Guidelines – revisions to the existing guideline to provide additional advice on decommissioning and incorporate other aspects of the Framework.

Benefit Sharing Guidelines – encourages equitable and sustainable distribution of benefits to local communities.

Private Agreement Guidelines – advises landholders and renewable energy developers on key considerations when negotiating commercial agreements for hosting renewable energy projects.

The Framework introduces setbacks to avoid significant visual impacts from wind energy and transmission infrastructure, updates requirements for assessing hypothetical dwellings and establishes the Government's expectations for how benefits from renewable energy projects will flow directly to regions. This is expected to generate over \$400 million to support community and local government initiatives.

In addition to the Framework and supporting guidelines, the NSW Government has released the Renewable Energy Transition Update to summarise progress on Government actions to deliver a clean, affordable and reliable energy system.

Planning approvals are an important step toward NSW reaching these goals. Since forming Government, the current NSW Government has approved 29 renewable energy and transmission projects. These approvals will deliver 5.7 GW of new energy generation and 6.3 GW (or 15.4 GWh) of storage.

Direct Newcastle to Cairns flights announced

Tropical travel options for the Hunter are set to kick off with Jetstar announcing the return of direct Newcastle (NTL) to Cairns (CNS) flights in 2025, following a record-breaking season in 2024.

Newcastle Airport CEO Dr. Peter Cock said our region loves tropic leisure getaways and passenger numbers are on the rise, highlighting the overwhelming demand for this route, which saw 27,600 passengers travel through Newcastle Airport during the 2024 season; an impressive 84% increase compared to 2023.

"It's a great vote of confidence from our region, seeing such strong growth in passenger numbers reflects the demand for easy and accessible travel to amazing places and shows just how much this connection to Cairns is valued," Dr. Cock said.

"We are working hard to provide the people of the Hunter with more travel options and are proud this popular route with Jetstar is one of the first to be announced."

Jetstar's Newcastle to Cairns flights will resume from 2 July 2025 and continue through to 24 October, coinciding with the new terminal's grand opening in August. The direct flights are timed to take advantage of Cairns' best weather and bustling tourist season, making them an ideal choice for a mid-year tropical escape, without the need for connecting flights.

Newcastle Airport's newest flight offering means Hunter travellers can trade their monotonous M1 journey for an easier trip to the airport and a quick flight that's under three hours, getting them poolside, beachside or tableside, with favourite drink in hand sooner.

Tropical travel trippers can also take advantage of Newcastle Airport's convenient and affordable parking options by booking online at parking.newcastleairport.com.au, securing the best rates for long-stay options or premium spots closer to the terminal.



PROSPERITY ADVISERS GROUP

Prosperity Advisers Group has appointed **Narelle Barnes** as HR Manager. With over a decade of experience leading human resources teams, Narelle brings a proven track record of driving growth and fostering leadership and culture through developing and implementing values-driven initiatives. Before joining Prosperity, Narelle served as Associate Director of People & Engagement at the NSW Public Service Commission in Sydney, where she led initiatives that improved all People & Culture metrics.



NOVECOM

Novecom has welcomed its new CEO, **Phil Jones**. Phil brings a wealth of experience to the Monitoring, Sensors and IoT company, having held leadership positions at Becker Mining systems, TR Group and Strata Worldwide. Phil is looking forward to working with Novecom's Mining and Agricultural clients to help them manage their environmental compliance and custodianship.

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Outstanding Contribution to Mining

The NSW Mining Annual Parliamentary Dinner celebrates the hard-working people that power our industry. Held at Parliament, guests at the dinner include MPs, Ministers and government representatives, and leaders from the NSW mining industry.

At the 2024 Dinner, on 24 October Port Waratah Coal Services' Chairperson, Stef Loader, was bestowed with the honour of the Outstanding Contribution to NSW Mining Award.

This award recognises an individual that has demonstrated outstanding leadership and performance over a sustained period, promoting, protecting and serving the industry through their career.

Since its inception, this award has become one of the highest honours the NSW mining industry bestows upon one of its own.

Stef was appointed chairperson of Port Waratah Coal Services in 2020 and she has been part of the natural resources and mining value chain for three decades. Working across four continents, and in seven countries, from exploration to project development to operations, sales and marketing through to her current focus on governance.

She is an accomplished leader who has had a career of firsts.

Starting as a Project and Exploration Geologist at Rio Tinto in 1994, Stef was part of discovery team for Khanong copper deposit at Sepon in Laos and designed the first Rio Tinto Global Drilling Data Model.

Identified as a future leader, Stef worked in London with Rio Tinto's CEO and ExCo where she provided technical and strategic advice, and implemented the first structured framework for prioritisation of global exploration expenditure.

She led the Order of Magnitude Study and subsequent Pre-feasibility study for the development of the Bunder diamond mine in central India and achieved the first Mining Lease approved for a non-Indian company for diamonds in 2011.

In 2012, Stef was made Managing Director of Northparkes Mines in the Central West of NSW, being the first woman to lead a mining business for Rio Tinto in NSW, where she improved safety performance and achieved operating costs savings during the transition of the mine to new owners. In 2014, Stef became the first woman to Chair the NSW Minerals Council, a role she served in for two and a half years with distinction.

Since departing her executive role in 2017 Stef has gone onto to build an impressive portfolio of non-executive roles including the Forestry Corporation of NSW, Sunrise Energy Metals, and as the Chair of Port Waratah Coal Services. She also supports the region of Central West NSW on the Boards of CatholicCare Wilcannia-Forbes and Orange360.

In her vote of thanks Stef acknowledged and thanked the important people throughout her career who have listened, supported and trusted her as their leader and also sincerely thanked the communities of the Central West of NSW, her adopted home.

"Regional communities are so important to our Industry. I live in a regional community of the Central West and I want to thank all the people in those communities for welcoming me and adopting me. Our regional communities thrive when our industry thrives,"



said Stef Loader.

Stef also took a moment to share advice for all the leaders across our Industry; "In my career of 'firsts' I've reflected on how that happened. I've learnt that we need to not only develop from within but bring people into the Industry from all sort of walks of life and appoint on potential. Someone took a chance on me and saw potential. Appoint on potential to support diversifying the types of people and thinkers we have in our Industry to solve the challenges of the future."

HVO funds new music therapy room for young people in Singleton

A new music therapy room for young people in Singleton is one of the six community projects that local mine, Hunter Valley Operations (HVO) is funding through its latest round of community grants.

Singleton based Detour Youth Services will use the funds to provide a music program that gives young people a creative outlet.

Manager Chris Giles said the room will be in its Mary Street premises. He will use the funding to purchase different musical instruments and devices that will give young people who are disengaged from school or community access to a broad range of musical experiences.

"There are local young people with musical talent but it needs to be encouraged and supported," Mr Giles said.

"Our music therapy room will be a safe, welcoming and judgement free place for young people where they can do something that is meaningful to them. This can help to address the problem of young people who are at a loss or 'bored' from not engaging at all or engaging in anti-social behaviour."

"Music is a great connector. We will provide a team of mentors with expertise in music to help young people to identify and broaden their skills."

"Our organisation is about engaging, equipping and empowering young people in Singleton that are seeking direction and purpose. We want them to be thriving and living happy, healthy and full lives."

Mr Giles expects the program to start in Term One 2025. He said it will be open to people from surrounding areas with Detour Youth Services able to provide transport within a 30 km radius of Singleton. People wishing to register their interest should visit Detour's Facebook page or phone 0499 276 857.

The other projects HVO is supporting are:

- Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service's Upper Hunter Charity Golf Day
- Gazebos and iPads for the Bellbird Cricket Club
- New signage for the Singleton Neighbourhood Centre
- Samaritans Singleton's Christmas Eve Lunch
- Singleton Fire Brigade Social Club's annual Santa lolly run.

HVO environment and community officer Nic McLaughlin said these projects are on top of the 20 projects HVO funded in the first round of its grants for 2024.

"HVO funded a record number of projects in our first grants round earlier this year and have funded a total of 26 projects in 2024," Mr McLaughlin said.

"This round of grants will help several key service providers continue their great work supporting our community as well as spread some Christmas cheer," he said.

"Our grants program is about helping not for profit organisations such as Detour Youth Services access funding for smaller scale projects or that develop community capacity to build positive and lasting social and economic benefits."

Since 2018, HVO has provided \$520,000 to 116 programs or projects. This is in addition to funding for its charity partnerships, the Jerrys Plains Public School Ready4School program and its workplace giving programs.

HVO's next community grants round will open in April 2025.



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Thiess restores Muswellbrook mined land

The origins of Thiess in the Hunter Valley began in 1944 when the Thiess Brothers broke ground on open-cut operations at Muswellbrook Coal Mine. Fittingly, 80 years later Thiess Rehabilitation is making significant progress with technology-led post-mining land restoration works for the site's current owner Idemitsu Australia.

Over the next 12 months, 156 hectares of post-mining land will be restored, with the site returned to a mix of native ecosystems and improved pastures over 180 hectares.

Since mobilising to site in July 2023, Thiess has safely and successfully deployed a dozer and excavator fleet to move 7.3 million cubic metres of mined earth – enough to fill over 1,500 Olympic-size swimming pools, and celebrated 479 days reportable incident-free at the end of October 2024.

Other milestones include the completion of six blasts on the highwall to create a final landform that is sustainable and complements the landscapes of the surrounding region.

Civil works were progressively delivered on areas undergoing rehabilitation to support a post-mining landform that delivers both vegetation and pasture land uses. Over the next year, 2.8 km of rock-lined drains, 19 km of contour banks, and 16,000 tonnes of compost spreading will be delivered.

Thiess Rehabilitation Group Manager Jonathan Miln said "Given Thiess' legacy at Muswellbrook Mine, Thiess Rehabilitation is pleased to be able to contribute to the successful rehabilitation of

the Muswellbrook site and meet Idemitsu Australia's approved mine rehabilitation objectives."

In 2024, Thiess celebrates 90 years – having grown from humble beginnings in rural Queensland nine decades ago to be at the forefront of sustainable mining and infrastructure services, with operations across eight countries and three continents, with more than 15,000 employees.

Reflecting on these achievements, Thiess Group Executive Strategy, Sustainability and Safety Shankar Gopalan said: "Since 1934, Thiess has remained focussed on delivering great value to our clients. Our long-term commitment extends beyond continuity – it encompasses embracing change, fostering innovation, and nurturing enduring relationships with all stakeholders.

"Thiess stands poised at the forefront of this transformative era, ready to continue our legacy of excellence while embracing the challenges and opportunities of the global energy transition."



Upper Hunter students engage in SMART science shows

The University of Newcastle's inspirational SMART (Science, Maths and Real Technology) program toured Upper Hunter schools recently, delivering eleven SMART Science Shows and STEM Workshops, thanks to its long-term partners, Yancoal Australia's Mount Thorley Warkworth and Ashton Coal mine operations.

The show's theme was "Force and Motion" - the students explored the effects of common contact and noncontact forces, including gravity, air-resistance, and magnetism. Over 880 local budding scientists from St Mary's Primary School Scone, Merriwa Central School, Singleton Heights Public School, Muswellbrook Public School and St Joseph's Primary School Denman had a great time at the highly interactive shows.

The science shows are designed to captivate and educate primary school students, blending excitement with education in a way that resonates with young learners. Each show is designed to be visually stimulating and interactive, incorporating live demonstrations, audience participation, and captivating explanations that make complex scientific concepts accessible and memorable.

The SMART team's approach is aligned with the K-6 Science and Technology syllabus (NSW), ensuring that its content not only entertains but also complements the curriculum.

Olivia Clarkson, SMART Program Team Leader, University of Newcastle recognises that the passion for STEM starts at a young age.

"We want to make science accessible, fun, and relevant so the SMART program continues to play a pivotal role in nurturing the next generation of scientists, engineers, and innovators.

"Our commitment to delivering high-quality, interactive science education ensures that children across NSW have the opportunity to explore, understand, and fall in love with the wonders of science," said Olivia.

SMART is one of the longest running outreach programs delivered by the University of Newcastle's College of Engineering, Science and Environment, alongside the Science and Engineering Challenge. SMART offers a variety of programs aimed at inspiring students to explore future careers in science and engineering.

Mount Thorley Warkworth General Manager Cris Shadbolt was pleased to help fund this amazing program for another year.

"The SMART science shows provide primary school students in our region a fantastic opportunity to get involved in science, mathematics, and real technology related activities in a meaningful and hands on way.

"Getting students excited about STEM at a young age, can help open their minds to a career in mining and engineering.

"The shows were well received, and we are looking forward to helping it reach more Upper Hunter schools next year," said Cris.

New additions to Singleton Hall of Fame

Two Singleton-based organisations that have made an important mark on Australia's national identity are the latest additions to the Wambo Coal Singleton Hall of Fame.

The Northern Agricultural Association (NAA) and the Australian Army Infantry Museum became the 80th and 81st inductees at a special ceremony held at Singleton Civic Centre on 28 November, which also celebrated the 15th year of the partnership between Singleton Council and Wambo Coal.

The Singleton Hall of Fame recognises and honours those individuals, families and organisations who were born in or have a strong association with Singleton and who have attained prominence at a State, national or international level in their field of endeavour.

Appropriately, the NAA's induction coincided with the 150th Singleton Show in September, and came 156 years after the Association was formed in 1868. In addition to the Singleton Show, the organisation also holds an annual rodeo in April and a campdraft in October.

The Australian Army Infantry Museum was officially opened soon after the Infantry Centre was established in Singleton in 1973, and moved into its current award-winning, purpose-built, accessible gallery space in 2011. The Museum is home to an extensive collection of Infantry Corps history and artefacts and has been described as the Hunter Valley's answer to the Australian War Memorial.

Mayor of Singleton, Cr Sue Moore said the Wambo Coal Singleton Hall of Fame induction ceremony was an important occasion because it recognised the talents and achievements of individuals, organisations and businesses from across the Singleton local government area.



"But more importantly, it's a night we recognise the mark that we as the people of Singleton make not just on our own community, but on Australia and the world," she said.

"We continued that tradition this year by recognising two organisations that are critical to the very foundations not only of our community, but to Australia's national identity.

"The NAA continues to celebrate Australia's agricultural and livestock heritage through the events it holds each year, while the Australian Army Infantry Museum plays a crucial role in the public's understanding of our military history.

"I'm extremely proud to recognise these organisations that are based right here in Singleton and congratulate all the volunteers who are involved in their ongoing success and contribution.

"I also sincerely thank Wambo Coal Peabody Energy for continuing to partner with Council on this important initiative over the past 15 years, and I hope for many more years to come."



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NSW Government's Critical Minerals Strategy

The NSW Minerals Council has welcomed the release of the NSW Government's Critical Minerals Strategy by Ministers Houssos and Scully.

While it will be important to see some more details on several of the key initiatives, the high level whole-of-government commitment and general direction outlined in this Strategy is welcome," NSW Minerals Council CEO Stephen Galilee said.

"The NSW Government's commitment to the sector stands in stark contrast to a federal government that blocks NSW mining projects based on secret whispers and public murals."

The Strategy confirms the NSW Government's vision for NSW to become a global leader in critical minerals production, and identifies a number of important steps required to ensure NSW has an opportunity to do so.

This includes the need for greater support for exploration, improvements to the NSW planning system, improved investment attraction efforts, and greater access to relevant federal government funding and programs.

The proposed royalty deferral initiative also has the potential to assist critical minerals projects.

"It's pleasing that this Strategy prioritises a range of specific actions to be undertaken over the short to medium term, and the medium to long term."

The Strategy has been released at an important time for the critical minerals sector in NSW.

Thirteen NSW mines currently produce commodities included on the NSW Government's Critical Minerals list, and there is the potential for more critical minerals operations in the future.

At least three more critical minerals in NSW projects are fully approved and currently seeking a combined investment of over \$3 billion. These projects could provide over 2,000 jobs.

Another three potential critical minerals projects are also currently under assessment in the NSW planning system. These projects have the potential to deliver over \$700 million of additional investment for NSW and over 1,000 jobs.

At least six further potential critical minerals projects are currently preparing EIS applications, with the potential for more than \$1.3 billion of further investment and over 1,500 new jobs.

"Mining is a vital industry for NSW. The sector provides around 40,000 direct jobs and supports tens of thousands more jobs, including almost 7,000 mining supplier businesses across the state, while also providing NSW with its most valuable export commodities."

"Support for the further development of critical minerals projects will help ensure mining continues to make an important economic contribution to NSW for generations to come."

NCIG 2024 Sustainability Report released

Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group (NCIG) has recently published the 2024 Sustainability Report.

The report measures their progress towards their sustainability targets and details their ambitious goal of achieving net zero operational emissions (Scopes 1 and 2) by 2030.

Structured around NCIG's people, culture, plant, environment, community, stakeholders and customers, the report provides an overview of the challenges faced and the achievements of their team during the period, including:

- 49 Mt coal loaded
- 545 ships loaded
- 1,800 days Lost Time Injury free achieved
- 30% purchased certificate renewable energy
- 74% waste recycled
- 80% reduction in potable water use
- \$34.4m local economic spend
- \$392,000 invested in community initiatives across 63 community groups

The full 2024 Sustainability Report is available online at <https://ncig.com.au/2024-sustainability-report/>

Minerals Council of Australia welcomes CSIRO report

The Minerals Council of Australia has welcomed the findings of CSIRO's 2024 survey report on Australian attitudes toward mining, highlighting an encouraging improvement in public trust toward the industry.

Mining companies are committed to the essential task of continually enhancing their practices, and the MCA appreciates CSIRO's insights into the importance of mining for Australia's future.

The report reflects a broad acknowledgment among Australians of mining's role in supporting the transition to a sustainable future. Key findings demonstrate that:

- 73% of Australians recognise that access to critical minerals is essential for achieving net zero emissions
- 71% agree that mining plays a vital role in the Australian way of life
- 72% believe that mining will underpin Australia's future prosperity.

The industry is taking proactive steps to support continual improvement in its environmental and social performance with initiatives such as the Towards Sustainable Mining (TSM) program, which enhances transparency and strengthens community engagement across the sector.

The MCA recognises the need to continue building trust and engaging transparently with communities. Australians understand the essential role of mining in driving the energy transition, and there is a shared commitment to deepen our partnerships with communities to ensure this transition is both responsible and inclusive.

Mining industry's record-breaking tax contribution

The Minerals Council of Australia has reported that the latest ATO Corporate Tax Transparency Report shows that Australia's mining industry continues to be the nation's biggest taxpayer, paying \$43.1 billion in company tax for 2022-23 and highlighting the crucial role mining plays in keeping our economy strong and funding the essential services that Australians rely on every day.

In 2022-23, the mining sector not only led the nation in tax contributions, increasing its payments from the previous year, but also paid a combined \$74.6 billion in company tax and royalties, including \$31.5 billion in royalties alone.

This record tax contribution marks the second consecutive year the sector has paid more in tax than all other industries combined.

Mining companies make up more than half of Australia's top 20 largest taxpayers, with Rio Tinto, BHP, and Glencore taking the top three spots. In 2022-23, the sector accounted for approximately 44% of tax paid by large corporate entities, according to the ATO report.

This means reliable funding for the NDIS, schools, roads, aged care, hospitals, and Australia's national security, including the AUKUS submarine program.

The industry also continues to pay the highest average wages and plays a vital role in supporting communities across Australia – backing 1.1 million jobs in the mining sector and its supply chains. From hospitals to highways, a strong mining industry means a strong and secure future for all Australians.

Since 2014-15, mining has increased its tax payments fivefold, illustrating the industry's unwavering commitment to powering Australia's future.

This growth reflects strong export demand for Australian resources, a clear reminder that we should be backing new mining projects – not holding them back with red tape and drawn-out approvals.

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One day, a girl walks to her mother and look at her mother's hair and sadly said: "Why are some of your hair white mum?"

The mother replied, "Well, your my daughter and every time that you do something wrong and make me cry or unhappy, one of my hairs turns white."

The girl thought about this revelation a while, and then said, "Mum, how come all of grandma's hairs are white?"

A man was speeding down the highway, feeling secure in a gaggle of cars all traveling at the same speed. However, as they passed a speed trap, he got nailed with a speed detector and was pulled over.

The officer handed him the citation, received his signature and was about to walk away when the man asked, "Officer, I know I was speeding, but I don't think it's fair - there were plenty of other cars around me who were going just as fast, so why did I get the ticket?"

"Ever go fishing?" the policeman suddenly asked the man.

"Ummm, yeah..." the startled man replied.

The officer grinned and added, "Did you ever catch all the fish?"

Magistrate: "You say this man was drunk. What was he doing when you arrested him?"

Policeman: "He was arguing with a taxi driver, Your Honour."

Magistrate: "That is no proof he was drunk."

Policeman: "Well, Your Honour, there was no taxi driver there."

This fisherman goes to the river to check an illegal fish trap that he owns. He looks around to make sure there are no Fishing Inspectors about and proceeds to pull the fish trap out to check it. An Inspector steps out of the bushes, "Ahha!" he said and the

fisherman spun around, let out a scream and jumped about a metre in the air.

The Inspector, who wasn't expecting such a response said "Settle down, I'm the Fishing Inspector".

"Thank God for that" said the fisherman, "I thought you were the bugger who owned this fish trap".

A customer at Green's Gourmet Grocery marvelled at the proprietor's quick wit and intelligence.

"Tell me, Green, what makes you so smart?"

"I wouldn't share my secret with just anyone," Green replies, lowering his voice so the other shoppers won't hear. "But since you're a good and faithful customer, I'll let you in on it. Fish heads. You eat enough of them, you'll be positively brilliant."

"You sell them here?" the customer asks.

"Only \$4 a piece," says Green.

The customer buys three. A week later, he's back in the store complaining that the fish heads were disgusting and he isn't any smarter.

"You didn't eat enough," says Green. The customer goes home with 20 more fish heads. Two weeks later, he's back and this time he's really angry.

"Hey, Green," he says, "You're selling me fish heads for \$4 a piece when I can buy the whole fish for \$2. You're ripping me off!"

"You see?" says Green. "You're getting smarter already!"

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Don't be distracted by criticism. Remember, the only taste of success some people get is to take a bite out of you."

- Zig Ziglar

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