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## From the Editor



The new year has brought some uninspiring economic data for Australia, including the December CPI figures released in late January which showed inflation remained stubbornly higher than the RBA's target of 2-3%.

According to the figures from the BAS the consumer price index rose 3.8% in the 12 months to December 2025, up from a 3.4% rise in the 12 months to November 2025.

Trimmed mean inflation, the figure mainly used by the RBA, was 3.3% in the 12 months to December 2025, up

from 3.2% in the 12 months to November 2025.

This led to the RBA increasing interest rates by 0.25 basis points to 3.85%.

Whilst this is still not a high rate by historical standards, it is the first rate rise since November 2023 and there are fears that rates may increase further during 2026, particularly with the RBA forecasting the inflation rate is likely to rise slightly more this year before coming down.

It is certainly not the news that struggling business and mortgage owners wanted to hear.

There is however some positive news on inflationary pressures with a higher Australian dollar leading to some easing of import prices.

Oil prices are also forecast to ease, although this may be turned on its head if the US-Iran situation escalates further.

\* \* \*

The decision to extend the operating life of the Eraring Power Station to 2029 is a commonsense decision that will help to support energy certainty during the transition to renewable energy.

Forecasts from a few years ago regarding renewable energy supplies have proven to be overly optimistic.

While there are billions of dollars being invested in new energy projects, it will take some time to reach levels where all the aging fossil power stations can be retired.

The scope of the transition to renewable energy cannot be underestimated.

New energy projects take some years to go from initial plans, through approvals, constructions and commissioning.

Wind and solar energy also requires major investment in energy firming projects so that supplies can be maintained when the sun isn't shining and the wind isn't blowing.

Then there are the challenges of grid infrastructure required where we move from a relative small number of massive power generators to a myriad of dispersed energy sources.

The transition to renewables is an incredibly complex process and will require very astute planning if we are to maintain the energy certainty that business and consumers require.

**Garry Hardie**  
Editor and Publisher

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### WE WANT YOUR NEWS!

**HBR** is always happy to consider story submissions for possible inclusion at no charge. If you have company news, major new appointments, business advice or other information of interest, we would like to hear from you.

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## Chamberlains Law Firm merges with Braye Cragg Lawyers

National Law Firm Chamberlains Law Firm has further strengthened its commitment to the Newcastle and Hunter Region. Having established a Newcastle office in 2020, Chamberlains has now merged with Braye Cragg Lawyers, one of Newcastle’s oldest and most esteemed legal firms in January 2026.

Robert McKessar, Accredited Specialist – Personal Injury, joins Chamberlains with members of the Braye Cragg team, following his role as a Partner at Braye Cragg for over 36 years.

In appreciating the merger of one of Newcastle’s most trusted firms, operating in the Hunter since 1898, he notes: “This merger allows us to combine our long-standing reputation for personal service with Chamberlains’ innovative approach, giving you access to a wider range of legal expertise and resources. Our focus remains the same: delivering exceptional outcomes and caring for our clients every step of the way.”

The merger sees the further expansion of the team in Newcastle, following the success of Marissa Dimarco, Director – Property, Corporate & Commercial, joining the team from Dimarco Garland Lawyers in 2024. Having moved to new premises at 400 Hunter Street in late 2025, the Newcastle team now comprises of 28 local staff.

The addition of the Braye Cragg team allows the Newcastle office to be able to offer Chamberlains Law Firms national

service offering of Compensation, Corporate & Commercial, Family Law, Conveyancing, Employment, Wills & Estates, Insurance, Construction, Insolvency & Structuring and Litigation.

Chamberlains Law Firm Newcastle office now has a dedicated conveyancing team that can service clients requiring bulk conveyancing services.

The announcement of the merger was made at Chamberlains annual Spring Drinks at the Newcastle Club in October 2025, where both firms celebrated the opportunity to strengthen capabilities across key practice areas including Compensation, Corporate & Commercial, Family Law, Conveyancing, Employment, Wills & Estates, Insurance, Construction and Litigation.

Stipe Vuleta, Managing Director, notes: “Braye Cragg’s legacy and reputation in the region are unparalleled. By combining their deep roots with Chamberlains’ innovative approach, we are creating a platform for sustainable growth and enhanced client service for decades to come.”

Chamberlains Law Firm is a nationally awarded full-service law firm, assisting clients across the Australia from offices in Canberra, Sydney, Perth, Brisbane and Newcastle. As a full-service firm, Chamberlains draws on a range of industry leading experts to provide pragmatic legal solutions. With their real-world understanding, nationally recognised expertise, and straightforward advice, Chamberlains guides their clients through any legal challenge. Big or small. Complex or simple. Start to finish.

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## Braye Cragg Solicitors Joins Chamberlains Law Firm



Braye Cragg has joined Chamberlains, uniting a shared commitment to personal service and outstanding legal outcomes.

By combining Braye Cragg’s deep community roots with Chamberlains’ innovative legal approach, we now offer greater value, broader expertise, and enhanced support across Newcastle and the Hunter.

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## Origin extends Eraring Power Station operations to 2029

Origin Energy has advised the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) that it will extend the operation of all four units of the Eraring Power Station from 19 August 2027 to 30 April 2029, to support energy supply in NSW through the energy transition. Extending Eraring’s operation reduces risks to system security highlighted by AEMO in its recently released Transition Plan for System Security and enables the plant to continue to support reliable power to NSW households and businesses.

The extension of Eraring operations is not expected to affect Origin’s 2030 emissions reduction targets and long-term ambition to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, as outlined in the company’s 2025 Climate Transition Action Plan.

Origin will continue to support Eraring employees through its Future Directions program, which offers career, learning, wellbeing and financial assistance, along with up-to-date information and resources. The program has already funded 525 training courses.

In addition, the \$5 million Eraring Community Fund, established to support communities affected by the plant’s eventual closure, will remain in place until 2032. To date, the Fund has committed nearly \$1.5 million to 47 community projects.

Beyond 2029, the Eraring site will remain a significant part of the National Electricity Market. The Eraring Battery commenced commercial operation in late 2025 (stages one and three), with the final stages anticipated to come online in the first quarter of 2027, including the recently approved fourth stage which extends the dispatch duration of stage two to nearly six hours. Once all stages are complete, the Eraring battery will deliver 700 MW / 3,160 MWh, providing an average of 4.5 hours of storage capacity in NSW.

## KONGSBERG signs agreement with Commonwealth of Australia

KONGSBERG and the Commonwealth of Australia have signed a landmark strategic partnering agreement to drive collaboration and engagement under Australia’s Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance (GWEO) Enterprise, marking an important milestone in our shared ambition to manufacture and maintain long-range strike capability in Australia.

The Kongsberg Program Agreement formalises the industrial and strategic cooperation between Kongsberg Defence Australia, Kongsberg Defence & Aerospace, and the Commonwealth of Australia and provides a single programmatic approach for the management of a range of GWEO activities.

“KONGSBERG is proud to deepen its partnership with the GWEO Enterprise, contributing to national security, job creation and high-tech industry growth,” said John Fry, Managing Director, Kongsberg Defence Australia.

“This long term agreement will facilitate and streamline activities with KONGSBERG technology across all GWEO areas”.

“KONGSBERG is pleased to contribute expertise to Australia’s sovereign defence capability. This agreement affirms the strong and growing partnership between KONGSBERG and the Commonwealth of Australia. Together, we will help grow Australia’s defence manufacturing base and strengthen allied capability,” said Øyvind Kolset, Executive Vice President Missile and Space, Kongsberg Defence and Aerospace.



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## Hunter Primary Care and Yakuway join forces

Hunter Primary Care and Yakuway Indigenous Corporation have announced a new partnership, formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), designed to foster collaboration and support within the community. This partnership marks a significant step forward in both organisations’ shared commitment to creating lasting, positive change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

At the heart of this partnership is a dedication to working together cooperatively, building upon the unique strengths of both organisations. Hunter Primary Care and Yakuway are united in their goal to ensure the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are heard, their needs met, and their cultures respected. Both organisations are committed to delivering services that support and uplift these communities, with a focus on cultural understanding and meaningful engagement.

The partnership will pave the way for joint ventures and community-focused initiatives that promote wellbeing, empowerment, and sustainable growth. Both organisations are committed to exploring new opportunities to work together, ensuring that their combined efforts make a meaningful difference.

Looking forward, Hunter Primary Care and Yakuway will continue to develop a long-term strategic plan to ensure the partnership’s success and deliver on shared goals.

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## University of Newcastle's I2N takes out top honours

The University of Newcastle's Integrated Innovation Network (I2N) has been named the most recommended startup accelerator in Australia by Startup Muster – the largest survey of the nation's startup ecosystem.

As the University's entrepreneurship and venture development unit, I2N fuels the success of innovators, entrepreneurs, startups and small businesses by connecting them to community, customers, capital and coaching.

Since it was established in 2016, I2N has supported 188 startups and small businesses that have gone onto:

- raise more than \$62.7 million in capital
- create 280 jobs
- contribute \$44.1 million in wages for the Hunter and Central Coast regions.

I2N takes curious problem solvers and skills them up to become budding entrepreneurs through a host of programs and engagement strategies, including Grand Challenges, Hackathons and its flagship Accelerator program.

University of Newcastle Vice-Chancellor Professor Alex Zelinsky, said I2N is a major drawcard for entrepreneurial thinking and investment in the Hunter and Central Coast regions.

"I2N is central to the University's efforts to build and nurture an entrepreneurial ecosystem," Professor Zelinsky said.

"This achievement demonstrates that high-quality innovation support can thrive in regional Australia. Founders no longer need to relocate to Sydney or Melbourne to access world-class acceleration support – they can get that support right here in the Hunter and Central Coast."

Being named the number one startup accelerator in the country is the latest accolade for the University's Integrated Innovation Network.



In 2024, I2N won the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Activators of the Year at the Asia Pacific Triple E Awards.

At the 2023 Asia Pacific Triple E Awards, Siobhan Curran (Acting Director of Knowledge Exchange and Entrepreneurship) won the Entrepreneurial Leader of the Year Award and the People's Choice award in her category.

"Any recognition our I2N programs receive belongs to the people who make it possible – the mentors, coaches, industry partners and funding partners, including the NSW Government's Boosting Business Innovation Program which has backed regional innovation since 2016," Ms Curran said.

"Startup Muster's national survey represents the voice of the startup community, so being named the number one startup accelerator validates that our regional approach is a competitive advantage.

"We've nurtured a close-knit community of entrepreneurs and innovators, established a network of accessible mentors, and created a culture of genuine collaboration. Those attributes will continue to serve us well as I2N heads into its 10th year in 2026."

I2N supports startup founders, researchers and students by teaching them essential business skills and testing ideas to help their ventures grow faster. Expressions of interest for the 2026 cohort of I2N's flagship Accelerator program are now open at [www.newcastle.edu.au/accelerator](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/accelerator).

## Singleton Bypass on track to open in 2026

The Singleton Bypass is on track to open to traffic later this year, with construction teams back from the break and hard at work, delivering an extraordinary project for the Hunter. The project is being delivered with a \$560 million investment from the Federal Government and a \$140 million investment from the NSW Government.

This region-changing project will take 15,000 vehicles a day off Singleton's main street, improving travel times, freight efficiency and safety for local and interstate motorists, allowing them to avoid five sets of traffic lights.

The 8 kilometre bypass starts near Newington Lane in the south and rejoins the highway just past Magpie Street in the North. The project features a full interchange at Putty Road and connections to the New England Highway at the Southern and Northern ends and at Gowrie.



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## Newcastle office market holds up, but new supply lifts vacancy

Newcastle's office market is still attracting tenants, but a wave of new space over the past year has nudged overall vacancy higher.

The latest Property Council of Australia Office Market Report shows Newcastle's total vacancy rose to 15.6%, up from 14.9% last year, as 4,836 sqm of new supply came online.

Property Council NSW Executive Director Anita Hugo said the underlying demand story remained positive, particularly for higher-quality space.

"New supply is pushing the headline vacancy rate up, but the market is still leasing, and A-grade space continues to do the heavy lifting," Ms Hugo said.

"This is the same 'flight to quality' trend we're seeing nationally. Tenants are choosing better located, higher-performing buildings, leaving older stock with the need to upgrade or consider a new use where it makes economic and planning sense."

Key Newcastle results (year to January 2026) include:

- Total vacancy: 15.6% (stock 308,164 sqm)
- Net absorption: +4,836 sqm
- Net supply: +8,206 sqm
- A-grade vacancy: 15.4% with +6,970 sqm net absorption
- B-grade vacancy: 13.9% with -1,546 sqm net absorption
- C-grade vacancy: 20.2% with -869 sqm net absorption
- D-grade vacancy: 4.0% with +281 sqm net absorption

Ms Hugo said the next step was to keep Newcastle competitive by backing reinvestment and improving the everyday experience of coming into the CBD.

## Newcastle scientist named among UNESCO Quantum Top 100

University of Newcastle quantum scientist Dr Lachlan Rogers has been named among UNESCO's global Quantum Top 100, recognising leading researchers shaping the future of quantum science and technology.

The announcement coincides with the culmination of the International Year of Quantum Science and Technology 2025, led by UNESCO and proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly.

Dr Rogers was among only a handful of Australian scientists included on international list. He has made a significant contribution to public engagement with quantum science, from national outreach initiatives to hands-on museum demonstrations seen by thousands of students.

Dr Rogers' research focuses on diamond-based quantum technology, using laser light to make tiny defects in diamonds glow and reveal their quantum properties. His work supports emerging applications in quantum computing, sensing and advanced imaging, and contributes to the "second quantum revolution".



## City of Newcastle selects partner to deliver landmark affordable housing project

Forty-eight affordable housing units are proposed to be developed on what is the last remaining parcel of land to be developed of the former heavy rail line into Newcastle. Councillors voted in December to endorse the proposal by specialist community housing provider Home in Place following a rigorous two-stage selection supported by independent probity oversight.

City of Newcastle Chief Executive Officer Jeremy Bath said the appointment of a not-for-profit, community-focused provider marks a pivotal step forward to help address the city's housing crisis.

"Home in Place has demonstrated the capability, experience and vision needed to bring this project to life," Mr Bath said.

"Their strong financial foundations and proven success in delivering affordable housing gave us great confidence in selecting them to partner with us on this landmark project, which is the first of its kind in the Hunter."

The 4,125 sqm lot at 280 Hunter Street, known as Rail Bridge Row, stretches from Brown Street to near the intersection of Darby and Hunter Street and is opposite the Crown Street light rail stop. It was purchased by City of Newcastle from Hunter and Central Coast Development Corporation in 2020 and is the final piece of the former heavy rail corridor to be redeveloped.

Home in Place's concept design proposes the delivery of 48 units in a mix of one, two and three-bedroom apartments above a ground floor commercial development, supported by 37 car spaces for residents and retail tenants. The proposal also includes a new laneway connecting Argyle Lane with Wharf Road and a cycleway link to Market Street for bicycle riders.

A Development Application currently under assessment seeks approval for mine investigation and remediation works beneath the site. Subject to approval, grout-based remediation targeting historic workings is expected to begin in 2026. These works are essential to stabilise the site prior to future construction.

*An artist's impression of the proposed affordable housing project at Rail Bridge Row*



## Law Partners acquires Catherine Henry Lawyers

Australia's largest specialist personal injury firm, Law Partners, has acquired Newcastle-based Catherine Henry Lawyers (CHL), multi-award-winning firm with a long-standing presence in the Hunter and across regional New South Wales.

Established in 2009, CHL has built a strong legacy across medical negligence and institutional abuse matters, supported by a deeply experienced team known for exceptional client advocacy and case outcomes. Taking place from 27 January 2026, the acquisition sees CHL's people and practice transition into Law Partners, strengthening the firm's presence in Newcastle, and enhancing its specialist medical negligence capability. CHL's clients can expect minimal disruption to services, with the continuity of their claims and high levels of service treated as a priority.

Founding Partner at Law Partners, Shane Butcher, said the acquisition is a significant and positive step for both firms and the communities they represent.

"Catherine Henry Lawyers has earned an exceptional reputation over many years, particularly for its work in medical negligence," Mr Butcher said.

"This acquisition brings together two teams with a shared commitment to client advocacy and legal excellence. Strengthening our presence in Newcastle and the Hunter region means we can support even more Australians who are seeking help with what can be very complex medical negligence claims."

Founder and principal of CHL, Catherine Henry, said the alignment of values and shared focus on client outcomes made the decision a natural one for her and her team.

"Law Partners shares our dedication to compassionate, high-quality legal representation," Ms Henry said.

"The joining of our two firms is an excellent outcome for our clients. It also ensures our dedicated staff will continue to thrive, while strengthening our ability to deliver for communities across Newcastle, the Hunter region and rural communities across the state. I couldn't be happier with the strong alignment between our practices and our combined ability to support clients through complex medical malpractice, health regulatory and professional negligence matters."

Ms Henry will continue in a senior leadership role within Law Partners' health law and medical negligence team, with her current team continuing to report to her. Over the coming months, both leadership teams will work closely to ensure a smooth and seamless integration for clients and staff.

This strategic acquisition reflects Law Partners' continued investment in its specialist practices and its commitment to expanding access to high-quality personal injury services across NSW and Australia. By bringing together two highly regarded teams with deep expertise in medical negligence, Law Partners is strengthening its capability, broadening its regional presence, and reinforcing its long-term strategy of growth through cultural alignment and client-focused excellence.

The acquisition marks an important step in Law Partners' ongoing expansion and its mission to help more Australians get all the compensation they deserve.

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## City of Newcastle receives recognition for leadership in equitable workplaces

City of Newcastle is one of only two councils in Australia to be recognised as an Inclusive Employer by the peak national body for diversity in the workplace.

It is the second time City of Newcastle has been included on Diversity Council Australia's annual Inclusive Employer Index, joining more than 80 organisations nationwide that have been recognised for best-practice inclusion.

Chief Executive Officer Jeremy Bath said the recognition reflects City of Newcastle's ongoing delivery of its Inclusion, Diversity and Equity (IDE) Strategy, which was launched in 2023 around the pillars of inclusive culture, inclusive leadership, and a diverse, representative workforce.

The strategy targets five priority areas: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement, accessibility, culturally and linguistically diverse inclusion, gender equity, and LGBTIQ+ inclusion.

Key initiatives of the approach include inclusive leadership programs, tailored staff learning, diverse working groups, workplace adjustments, inclusive recruitment practices, accessibility support, and ongoing awareness campaigns.

## Brunners Bridge opens in the Upper Hunter

On 27 January the Federal and NSW Governments, in partnership with Singleton Council, cut the ribbon on a major upgrade to Brunners Bridge at Mitchells Flat – strengthening freight access, and improving safety in the Upper Hunter.

The \$7.2 million upgrade replaces an ageing bridge with a modern, heavy-duty crossing designed to carry larger freight vehicles and better connect local communities. The project was jointly funded, with \$6.5 million from the NSW Government and \$700,000 from the Australian Government's Safer Local Roads and Infrastructure Program.

For communities in the Upper Hunter, Brunners Bridge is a vital everyday connection – linking Singleton, Elderslie and Gresford and providing access to the Hunter Regional Livestock Exchange. The Bridge also supports families, connecting them to work, schools and local services.

With a heavier load limit of 68.5 tonnes, the upgraded bridge improves reliability, supports local industry and keeps the region connected when it matters most.

## \$6.5 million upgrade to future-proof Singleton's Sewage Treatment Plant

A major \$6.5 million upgrade is now underway at the Singleton Sewage Treatment Plant, marking the latest phase in Council's ongoing capital investment into critical wastewater infrastructure.

The project, which includes a \$1 million contribution from the Australian Government's Community Energy Upgrades Fund (Round 2), incorporates a major program of energy efficiency, electrification and automation improvements that will reduce emissions, cut operating costs and improve the resilience of one of Council's highest-use energy assets.

Mike Duff, Council's Director Infrastructure and Planning Services, said the project would ensure the 40-year-old facility continues to perform safely and efficiently for the growing community, even though customers may not notice it when they turn on a tap or flush the toilet.



At the heart of the upgrade is a transformation of the plant's aeration system — the Singleton Sewage Treatment Plant's largest energy user, accounting for around 80% of total electricity consumption. Upgrades are estimated to reduce energy usage by 60%, cut energy costs by almost \$100,000 annually and avoid 93 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per year. Work also includes major upgrades to the plant's critical electrical and control systems to support the shift to modern automation, as well as improvements to the UV disinfection system.

Construction is now underway, with commissioning of the upgraded systems expected in late 2026.

## National Historic Machinery Association National Rally in conjunction with Steamfest 2027

Maitland has been announced as the host city for the National Historical Machinery Association (NHMA) National Rally in 2027, a major milestone for the region's events calendar, with a bumper week-long program of activities and experiences expected to attract large crowds to the city.

The Rally will be the 20th Biennial National Rally and will coincide with the 40th anniversary of the Burton Automotive Hunter Valley Steamfest, creating a major national celebration of heritage machinery that is expected to inject \$3.2 million into the local economy.

The combined program, supported by Maitland City Council, will run for nine days, beginning with the NHMA National Rally from 10 to 11 April 2027, followed by a week of activities and culminating with Steamfest on 17 to 18 April 2027.

Visitors can expect an impressive showcase of steam engines, vintage tractors, antique farm machinery, as well as heritage train rides, show-and-shine displays, kids' activities, and plenty of food and entertainment.

Organisers are also working toward developing an enhanced rail program for Steamfest, alongside a broader week-long program of steam train experiences.

With an expanded nine-day program, the 2027 National Rally and Steamfest are expected to draw around 70,000 visitors and provide a significant boost to local businesses, including the city's accommodation providers that are expected to be fully booked for the event.



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**MAXIM BUSINESS ADVISORS**

Long-serving team member **Daniel Sullivan** has been promoted to a principal role at Maxim Business Advisors. Dan, who has been with the firm for over 20 years, leads the specialist tax advisory group, providing high-end tax advice and corporate restructuring expertise.



**SWS LAWYERS**

**David Ifield** has been promoted to Senior Associate. David has been with SWS Lawyers since before his admission as a solicitor, and the firm is very proud to have supported his continuous development as a lawyer since that time. He possesses an outstanding legal knowledge, is very patient and has the ability to foster excellent relationships with colleagues, clients and friends of the firm. His unflappable 'calm-under-pressure' composure sets David apart from his contemporaries.



**SWS LAWYERS**

**Nathan Avery-Williams** has been promoted to Partner. Since joining SWS Lawyers, Nate has made a significant impact. His transition from the NSW Bar to leading the firm's disputes team has brought a level of legal acumen and strategic foresight that has already proven invaluable to SWS Lawyers' clients, bringing fresh ideas to longstanding legal and procedural issues and helping to save one client many tens of millions of dollars in a recent long-running contractual dispute.



**MAXIM BUSINESS ADVISORS**

Maxim Business Advisors has promoted **Chris Henshaw** to a principal role. Chris, a former business consultant with more than 10 years at Maxim, oversees a client portfolio and team, delivering commercial insight and clear guidance.



**MAXIM BUSINESS ADVISORS**

**Tyler Cannon** has been promoted to a principal role at Maxim Business Advisors. Tyler Cannon has spent the last 10 years at Maxim, progressing from senior accountant to client manager. In his new role, he delivers timely tax and compliance advice while fostering strong relationships with clients and colleagues.

# LET US KNOW ABOUT YOUR PEOPLE!

We would be pleased to receive information about your new appointments. Just email around 80 words on the employment plus a high resolution head shot to [editorial@HBRmag.com.au](mailto:editorial@HBRmag.com.au)

Submissions are **FREE** but subject to editorial control.



# GROW YOUR BUSINESS WITH 2NURFM & SUPPORT YOUR COMMUNITY

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\*[National Listener Survey - conducted by McNair Yellow Squares - Greater Newcastle 2025 Survey Wave 1].

# COMING EVENTS

**26 February 2026, 12:00 pm – 2:00 pm**

**Business Hunter**

Energy and Resources lunch

Venue: McDonald Jones Stadium

Cost: \$165.00 – \$198.00

<https://events.humanitix.com/coal-and-critical-minerals-what-s-next-for-nsw-or-with-thanks-to-ugl>

**26 February 2026, 7:00 am – 9:00 am**

**Business Singleton**

February Business Breakfast

Venue: Horse & Jockey

Cost: Free – \$37.50 - \$45

[https://www.stickytickets.com.au/73f1pt/february\\_business\\_breakfast.aspx](https://www.stickytickets.com.au/73f1pt/february_business_breakfast.aspx)

**3 March 2026, 12:00 pm – 1:30 pm**

**Newcastle Business Club**

International Women's Day Luncheon with Christie Dawes

Venue: McDonald Jones Stadium

Cost: \$75.00 – \$95.00

<https://newcastlebusinessclub.com.au/event/march-luncheon-international-womens-day/>

**4 March 2026, 10.45 am – 12:30 pm**

**Lake Macquarie Business - Seminar/Workshop**

Seven Steps to assist Your Business Breakthrough in 2026!

Venue: Cardiff RSL

Cost: \$22.00 inc GST

<https://www.lakemacbusiness.com.au/events/>

**6 March 2026, 12:00 pm – 4:00 pm**

**Gen Collective**

2026 International Women's Day Luncheon with Cathy Freeman

Venue: Newcastle City Hall

Cost: \$170.00 – \$180.00

<https://www.gencollective.com.au/gen-collective-events/2026-international-womens-day-luncheon-with-cathy-freeman>

**6 March 2026, 11:30 pm – 2:30 pm**

**Business Singleton**

2026 International Women's Day Luncheon with Melinda Schneider

Venue: Civic Centre

Cost: \$83.50

[https://www.stickytickets.com.au/0j1i82/international\\_womens\\_day\\_2026.aspx](https://www.stickytickets.com.au/0j1i82/international_womens_day_2026.aspx)

**11 March 2026, 5:30 pm – 8:30 pm**

**Hunter Business Women's Network**

International Women's Day Luncheon with Janine Allis

Venue: NEX Newcastle

Cost: \$195.00 – \$215.00

<https://hbwn.org.au/event/international-womens-day-2026/>

**25 March 2026, 6:00 pm – 11:00 pm**

**Business Hunter**

Hunter Nexus, proudly sponsored

by Newcastle Airport

Venue: Great Hall, The University of Newcastle

Cost: \$165.00 – \$198.00

<https://events.humanitix.com/hunter-nexus-or-march-2026>

**25 February 2026, 5:00 pm – 7:00 pm**

**Maitland Business Centre**

Sunset Networking

Venue: Punthill Apartments Maitland

Cost: Free – \$40.00 - \$50.00

<https://maitlandbusiness.com.au/event/sunset-networking/>

**26 March 2026**

**Business Hunter**

CEO Connect, hosted by Sparke Helmore

<https://www.businesshunter.com/hunter-business-events/our-events>

**27 March 2026, 12:00 pm – 3:00 pm**

**Maitland Business Centre**

Women in Business featuring Kim Payne

Venue: Maitland Town Hall

Cost: \$150.00 – \$160.00

<https://maitlandbusiness.com.au/event/women-in-business-2026/>

**29 May 2026, 7:00 pm**

**Hunter Region Business Hub (The Hub)**

Hunter Region Business Excellence Awards

Venue: Ben Ean, Pokolbin

Cost: \$160.00

<https://www.huntervalleyhub.com.au/business-community/awards/>

## ARE YOU ORGANISING A COMING BUSINESS EVENT?

We would be pleased to receive basic information as above for consideration for inclusion in a coming issue of **HBR**.

Advertising opportunities in **HBR** and the **HBR** email newsletter are also available.

Please email [garry@HBRmag.com.au](mailto:garry@HBRmag.com.au)



## CYBERSECURITY CAN NO LONGER WAIT FOR HUNTER SMES

**An interview with Tony Heitmeyer, General Manager, CIBIS International**

**Hunter Business Review:** *For a long time, cybersecurity was seen as a problem for big corporates. Is that still the case?*

**Heitmeyer:** That perception is probably the biggest risk we see among small and medium-sized businesses. Historically, cybercrime was associated with banks, telcos and multinationals, but that world has changed completely. Today, attacks are automated and indiscriminate. Hackers aren't choosing targets based on brand recognition. They're basically just scanning the internet 24/7 for the easiest way in, and SMEs are often the most exposed.

**HBR:** *Are Hunter businesses really being targeted at the same level as larger organisations?*

**Heitmeyer:** Absolutely. Nationally, small businesses now account for more than 40 per cent of reported cybercrime incidents, and what we're seeing locally reflects that trend. Many Hunter SMEs come to us after experiencing phishing attacks, email compromises or ransomware. In most cases, they didn't think they were a target until it actually happens to them.

**HBR:** *What makes SMEs particularly vulnerable?*

**Heitmeyer:** Most SMEs don't have dedicated security teams, layered controls or formal incident response plans. That's completely understandable as they're focused on running their business. But gaps like weak passwords, no multi-factor authentication, outdated systems or poor backup practices make them attractive targets. When an incident occurs, the impact can

be severe: downtime, lost revenue, reputational damage and, in some cases, regulatory or legal obligations.

**HBR:** *How are business owners' attitudes changing?*

**Heitmeyer:** There's been a noticeable shift. Cybersecurity is no longer viewed as just an IT issue and it's now being recognised as a core business risk, alongside financial controls, insurance and workplace safety. Hunter SMEs are more aware and more engaged than they were even two or three years ago. We've had a fair number of SMEs reaching out to us lately to help them assess their current processes, mitigate their risks and formalize their workflows.

**HBR:** *What does effective cybersecurity look like for an SME?*

**Heitmeyer:** It doesn't mean buying enterprise-grade tools you'll never use. It's about clarity and prioritisation. Understanding what systems are critical, what data matters most, and what risks are most likely to hurt your business. From there, it's practical steps: multi-factor authentication, reliable backups, staff awareness training and a clear, simple incident response plan.

**HBR:** *Is cyber resilience an ongoing process?*

**Heitmeyer:** Without question. Cybersecurity isn't a one-off project. Threats evolve, businesses change, and controls need to mature over time. The goal is resilience - accepting that incidents may happen, but ensuring the business can recover quickly and continue operating.

**HBR:** *What's your message to Hunter SMEs?*

**Heitmeyer:** Cybercrime is no longer optional to think about. The good news is that with the right approach, it's manageable. The worst position to be in is unprepared. The best time to start is now.

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## CONFESSIONS OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANT: THE HIGH-VIS PHILOSOPHER OF AUSTRALIA

**Andrew Russell**  
**Hazmat Services**

If you've ever driven past a construction site and seen someone in a high-vis vest, steel-caps, and a hard hat, standing very still while staring thoughtfully at a patch of dirt, there's a good chance you've just spotted an environmental consultant in their natural habitat.

To the untrained eye, it may look like we're "just standing there." In reality, we are performing a complex scientific ritual known as Assessing the Dirt. This involves nodding, squinting, tapping a clipboard, and occasionally saying things like, "Hmm, that's interesting," even when absolutely nothing interesting is happening at all.

### The Many Hats (Mostly Hard Hats)

Environmental consultants in Australia are a unique species. We are part scientist, part bureaucrat, part detective, and part emotional support human for stressed project managers. Our job is to translate between three powerful forces of the universe:

1. Nature, which does whatever it wants
2. Regulators, who write documents longer than the Lord of the Rings
3. Developers, who just want to start pouring concrete yesterday

This means our daily vocabulary includes phrases like:

- "According to the guideline..."
- "It depends."
- "We'll need to do some further investigation."
- "Yes, but the EPA might not see it that way."

These phrases are carefully designed to sound helpful while buying us time to actually work out what's going on.

### The Art of Soil Sampling (a.k.a. Fancy Dirt Scooping)

One of the core duties of an environmental consultant is collecting soil samples. This involves taking dirt from the ground, putting it into a small jar, and sending it to a lab so they can tell you — for a fee — that it is, in fact, dirt. Occasionally, they also find exciting things like hydrocarbons, asbestos, or mysterious substances from the 1970s that nobody admits to using but everyone somehow spilled.

We then write a report explaining, in great detail, that:

- The dirt is contaminated
- The dirt is not contaminated
- Or the dirt is "inconclusive," which is consultant-speak for "we need more money to look at more dirt"

### Reports: Where Trees Go to Die

Environmental consultants write reports. A lot of reports. Long reports. Reports with tables, appendices, figures, and disclaimers that basically say, "This is correct unless it's not, in which case it's not our fault."

A standard environmental report in Australia includes:

- A site history dating back to when Captain Cook blinked
- At least 14 acronyms no one remembers
- Maps that no one can read
- Photos of soil stockpiles that all look exactly the same



# HAZMAT SERVICES

## OHS | WASTE | ENVIRONMENT

HAZMAT SERVICES is a locally owned & operated Specialist OHS | Waste | Environment Services Consultancy. Our qualified Team deals specifically with hazardous materials in the workplace, in, on or under the ground. Our goal is to provide our clients with practical and technically sound solutions to comply with various legislative requirements in order to maintain their corporate, regulatory and social responsibilities.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Remediation Action Plans</li> <li>◆ Environmental Monitoring</li> <li>◆ Environmental Site Assessments</li> <li>◆ Contaminated Land Management</li> <li>◆ Soil and Waste Classifications</li> <li>◆ Licensed Asbestos Assessors</li> <li>◆ Environmental Management Plans</li> <li>◆ Asbestos and Hazardous Materials Surveys</li> <li>◆ Asbestos and Hazardous Materials Management Plans</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Emergency response to Catastrophic Events</li> <li>◆ Asbestos, Silica, Dust, Chemical, Noise, Water Monitoring</li> <li>◆ Occupational Hygiene Monitoring Programs for Environmental Remediation Projects</li> <li>◆ Occupational Hygiene Management Plans</li> <li>◆ Respirator Fit Testing</li> </ul> |
|--|--|



Level 1, 45c Fitzroy Street, Carrington NSW | [www.hazmat-services.com.au](http://www.hazmat-services.com.au)  
E. [admin@hazmat-services.com.au](mailto:admin@hazmat-services.com.au) | T. 02 4961 1887 F. 02 4969 5887

Somewhere, buried on page 147, is the one sentence the client actually wants:

"The site is suitable for the proposed use, subject to conditions." Those conditions, of course, are where the fun begins.

### High-Vis Diplomacy

A large part of the job is conflict resolution. You will find yourself explaining to:

- A builder why they can't just "dig it up and see what happens"
- A client why "just covering it with concrete" is not a long-term environmental strategy
- A regulator why this contamination is technically historic and therefore emotionally complicated

Environmental consultants are the Switzerland of the construction world. Neutral. Calm. Slightly tired.

### Weather: Our True Boss

Environmental consultants do not work for clients. We work for the weather.

Rain delays sampling. Wind ruins dust monitoring. Heat makes PPE feel like a portable sauna. Cold makes you question every life choice that led to you standing in steel-caps at 6am holding a clipboard while a magpie judges you.

And yet, no matter the conditions, someone will always ask:

"Can you still get it done today?"

Yes. Yes we can. We will complain quietly and then do it anyway.

### Why We Actually Love It

Despite the paperwork, the dirt, and the endless guidelines, most environmental consultants secretly love their jobs. We get to:

- Solve real-world problems
- Protect people and the environment
- Walk onto sites like we own the place (we do not)
- Wear high-vis and feel important

We are the people who make sure yesterday's dodgy practices don't become tomorrow's expensive disasters. We are the ones who say, "Hang on, maybe we should check that first," and then save everyone millions — or at least a very awkward conversation with the EPA.

So next time you see someone staring thoughtfully at the ground in a hard hat, remember: they're not lost. They're not bored. They're just an environmental consultant, bravely interpreting the ancient secrets of Australian dirt — one soil sample at a time.

**For further information contact Hazmat Services on (02) 4961 1887, email [andrew.russell@hazmat-services.com.au](mailto:andrew.russell@hazmat-services.com.au) or visit [www.hazmat-services.com.au](http://www.hazmat-services.com.au)**

## ERARING EXTENSION REINFORCES URGENCY OF BUILDING NEW RENEWABLES AND STORAGE AS COAL RELIABILITY DECLINES

### Clean Energy Council

Origin Energy's decision to extend the life of the Eraring coal-fired power station until 2029 is not unexpected, but underscores the urgent need to accelerate private investment in renewable energy, storage and transmission across NSW and the nation, to reduce reliance on an ageing coal fleet that is increasingly unreliable and costly, according to the Clean Energy Council.

Jackie Trad, Chief Executive of the Clean Energy Council, the peak body for the wind, solar, pumped hydro and energy storage sector, said the extension reflects the importance of managing the energy transition in an orderly way to maintain system security as large coal generators retire. However, continued reliance on ageing coal power stations is increasingly driving unplanned outages, wholesale price spikes and higher electricity costs for households and businesses.

"The average age of coal-fired generators in the National Electricity Market is now 38 years, with the historical retirement age just 44 years, placing much of the fleet firmly in the high-risk phase of its operating life," Ms Trad said.

"Only last week, we saw the latest episode in a series of coal-fired power failures, with yet another unplanned outage at the Callide C coal plant in Queensland, which saw two units taken offline and wholesale prices spiking yet again.

"Every renewable energy, storage and transmission project that reaches delivery reduces our reliance on ageing coal and moves the system closer to being cleaner, more affordable and more reliable," she said.

Ms Trad said these outcomes underline why extending the life of ageing coal plants is far from ideal.

"An orderly transition matters, but the reality is that old coal power stations are increasingly unreliable and expensive, and that volatility flows straight through to consumers," Ms Trad said.

The consequences of these unexpected outages are material. Large coal units, averaging around 1500 MW in capacity, going offline without warning have been a major contributor to

wholesale price spikes across the NEM in recent years. In the 12 months to 31 October 2025, an average of 24 per cent of coal-fired generation was unavailable in NSW and Queensland, with Victoria close behind at 19 per cent. In just one month from late October to late November last year, there were seven unplanned coal outages.

During that period, wholesale electricity prices surged from around \$70/MWh in October to \$220/MWh in NSW. The analysis recorded 128 unplanned coal breakdowns - eight times more than expected by the market operator.

The Clean Energy Council also acknowledged Origin Energy's ongoing commitment to its large-scale battery project at the Eraring site, which will play a critical role in supporting system reliability as coal exits the grid. Large batteries are already providing fast, flexible support to the power system, helping manage peak demand, firm renewable generation and deliver essential system services once provided by coal.

Momentum in energy storage continues to accelerate nationwide. In the most recent quarter, five storage projects worth a combined 1199 MW of capacity and 4062 MWh of energy output reached financial close — the third highest quarterly result on record. Three storage projects were commissioned during the same period, delivering a record 541 MW and 1766 MWh of new capacity.

Ms Trad said these investments demonstrate that the pathway to a more reliable and affordable energy system is already well underway.

"The solution is not to lean longer on ageing coal plants a day longer than necessary.

"The solution is to continue accelerating renewable energy, batteries, pumped hydro and transmission so Australia can replace coal with cleaner, cheaper and more reliable power, while avoiding the price shocks that coal outages continue to cause," she said.

## LARGEST BATTERY IN SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE TO GET EVEN BIGGER

Origin has approved the fourth stage of its large-scale battery at Eraring Power Station, a move that will significantly extend the battery's dispatch duration to cover the evening peak.

Origin has committed \$80 million to construct the fourth stage of the project, which will lift the dispatch duration of stage two of the Eraring battery project to nearly six hours, allowing it to store electricity produced in the daytime such as from solar, for release when needed most. Construction of stage four will begin before the end of the year and is anticipated to come online in the first quarter of the 2027 calendar year.

All other stages of the project are also progressing on track, delivering Origin additional storage and dispatch capability. Across all four stages, the total size of the Eraring battery will now be 700 MW / 3,160 MWh, providing 4.5 hours of storage on average.

Origin's Head of Energy Supply and Operations, Greg Jarvis said, "This next stage of the Eraring big battery adds 360 MWh of storage, building on the work now underway and strengthening the site's status as the largest approved battery energy storage system in the Southern Hemisphere.

"As Australia continues its energy transition, large-scale batteries will be essential for reliable supply of energy, supporting more renewables coming online and helping ease pressure on wholesale prices.

"Batteries can respond instantly to changes in supply and demand, which is why they're becoming a core part of Australia's renewable energy future.

"We're excited to add additional storage capacity at Eraring to cover the evening peak – the period of highest electricity demand – as we continue to transform the site to support the reliability and security of electricity supply through the energy transition.

"When complete, Australia's largest power station site will host the nation's largest approved battery storage system, reinforcing Eraring's role as critical infrastructure at the centre of Australia's energy system for decades to come," Mr Jarvis said.

Origin has committed to developing or contracting 1.7 GW in owned and tolled large-scale battery projects, including at Eraring, Mortlake Power Station in Victoria, the Summerfield battery storage project in South Australia and the Supernode battery in Queensland.

Battery equipment for stage four of the Eraring battery will be supplied by Finnish technology group Wartsila and design and construction services will be provided by Enerven, consistent with the rest of the project.

## UPGRADES TO EXISTING NETWORK PROPOSED FOR HUNTER-CENTRAL COAST RENEWABLE ENERGY ZONE NETWORK INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT

The NSW Government has reached a major milestone in securing the state's energy future with EnergyCo signing the Project Deed with network operator Ausgrid to deliver the Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) Network Infrastructure Project.

It means Ausgrid can now begin construction on the project to deliver an additional one gigawatt of transfer capacity, which is how much energy can be exported from the REZ at any given time.

It is the first of a kind in NSW, providing renewable energy by upgrading Ausgrid's existing distribution poles and wires rather

than building new ones. This approach significantly reduces the impacts on surrounding communities and the environment.

The Hunter-Central Coast REZ Network Infrastructure Project will see the region play a key role in keeping the lights on and preventing price-spikes as coal-fired power stations retire.

The REZ is expected to connect approximately 1.8GW of new renewable generation and storage.

The Project Deed signing follows a revenue determination by the Australian Energy Regulator, signalling the Regulator's acceptance that Ausgrid will deliver the project in a prudent, reasonable and efficient manner, to ensure the lowest possible cost recovery impacts on energy consumers.

Construction is expected to start in early 2026. Ausgrid will deliver, operate and maintain the project and will continue to work with EnergyCo to build on the Hunter region's diverse economic skill base and create local jobs.

EnergyCo and Ausgrid will continue to engage closely with the local community, industry, councils and other stakeholders as the project progresses to minimise impacts and realise benefits.

The Hunter-Central Coast REZ is expected to bring up to \$3.9 billion in private investment. It is forecast to support an average of about 590 direct jobs per year during construction, and 220 ongoing operational jobs from 2030.

The REZ will also create additional demand for workers in local manufacturing, retail, transport and the supply of goods and services.

EnergyCo Chief Executive, Hannah McCaughey said "We're excited to see this significant project move ahead, ensuring the region remains a major player in future electricity generation. It will provide communities with tangible benefits and reliable energy for homes and businesses."

## CARGILL LAUNCHES LARGE-SCALE RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECT

This 2.58 MW self-built and self-owned solar array is now helping to power Cargill's Newcastle Crush Plant.

The asset will generate more than 4,200 MWh of renewable electricity annually, cutting Scope 2 emissions by ~2,700 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e.

First fully owned renewable energy asset operated by an oilseed processor and bulk handler in Australia

Cargill has launched a 2.58 MW solar array at its Newcastle Crush Plant – the company's first large-scale renewable energy project in Australia and an important milestone in its efforts to reduce emissions, strengthen energy resilience and support a more sustainable food supply chain.

The solar array has been installed onsite at the Newcastle facility and is the only fully built and owned renewable energy asset currently operated by a bulk handler and oilseed processor in Australia.

This project is forecasted to generate more than 4,200 MWh of renewable electricity each year and reduce Scope 2 greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 2,700 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> annually – the equivalent electricity consumption of about 700 NSW households.

The project is already showing positive impact on the environment and will contribute to Cargill's ambition of reducing absolute Scope 1 and 2 emissions by 25% by 2035.

"This initiative is about taking real, practical steps toward sustainability and innovation," said Nick Ebrill, Senior Director, Regional Operations SSEA-Australia, Cargill.

"By integrating renewable energy directly into our manufacturing infrastructure, we reduce emissions, enhance resilience and create lasting value. It is a strong example of what can be achieved when persistence and local insight come together to drive bold, transformative outcomes."

As the Australian Government works towards its 2035 target of reducing emissions to 62–70% below 2005 levels, momentum is building across the food and agriculture sector to adopt lower carbon inputs and improve emissions transparency.

The initiative from Cargill supports this shift by helping to power its Newcastle Crush Plant with renewable electricity for the production of canola oil, cottonseed oil and animal meals. Cargill owns the solar array and keeps all renewable energy certificates generated onsite.

In addition to helping cut emissions, having the solar array onsite also helps strengthen supply chain resilience. With energy markets becoming increasingly volatile, generating electricity onsite helps stabilise costs and improve the overall reliability of Cargill's operations, delivering greater certainty for customers and the wider supply chain.

The project is a part of Cargill's broader investment in Australia's oilseed processing network. In 2023, Cargill announced a \$100 million investment to upgrade and expand its Newcastle, Narrabri and Footscray facilities to help meet growing demand for food, feed and renewable fuels.

Alongside this expansion, Cargill Australia has been implementing a series of initiatives to reduce the environmental footprint of its operations, including sustainability programs like Sustain Connect announced previously in 2024.

## CITY OF NEWCASTLE CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

City of Newcastle's draft Climate Action Plan 2030 (CAP 2030) is currently on public exhibition. The plan is a 5-year roadmap to achieve net zero emissions from City of Newcastle's operations by 2030 and to support a Newcastle-wide transition to net zero by 2040.

It outlines the actions that will take place to reduce the impacts of climate change, recognising that cutting emissions also improves our quality of life, supports equity, strengthens our local economy and builds a more resilient city.

The CAP 2030 is informed by extensive community consultation, economic modelling, best-practice research, and cost-benefit analyses.

City of Newcastle has a long history of climate action and has established itself as a leader in sustainability and innovation. They were the first council in NSW to be powered by 100% renewable electricity and have designed and delivered multiple projects that have reduced costs, lowered emissions, and strengthened community resilience.

## NEW GRANT ROUND FOR POWERING THE REGIONS FUND

The Australian Government has opened Round 2 of the Safeguard Transformation Stream (STS).

STS Round 2 will support trade-exposed Safeguard Mechanism facilities to reduce their emissions. Up to \$321 million in grant funding is available.

The STS is technology neutral. Technologies supported in Round 1 included:

- renewable energy
- energy efficiency
- electrification.

The STS is part of the Powering the Regions Fund announced under the Powering Australia plan. The STS complements other initiatives, such as a Future Made in Australia and Net Zero by 2050.

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## Hybrid modelling and the return to the workplace

Across New South Wales, many businesses have yet to return to the pre-pandemic “normal” of five days per week in the office. That said, the overall trend is slowly gravitating back toward increased in-office attendance.

While displaying a level of flexibility, the NSW Government has mandated a full return to the office for public sector employees, the private sector continues to demonstrate greater flexibility. In many cases, a structured hybrid approach remains both acceptable and, in some cases, preferred.

### So, what is a hybrid model?

A hybrid working model allows employees—many of whom have become accustomed to the lifestyle benefits of working from home—to transition back into the workplace in a gradual and balanced way. Rather than enforcing an abrupt return, businesses are blending remote and office-based work to meet both operational needs and employee expectations.

Typically, this involves employees attending the office three to four days per week, while still allowing one or two days working from home. To encourage attendance, employers are placing strong emphasis on team building, collaboration, and training, making the workplace a destination rather than an obligation.

Technology plays a critical role in supporting this model. Hot desking, room-booking systems, advanced video conferencing, and upgraded data infrastructure are all being implemented to ensure structure and efficiency—regardless of where work is being undertaken.

### No one-size-fits-all solution

There is no universal approach to hybrid working. Some employers report increased productivity from remote work, citing fewer distractions and reduced “hustle and bustle.” Others argue that a lack of day-to-day collaboration can lead to reduced visibility, missed opportunities, and weaker project oversight.

Ultimately, the decision rests with individual businesses and industries, who must determine what works best for their people, culture, and objectives.

### Investing in the workplace to attract staff back

A significant number of NSW employers encouraging a return to the office are investing heavily in their work environments. This includes upgrading existing premises or relocating to higher-

quality buildings with improved amenities. These investments are intentionally designed to foster collaboration, strengthen team connections, and enhance overall employee experience—areas where working from home can sometimes fall short.

Common incentives and upgrades include:

- **Workplace refresh and refurbishment**

Ranging from simple upgrades such as new carpet and fresh paint, through to full refurbishments involving reconfiguration, modern layouts, increased internal glazing, improved HVAC, LED lighting, upgraded data infrastructure, enhanced security, and new FF&E including desks, storage, and seating.

- **Reconfiguration of existing space**

With reduced daily occupancy, businesses can reallocate space more effectively—providing larger work areas, compartmentalised zones for focused tasks, or private offices for roles requiring confidentiality. Others are using this opportunity to downsize, reducing rental costs while maintaining operational efficiency.

- **Enhanced staff facilities**

Improved kitchen and canteen spaces are high on the agenda, often doubling as informal collaboration areas with soft seating and booths. Increasingly, clients are also incorporating recreational spaces such as pool tables, table tennis, or games areas to promote wellbeing and engagement. End-of-trip facilities—including showers and change rooms—are another welcome addition, supporting employees who cycle, run, or exercise during the workday.

- **Relocation of premises**

Relocation can be a strategic decision driven by changes to transport infrastructure, parking availability, staff commuting needs, or business growth or contraction. For many, the primary motivation is creating a workplace that employees genuinely look forward to returning to—one that promotes connection, purpose, and again, that buzz word.... collaboration.

A well-designed workplace does more than house your team—it connects them. Newcastle Office Interiors creates environments that support collaboration, wellbeing, and productivity in a hybrid world. Call Newcastle Office interiors on (02) 49 425 109 to discover how the right space can bring your people back together.





## YOU KNOW NOI. BUT YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW JUST HOW FAR WE GO.

Yes, **Newcastle Office Interiors** delivers commercial interiors – it's in the name. What isn't in the name is the breadth of work we take on when our clients need more.

When a Sydney-based client engaged NOI to deliver 2 projects in South Australia, the brief didn't stop at interiors. Midway through the project, an unexpected challenge emerged: a dilapidated hopper that urgently needed to be removed.

We stepped in. Within days, the hopper was dismantled, cut up, removed, and responsibly disposed of – keeping the project moving without disruption.

That same adaptability was delivered for AGL. Initially engaged as accessibility consultants for the refurbishment works we were undertaking, NOI was subsequently requested to install a brand-new lift shaft – our second lift shaft installation that year. A task typically well beyond the scope of an internal fit-out contractor, but not beyond NOI.

While commercial interior fit-outs and refurbishments remain our bread and butter, NOI is built for more than the expected. We work alongside our clients to solve problems as they arise, take on complex challenges, and deliver – even when the brief changes.

If it's part of your project, chances are NOI can handle it.



For refurbishment and fit out

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# SHAPING COMMERCIAL SPACES ACROSS THE REGION

In a city known for its strong community spirit and thriving business scene, **Total Fitouts Newcastle** is quietly shaping the commercial spaces where local businesses grow, connect and succeed.

Led by husband-and-wife team Jason and Katie, the locally owned fitout company has built a reputation for delivering carefully considered, high-quality commercial environments across the Newcastle region. While managing a growing business, the couple is also raising their four young children, an experience that has naturally shaped their approach to business. Family values sit at the heart of everything they do, influencing a culture built on trust, accountability and genuine care for the clients and communities they work with.

Jason's deep local knowledge provides a strong connection to the Newcastle business landscape, allowing the team to understand the unique needs of local operators. At the same time, the business is supported by a broader network of experienced fitout specialists, drawing on decades of combined industry expertise. This collective knowledge allows **Total Fitouts Newcastle** to confidently deliver tailored shopfitting solutions across a wide range of sectors, including fitness, retail, wellness, medical and hospitality.

Behind the scenes, a dedicated team helps bring each project to life. Staff members Rohan, Cameron and Bethany play key roles in ensuring every fitout reflects the same commitment to professionalism, collaboration and quality craftsmanship that defines the business.

**Total Fitouts Newcastle** takes pride in building strong partnerships with clients from the very beginning. By investing time to understand each business's goals, operational needs and future growth plans, the team delivers spaces that are not only visually impressive but also practical, durable and designed to support long-term success. With a hands-on approach, transparent communication and meticulous attention to detail, projects are delivered with consistency and care.

As Newcastle continues to evolve, **Total Fitouts Newcastle** remains deeply committed to supporting the local business community. Through meaningful relationships, strong local partnerships and a passion for helping businesses thrive, Jason, Katie and their team are helping shape the spaces that keep the region moving forward.

SCAN TO LEARN MORE



# BUILD YOUR DREAM FITOUT TODAY.

**Powered by a national network. Built by locals.**

Total Fitouts Newcastle is a family-owned commercial fitout company delivering high-quality, functional, and visually impactful spaces across the region. Led by husband-and-wife team Jason and Katie, the business combines design, project management, and construction expertise with a hands-on, client-focused approach.

Grounded in trust, strong relationships, and attention to detail, Total Fitouts Newcastle prides itself on delivering every project with care while supporting local partnerships and contributing to the Newcastle community.

**Total Fitouts**  
Newcastle



Jason Dowdall - Director



# 2026

# HUNTER INVESTMENT PROSPECTUS

YOUR NEXT SMART BUSINESS,  
INVESTMENT & LIFESTYLE  
CHOICE

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# FUELLING SUCCESS: WHY BOOSTING NUTRITION AT WORK MATTERS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

**Laureate Professor Clare Collins**  
**University of Newcastle**

Could the corporate world be missing the productivity secret weapon? How your workforce is fuelled, in terms of the nutritional quality of food and drink available, is a key contributor to how well your staff can think, move and perform. Business invests heavily in maintaining equipment and technology, imagine if the same level of care extended to your people? The true engine of productivity! Poor nutrition doesn't just lead to weight gain; it slowly corrodes the machinations of the engine that is your workforce. Poor diet is a silent risk factor that impacts physical health (like high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, heart disease), wellbeing (bursting with energy and feeling well), and ultimately workplace performance (able to concentrate, have stamina, recover from illness). Think of it this way, would you put dodgy fuel sold in a back lane in your high-performance vehicle? If your answer was no, then consider what currently fuels your employees and what your business could do to help? Poor nutrition leads to inefficiency, breakdowns and costly repairs.

## The Business Case for Nutrition

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, poor nutrition contributes to about 50% of disease burden attributed to heart disease. Of the top five risk factors for disease in Australia,

excess body weight now ranks number one, followed by smoking and then poor diet. These statistics translate into real costs for businesses and contribute to absenteeism, reduced productivity, staff turnover, and higher healthcare expenses.

Employees spend most of their waking hours at work or commuting, meaning a significant portion of their daily food intake occurs during this time zone. When healthy options aren't accessible or promoted, convenience eating takes over, which can lead to poor dietary choices. Imagine if your workplace had a fruit basket for snacks and predominantly healthy options in vending machines and canteens and actively encouraged healthy meals?

Supermarkets now offer between 30,000 and 50,000 products, with clever marketing making less unhealthy options look cheaper, easier, and even more healthy. Labels like natural, low fat, or high protein can be misleading. For example:

- Low fat often means added sugars or refined starch to bulk them out.
- High protein snacks may still be ultra-processed and loaded with salt, added sugars or saturated fat.
- Natural doesn't always mean nutritious. Chips made from "natural ingredients" are still chips.

In other words, you might think you are getting super premium 98% unleaded but realistically you are getting E10 or regular 91 with some extra additives at best. This leads to a higher risk of health problems, fatigue, and decreased cognitive performance, all of which erode productivity and increase costs for your business.

## Breaking the Time Barrier

But eating healthy takes a lot of motivation, organisation, preparation and costs more, I hear you say! One of the most common barriers to healthy eating is time. Busy professionals often feel they lack the time or motivation to prepare nutritious meals, defaulting to fast food or processed snacks kept in the

# FUEL YOUR WORKFORCE. BOOST YOUR BOTTOM LINE.

**Your people are your greatest asset - what fuel are you providing them?**

Poor diet is a leading contributor to chronic disease and reduced productivity. The right nutrition strategy can transform workplace performance.

**INVEST IN WORKPLACE NUTRITION**

Partner with Australia's leading nutrition experts to fine-tune your workforce for peak performance.

**WHY IT WORKS**

Generic wellness programs fall short. Our tailored solutions-including the Australian Eating Survey from Laureate Professor Clare Collins and team - deliver personalised, data-driven insights that help organisations boost employee **health, focus, and productivity.**

**THE BENEFITS OF BETTER FUEL**



**Higher productivity & engagement**



**Reduced sick leave & absenteeism**



**Improved morale & loyalty**



**Stronger ROI on wellness programs**

**WHAT WE PROVIDE**

- ✓ Personalised nutrition reports using the Australian Eating Survey (AES)
- ✓ Nutrition policy development
- ✓ Pre-recorded webinars
- ✓ Individual telehealth appointments (limited number)

**YOUR NEXT STEP**

Make nutrition a strategic priority and gain a sharper, healthier, more productive workforce.

CONTACT US!





[nmnt@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:nmnt@newcastle.edu.au)

[02 4921 7353](tel:0249217353)



desk drawer. It doesn't have to be that hard! Here is how your workplace can help.

### 6 ways to Fuel your Workplace

1. Introduce a nutrition policy – ask us how!
2. Consider having a 'help yourself' fruit bowl in the lunchroom
3. Make meetings healthier: swap the pastries for fruit and vegetables – pair it with some hummus or tzatziki – it doesn't have to be boring!
4. Have a walking meeting, don't forget your drink bottle.
5. Install a chilled water station in your lunchrooms to encourage hydration.
6. Encourage mindful eating: this is a hard one for busy people – step away from the desk! Mindful eating reduces overeating and improves digestion. Have lunch with a colleague and make it social!

Healthy eating is the premium fuel your workforce needs, and it starts with leadership. You will find practical tools through our No Money No Time platform: quick recipes, nutrition hacks, short-read articles, the Healthy Eating Quiz, and our Nutrition Science Bites podcast with Laureate Professor Clare Collins. If you are ready to take it further, our expert team can deliver tailored, data-driven nutrition solutions designed specifically for your organisation. Now is the time for executives to lead from the front and make nutrition a strategic priority for a healthier, sharper, more productive workforce. Your employee's will thank you for it!

#### References:

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/burden-of-disease/australian-burden-of-disease-study-2024/contents/about>  
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/burden-of-disease/australian-burden-of-disease-study-2024/contents/interactive-data-on-risk-factor-burden/burden-attributable-to-risk-factors>



**Laureate Professor Clare Collins'** research in nutrition technologies and interventions to personalise nutrition therapies has had a major impact on current thinking around nutrition and dietary patterns in health and chronic disease prevention. An internationally distinguished leader in nutrition and dietetics, Laureate Professor Collins has a research track record that places her performance in the top 1% of the world's most cited scientists in her field of research. She's been awarded more than \$33 million in research grants, published over 550 manuscripts and supervised over 50 PhD candidates.

## EXERCISING WHEN YOU ARE TIME POOR

Running a business can be a demanding task and usually involves long work hours that can make it difficult to find the time to exercise.

We should however remember that exercise can bring many benefits to your general wellbeing and your business.

Even incorporating a little regular exercise can improve your health, resulting in you being more productive at work, improving your decision making and reducing illness. Whilst exercise has major impacts on your physical wellbeing, it can also help significantly with your mental health. In fact exercise is one of the most powerful ways to combat stress and help with a broad variety of mental health issues, including anxiety and depression. It can also help to promote better sleep patterns, making you more refreshed in the morning and able to face the day's challenges.

The problem many businesspeople face is that they are very time poor. Finding time to exercise can be a real challenge. The first thing to remember is that spending time to exercise is an investment in you and your business, The benefits are likely to easily outweigh the time spent. A great goal is to find 30 minutes a day for exercise.

The following are some tips for reaching this daily goal:

- **Break up the 30 minutes** – If 30 minutes in one stretch is just too difficult, consider breaking it up into 2 x 15 minutes or even 3 x 10 minutes.
- **Schedule exercise** – It is best to schedule exercise, especially until you create the habit, otherwise it will be all too easy to miss exercising.
- **Increase your incidental exercise** – There are many things you can do throughout the day to contribute. Consider parking a little way from work and walking, takes the stairs instead of a lift, walk to the nearby shop instead of driving – there are countless ways to introduce little bits of exercise into your day.
- **Have a walk at work** – A regular lunchtime walk can contribute greatly to your goals. It is also a great way to clear the head and return refreshed. You may even like to consider a walking meeting. If you would like to have a discussion with a work colleague, perhaps you can have a walking meeting. This will also remove you from distractions in the office.
- **Consider a gym membership** – You may wish to consider a gym membership. This can be advantageous because of the equipment and advice on offer. Tell them for example you can only do 20 minute sessions and they can map out an exercise plan. Time spent at the gym can be intense, meaning you can cram a lot of exercise into a short period. Select a gym that is close to your work, home or on your daily travels. If time is tight, you don't want to spend extra time traveling to exercise.

Running a business can be difficult and stressful. Remember that you are one of the greatest assets of your business. It only makes sense to invest some time in your health so you can be even more effective for your business.

## HELPING COAL MINEWORKERS PROTECT THEIR CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH

Coal Services NSW has launched a new health campaign encouraging coal mine workers to look after themselves by making simple, healthy choices that reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Developed to support the recently-introduced NSW Coal Industry Cardiovascular Health Standard, the campaign aims to raise awareness and equip coal mine workers with practical knowledge to protect their cardiovascular health, both on and off the job.

Cardiovascular disease remains one of Australia's leading causes of death, with one person dying every 12 minutes. Many of these deaths are preventable.

"We know that small, consistent changes can make a big difference," said Chris Catchpole, Head of Health Services. "This campaign is about empowering coal mine workers with clear, achievable steps they can take to improve their heart health."

Key messages focus on maintaining a healthy weight, eating a healthy diet, staying physically active, limiting alcohol intake, and quitting smoking and vaping. To support these messages, CS Health developed a suite of educational materials, including short videos, posters, and easy-to-understand fact sheets, which are available on the Coal Services website.

With the New Year often bringing renewed focus on personal wellbeing, February is an ideal time for coal mine workers to turn good intentions into lasting habits.

"As people revisit their New Year health goals, we want them to see cardiovascular health as achievable, not overwhelming," Chris said. "Looking after your heart health is one of the most important investments you can make for yourself, your family and your future."

## The Practice That Attracts Self-Starters

Over 25 years running **Ashtanga Yoga Newcastle**, we've watched yoga trends cycle through. Hot yoga, yin yang yoga, corporate wellness programs, influencer-driven movements. Through all of it, our studio has drawn the same type of person: self-directed, strategic, unwilling to settle for uninspired situations.

Ashtanga is for people who enjoy their own company and are self-motivated, yet relish expertise and community. Many run their own businesses, others work within organisations, but what they share is a quality of self-direction. Mysore-style classes provide supervised space for that introspection, and it brings out qualities that serve them well beyond the studio.

The practice differs from typical gym-style yoga classes. You learn a sequence one posture at a time and practice it independently with tuition. You gradually remember and become increasingly independent. Doing the same sequence day after day at your own pace develops fine-grained discernment. You notice subtle shifts in breath, small adjustments in alignment, mental patterns that arise under physical demand. That granular awareness transfers directly outside the studio.

After a few months of practice, people notice their breath automatically smoothing during intense work situations. The conditioning kicks in without conscious effort. This is why business owners and strategic thinkers gravitate toward the practice. It builds resilience, self-reflection, prioritisation and discipline in ways that compound over time.

We focus on morning classes because the effects are substantially stronger. Training before the workday begins creates energy and mental clarity that carries through. Someone willing to develop a morning practice habit demonstrates the kind of self-prioritisation that accelerates everything else.

Over decades, we've observed that the people drawn to this practice consistently demonstrate the qualities that make organisations thrive: autonomy, strategic thinking, sustained focus under demand. They show up regularly and apply themselves without complaint. These are exactly the people you want on your team or to work with.

**Ashtanga Yoga Newcastle** is the longest running yoga studio in Newcastle, celebrating 25 years in the same King Street location. Morning classes run seven days a week.

## ENHANCE YOUR LIFE WITH *MYSORE STYLE YOGA*

*YOGA HAS BEEN SHOWN TO REDUCE BLOOD PRESSURE,  
EASE ANXIETY AND PAIN, BOOST GENERAL WELLBEING.*

**Mysore style means:**

- \* One-on-one tuition from expert teachers
- \* Gradually learn poses tailored to your ability
- \* Similar to small group personal training
- \* Develop safely in relaxed atmosphere
- \* Feel intelligent and empowered!



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## CREATING A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE

In a mentally healthy workplace, people feel supported, happy coming to work and comfortable talking about mental health.

A mentally healthy workplace is generally one in which:

- there is a positive workplace culture and an understanding that mental health is everyone's responsibility
- stress and other risks to mental health are managed
- people feel safe and supported to talk about mental health
- mental health support is tailored for individuals and teams.

### Benefits of creating a mentally healthy workplace

Creating a mentally healthy workplace has many benefits to the people around you as well as your business operations. It's also a legal requirement for business owners.

The benefits include:

- less staff absenteeism and lost working days
- increased productivity
- greater job satisfaction
- reduced staff turnover
- you attract talented workers.

### Work health and safety obligations

As a business owner, you have a duty under work health and safety (WHS) laws to manage risks to your workers' mental health arising from their work. You're legally required to look after your workers' mental health under a variety of laws. This includes:

- Providing a physically and mentally safe workplace and managing any risks to the mental health of your workers arising from the work of your business (WHS laws).
- Preventing discrimination against workers with a mental health condition (anti-discrimination laws).
- Protecting your workers' personal information – don't tell anyone about your workers' mental health conditions unless they agree to it (privacy laws).
- Not taking any unfair action against someone because of their mental health condition (fair work laws).

### Manage mental health risks

Risks to mental health can be managed through the same process as you use for physical risks:

- identify the hazards
- assess the risks
- control the risks
- continually review the control measures to make sure they



are working.

As with physical risks, you should involve and consult your workers throughout this process. Your workers are a great source of information on the risks in their work and options to manage these.

To identify the hazards:

- have regular conversations with your workers to find out how they are
- understand causes of stress in the workplace and manage them
- look out for signs of stress in your workers.
- Stress is the physical, mental and emotional reactions you have when the demands of your job exceed your ability or resources to cope. Stress itself is not an injury but if prolonged or severe can cause psychological and physical injury.

### Promote good mental health in your business

There are simple steps you can take to build and promote a mentally healthy workplace:

- Protect your employees from bullying, harassment or discrimination.
- Ensure your staff have the right level of training and support.
- Talk to your employees about mental health in the workplace - be open about mental health and check in to see how they are going.
- Provide a healthy work/life balance.
- Make sure your employees know where to go for help.
- Look after yourself - running a business can be tough, but there is help available.

**For further information visit <https://business.gov.au/risk-management/mental-health/create-a-mentally-healthy-workplace#promote-good-mental-health>**

## WORKPLACE WELLBEING, PROTECTING YOUR PEOPLE, STRENGTHENING YOUR BUSINESS

Businesses today are navigating rising expectations to manage psychosocial hazards, comply with new workplace safety standards, and protect employee wellbeing. But supporting mental health is about more than compliance - it's a driver of productivity, retention, and long-term success.

For the past 15 years, Hunterlink has delivered confidential, 24/7 counselling and wellbeing support for more than 100,000 employees and their families across Australia and internationally. As a national and global EAP provider, we understand the diverse challenges facing today's workforce and we understand that mental health support must be proactive, practical, and accessible.

What we deliver:

- 24/7 confidential counselling via phone, video, email and WhatsApp.
- Outplacement and redundancy support to guide employees through change with confidence.
- Mental Health First Aid and wellbeing training to build resilience in teams.
- Critical incident onsite support when workplaces need immediate care.
- Specialist management and organisational consultancy to address psychosocial risks.

Working across industries from maritime and mining to retail, hospitality, and community services. Our not-for-profit status means our focus is where it matters most — protecting

your people and strengthening your workplace.

*"My counsellor has been by my side through some of the most difficult times in my life. They initially supported me through couples counselling, and later through individual counselling when circumstances at home changed. Throughout it all, they have consistently shown compassion, understanding, and professionalism." (individual client)*

Leaders turn to Hunterlink when workplace wellbeing can't be left to chance - because together, we create safer, healthier workplaces

**HUNTERLINK. SUPPORTING YOUR WORKFORCE, ANYTIME, ANYWHERE.**



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"SECURE DESTRUCTION - GUARANTEED"

- A man goes into a pharmacy and asks the pharmacist if he can give him something for the hiccups.

The pharmacist promptly reaches out and slaps the man's face.

"What did you do that for?" the man asks.

"Well, you don't have the hiccups anymore, do you?"

"No," the man says, "but my wife out in the car still does!"

- Hiking in your 70s is a great way to meet new people. Today I met two paramedics, three nurses, a cardiologist and nearly met my maker.

- A little kid calls the police...  
"Police? You need to come quick! My dad's been fighting the neighbor for two hours!"

"Two hours? Why didn't you call us earlier?"

"... Earlier, my dad was winning."

- A woman visits her husband in prison. Before leaving, she says to a correction officer, "You shouldn't make my husband work so hard, he's exhausted!"

The officer laughs, "Work? Ma'am, he only eats, sleeps, and stays in his cell!"

The wife replies, "That's strange... he told me he's been digging a tunnel for months!"

- There was a final exam to become a detective. The chief commissioner gathers the three remaining candidates and presents them with the final test. They must look at a suspect's mugshot for just a few seconds and then explain how they would recognise that suspect in a crowd.

The first candidate comes in, the commissioner shows him the photo, and after a moment, he says, "It's easy! The suspect has

only one ear and one eye, so he's easy to spot."

The commissioner replies, "Are you stupid? That's a side photo! Get out of here right now!"

The second candidate comes in, sees the photo, and after a few seconds says, "It's easy! The suspect has only one ear and one eye, so he's easily distinguishable in a crowd."

The commissioner gets angry again and says, "You're an idiot too! Get out of here!"

The third candidate enters, and the commissioner warns him, "Be careful, because the others were really unqualified."

He shows the photo to the third candidate, who thinks for a moment and then says, "The suspect wears contact lenses."

The commissioner is amazed because he doesn't even remember if the suspect actually wore contact lenses, so he goes to check the records. He confirms that it's true, and then he returns to the candidate and says, "Congratulations, you've become a detective! But I have to ask, how did you know that he wore contact lenses?"

The candidate replies, "Well, with only one ear and one eye, it's hard to wear glasses!"

- What's the difference between Iron Man and Aluminium Man? Iron Man will stop the bad guy. Aluminium Man will just foil their plans.

### QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Improving the health and well-being of our employees makes good business sense... It offers a 'win-win' all round."

- Steve Flanagan



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# Invest Maitland Heart of the Hunter



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