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## From the Editor



After years of promised reduced electricity prices in Australia, only to see steep price increases, the announcements by the Australian regulators that the Default Market Offer (DMO) will reduce from 1 July will be welcome news for struggling consumers and businesses.

It will hopefully help to reduce inflation which is still running above the RBA's target range and help to ease pressures to raise interest rates further, although the situation in the Middle East will continue to bear heavily on overall energy prices.

The calls years ago that the transition to clean energy would create immediate downward pressure of electricity prices was always wishful thinking, particularly given the massive scope of the transition and the billions of dollars in investment that continues to be required.

The transition process not only requires replacement electricity generation but also a massive restructure of the grid, from a relatively small number of huge power stations to an array of energy projects scattered across the country. It was always going to be a long process.

The residential flat rate standing offer price will fall by between 3.4% and 5.0% in New South Wales. For smart meter households on a time of use standing offer, there are savings of between 3.7% and 7.7%.

Small businesses will see reductions of between 9.0% to 20.9% in New South Wales, depending on whether their standing offer uses a flat rate or time of use tariff.

The reductions compared to last year reflect easing costs across most components of the DMO, particularly in wholesale energy, where we've seen lower electricity contract prices, reduced spot price volatility, and increased output from wind and battery generation during evening peak.

With this announcement, it is hoped that electricity prices will continue to fall and that we will all finally see benefits for the transition to clean energy.

This issue includes a Mining & Energy Update and includes some further news on the transition to clean energy.

Even with the global push to clean energy, coal will continue to be a major component of the Hunter economy for many years. Although domestic demand for coal has decreased, global demand remain robust. In 2025 over 149 million tonnes of coal was exported through the Port of Newcastle. For the first four months of 2026 (the latest figures available when going to print), around 1.35 million tonnes more coal had been exported through the Port of Newcastle than the corresponding period in 2025.

**Garry Hardie**  
Editor and Publisher

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## Honeysuckle HQ to deliver homes, jobs and a vibrant waterfront

On 20 May, the NSW Government announced DOMA Group as the successful delivery partner for Honeysuckle HQ, the final piece in the revitalisation of Newcastle Harbour.

The landmark mixed-use precinct includes around 1,000 new homes, commercial and retail space to support around 4,000 workers, and a new 180-room hotel and conference centre integrated with the heritage-listed Wickham School of Arts.

The master-planned precinct will feature more than 11,000 sqm of public open space, including a new waterfront park known as 'Honeysuckle Green', a Wickham School of Arts-anchored plaza, improved pedestrian connections and shared public spaces designed to maximise community access to the harbourfront.

The project is expected to deliver significant economic benefits for Newcastle and the wider Hunter region, supporting jobs

during construction and helping grow the city's visitor, tourism and night-time economies.

Construction is anticipated to contribute around \$80 million annually to the economy, while the completed precinct is expected to generate approximately \$133 million each year for the city and region.

Site preparation works are expected to begin in 2026.

HCCDC Chief Executive, Valentina Misevska said "Today's milestone announcement marks a significant moment in the Honeysuckle Urban Renewal Project and reflects what the community told us they wanted to see – a well-connected precinct with quality public spaces, that strengthens connections to the waterfront and transport and creates opportunities for vibrant activation.

"It also delivers on ambitions for high quality design and sustainability, while respecting the area's heritage and culture, creating a precinct that offers something for everyone."

*Artist's concept render, subject to approvals. Image courtesy of DOMA Group.*



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## New luxury resort

Private Hotel Owner and Developer HVL Hotels has announced Laval Hunter Valley—a new 65-villa luxury resort and tourism destination on the 165-acre historic Lindeman Estate in Pokolbin, opening in the second half of 2027. Laval marks the first new-build luxury resort development of this scale in the Hunter Valley in two decades.

The project is expected to generate approximately \$49 million pa in economic activity and create up to 479 jobs in construction and ongoing operations, delivering lasting impact for the region.

Laval sits within an iconic viticultural landscapes in the Hunter Valley on the hills of a 165-acre site in Pokolbin (formerly Lindeman’s Estate and Ben Ean Estate)—offering expansive 360-degree views of vineyards, valleys and layered rural terrain.

A private helicopter landing facility enables fly-in, fly-out access and elevated perspectives over the landscape.

Developed by Lisa Howard of TCL Landscape Architects, the resort’s gardens include immersive art installations, lush meadows, calming meditation areas, a Wollemi pine grove, and a 25 m red-tiled pool, located right along the Shiraz Vineyard.

Across the estate, over 6782 vines and 21,000 plants, including 300 different species, will be planted as part of a major ecological regeneration program to restore the site’s former agricultural character and increase birdlife and insect activity.

The luxury villas include a Wabi Sabi style Presidential Villa by Tonkin Zulaikha Greer - all designed to frame uninterrupted views of the surrounding landscape from the moment of entry.

Architecture by EJE Architects and Interiors by Some Studio will draw the personality, uniqueness and warmth of a residential space into bold and sculptural architectural designs.

Technology is seamlessly integrated across the property through collaboration with Bang & Olufsen—their only resort in the southern hemisphere - bringing music alive as part of the

guest experience. A fluid technology-enabled arrival system supported by “Everywhere People” allows guests to check in anywhere and have their own personal butler service.

Laval will also be home to one of the world’s largest collections of Gillie & Marc sculptures—with 13 major works punctuating the landscape, alongside over 130 in-room pieces and digital artworks.

Led by Justin North, Laval’s culinary program is centred on signature restaurant Vallery. Diners can experience something new with each visit through an evolving à la carte menu informed by a Mediterranean expression of Provence, coastal Spain and Southern Italy, with subtle influences of Japan. An onsite kitchen garden adds unique produce, heirloom varieties and local botanicals directly to the restaurant, and serves as a setting for immersive communal dining experiences.

La Vida, the poolside bar and restaurant, delivers a high-energy experience inspired by coastal Cali-Mex flavours. Framed by the signature red-tiled pool, it transitions from relaxed daytime dining to sunset drinks, DJ-led afternoons and evening gatherings.

The Lobby Bar forms the social heart of the resort, designed for arrivals, informal meetings and pre- or post-dinner drinks, with a focus on curated beverages and share-style plates.

Veraia Spa is a 1,000-square-metre, two-level longevity-led wellness sanctuary featuring 15 treatment rooms and a world-class approach to health, recovery and regeneration. Designed by Nikki Lambrinos, it features world-class treatments, thermal circuits and regenerative therapies, offering medical-grade innovative treatments and programs that haven’t been seen before in Australia.

Landscaped meditation meadows, yoga platforms and sensory gardens extend the experience outdoors, whilst spaces within the spa including the sauna, salt room and treatment rooms offer panoramic views of the surrounding vineyards.

An 100 sqm gym fitted with NOHRD equipment supports functional training, framed by expansive vineyard views that connect movement to landscape.

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## Foreshore rehabilitation partnership

Lake Macquarie City Council has joined forces with Biraban Local Aboriginal Land Council to preserve one of the city’s most scenic stretches of lakeside land.

Council project staff worked alongside Aboriginal heritage officers from the land council to rehabilitate more than 150 m of foreshore on Shingle Splitters Point at Balcolyn, a finger of land with spectacular views towards Pulbah Island and Myuna Bay.

Lake Macquarie Mayor Adam Shultz said the \$200,000 project involved installation of rock revetment along the shoreline to address significant erosion that occurred during intense storms in May and June 2025.

“We identified Aboriginal heritage items in the vicinity prior to work getting underway, which prompted us to contact Biraban LALC and work closely with them throughout the project,” he said.

“By working closely with their Aboriginal heritage officers, we were able to protect the foreshore while also respecting the area’s cultural significance.”

“It’s a great example of how infrastructure projects can be delivered in partnership with traditional custodians of our city.”

Similar foreshore works are now underway to stabilise a section of the Pelican foreshore, east of the Maritime Rescue NSW base.

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## Kongsberg missile factory construction milestone reached

A 'topping out' ceremony was held on 19 May at the Kongsberg Missile Factory at Astra Aerolab Precinct, Newcastle Airport, marking a major construction milestone for this complex manufacturing and maintenance facility.

The event brought together the Hon Pat Conroy MP, Minister for Defence Industry, Chief Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance, AIRMSHL Leon Philips OAM, Mr Erik Svedahl, Deputy Head of Mission at the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Australia, project partners Multiplex and Newcastle Airport, members of the Commonwealth of Australia, and the Hunter Business Community to recognise the progress of the project and its significance.

The topping out ceremony – a long-standing construction tradition – symbolises the building's construction reaching its highest point and was marked with the installation of a ceremonial tree, representing growth, resilience and the enduring legacy of the project.

The project is delivering strong local economic benefits, with 74 per cent of project trade value awarded locally and \$36.3 million in local expenditure incurred to date. This reflects significant engagement of local subcontractors and suppliers, supporting jobs and economic activity.

Construction will now progress through the final stages ahead of completion in early 2027.



## Australia's first purpose-built regional phase I clinical trials facility opens

On International Clinical Trials Day, May 20, local clinical research organisation, Novatrials, marked an historic milestone for regional healthcare with the official opening of its purpose-built Charlestown clinical trials facility.

Located at the Charlestown Healthcare Hub (99 Pacific Highway), the facility is the first of its kind in regional Australia and offers some of the most advanced early-phase clinical trial capabilities in the country.

It was officially opened by the Member for Charlestown, Hon. Jodie Harrison MP.

Novatrials CEO, Amanda Koegelenberg, said the new facility is a gamechanger for the region, for research, and for patient access to life-saving treatments which were traditionally limited to capital cities.

"Our region has a strong track record in clinical trials across public, academic and private sectors, built on experienced clinicians, researchers and strong community participation," Ms Koegelenberg said.

"We're proud to extend that capability and provide a dedicated location for enabling early- to late-stage clinical trials to be conducted right here in the Hunter."

Phase I clinical trials are the essential first step in testing new medicinal interventions in humans. These highly regulated, healthy volunteer studies include paid participants who stay overnight at the facility while researchers monitor the safety, dosage, and potential side effects of emerging therapies.

"Becoming a globally recognised region for first-of-kind clinical trials strengthens our ability to attract future studies and ensures people who need it most can access treatments otherwise unavailable," Ms Koegelenberg said.

"We can now undertake first-in-human studies here in the Hunter, reducing the barriers for people to participate and helping clinicians stay at the forefront of innovation."

The Charlestown unit includes 31 overnight beds, an on-site laboratory and pharmaceutical dispensary, consulting rooms, a dedicated infectious disease room, and an infusion lounge, enabling seamless, end-to-end delivery across Phase I to III trials.



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## Latest stage of Branxton's revitalised town centre unveiled

Another stage of the Branxton Town Centre Upgrade is complete, with Cessnock City Council unveiling the significant improvements for the community and visitors to enjoy.

The revitalisation work spans from Church Street/Paterson Lane towards Anvil Creek Bridge, narrowing the former highway corridor, improving pedestrian experience and parking, and introducing landscaping to create a more welcoming and attractive environment.

New footpaths and kerbs, upgraded drainage, pedestrian crossing, trees and gardens, parking including wheel stops, a median island on Maitland Street, extra seating and bins, and the installation of a heritage sign are among the improvements.

Cessnock City Mayor Daniel Watton said the upgrade was a boost for Branxton, as it continued to thrive as a vibrant township and one of the Hunter Valley's key heritage destinations.

"The refreshed town centre enhances the character of the village, creating a safer, greener, and more connected space for residents, businesses and visitors to enjoy," said Cr Watton.

"Congratulations to Council staff for making these important upgrades a reality, and thanks to the NSW Government for its vital funding contribution."

The project comes amid significant growth in Branxton following the opening of the Hunter Expressway in 2014 and the ongoing development of Huntlee.

The works benefitted from a \$929,000 grant from the NSW Government's Resources for Regions program.

## Hunter Safety Awards Celebrates 10 Years of Safety Excellence

The Hunter Safety Awards has officially marked a decade of recognising workplace health and safety excellence, with the 2026 winners announced at the 10th Annual Hunter Safety Awards Gala on 8 May.

Celebrating the individuals, businesses, and leaders shaping safer workplaces across the Hunter region, this year's milestone event recognised outstanding achievement across innovation, leadership, wellbeing, training, and workplace safety systems.

Director Alanna Ball said the 10-year celebration was both a reflection on how far the region has come and a powerful reminder of the Hunter's leadership in workplace health and safety.

"For the past decade, the Hunter Safety Awards has celebrated the incredible work happening across our region — recognising the people, organisations, and initiatives raising the bar for safety excellence," Ms Ball said.

"This year's winners represent the very best of what workplace health and safety can look like when innovation, leadership, and genuine commitment come together."

### AWARD WINNERS

**WHS Business of the Year:** Port of Newcastle - Recognised as the evening's highest honour, Port of Newcastle was awarded for organisation-wide excellence, continuous improvement, and exceptional commitment to workplace health and safety.

**Best Health & Wellbeing Program (Large):** Coal LSL - Recognised for embedding psychosocial risk management into leadership, systems, and governance to drive meaningful cultural and behavioural change.

**Best Health & Wellbeing Program (SME):** Swietelsky Rail Australia - Awarded for treating wellbeing as a core safety control and embedding physical, mental, and psychosocial health into daily operations.

**Best WHS Training Program:** University of Newcastle - Recognised for its evidence-based Leading WELL program, redefining psychosocial safety through leadership development.



**Best WHS Innovation & Improvement (Large):** ACCIONA -

Awarded for using AI-powered innovation to transform safety in high-risk construction and set a new benchmark for digital safety.

**Best WHS Innovation & Improvement (SME):** Applied Ultrasonics - Recognised for reimagining post-weld safety through advanced technology that eliminates hazards at the source.

**Best WHS Management System (Large):** Port of Newcastle - Awarded for embedding safety into every level of operations, leadership, and culture through a world-class WHS framework.

**Best WHS Management System (SME):** Red Insight - Recognised for building a governance-led WHS system grounded in accountability, practical implementation, and continuous improvement.

**WHS Champion of the Year:** Rebecca Lehmann (PCYC NSW) - Awarded for setting an extraordinary benchmark in workplace safety, including the first-ever 100% WHS audit score across 67 PCYC NSW clubs.

**WHS Rising Star Award:** Mohamed Seweify (John Holland) - Recognised for making an exceptional impact early in his WHS career through leadership, strong work ethic, and high-risk project outcomes.

**Young WHS Leader of the Year:** Russel Driver (Freyssinet Australia) - Awarded for proactive safety leadership, measurable outcomes, and setting a powerful standard for the future of WHS leadership.

## Work Commences on Doyle Street Bridge Replacement

Cessnock City Council has commenced construction on the Doyle Street Bridge replacement, a significant infrastructure project that will improve safety, reliability and connectivity for the local community.

The \$2.7 million project involves replacing the existing ageing timber bridge over Black Creek with a new concrete structure designed to meet modern transport standards, provide a longer service life, reduce maintenance requirements, and better support local traffic.

The current bridge, which has experienced deterioration in key structural components, has had its load limit reduced in recent years.

The replacement will restore full load capacity and deliver a more durable, long-term solution for road users, while also improving accessibility for all users while enhancing overall road safety.

The project will include demolition of the existing bridge, construction of new foundations and a concrete deck, installation of safety barriers and guardrails, as well as road and drainage improvements.

During construction, temporary road closures and detours will be in place to allow works to be carried out safely. Council will work closely with the community to minimise disruption and provide notice of any changes to traffic conditions.

Construction is scheduled for completion in December 2026, weather permitting.

## Tourism gold for Broke Fordwich

Broke Fordwich broke a two-year silver streak to claim top honours in the 2026 Top Tourism Town Awards.

Strong public support helped push the historic region to the top of the podium in the Tiny Tourism Town category (population under 1,500 residents) in the NSW Tourism Industry Council awards.

Mayor of Singleton, Cr Sue Moore accepted the gold award on behalf of the Broke Fordwich community at the LGNSW Destination and Visitor Economy Conference in Maitland on Wednesday 27 May.

She said the win was a just reward for the region after being consistently recognised as one of the state's best regional destinations for the past six years.

"We're incredibly proud of Broke's silver results over recent years, but it has been ready for its golden moment — and now it's here," Cr Moore said.

"It's a village brimming with reasons to visit — history and heritage, arts and culture, incredible food and wine experiences, and plenty of country charm.

"To be acknowledged in these awards is a testament to the passion, authenticity and love that our local businesses, makers and community share with visitors to Broke. I'd like to also thank everyone who voted for Broke, as judging relied heavily on public support."

Just 15 minutes from Pokolbin, Broke Fordwich offers a slower pace than the region's busier wine hubs. Visitors can dine at hatted restaurants, explore sculpture parks and galleries, meet alpacas and artisan producers, or simply soak up the scenery by day and the five-million-star night sky by night – experiences that are resonating with visitors.



Mayor of Singleton, Cr Sue Moore accepting the gold award on behalf of Broke Fordwich at the LGNSW Destination and Visitor Economy Conference. Pictured with Singleton Council's Coordinator Customer Service Brendon Burness, Manager Community Experience + Events Nicole Rindal and the Chairperson NSW Tourism Association Stuart Ayres

Broke has seen an eight per cent increase in visitation over the past 12 months, delivering a flow on effect of a 10% boost to the local economy.

Cr Moore said the steady growth highlights the increasing appeal of Broke as a destination for travellers seeking authentic regional experiences.

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## 2026 Newcastle Hospitality & Tourism Awards

The region's leading hospitality and tourism operators, events, venues and industry professionals have been recognised at the Prosperity Advisers 2026 Newcastle Hospitality & Tourism Awards, with winners announced at a sold-out gala celebration at Ravella Newcastle on 18 May.

The Awards brought together businesses and individuals from across the visitor economy to celebrate excellence, innovation and leadership in an industry that continues to play a critical role in Newcastle's economic growth and identity.

NTIG Chair and CoastXP founder Dominic May said the strength of this year's finalists and winners reflected the momentum currently driving the region's visitor economy.

"Across the past 12 months, Newcastle and the wider Hunter have continued to evolve as a destination, with growing visitor numbers, major investment in infrastructure and increasing national attention on the experiences our region offers," Dominic May said.

"The quality of this year's submissions demonstrates just how ambitious, resilient and innovative our hospitality and tourism businesses are. From accommodation providers and restaurants to festivals, tours and industry leaders, our winners represent the very best of a sector that continues to raise the bar.

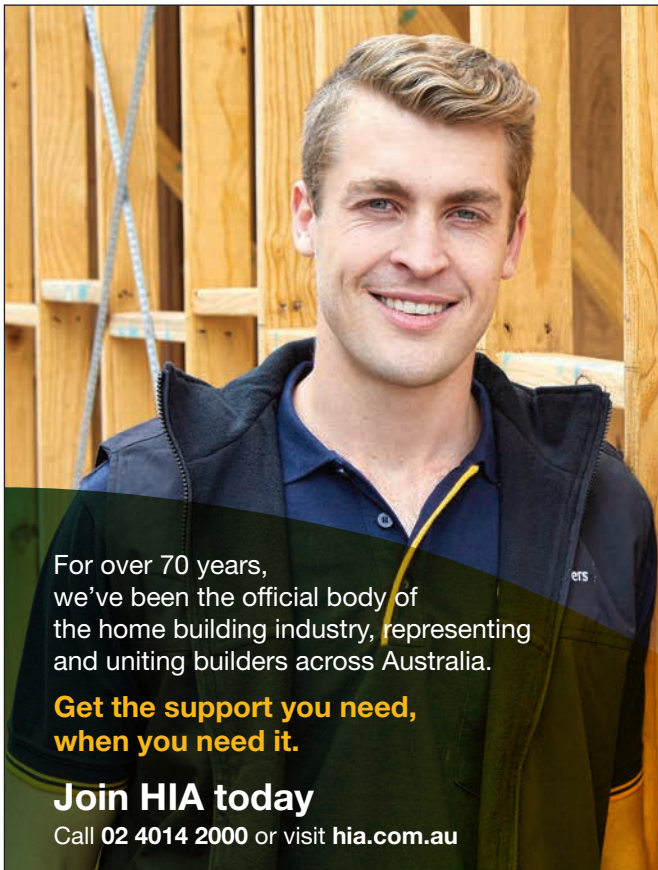
"Newcastle's visitor economy has enormous opportunities ahead of it. The expansion of Newcastle Airport, major city revitalisation projects and improved connectivity will continue to transform the region, and our industry is ready to meet that growth with exceptional experiences and genuine hospitality."

The finalists and winners were:

**Support Partner of the Year** - Winner: EDL Consulting; Finalists: Hunter Valley Wine & Tourism Association, Earp Distilling Co.



- Inclusive Tourism & Hospitality Operator of the Year** - Winner: Quest Newcastle; Finalists: MOA & Co, Reflections Holidays
- Best New Visitor Economy Business** - Winner: Newy Food Adventures; Finalists: The Yellow Door Kitchen, Midtown Newcastle
- Excellence in Sustainability** - Winner: MOA & Co.; Finalists: Crystalbrook Kingsley, Foghorn Brewery
- Best Tourism Experience** - Winner: Newy Tour Co; Finalists: 4WD Tours R Us, Earp Distilling Co.
- Best Event or Festival** - Winner: Newcastle Pride Festival; Finalists: Newcastle Food Month, Hill to Harbour
- Culinary Excellence** - Winner: Bistro Penny; Finalists: NOAH'S on the Beach, Cakeboi
- Outstanding Accommodation Provider** - Winner: Quest Newcastle West Finalists: NOAH'S on the Beach, Holiday Inn Express, Rydges Newcastle
- Rising Star Award** - Winner: Emily Box (Young Street Hotel) Finalists: Shea Calvin (The University of Newcastle), Jordann Charter-Smith (QT Newcastle), Allen Miller (Scratchleys)
- Customer Service Champion** - Winner: Stewart Ford (Newcastle Cruise Ship Volunteers); Finalists: Vanessa Zietsman (Earp Distilling Co.), Paris Locke (Quest Newcastle)
- Employer of the Year** - Winner: Quest Newcastle/Newcastle West; Finalists: Rydges Newcastle, Newcastle Airport
- Industry Leader of the Year** - Winner: Linc Horton (Newcastle Airport), Finalists: Cameron Burns (Newcastle Cruising Yacht Club), Jennifer Roberts (Castlecrest Consultants)



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## MidCoast Council invests in region

MidCoast Council is investing in the region's economic future through long-term support for three major events expected to inject an estimated \$34 million into the local economy.

Council will provide \$90,000 in funding support, with the events projected to deliver an estimated return of 379:1 to the local economy for every dollar invested. That projection equates to an estimated \$34 million flowing into local businesses and the wider visitor economy.

The three events include the Old Bar Beach Festival, the Barrington Coast Air Show and the Barrington Coast Beach 5s.

A key part of the agreements means each event will be provided support for three years. Securing multi-year agreements for these events provides certainty for organisers, businesses and visitors, while helping establish the MidCoast as a premier regional events destination.

The Barrington Coast Air Show will be delivered biannually from this year until 2030.

Council's Executive Manager Sustainable Development, Rachel Pleasant said the move shows the commitment to grow the region's economy.

"These agreements are about backing events that bring real economic value to the MidCoast," Ms Pleasant said.

"By providing long-term certainty, we're giving organisers the confidence to grow these events, while helping local businesses plan for the increased visitation they bring. More visitors means more people staying in our accommodation, dining in our restaurants, shopping locally and experiencing what makes the MidCoast such a special destination."

The funding to support the events will come from Council's Grants, Donations and Sponsorship Program.

## REGISTRATION & APPLICATIONS ARE NOW OPEN

This year's Hunter Manufacturing Awards theme, "We Make It Here", celebrates excellence in manufacturing across our region.

If your business is actively engaged in the manufacturing sector within our region, this is your time to shine.

Participating in these awards showcases organisations small and large, opening doors to valuable business opportunities and boosting your company's reputation and visibility.



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## Hunter Region Business Excellence Awards

The Hunter region's most outstanding businesses and business leaders have been recognised at the prestigious 31st Hunter Regional Business Excellence Awards, held on Friday 29 May 2026 at Ben Ean, Pokolbin. The gala event brought over 400 businesses together celebrating innovation, resilience, leadership, and outstanding contribution to the regional economy.

Hosted by Hunter Region Business Hub, the awards honour excellence across a diverse range of industries and sectors.

Chair of Hunter Region Business Hub, Kavita Payall, said the calibre of entries this year reflected the strength, ambition, and determination of businesses across the Hunter.

"This year, we received over 190 nominations, resulting in 135 exceptional finalists. Each has undergone a rigorous judging process - evaluated across leadership, innovation, customer experience, and overall business performance. That alone is an outstanding achievement," Ms Payall said.

The awards recognise businesses and individuals who continue to drive economic growth, create employment opportunities, and contribute positively to the Hunter region despite ongoing economic and operational challenges.

General Manager of Hunter Region Business Hub, Alena Pople, said the awards were an important opportunity to acknowledge the achievements of local businesses and leaders.

"These awards are about recognising resilience, innovation, determination, and the extraordinary achievements of the successful businesses who invested in their business and achieved finalist status. It is about celebrating the people who continue to lead, create opportunities, employ others, and contribute so much to our region despite the challenges around us," Ms Pople said.

The 31st Hunter Regional Business Excellence Awards showcased businesses that are setting new benchmarks in customer service, sustainability, innovation, and operational excellence, reinforcing the Hunter's reputation as one of Australia's most dynamic regional economies.

### AWARD WINNERS

#### Access & Inclusion

Winner - 24/7 Care Disability services and activity hub  
Highly Commended - Zen Wellness Centre

#### Financial & Real Estate Services

Winner - The Mutual Bank  
Highly Commended - Beam Bookkeeping

#### General

Winner - Dragonfly Cakes  
Highly Commended - Coal & Wine Creative  
Highly Commended - KISSOFIRE Hunter Valley Butterscotch

#### Health

Winner - MSK Podiatry Plus  
Highly Commended - Transformational Institute

#### Home Based

Winner - Just ROLL with it Huntlee  
Highly Commended - Outback Jess

#### Hospitality & Tourism

Winner - McCaffrey's Estate  
Highly Commended - Hunter Valley Wildlife Park

#### New Start

Winner - Bridgestone Select Tyre and Auto Huntlee  
Highly Commended - Just ROLL with it Huntlee



*Councillor Mitchell Hill from Cessnock City Council (CCC), Chrissy Grainger CCC, Winner of Business of the Year and Financial and Real Estate Business - Mark Williams from The Mutual Bank, Business Leader of the Year - Jeremy Brett from Morgan Engineering, Lauren Higgins CCC and Councillor Sarah Pascoe CCC.*

#### Not For Profit

Winner - Hume Community Housing  
Highly Commended - The Groundswell Collective

#### Online Based

Winner - Springhill Beef Co  
Highly Commended - Jezweb

#### Personal Services

Winner - Evolution Hair Co  
Highly Commended - Bespoke Hair Artistry

#### Professional Services

Winner - Acrobat Removals and Storage  
Highly Commended - Tailored HQ

#### Trades & Industry

Winner - Morgan Engineering  
Highly Commended - Precision Fencing Newcastle

#### Customer Service - Individual

Winner - Pettina Smith Hunter Valley Flooring Xtra  
Highly Commended - Kim Whitehead Flamingos Live

#### Customer Service - Whole Business

Winner - Bridgestone Select Tyre and Auto Huntlee  
Highly Commended - Hunter Valley Tours

#### Young Entrepreneur of the Year

Winner - Jake Rooney and Lucas Dagg Wick Boys  
Highly Commended - Alice Farrelly Reformed Bookkeeper & Alice May Web Design

#### Business Woman of the Year

Winner - Sarah-Jane Dunford Riskology  
Highly Commended - Tori Leeke Newcastle Counselling Service

#### Business Leader of the Year

Winner - Jeremy Brett Morgan Engineering  
Highly Commended - Xavier King Earth and Elm Studio and Wellness Services  
Highly Commended - Lindsay Guy Guy's Karate School

#### Business of the Year

Winner - The Mutual Bank

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\*[National Listener Survey – conducted by McNair Yellow Squares – Greater Newcastle 2024 Survey Wave 2].



**CESSNOCK CITY COUNCIL**

Cessnock City Council has appointed **Natalia Cowley** to the position of General Manager, following an extensive recruitment process. Natalia is a Fellow Chartered Accountant and joins the organisation with a background in local government financial recovery, organisational transformation and sustainable growth.



**NIER**

The University of Newcastle has appointed **Dr Paul Ebert** as the new Executive Director of the Newcastle Institute for Energy and Resources (NIER), following an extensive international search. A proud Novocastrian and alumnus of the University of Newcastle, Dr Ebert brings nearly two decades of global leadership experience in the energy, chemicals and resources sector. Most recently Dr Ebert served as Group Director Sustainability and Energy Transition Leadership at Worley, a global engineering services company with more than 50,000 employees.



**BAKER LOVE LAWYERS**

Baker Love Lawyers, the oldest law firm in the Newcastle area, has appointed **Adrian Corbould** as Special Counsel. This strategic addition significantly enhances the firm's multi-disciplinary offering, which currently comprises four directors leading a team of 25. Adrian Corbould is a highly respected Accredited Specialist in Wills & Estates. With over 25 years of dedicated experience specialising in wills and estates litigation, Adrian brings a great depth of knowledge and a proven track record of success to Baker Love Lawyers.



**PROSPERITY ADVISERS GROUP**

Prosperity Advisers Group has appointed former KPMG Australia Partner and Board member **Tony Nimac** as Chair, marking a significant step in the firm's continued growth and strategic expansion. Tony brings more than 30 years' experience with KPMG Australia, where he played a senior leadership role in the firm's mid-market practice. He led the division through a significant growth phase, driving expansion through strong external market engagement, strategic partner recruitment, internal talent development, acquisitions and the opening of a new Western Sydney office.

# 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.



# COMING EVENTS

**23 June 2026, 10:00am – 12:00pm**

## **Engineers Australia**

International Women in Engineering Day Newcastle: Networking  
Venue: 6 Workshop Way  
Cost: \$35/\$65  
<https://hunternewenergy.com.au/events/international-women-in-engineering-day-2026-newcastle-networking/>

**24 June 2026, 11:00am – 12:00pm**

## **Boomerang Labs**

Future-proofing Supply Chains: Circular Strategies for a Volatile World  
Venue: Online  
Cost: Free  
<https://hunternewenergy.com.au/events/future-proofing-supply-chains-circular-strategies-for-a-volatile-world/>

**24 June 2026, 11:00am – 12:00pm**

## **Business Hunter**

Business Hunter Economic Update Breakfast | Property, productivity and the Hunter economy  
Venue: McDonald Jones Stadium  
Cost: \$66 +\$2.75  
<https://hunternewenergy.com.au/events/business-hunter-economic-update-breakfast-property-productivity-and-the-hunter-economy/>

**27 July 2026, 1:30pm – 6:15pm**

## **The University of Newcastle**

Newcastle Industry Open Day  
Venue: Brennan Room, Callaghan  
Cost: Free  
<https://events.humanitix.com/newcastle-industry-open-day>

**14 August 2026, 12:00pm – 4:00pm**

## **HunterNet**

HunterNet Future Leaders Roundtable Luncheon  
Venue: Merewether Surfhouse  
<https://hunternet.com.au/event/2026-hunternet-future-leaders-roundtable-luncheon/>

**26 - 27 August 2026**

## **Hunter Defence**

2026 Hunter Defence Conference  
Venue: Rydges Hunter Valley  
<https://www.hunterdefence.org.au/hdc2026/>

**4 September 2026, 8:00am – 9:30am**

## **HunterNet**

Business Practice Forum – AI Workshop with Myrtec  
Venue: HunterNet  
<https://hunternet.com.au/event/business-practice-forum-ai-workshop-with-myrtec-3/>

**30 October 2026 (applications close 20 August)**

## **HMA**

2026 Hunter Manufacturing Awards (HMA)  
Venue: NEX Newcastle  
<https://www.hma.org.au/>

**12 November 2026**

## **HunterNet**

HunterNet Industry Excellence Awards  
Venue: Newcastle City Hall  
<https://hunternet.com.au/event/hunternet-industry-excellence-awards-2/>



## 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)

## UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE OFFICIALLY OPENS NEW GOSFORD BUILDING

Federal Minister for Education the Hon Jason Clare MP and NSW Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education the Hon Steve Whan MP officially opened the University of Newcastle's Gosford Central building in April.

Gosford Central was jointly funded by the Australian Government (\$18 million), the NSW Government (\$18 million), and the University of Newcastle (\$31.3 million), using land provided by the NSW Government's Hunter and Central Coast Development Corporation.

Federal Minister for Education the Hon Jason Clare MP said the University's new building gives locals more opportunity to study higher education without leaving the Coast.

"I congratulate the University of Newcastle on this significant milestone. The opening of this facility builds on the University's strong record of making higher education accessible to students who might otherwise miss out. This is the kind of investment that strengthens communities, supports regional growth, and changes lives."

NSW Minister for Education, Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education the Hon Steve Whan MP said the facility was a game changer for tertiary education on the Coast.

"With access to a world-class university in the heart of Gosford, and TAFE nearby, Central Coast students can gain the skills and qualifications needed for the jobs of the future, and keep local talent in the region," said Minister Whan.

University of Newcastle Vice-Chancellor Professor Alex Zelinsky AO said the facility had already begun transforming access to education for the Central Coast.

"In just its first semester, we have welcomed more than 1,200 students, and we're seeing strong demand from industry and community partners.

"With plans underway to deliver affordable student accommodation nearby, we are creating a vibrant, connected campus that gives students every reason to choose the University of Newcastle's Central Coast Campus as the place to start and build their future," said Professor Zelinsky.

Federal Member for Robertson Dr Gordon Reid MP said the new building was already reshaping the city.

"This state-of-the-art building is bringing new energy into the heart of Gosford, delivering a great student experience while creating lasting social and economic opportunities for the region."

NSW Member for Gosford Liesl Tesch MP said it was wonderful to see the building officially opened and welcoming students.

"As a graduate of the fantastic University of Newcastle, I am overjoyed to see this investment in the Coast opening up new opportunities for locals in an absolutely stunning facility. I couldn't be more proud," said Ms Tesch.



## UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE RETURNS TO POSITIVE CORE OPERATING RESULT IN 2025

The University of Newcastle's Vice-Chancellor has shared the university's 2025 financial results.

The Vice-Chancellor recognised the challenges faced by staff during 2025 and looked to the future.

"2025 was a challenging year for many across our University community. We recognise organisational change affected staff and teams last year as we navigated a Business Improvement Project to make our core operations financially sustainable," Professor Zelinsky said.

"These decisions were not taken lightly. We've now achieved our first core operating surplus since 2021, which is an important milestone that places us in a stronger position to now rebuild and invest in the things that matter most - our students, staff and communities."

In 2025, the University reported a Consolidated Operating Surplus of \$112.5 million and a Core Operating Surplus of \$15.4 million. As the University is a not-for-profit organisation, these funds are reinvested into student, staff and community services, initiatives and facilities.

The result was supported by strong growth in international student numbers, continued strong domestic student numbers and improved retention, and operational efficiencies delivered through the Business Improvement Program.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Alex Zelinsky said the return to a positive operating margin strengthened the University's capacity to invest in its future.

"Across the sector we're seeing how challenging things are at the moment and, while we've weathered significant challenges, our result now positions us well for the future.

"While our 2025 Annual Report outlines important progress towards long-term financial sustainability, the broader higher education sector continues to face ongoing uncertainty.

"We are operating in an inflationary environment and can expect operating expenses to continue increasing, alongside insufficient public funding for critically-important public research, increased regulation of student numbers through the Australian Tertiary Education Commission, increasing competition, and investment returns that could be softer.

"These factors mean the University is facing an environment that will require prudent management. I am confident that by working together with our teams and with our communities we can overcome these challenges."

"We want to be a strong university that provides opportunities for people in our region to study, work and be part of life-changing research," Professor Zelinsky said.

"When I look back on 2025, despite the challenges, I also want to recognise some of the achievements. We now teach more than 39,000 students, our student satisfaction continues to improve strongly year on year, and women now represent almost 40% of senior academic positions, up from 33.5% five years ago.

"We're also working to provide more desperately-needed accommodation for our students, with construction commencing on the City Campus student accommodation, which will provide an additional 445 student beds in the heart of the CBD."

The University's annual report will be available on the university's website after tabling in NSW Parliament this month.

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### CERTIFICATE IV IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND NEW BUSINESS

When Zoey Mackey-Craig moved on from her career in higher education, starting a business wasn't the plan. But when she did decide to give her own business ago, she was smart enough to know the difference between being able to do the work and knowing how to run a business.

"I had the skills to do the work," she says. "I just didn't have the skills to run the business itself."

A friend's recommendation led her to The Business Centre and the Certificate IV in Entrepreneurship and New Business. From the moment she walked in the door, something felt different. "I felt so supported, right from that very first conversation."

Nowhere was that support more evident than in the classroom. Everything Zoey learned was applied to the business she was actually building, not a hypothetical case study. For Zoey, the process of constructing a real business plan was the turning point. "It forced me to test my own preconceptions about my business and the market," she says. "That was genuinely valuable."

The biggest difference, Zoey says, is in the quality of teachers at The Business Centre. She is currently completing a Diploma at through another RTO, and the contrast is stark. "The difference is noticeable. I would bet the assessments weren't written by people who run their own businesses. The trainers at The Business Centre are empathetic, honest, and realistic."

Her trainer Ben Price recognised Zoey's potential. "Zoey was a great business owner from the start," he says. "Her confidence shifted in the fourth month when she had filled her books with clients."

June marks one year in business for Zoey, now working as a Virtual Assistant with three clients across in-office days, project delivery and event coordination. The course gave her more than a qualification. "It helped me define my business and feel confident in my offer and foundation, which has helped me succeed."

Her advice to anyone in the Hunter sitting on the fence? "Do it. Seriously."

The Business Centre's Certificate IV in Entrepreneurship and New Business is delivered face-to-face in Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Maitland and Singleton, and online via self-paced study. Fee-free and subsidised pathways are available through NSW Smart & Skilled and the Workforce Australia Self-Employment Assistance Program. Express your interest at [businesscentre.com.au](http://businesscentre.com.au)

### GIRLS IN PROPERTY PROGRAM

Almost 100 Hunter high school students joined some of the region's top industry professionals in May at the University of Newcastle as the Property Council of Australia's Girls in Property program kicked off in one of NSW's fastest-growing regions.

The Girls in Property program gives high school girls hands - a chance to gain insights into the property sector and hear from industry leaders about what a career in property might look.

The program also puts a focus on the critical role the industry plays in the social and economic development of Australia.

Property Council Hunter and Central Coast Regional Director Stephen Crowe said the program was helping equip the next generation of local leaders to take part in the Hunter's economic transformation.

"From southern Lake Macquarie to the upper valley, our region is undergoing significant growth and diversification - and we want more young women to see themselves as part of that future," Mr Crowe said.

"This program opens doors and changes minds. It shows students what's possible with the right support, skills and guidance."

The program was launched with an address from Minister for the Hunter, The Hon. Yasmin Catley MP, who spoke passionately



about her own career path in a male dominated industry.

The Minister's address was followed by interactive mentoring, group project work and a behind-the-scenes industry site tour, with students working on ideas to transform workplaces, housing and local retail centres.

"We're proud to bring this opportunity to Newcastle again in 2026. Our industry thrives when we tap into diverse talent and new ideas - starting with our schools," Mr Crowe said.

Girls in Property is delivered with the support of the NSW Department of Education and in partnership with local high schools, the University of Newcastle and leading property companies across the region.

### 2027 HUNTER INVESTMENT PROSPECTUS NOW SEEKING SUPPORT

We are currently seeking support for the 2027 edition of the Hunter Business Investment Prospectus, the annual hard copy and online publication that promotes the Hunter Region as a smart business, investment and lifestyle choice.

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## FINDING THE RIGHT PATH: HOW HUNTER-BASED SUPPORTS ARE HELPING PEOPLE INTO EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Some people know exactly what they want in their career. They just need someone to help them get there. Others aren't sure yet, carrying a quiet sense that something more is possible but not quite knowing where to start. At **Mai-Wel**, we work with both.

Every week across the Hunter, people arrive at a crossroads. A young person finishing school with no clear next step. A parent whose youngest is nearly school age, starting to think about what comes next for them. Someone living with disability who has the drive to work but hasn't found a pathway that fits.

What changes the outcome isn't one big intervention. It's the right support at the right time from people who are genuinely invested in where someone ends up.

Take one young man, Caleb, who we worked with through our Transition to Work program. He arrived uncertain, having faced real barriers to employment that had knocked his confidence over time.

While being supported by **Mai-Wel**, he has secured employment and enrolled in a TAFE course in a field he is genuinely passionate about.

Through our Inclusive Employment Australia service, we have supported a man named Ben who has now been working at a local medical facility for more than ten years. He found his way there with the support of our employment team and, a decade on, we are still beside him, ensuring he has the support and access to training he needs to keep thriving in a role he loves. That kind of long-term, sustained employment is exactly what genuine support makes possible.



For parents, the journey looks different, but the outcome matters just as much. One mother supported through Parent Pathways arrived unsure whether returning to study was even realistic around her family. With Mai-Wel's Parent Pathways Mentors beside her, she built a plan and enrolled in a course she had been putting off for years.

For people who need to build foundational workplace skills before any of that is possible, our Academy and Academy Prep programs deliver structured pre-employment training that produces job-ready candidates. For employers in the Hunter, that means people who arrive prepared, not just available.

*Different starting points. Different journeys. The same belief behind all of it.*

**To find out more, visit [mwlf.com.au](http://mwlf.com.au).**

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## FUTURE LEADERS PROGRAM STRENGTHENS GOVERNANCE

As the HunterNet Future Leaders Program marks more than 10 years of developing emerging leaders across the Hunter region, the program is continuing to evolve with the introduction of a formal Advisory Board and Subcommittee structure.

Over the past decade, the Future Leaders Program has grown into a respected leadership development initiative, equipping participants with the skills, networks and confidence to grow both personally and professionally. As the program continues to mature, a more formal governance model now supports its ongoing growth, sustainability and future opportunities.

The program has officially transitioned from a broader, informal alumni committee to a smaller, more focused Advisory Board with clearly defined leadership and governance responsibilities. The board consists of a core group of four to five members, bringing diverse expertise across areas such as marketing, operations, finance, education and human resources. Alumni representation remains an important part of the structure, while external networks and industry expertise continue to strengthen the board's strategic direction.

This new governance model also creates additional development opportunities for alumni, offering valuable exposure to governance processes and board-level experience, further enhancing the long-term value of the program.

To support the new structure, a formal charter is now in place, clearly outlining the board's purpose, responsibilities and operating framework. Defined roles, responsibilities and meeting structures are also helping ensure clarity, accountability and strong governance.

In addition to the Advisory Board, dedicated subcommittees are now operating to focus on specific initiatives such as events,



projects and strategic priorities. These groups include board representatives alongside alumni members who contribute their expertise to key areas of the program.

The governance changes align with the program's broader focus on delivering strong participant outcomes. Feedback from this year's cohort and presenters continues to reinforce the value of smaller, highly engaged participant groups that allow for deeper connections and stronger learning outcomes.

This model is also helping build demand for future intakes, with growing interest creating a sense of exclusivity and strong momentum around the program.

At the same time, the program continues to explore long-term sustainability through financial planning, presenter return on investment and identifying the ideal scale for future growth.

Looking ahead, there is also significant potential to expand the Future Leaders Program model even further, with opportunities being explored to replicate its success in new markets.

This strengthened governance structure marks an exciting new chapter for the Future Leaders Program and ensures it remains well-positioned to deliver meaningful impact for the next generation of leaders across the region.



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# 2026 ZEAL FUTURES EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNERS ANNOUNCED

The next generation of skilled workers has been recognised at the 2026 Zeal Futures Excellence Awards on 8 May.

Zeal Futures proudly recognised apprentices, trainees, students, host employers and partners who are setting the benchmark for excellence across vocational education and training (VET). These awards celebrate not only individual achievement, but the collective strength of an industry that continues to play a critical role in shaping Australia's workforce.

The Zeal Futures Excellence Awards began in 2015 as an opportunity to recognise the achievements of their outstanding apprentices, trainees, students, and business partners, highlighting the value of vocational education and training pathways in Australia.

Now with nine regional branches and three training campuses, the success stories come from across NSW and beyond, and provide a platform for finalists and winners to thrive in their careers and be recognised in their communities at a local, regional, state, and national level.

This year's winners represent the very best of what VET has to offer – dedication, resilience, and a commitment to building real-world skills that drive industries forward.

### Congratulations to the 2026 award winners:

- **Apprentice of the Year:** Thomas Oliphant (hosted to BlueScope)
- **Trainee of the Year:** Bec Dobson (hosted to Service NSW)
- **Milton Morris Encouragement Award:** Robert Hughan (hosted to Centennial)



- **Woman in Non-Traditional Trade Apprentice/Trainee of the Year:** Alana Buresti (hosted to Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group)
- **Student of the Year:** Cameron Luck (employed by HVO)
- **School-based Apprentice/Trainee of the Year:** Indi Chapman (hosted by Sydney Airport Corporation)
- **Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Apprentice/Trainee of the Year:** Tylah Mapperson (hosted by Service NSW)
- **Adversity Champion:** Darcy McNeil (hosted to Origin Energy)
- **Overall Host Employer of the Year:** Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group



## CELEBRATING SUCCESS STORIES

The Zeal Futures Excellence Awards recognise the apprentices, trainees, students and host employers who are setting the benchmark in vocational education and training. Together we are building the skills needed to drive industries forward. Scan the QR code to read more about this year's winners and finalists, and start your own journey to success.



Let's create your success story.

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- **Host Employer Safety Award:** Dynelec
- **Industry Innovation Award:** Glencore – AUR Mobile Plant Training Program
- **Large Host Employer of the Year:** Centennial
- **Medium Host Employer of the Year:** Peabody Energy
- **Small Host Employer of the Year:** Attila Heavy Equipment Repairs
- **Zeal Futures Employee of the Year:** Nick Goder

Zeal Futures CEO Sharon Smith said the awards highlight the growing importance of skills-based training in today’s rapidly changing world.

“In a time where industries are evolving and skills shortages are being felt across the country, our apprentices and trainees are stepping up to meet real workforce needs,” she said.

Ms Smith also acknowledged the role of employers and industry partners in supporting the next generation.

“Our host employers and partners are essential to this success. By investing in training and development, they are creating opportunities that benefit entire industries and communities; helping build the future of our economy.

“As Australia continues to navigate economic and technological change, the demand for skilled workers remains strong.

The Excellence Awards shine a spotlight on the people and organisations rising to meet that demand, proving that skills training is not just relevant, but essential.”

## NCIG RECOGNISED AT ZEAL FUTURES EXCELLENCE AWARDS

NCIG was recognised for its commitment to developing future talent, taking home the Overall Host Employer of the Year award at the 2026 Zeal Futures Excellence Awards.

The awards, established in 2015, celebrate outstanding apprentices, trainees, students and business partners, while highlighting the important role vocational education and training pathways play across Australia.

Selected from host employers across NSW, NCIG was recognised for strong performance over the past year, including maintaining a 100% apprentice completion rate, prioritising apprentice safety with more than 2,100 LTI-free days, and fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce with 45% women in trades participation and 9% Indigenous participation.

The award also recognised our strong focus on mentoring, community engagement and creating meaningful development opportunities for apprentices.

NCIG has partnered with Zeal Futures for more than 10 years, with 12 apprentices recruited through the partnership. The recognition reflects our long-term commitment to workforce development, learning and innovation.

Adding to the celebrations, former NCIG apprentice Alana Buresti was named Women in Trades – Apprentice of the Year.

Alana completed her electrotechnology apprenticeship through NCIG and Zeal Futures, where she built strong technical, safety and communication skills while working in a high-risk industrial environment. Alongside completing her electrical training, she also undertook a Diploma of Project Management and represented Zeal Futures at industry and community events, advocating for vocational education and training pathways.

Reflecting on the award, Alana said she was surprised and grateful to be recognised for the hard work she had put into her apprenticeship journey.

One of the highlights of her apprenticeship was participating in the Girls Can Too Program through Zeal Futures, where she spoke with school students about opportunities in trades and apprenticeships.

“It was really rewarding to encourage girls to give it a go and consider a career in trades,” she said.

Alana credited both NCIG and Zeal Futures for helping shape her career, particularly the support provided by mentors and experienced tradespeople on site.

“The people you get to learn from at NCIG are highly skilled and very willing to pass on their knowledge,” she said. “It’s a supportive environment and there’s such a broad range of work, so you’re always learning something new.”

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**Overall Host Employer  
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2026 ZEAL FUTURES  
EXCELLENCE AWARDS

### 21 STUDENTS RECEIVE MAYORAL SCHOLARSHIPS

Cessnock City Council has proudly announced the recipients of its 2026 Mayoral Scholarships during an official presentation held on 14 May at Performance Arts Culture Cessnock (PACC).

Now in its 24th year, the Mayoral Scholarship Program has awarded 283 local students across the Cessnock Local Government Area with a combined total of \$745,500 since it began in 2002. This year, thanks to the generous support of local sponsors, Council awarded 21 scholarships, each valued at \$2,500.

Cessnock City Council Mayor Dan Watton said the program is an important investment in the future of the local community.

"It's inspiring to see so many talented and motivated students pursuing their educational and career aspirations," said Clr Watton.

"These scholarships provide meaningful support while also recognising the hard work and determination of young people across our region.

"Council is grateful to the sponsors who continue to partner with us in creating opportunities for local students to succeed."

Each scholarship provides students with direct financial assistance to help cover costs such as tuition, textbooks, and essential study resources.

The 2026 scholarship recipients were:

- Keeley Craft, sponsored by Austar Coal Mine and Yanoal
- Alice Goulding, sponsored by Belford Land Corporation
- Marissa Caban, sponsored by Cessnock Leagues Club
- Rosa Obeid, sponsored by Daracon Group
- May Webster, sponsored by East Cessnock Bowling Club
- Kiara Howson, sponsored by Fulton Hogan
- Bethany Knight, sponsored by Hunter Resource Recovery
- Darcy Russell, sponsored by KFC Cessnock and Kurri Kurri
- Jasmine Kerr, sponsored by Kurri Kurri Community Services Study Hub
- Ethan Jurd, sponsored by Lions Club of Cessnock
- Nicholas Perkins, sponsored by Lisa McGuigan Wines
- Macy Langworthy, sponsored by McCloy Group
- Chelsea Gunther, sponsored by Retired Mine Workers Association
- Jade Parker-Manderson, sponsored Railway Hotel Cessnock
- Jorja Schofield, sponsored by Recycle Central and Central Waste Station
- Danley Namuag, sponsored by Cessnock Rotary Club
- Kate Walker, sponsored by Rover Coaches and the Buslines Group
- Claire Mitchell, sponsored by Solo Resource Recovery
- Catarina Fara, sponsored by the Stevens Group
- Chantell Limond, sponsored by the Bloomfield
- Jemma Murphy, sponsored by the Mutual Bank

Council extends sincere thanks to all sponsors for their commitment to education and community development, and a huge congratulations to all of this year's recipients of the 2026 Mayoral Scholarship Program.

### NEW MEDOWIE HIGH SCHOOL REACHES TOPPING OUT MILESTONE

Construction has topped out on the new high school at Medowie, marking a major milestone in the delivery of the Hunter's first new public high school in more than 25 years.

Member for Port Stephens Kate Washington joined future students onsite to celebrate the highest concrete pour of the school's brand-new three storey building.

Medowie's first public high school will serve a community whose population is expected to increase by more than 4,000 residents by 2040.



The new school will provide local families with access to a public high school close to home, reducing the travel time spent on buses each day.

The school will include modern classrooms, including facilities for specialist support classes, specialist workshops for science, wood and metalwork, and creative and performing arts, a new multipurpose hall, library, administration, canteen, and outdoor play and sport facilities.

Road and infrastructure upgrades on Abundance Road and Ferodale Road will also be delivered to improve traffic flow and provide safe student pick-up, drop-off and pedestrian access ahead of the school's opening.

The project is part of a record \$9 billion in new schools and upgrades, including \$2.1 billion for regional NSW, ensuring students across the state have access to a world class public education close to home.

Deputy Premier and Minister for Education and Early Learning Prue Car said "This is an exciting milestone as the local community is finally seeing their long-awaited public high school become a reality. Medowie families have waited decades for a public high school, and from Day 1 Term 1 next year young people can finally begin attending high school close to home.

"This project reflects the NSW Government's commitment to rebuilding public education in regional NSW and ensuring growing communities like Medowie have access to the fee-free, world-class education they deserve."

Member for Port Stephens Kate Washington stated "Everything's on the up in Medowie with our new high school reaching its highest point, bringing us another step closer to welcoming the first students in 2027.

"It's very special to be marking this milestone with future students - they're the reason our community never gave up on its fight for the school.

"Thank you to the construction crews for powering through the build, we've all been watching in awe at the pace of progress."

Principal of the new high school Kylee Beasley said "It is a special feeling to be here with our future students, standing in the structure of what will soon be our school. It makes everything feel very real. These spaces will soon be filled with the energy of students beginning their high school journey.

"I am counting down the days until we open our doors and our students can make this space their own."

## Muswellbrook Solar Farm and Battery

OX2 will begin construction of the Muswellbrook Solar Farm and Battery, marking a significant step forward for the reliable renewable energy rollout in one of Australia's largest mining regions.

Located on the site of a former coal mine, the 135 MWac Muswellbrook Solar Farm and 100 MW Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) will power up to 52, 310 homes and create up to 200 jobs during construction.

The project is being built 2.5 km east of Muswellbrook in the Hunter Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone (REZ). OX2 says it is committed to genuine community engagement and creating long term tangible benefits for locals, through jobs, economic development, skills and training. OX2 will contribute around \$115,000 every year to a Community Benefit Sharing Program, as outlined in a Voluntary Planning Agreement (VPA) with Muswellbrook Shire Council.

This is the first owner/operator project for OX2 in Australia, further showcasing the long-term commitment to the Hunter community.

"OX2 is extremely proud to reach financial close on the Muswellbrook project and deliver a project that illustrates Australia's renewable energy opportunity."

"We are delivering on our long-term commitment to Australia's energy future and real benefits for regional communities through local jobs and the Community Benefit Sharing Program in partnership with Muswellbrook Shire Council," said Stephen Symons, Vice President, OX2 Australia.

Idemitsu Australia co-developed this Solar and BESS with OX2 and remains a long-term landholder of the project site.

"We welcome this major milestone for the Muswellbrook project and acknowledge the ongoing partnership with OX2 to help transform Australia's energy system with reliable firm renewables," said Steve Kovac, Chief Executive Officer, Idemitsu Australia.

Construction will begin immediately and the project will be operational in 2028. OX2 has appointed an Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) joint venture between Bouygues Construction Australia and Equans Solar and Storage Australia (BYESSA) to deliver the project.

"The Bouygues Construction Australia and Equans Solar & Storage JV, looks forward to commencing construction of the Muswellbrook project for OX2 and contributing to New South Wales' renewable energy transition. Across all of our sites we are focused on delivering positive environmental outcomes for the benefit of future generations. We firmly believe in the power of renewable energy to create a more sustainable future for all, and we are delighted to work with OX2 on this important project." Seved Robin, CEO Bouygues Construction Australia.

The project has secured a long-term hybrid power purchase agreement with an international offtaker, covering both solar generation and battery energy storage.

MUFG is the Sole Structuring Coordinator and Mandated Lead Arranger, Underwriter and Bookrunner on the project financing. This is the second project to be built by OX2 since it entered the Australian market in 2022.




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### Singleton District Hospital boost their emergency department equipment

The emergency department at Singleton District Hospital is better equipped to manage urgent patient care with new trauma stretchers, thanks to a \$34,000 joint donation from Mount Thorley Warkworth and Ashton Coal mines.

The funding enabled the purchase of four emergency department trauma stretchers that are specialised, high-mobility patient trolleys designed for rapid response situations. It is vital that hospital staff, doctors and nurses have the latest and greatest equipment available to treat and transport their critically injured patients.

Susan Paull, President of the United Hospital Auxiliary in Singleton was delighted with the new emergency beds. "Our emergency and trauma department requires equipment that can withstand extreme use and patient safety is vital.

"The new emergency trauma stretchers are made from high-quality and heavy-duty materials, straight tracking wheels and accurate steering allowing for good maneuverability and control.

"The stretchers are also very versatile, allowing a patient to be transported smoothly and have a full body X Ray, without needing to be moved. This will speed up the X-Ray process and reduce pain for our patients, not having to be moved onto another bed.

"We are always looking at ways to improve the hospital and we are thankful to Ashton Coal and Mount Thorley Warkworth for their funding to help make this project happen," said Susan.

The United Hospital Auxiliary in Singleton assists people in hospital and drives fundraising for vital equipment to better support patients at their time of need. The Auxiliary began in 1932 and meets monthly to discuss what equipment is needed at the hospital and the various fundraising activities.

Ashton Coal Operations Manager, Michael Bartlett, was proud to continue supporting the hospital. "Hospital emergency departments are under immense pressure, providing urgent care to a high-volume of patients daily.

"They play a vital role in our community, and it is imperative they have high-quality equipment for the benefit of everyone in our area when they need it most," said Michael.

The Ashton Coal and Mount Thorley Warkworth Community Support Programs run annually and are funded by Yancoal Australia, aiming to make a positive difference in the local community and to the lives of the people who work and live in the Hunter Valley.

### 2026 NSW Women in Mining Awards

Malabar Resources' Surface Infrastructure Manager Penny Woodward has been named the 2026 Exceptional Woman in NSW Mining.

As a bassoon player in touring orchestras, Penny's first career was a world away from her current role in mining. Now utilising the resilience, perseverance and dedication previously gained as a professional musician, Penny leads a multi-disciplinary team of over twenty people responsible for surface infrastructure critical to the Maxwell Underground Mine's long-term success.

Her career and personal experience shows how learned life skills can set someone up for a successful career in mining, with Penny now a strong advocate for women to consider mining as a career path.

NSW Minerals Council CEO Stephen Galilee congratulated Penny on being named this year's Exceptional Woman in Mining, highlighting her achievements as another example of world-class women in mining.

"Penny's pivot from music to mining shows the dynamic options available to women looking to forge a new career path in our industry. Her rise to a position of significant responsibility within Malabar Resources is a great example for other young women exploring their career options."

Other award winners include Glencore's Ulan Surface Operations' first female Production Superintendent Aliasha Saxby who has been named 2026 NSW Exceptional Young Woman in Mining.

A passionate advocate for STEM education and industry engagement, Aleisha has mentored graduates, supported university and school outreach programs, and represented mining at community and industry events to inspire future engineers, particularly young women, to pursue technical careers.

Environmental Adviser at Whitehaven Coal's Narrabri Coal Operations, Harriet Davies has received the 2026 Technological Innovation Award for her work leading the implementation and ongoing development of a purpose-built Environment and Rehabilitation Data Hub. This hub is a major digital innovation replacing fragmented, paper-based environmental management systems.

The 2026 Exceptional Tradeswoman/Operator/Technician Award was awarded to Taleigha Everingham-Potts from Evolution Mining's Northparkes Operations. An experienced Auto Electrician with more than six years in the mining sector, Taleigha has progressed from an apprenticeship into roles diagnosing and repairing heavy machinery including CAT loaders, Sandvik and Epiroc equipment.

Matthew Ireland from Endura has received the Inclusion & Diversity Champion Award. His leadership has led to measurable cultural and operational outcomes, including significant improvements in female, Indigenous and LGBTQIA+ representation and embedding of equitable hiring practices.

The Excellence in Diversity Programs & Performance Award went to Evolution Mining Northparkes Operations for the FlexCrew Program. Launched in April 2025 as a two-year pilot, the Northparkes FlexCrew Program created four fixed-term roles in the Ore Processing Department where working arrangements are co-designed between employees and leaders.

This flexible-by-design approach enables part-time and reduced-hours pathways that maintain safety, productivity and team integration while expanding access to operational careers.

NSW Minerals Council CEO Stephen Galilee congratulated all of the winners and finalists.

"Mining is a key contributor to the NSW economy and much of this can be attributed to our world-class mining workforce, including the contribution made by the incredible women of our NSW mining industry. These Awards celebrate their achievements in a range of fields," Mr Galilee said.

"From technology and innovation to engineering and trades, as well as operational roles and critical research, our award winners highlight the opportunities for women in mining, and showcase the career paths available in our sector."





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### Biggest boost to renewable power in NSW history

NSW is launching the biggest renewable energy tender in the state's history, seeking enough new generation to power about one-third of homes across NSW.

Tender 8 is seeking 2.5 GW of renewable energy, making it the largest generation Long-Term Energy Service Agreement tender under the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap.

The tender will be run by the independent Consumer Trustee, AusEnergy Service Limited (ASL). Once awarded, it will pave the way for NSW to achieve up to 90% of its renewable energy generation target of 12 GW by 2030.

At the same time, ASL will open Tender 9, seeking up to 12 GWh of long-duration storage.

NSW is already on track to exceed its long-duration storage targets for 2030 and 2034. The NSW Government is now seeking to unlock 50% more capacity beyond those benchmarks, to build a stronger pipeline of projects and a more reliable electricity system for the people of NSW.

Long-duration storage is critical for reliability, as it allows energy to be stored for extended periods and dispatched when demand is high or when weather conditions are not ideal for renewables to generate power. Eligible technologies include large-scale batteries and pumped hydro projects.

When delivered, Tenders 8 and 9 will significantly boost NSW's generation and storage capacity, helping ensure energy is always available when households, industry and businesses need it. They will result in enough generation capacity to power 1.26 million homes.

To adapt to the rapidly evolving market and improvements in battery technology, Tender 8 will also be the first to introduce a new Hybrid Generation Long-Term Energy Service Agreement product, allowing applicants to combine solar or wind generation with battery storage in a single project. This will make it easier for investors to bring forward projects that deliver the best outcomes for consumers.

The successful projects under Tenders 8 and 9 are expected to be determined by late 2026.

### Maxwell Underground Mine – Longwall commences

Malabar Resources has the completion of the first full shears of coal from the longwall machine in the Maxwell Underground mine on 14 April.

This major milestone sets the Maxwell mine on the pathway to becoming the newest and largest long-life longwall operation in the Hunter Valley.

Malabar Resources received approval for its Hunter Valley operation in December 2020. Underground construction commenced in May 2022 with the first coal produced from a bord and pillar operation early the following year.

The pathway from approval to first longwall coal has involved thousands of people, an enormous amount of work, and the support of our community, customers, and financial markets.

The final transition from development production to longwall production was delivered through a concentrated month of activity involving relocating the longwall equipment from the mini-build pad on the surface to underground, upgrading conveyors and infrastructure, and completing civil and ventilation works to bring the longwall machine online.

Wayne Seabrook, Chairman, Malabar Resources, celebrated this milestone, "First longwall coal from Maxwell Underground is the result of years of dedicated work by a remarkable group of people. Our employees, contractors and suppliers have shown extraordinary commitment to bringing this operation online, and I want to acknowledge each of them for what they have achieved.

"The mine now provides more than 430 full-time jobs and supports many local businesses and suppliers across the Hunter

Valley region.

"We are also grateful for the support of our local communities, the Muswellbrook Shire Council and the NSW Government.

Maxwell produces high-quality metallurgical coal that goes into making the steel the world requires and high-energy coal for new high-efficiency, low-emission (HELE) power stations.

We are proud to be delivering these products from the Hunter Valley, and we look forward to Maxwell becoming a long-term significant exporter to these global markets."

### Community grants from Mt Arthur Coal

Mt Arthur Coal has announced the winners from their latest round of community grants.

Benefiting My Community recipients receive up to \$10,000 for projects, events equipment or infrastructure that support the Hunter region. The successful applicants are determined by an employee representative committee.

Winners from the latest round were:

- Lions Club of Denman
- Scout Association of Australia, NSW Branch, 1st Scone
- Aussie Ark
- Dalswinton Rural Fire Brigade
- Denman Public School
- Muswellbrook Preschool Kindergarten
- Muswellbrook High School P&C Association

The winners of the Grassroots Sponsorship Grant each receive \$2,000. The winners of these grants are voted on by MAC teammates.

The winners from the latest round were:

- Upper Hunter Where there's a Will
- Singleton Strikers Football Club
- Muswellbrook Junior Rugby League Club
- Aberdeen Junior Rugby League Football Club
- Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Denman Pony Club
- Muswellbrook Touch Football Association
- Singleton Preschool
- McCully's Gap Hall
- Glendon Brook Hall

### Stage 1 complete for the Hunter-Central Coast REZ Project

The first stage of the Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) network infrastructure project is now complete, ready for new renewable energy projects to connect to the grid.

EnergyCo has commissioned Ausgrid to upgrade their distribution network and unlock 1 GW of network capacity in the region by 2028.

This first stage will deliver 350 MW of extra capacity, which represents more than a third of the total additional capacity needed for the Hunter-Central Coast REZ.

Stage 1 works include new fibre optic communications to link Muswellbrook Switching Station, Muswellbrook Bulk Supply Point, and Mitchell Line Switching Station. This upgrade builds on existing infrastructure, enabling a smarter, more efficient Upper Hunter electricity network with minimal new construction.

EnergyCo Chief Executive Hannah McCaughey said "EnergyCo welcomes the completion of this important milestone and reinforces that construction is underway to ensure the Hunter will continue to play a critical role in powering NSW. With these works complete, it will provide greater certainty to renewable energy generators to connect to the Hunter-Central Coast REZ by 2028."

Ausgrid CEO Marc England added "This is an exciting milestone for the Hunter-Central Coast REZ project. We're proud of the progress our teams have already made to get the network ready for new connections. It's another step towards delivering more affordable, reliable power for customers across the Hunter."

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Supporting individuals and families across the Hunter through crisis support, counselling, homelessness services and family support programs. To provide support and opportunities for our most vulnerable, businesses can partner on a number of initiatives including corporate Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Training, hosting the Carrie's Coffee social enterprise at your workplace or participating in our "It Takes a Team" program and through financial and business partnership - each of these create safer workplaces and informed teams, while supporting meaningful community outcomes.

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Wife to engineer husband, "Why did you make the potato soup with 125 small potatoes?"  
 Husband, "I know it seems like a lot, but the recipe called for five potatoes cubed."

Two aliens are reviewing a galactic survey report.  
 First alien: "Hmmm, the life forms on planet Earth have developed nuclear weapons."  
 Second alien: "Are they an emerging intelligence?"  
 First alien: "I don't think so. They're aimed at themselves."

A man walks into a pet shop and asks for a dog.  
 The owner points to a dog in the corner and says "That's the only one left but you can have him for just \$1."  
 The man walks over to the dog and to his amazement the dog says dog says he worked for the ASIO, travelled the world and saved countless lives.  
 The says to the owner "Tha's incredible, a talking dog! How come he is going so cheap?"  
 The owner shrugs and says "He lies about everything."

My wife asked me "Are you even listening to me?"  
 That was a really weird way of starting a conversation.

Martin was being interviewed for a new job.  
 The person conducting the interview wanted to find out something about his personality, so he asked, "If you could have a conversation with someone, living or dead, who would it be?"  
 Without hesitation, Martin responded, "The living one, of course!"

A Scotsman and his wife are walking past an expensive new restaurant.  
 "Mmm..., do you smell that food?" she asks, "It smells absolutely delicious."  
 Being a kind-hearted Scotsman, he thinks, "Oh what the hell., I will treat her".  
 He takes her arm, and they walk past it again.

Three conspiracy theorists walk into a bar.  
 You can't tell me that's a coincidence.

"I quit my job at the helium balloon factory today. I will never be spoken to in that tone of voice again."

A man walks into a bar and orders a whisky.  
 He asks for a straw, and the bartender says, "Don't worry, these glasses are very clean."  
 The man replies, "Oh, I know. But I just promised my partner I'd never put my lips on another glass of whisky."

**QUOTE OF THE MONTH**

"The only thing worse than training employees and losing them is not training them and keeping them" - Zig Ziglar



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