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Hunter Business Publications Pty Ltd
 ABN: 15 112 838 945
 PO Box 853, Hamilton NSW 2303
 Phone: (02) 4062 8133

PUBLISHER and EDITOR:

Garry Hardie
 Mob: 0414 463 125
 garry@HBRmag.com.au

ART DIRECTOR:

Sandie Collie
 sandie@HBRmag.com.au

CONTENT MANAGER:

Jason Duncan
 jason@HBRmag.com.au

PRINTING:

NCP Printing
 Phone: (02) 4926 1300
 sales@ncp.com.au
 www.ncp.com.au

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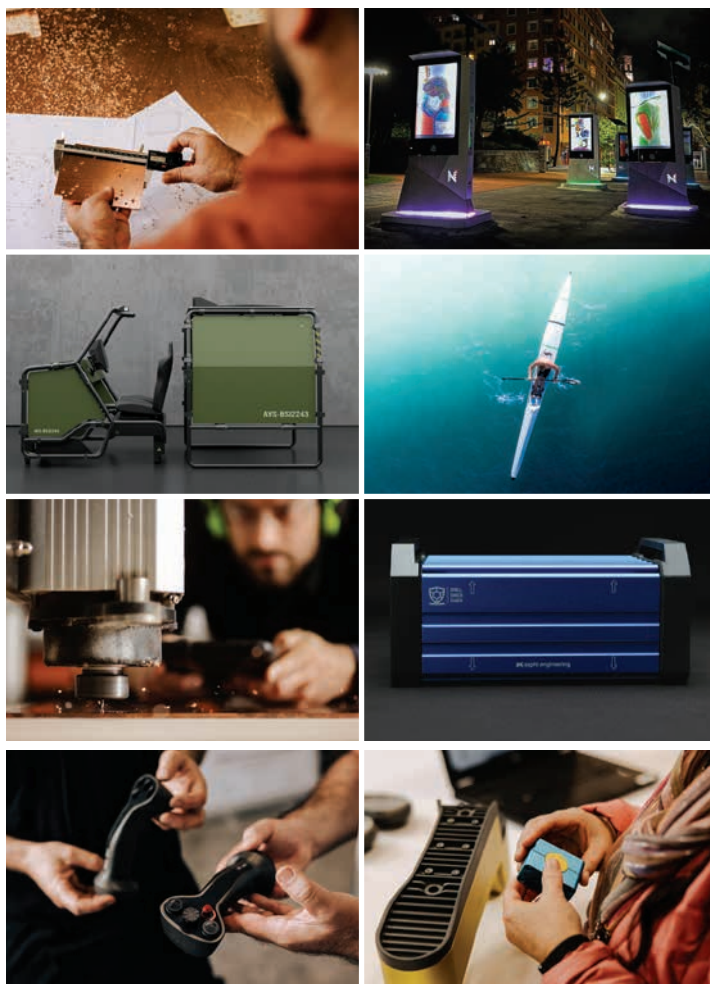
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From the Editor



The June quarter National Accounts released on 2 September makes mixed reading with GDP growth of just 0.4% and GDP per capita flat at 0%.

Productivity remains a major challenge, as it has for some time, with GDP per hour worked falling by 0.6%.

With the latest CPI figures remaining stubbornly above the Reserve Bank's target range there is a real chance that they may look at raising interest rates at their next board meeting on 29 September.

With subdued growth, flat private and business investment and falling

housing prices, any interest rate rises may well be a tipping point for many sectors of the economy and likely impact on economic growth, even possibly moving Australia towards a recession.

The challenge for the Reserve Bank will be how to reduce inflation without overly impacting in growth.

Of course a significant portion of inflationary pressures has been from global price pressures, particularly in terms of oil.

Unfortunately, the Reserve Bank cannot control this, no matter what they do with interest rates.

With the US- Iran war currently at a stalemate, it seems unlikely that oil prices will drop significantly in the short term. We can at least hope that there will not be any further major increases in oil prices, although nothing is certain.

All in all, the next couple of Reserve Bank meetings shape up as some of the most important for quite some time.

It is certainly a fine line to tread for the Reserve Bank and we hope that the economy will not be pushed too far with an interest rate rise.

Garry Hardie
Editor and Publisher

ON THIS MONTH'S COVER

A scene from Sandvik's new manufacturing facility Heatherbrae. For further information see the article on page 6 in this issue.



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CONSTRUCTION BEGINS ON NEW STUDENT ACCOMMODATION DEVELOPMENT

The University of Newcastle has marked a major milestone in addressing student housing demand, turning the first sod on its new 450-bed student accommodation development at Callaghan Campus.

Member for Wallsend Sonia Hornery MP joined representatives from the University and construction partner Hansen Yuncken to mark the commencement of construction.

The eight-storey development will provide purpose-built, affordable and modern accommodation from 2028, with a mix of single studios and shared living clusters.

Ms Hornery welcomed the start of construction and the benefits the project will bring to the local community.

"This is a significant project for our region and a welcome boost to student housing in Newcastle," said Ms Hornery.

"The University of Newcastle attracts students from across NSW, Australia and overseas, and it is essential that students have access to safe, affordable and high-quality accommodation close to where they study."

University of Newcastle Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alex Zelinsky AO, said the new accommodation would support more students to live on campus.

"We know students who live on campus are more likely to remain engaged with their studies and achieve strong academic outcomes," said Professor Zelinsky.

"This development will strengthen the student experience at the University of Newcastle's Callaghan campus while helping to address accommodation pressures facing students."



"Today's sod turn marks an exciting step forward in our commitment to providing students with affordable, high-quality accommodation."

Designed by Lyons Architecture, the timber-framed building will feature communal study and social spaces, bicycle parking, on campus electric vehicle charging facilities.

Once complete, the facility will add significantly to the University's accommodation offering and support growing demand from domestic, regional and international students.

The development is expected to welcome its first students in Semester 2, 2028.



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SANDVIK ADVANCES HUNTER MANUFACTURING WITH NEW HEATHERBRAE FACILITY

The ground support equipment manufactured at Sandvik's new Heatherbrae facility will not travel far to find its purpose. Rock bolts and plates produced at the site will support mining and tunnelling operations across the Hunter and beyond. They form part of the systems used to help protect people and equipment underground.

Sandvik has relocated its established ground support manufacturing operation from Bennetts Green to the upgraded Heatherbrae site, bringing local production into a facility designed around automation, safer work and future growth. The move marks the beginning of a 10-year smart manufacturing plan for the region.

Three automated rock bolt production lines sit at the centre of the new operation, alongside automated plate production and plate packing from the presses. Together, the systems are designed to improve consistency and productivity while maintaining specialised manufacturing capability and associated jobs in the Hunter.

The changes are practical as well as technological. Automated material handling will reduce the need for manual intervention at several stages of production, while the modernised facility provides a safer setting for employees to operate and maintain the new systems.

"This is a long-term investment in manufacturing capability in the Hunter," said Derek Hird, Regional Chief Executive Officer at Sandvik Ground Support (APAC). "The technology gives us a more consistent and competitive way to manufacture locally. Just as importantly, it creates opportunities for our people to develop the skills that modern manufacturing needs."

Workforce development is central to the plan. As Sandvik progressively introduces new technology at Heatherbrae, employees will be trained to run, maintain and improve the automated production systems. That combination of equipment and expertise is intended to strengthen the site's competitiveness over the full 10-year program.

Sandvik has long manufactured ground support equipment in the Hunter, supplying the region's mining and infrastructure sectors from Bennetts Green. Heatherbrae builds on that history rather than starting again: the local knowledge and production experience remain, supported by new systems and the engineering capability of Sandvik's global group.

Sandvik is a global high-tech engineering group providing solutions that enhance productivity, profitability and sustainability for the mining, manufacturing and infrastructure industries. The Heatherbrae operation combines Sandvik's global engineering resources with the local production knowledge developed through its Hunter workforce.

Following its official Project Bunjii opening on 26 August, the new Heatherbrae site gives Sandvik room to develop its manufacturing capability over the next decade while continuing to produce in the Hunter. For the people operating its lines, and the industries using what they make, Heatherbrae represents a long-term investment in local manufacturing capability.

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NEWCASTLE AIRPORT NAMED AUSTRALIA'S AIRPORT OF THE YEAR

Newcastle Airport has been named Australia's Airport of the Year at the 2026 Australian Aviation Awards, recognising its transformation into an international gateway for the Hunter and regional NSW.

The national award recognises Newcastle Airport's successful delivery of its international terminal, expansion of its domestic and international route network, commitment to passenger experience, and contribution to regional jobs and economic growth.

Newcastle Airport was selected from a strong field of finalists including Launceston Airport, Mackay Airport, Melbourne Airport and Port Hedland International Airport.

The award follows a significant period of growth for the airport, including the opening of its international terminal and the introduction of new domestic and international routes, providing more travel choice and strengthening connections between the Hunter and destinations across Australia and overseas.

The airport's expansion is also supporting tourism, trade, investment and employment opportunities across the region, including Port Stephens.

Newcastle Airport was also recognised for its operational readiness, innovative terminal design and sustainability initiatives, including carbon reduction, Green Star certification and sustainable airport operations.

The award caps a significant year for Newcastle Airport as it continues its transition from a regional airport to an international gateway for the Hunter.

Port Stephens Council is a joint owner of Newcastle Airport alongside City of Newcastle.

\$2.5 BILLION INVESTMENT IN THE HUNTER'S FUTURE

More than 1,000 Hunter jobs are secure, after the Federal and State Governments have jointly contributed \$2.5 billion to secure the future of aluminium smelting in the region.

The joint investment will deliver a long-term renewable energy solution for the Tomago Aluminium smelter that supports commercially sustainable operations beyond 2028 and accelerates decarbonisation of more than 10% of NSW's electricity grid, supporting and securing the future of one of the state's most important industrial assets.

Tomago Aluminium has agreed to invest at least \$1.1 billion in the facility as part of the deal. This includes \$100 million to drive further decarbonisation activities at the smelter and undertake an innovative demand-response program to support the NSW grid. This demand-response program aims to position the Tomago

smelter as the international leader in electricity demand response and flexibility services.

As part of the agreement, the NSW Government's contribution is capped at \$1.225 billion over 10 years from 2029, supporting the long-term future of Tomago and thousands of Hunter jobs.

As a result, Tomago Aluminium will continue operating beyond the expiry of its current electricity supply contract on 31 December 2028, providing certainty for workers, local businesses and the future of the Hunter region.

Tomago Aluminium is Australia's largest single electricity user. Securing a long-term renewable energy pathway for the smelter is critical to preserving nationally significant industrial capability and strengthens Australia's ability to supply the growing global market for low-emissions aluminium.

The joint investment will underpin nearly 3 GW of new renewable generation and firming capacity, strengthening the state's electricity system and supporting long-term energy affordability and reliability for New South Wales.

Australia is one of only a handful of countries with an end-to-end aluminium supply chain, spanning bauxite mining, alumina refining, aluminium smelting through to advanced manufacturing.

As a major value-added export, aluminium supports jobs, investment and industrial capability while playing a critical role in clean energy technologies, advanced manufacturing and national infrastructure.

The arrangements also ensure revenue comes back to the federal government when aluminium prices are high. This means all Australians will benefit from maintaining domestic aluminium capability and sovereignty, with the added benefit of a monetary return on investment from our governments' contributions should aluminium prices rise.

This joint investment will secure 1,000 direct jobs at Tomago Aluminium and 5,000 indirect jobs across the Hunter region, supporting a stronger and more resilient industrial future for New South Wales and Australia.

EXPANDED SUPPORT FOR AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE INDUSTRY

On 28 August, the Federal Government announced the \$US3 billion Defence Industry Growth Facility, which will ensure that the Australian defence industry can continue to grow and compete on a global scale.

Through the new Defence Industry Growth Facility, the Government will provide loans, bonds, guarantees and equity to support new export opportunities, to expand or upgrade facilities, and to develop new capabilities aligned with Defence priorities.

The new Facility modernises and expands the scope of the previous Defence Export Facility and will now support projects that prioritise sovereign defence capabilities and self-reliance.

The Government is committed to ensuring the Defence Industry Growth Facility is more flexible and responsive to industry needs, particularly small and medium enterprises that require timely access to finance. It is designed to crowd in private sector finance and complement other Commonwealth financing mechanisms.

The Defence Industry Growth Facility will be administered on the National Interest Account by Export Finance Australia.

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JACK-UP BARGE DEPARTS BELMONT AS DESALINATION MARINE WORKS CONCLUDE

Hunter Water has officially completed all major marine construction works for the Belmont Desalination Plant, marking another milestone in the delivery of one of the Lower Hunter's most important water security projects.

With offshore works now complete, the specialist jack-up barge that has been operating off the beach in Belmont has departed the area and returned to CTB Yard in the Port of Newcastle.

The completion of marine works follows the successful construction of the project's 830-metre seawater intake tunnel and recovery of the tunnel boring machine, "Rhiannan", from the offshore intake structure. The tunnel will allow seawater to be safely drawn from the ocean to the desalination plant for treatment.

A key component of the marine works was the installation of the offshore intake dome, which sits above the seawater intake structure and will protect the intake while allowing seawater to be safely drawn into the plant for treatment.

The Minister for the Hunter, Yasmin Catley, said this project is about building the infrastructure we need to futureproof the Hunter.

"The completion of these works marks a major milestone for the Hunter, bringing us one step closer to having this critical piece of infrastructure up and running.

"Getting a project of this scale to this point takes serious engineering expertise, and we're fortunate to have that capability right here in our region.

"Once operational, this desalination plant will be a game changer for the Hunter. It will provide an important new source of water, strengthen the security of our supply and give families and businesses greater confidence as our region continues to grow," Ms Catley said.

Hunter Water Executive Manager Infrastructure Delivery, Justin Watts, said the completion of marine works was a major achievement for the project team and the wider region.

"These works involved some of the most technically complex construction activities undertaken on the project, including offshore tunnelling beneath the seabed, installation of the intake dome and the successful recovery of the tunnel boring machine from the ocean.

"I'd like to thank the Belmont community, local businesses, beach users and stakeholders for their patience and support while these works were carried out.

"With marine works now complete and the jack-up barge having departed, our focus remains on constructing the desalination plant and associated infrastructure needed to connect it to the wider water network," Mr Watts said.

The Belmont Desalination Plant is a key action under the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan and will provide a reliable, rainfall-independent source of drinking water to support the region through future droughts and changing climate conditions.

Once in operation, the plant will be capable of producing up to 30 million litres of drinking water per day, equivalent to around 15% of the Lower Hunter's average daily water demand. The project will strengthen the resilience and diversity of the region's water supply system and help reduce pressure on existing water storages during extended dry periods.

IAN PEDERSEN HONoured WITH PRESTIGIOUS NSW BUSINESS AWARD

Hunter business identity and regional advocate Ian Pedersen has been recognised with a prestigious regional service award as part of Business NSW's 200th anniversary celebrations.

Mr Pedersen, a life member and past president of Business Hunter, was one of 10 business and community leaders from across New South Wales recognised with a Service to the Region Award for making a lasting contribution through leadership, advocacy and service.

Business NSW established the Service to the Region Awards to celebrate individuals whose impact extends beyond their own organisations, creating opportunities, supporting local businesses and strengthening communities across the state.

Business Hunter CEO Bob Hawes said Mr Pedersen's recognition was richly deserved and reflected more than three decades of commitment to the Hunter and the NSW business communities.

"Ian has devoted more than 35 years to serving the Hunter with distinction, generosity and vision," Mr Hawes said.

"His leadership has helped shape some of the most important chapters in our region's recent history.

"Whether it was supporting the Hunter through recovery from the Newcastle earthquake, advocating for the workforce and business community after the closure of the Newcastle Steelworks or championing infrastructure and regional development projects, Ian has always put the region first."

Mr Pedersen served on Business Hunter's board for 17 years, helping guide the organisation and the broader business community through periods of significant change and opportunity. During that period, he was part of the taskforce formed to advise then Prime Minister John Howard on how to manage the impacts of the BHP Steelworks closure on the region.

Beyond Business Hunter, Mr Pedersen has made substantial contributions through leadership roles with Business NSW, Engineers Australia and Regional Development Australia Hunter, of which he is currently Chair.

"It was an unexpected honour to have been recognised by Business NSW for my service to business and the community in the Hunter Region, especially when there are so many other eminent business people in Business Hunter and our region," Mr Pedersen said.

Mr Pedersen received his award from the Governor of NSW, The Hon. Margaret Beazley AC KC at a gala ceremony at Sydney Town Hall last week to mark Business NSW's 200th anniversary. This year is also the 140th anniversary of Business Hunter.

Business NSW President Joseph Carrozzi AM said the award recipients embodied the values that have long defined regional communities across NSW.

"Across NSW, there are people who quietly get on with the job of making their communities stronger," Mr Carrozzi said.

"They create opportunities, support local businesses and bring people together."

Mr Pedersen was recognised alongside recipients from across the state, representing the Hunter, Mid North Coast, Central Coast, Western NSW, Riverina Murray, Northern Rivers, Illawarra Shoalhaven, Western Sydney, Sydney and New England North West regions.





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CITY OF NEWCASTLE UNVEILS UPDATED PLANS FOR NEWCASTLE OCEAN BATHS

City of Newcastle has refined its design for the final stage of the Newcastle Ocean Baths upgrade, ensuring the revitalised community facility is purpose-built for generations to enjoy.

Key changes have been made to the layout and location of the amenities, design of the roof and retention of heritage elements, providing a balance between preservation, functionality and community expectations.

Newcastle Lord Mayor Gavin Morris said he was pleased to see strong feedback from the community, Heritage NSW, the NSW Heritage Council and the Urban Design Review Panel all help shape the design that will go on public exhibition.

"The Newcastle Ocean Baths are a much-loved part of our city, so it's only natural that people have passionate views about their future," Cr Morris said.

"Newcastle Ocean Baths belong to us all. Ask any Novocastrian about them and you'll get a story. They're more than a swimming pool. They are a part of our history, our coastline, and our identity.

"Following the many impassioned conversations during the by-election and since, I presented a Lord Mayoral Minute to Council in May to ensure the community's voice was integral to the revised design process.

"The Newcastle Ocean Baths Stage 2 development has seen Council work closely with Heritage NSW, independent design reviewers and our technical experts to make sure the plans strike the right balance between preserving what makes the Baths special and creating a facility that works well for everyone.

"The updated design gives us an opportunity to deliver a facility that feels open, inviting and easy to use, while respecting the character and history of the site.

"Most importantly, it will provide a safe and accessible place for the community to enjoy now and well into the future."

A development application for the final stage of the revitalisation project, including the pavilion buildings, upper promenade and surrounding areas, was lodged in November last year.

City of Newcastle received feedback from Heritage NSW, the Urban Design Review Panel and the community, which was used to guide the final design.

A more open layout has been introduced to the amenities to make it easier for people to move around, balanced with improved privacy options for users, including children, families and vulnerable people.

The accessible amenities and Changing Places facility have been relocated to the southern pavilion closer to the accessible parking spaces and pool access ramp for added convenience.

Family change rooms have been redistributed across the southern and central pavilions, while the community space has been reduced to accommodate these changes.

The pavilion's roof has also been refined to better balance openness, comfort, privacy and protection from the elements.

It features a simplified design and glazed finish that "floats" above the original building to maximise natural light and ventilation, while an engineered timber frame combines strength and durability with a warm, natural appearance.

Other key updates enhance the site's heritage elements, with changes to the tiered seating adjacent to the Canoe Pool to highlight and preserve the historic seawall, while the Art Deco façade will be enhanced with the addition of a second awning to add balance to the front of the building.

A café and kiosk remain part of the plans in the southern wing of the building, providing both sit-down dining and takeaway options, with the operational plan allowing for earlier opening hours to service the early morning Baths users.

ANAMBAH TO BRANXTON REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT GROWTH AREA

The Cessnock, Maitland and Singleton communities are invited to have their say on the draft Structure Plan for one of the Hunter Region's most significant growth areas.

The draft Structure Plan for the Anambah to Branxton Regionally Significant Growth Area (A2B RSGA) is now on public exhibition for six weeks, following resolutions from Cessnock City Council, Maitland City Council and Singleton Council.

The growth area spans about 15,000 hectares across three local government areas and is well-positioned along major transport routes including the New England Highway, Hunter Expressway, and Main Northern Rail Line.

The Structure Plan implements a key action from the NSW Government's Hunter Regional Plan 2041, providing an evidence-based framework to help prepare for expected growth.

The plan was funded by the Australian Government through the Housing Support Program, which supports the supply of well-located homes. The plan was developed collaboratively by the three councils with technical specialists, NSW Government agencies and industry stakeholders.

It outlines a long-term framework to guide future land uses, infrastructure needs, environmental considerations, transport connections and residential growth.

The Structure Plan will not change existing land zoning or approve development applications. Any future changes to land use or development would remain subject to the established planning and statutory approval processes.

Cessnock City Mayor Dan Watton encouraged the community to read the draft Plan and submit feedback.

"The Structure Plan will provide a big picture of how we can cater for expected growth in the Anambah to Branxton area, and community input has a key role in achieving the best possible results," said Mayor Watton.

Maitland Mayor Phillip Penfold said the Structure Plan is an opportunity to learn from the past and plan for the future.

"We've listened to our community's feedback about the need to plan for growth differently. This Plan is about planning infrastructure alongside growth, rather than catching up after it occurs," said Mayor Penfold.

Singleton Mayor Sue Moore said the collaborative approach by the three councils gave weight to ensure future communities were properly supported to thrive.

"The Structure Plan aims to go beyond the basic provision of housing to consider the needs of future residents in terms of lifestyle and economic opportunities that will reflect all that we already love about our region and help this new area to grow and prosper from the outset," Mayor Moore said.

Visit the A2B information hub at <https://bit.ly/A2BInfoHub> to explore the draft Structure Plan for the Anambah to Branxton Regionally Significant Growth Area and have your say before 6 October.



CONSTRUCTION BEGINS ON OLYMPIC PARK REDEVELOPMENT

Construction has commenced on the Olympic Park redevelopment, marking a significant milestone in the transformation of one of Muswellbrook Shire's premier sporting precincts.

The redevelopment is one of the largest investments in sporting infrastructure in the Shire's history and will create a modern, fit-for-purpose venue for local sport and regional events.

Following the acceptance of the construction tender earlier this year, the project has now entered the delivery phase. Temporary fencing was installed on 10 July before site establishment began on 13 July.

The redevelopment will deliver a modern grandstand and amenities building, enhancing the experience for both female and male players, spectators and sporting organisations while strengthening Olympic Park's capacity to host major sporting events well into the future.

Mayor Jeff Drayton said the project is an investment in both the future of local sport and the wider community.

"Olympic Park has played an important role in our sporting community for generations. This redevelopment will ensure the next generation of local athletes has quality facilities to train, compete and pursue their sporting ambitions close to home, while creating a modern space the whole community can enjoy for years to come," Mayor Drayton said.

Minister for Sport Steve Kamper said the NSW Government is committed to increasing the quality and quantity of sports facilities throughout the state.

"As communities grow and change, so do their sporting needs and local sports infrastructure should cater for this.

"Olympic Park has served the Muswellbrook community for generations, and it's fantastic to see this redevelopment move into construction, delivering the kind of modern facilities local clubs, volunteers and families deserve.

"Projects like this show what's possible when Council, the NSW Government and local partners work together, and I look forward to seeing the benefits it brings to sport and recreation across the region for years to come."

The project has been made possible through a combination of Council investment and external funding from the Priority Community Infrastructure Program (PCIP), the NSW Government Office of Sport's Regional Sport Facility Fund, the NSW Stronger Country Communities Fund and the Bengalla Community Contribution Fund.

Construction of the new grandstand and amenities building is expected to be completed in late 2027, with upgrades to the playing fields to follow as part of the broader redevelopment.

Council will continue to keep the community informed as the project progresses and thanks residents, sporting clubs and park users for their patience and understanding during construction.

INAUGURAL SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT DETERMINED TO HONOUR LEGACY OF FORMER COUNCILLOR

A Newcastle sustainability advocate who co-founded two community-led climate action groups has become the first recipient of a scholarship in memory of former Councillor Sinéad Francis-Coan.

Interior designer Nadine Samwell said she hopes to use the training she receives through Women's Environmental Leadership Australia (WELA) to inspire practical change in people for the benefit of the planet.

Deputy Lord Mayor Charlotte McCabe said the scholarship is the perfect embodiment of Sinéad.

"Sinéad was always looking for ways to share her change-making skills with women and gender diverse community members who have that fire in their bellies for change that she had," Cr McCabe said.

"The problems we face can be overwhelming, but with the right tools and support, advocates for change can make a huge difference. Sinéad definitely demonstrated that throughout her life.

"It's especially meaningful to announce the first recipient of one of three scholarships that City of Newcastle is funding to honour the three years that Sinéad would have been serving as a Councillor."

The scholarship was established through a unanimous notice of motion by the elected Council following the sudden passing of Cr Francis-Coan partway through her first term as a Ward 3 Councillor.

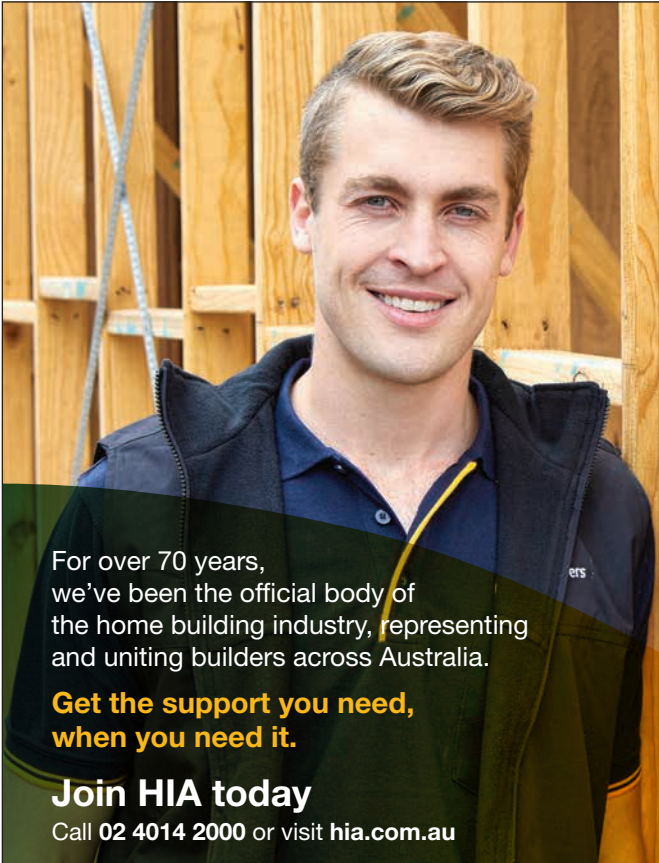
City of Newcastle is funding the initiative for the next three years, providing women and gender-diverse changemakers connected to Newcastle the chance to participate in WELA's transformative national leadership programs.

Through her business, Ms Samwell uses the principles of circular design to keep materials in use for longer, maximising their value and minimising waste.

Her community-led action includes helping to form the Hunter Region Branch of Renew, a national, not-for-profit organisation that advocates for people to live sustainably in their homes and communities.

After taking part in City of Newcastle's Empowering Climate Champions program, Ms Samwell formed another group that funded an energy assessor who visited Mayfield homeowners and provided advice on how to lower their carbon footprint and save money on energy costs.

Ms Samwell said she is honoured to receive a scholarship inspired by Sinéad's substantial contributions towards social equality, feminism and environmental sustainability.



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HOLIDAY PARK STRIKES GOLD AT INDUSTRY AWARDS

Lake Macquarie Holiday Parks have cleaned up at an annual industry awards night, taking home two top gongs and narrowly missing a third.

Swansea Lakeside Holiday Park won the Innovation Award at the Caravan and Camping Industry Association NSW ceremony on 13 August, while Holiday Parks Coordinator Garry Ellem was named the industry's Employee of the Year. Swansea Lakeside also won Bronze in the NSW Holiday Park of the Year category and was a finalist for best NSW Holiday Park on Crown Land.

Lake Macquarie City Council Manager Property and Business Development Elizabeth Lambert said it was "humbling" to receive the accolades.

"Swansea Lakeside Holiday Park is our largest park, with more than 380 sites, but we were up against some really big corporate parks including sites by Big4, Discovery and Ingenia," she said.

"We are so proud of the whole holiday parks team, but particularly Garry who has dedicated the past nine years of his career to making our holidays parks better and more accessible for everyone."

The innovation award recognised a suite of measures and facilities introduced at Swansea Lakeside in the past 12 months, including new sensory rooms, new accessible barbecue facilities and amenities, a new all-abilities exercise precinct, a new website designed to be fully accessible and specialised training for all staff.

Lake Macquarie Mayor Adam Shultz said the awards were a fitting recognition for the hard work, dedication and commitment of Council's holiday park teams.

"Congratulations to Garry Ellem on being named Employee of the Year, and to the Swansea Lakeside Holiday Park team for showcasing why it is one of the best holiday parks in NSW," he said.

"This recognition reinforces Lake Macquarie's reputation as a great place to visit and stay. The team's focus on innovation and improving accessibility is helping more people enjoy everything Lake Macquarie has to offer."

Mr Ellem said all the awards, including his, were a team effort.

"Every step forward and every improvement is guided by our vision to make inclusive tourism mainstream," he said.

"Through the universal design lens, we are always on the lookout for what else we can do that makes our parks easier to navigate and enjoy."

Mr Ellem said more improvements were in the pipeline across all five Lake Mac Holiday Parks sites, starting with the installation of two new tiny homes and an accessible ensuite unit for caravanners at Belmont Lakeside Holiday Park.

"We're also looking to further push the boundary of tourism tiny homes, with designs taking shape for an accessible version," he said.

"The project is in its infancy as we work through the challenges of fitting everything we need into the width of a caravan, but where there is a will, there's a way."



INDUSTRY PATHWAYS CONNECTS LOCALS WITH CAREERS IN CONSTRUCTION

Strong engagement, valuable conversations and new connections have marked the successful launch of Singleton Council's new Industry Pathways program, giving locals a clearer picture of how to build a career in one of the region's leading industries.

Industry Pathways – Construction brought job seekers, career changers and people exploring their next steps together with employers, industry professionals and training providers at Singleton Diggers on Thursday, 20 September.

Participants actively interacted with speakers, asking questions and taking advantage of networking opportunities to make direct connections with industry and training representatives.

They heard from Matthew Haines from Master Builders Association, Marcus Jefferies from the University of Newcastle, retired McDonald Jones Homes executive David Campbell and Sarah Craven from Bouygues Construction Australia, plus connected with representatives from Mai-Wel, Novaskill and SGS.

Mayor of Singleton, Cr Sue Moore said the level of engagement demonstrated the value of creating direct connections between the community and local industry.

"Council has an important role to play in bringing people together and creating opportunities that strengthen our community and our economy," she said.

"Industry Pathways does exactly that by connecting local people with employers and training providers, giving them practical information about the jobs that are available and, importantly, the steps they can take to secure them.

"When we help local people build the skills and confidence to pursue careers here in Singleton, we're also helping our businesses develop the workforce they need to grow and supporting a stronger local economy."

Attendees will also have the opportunity to get a head start in the construction industry, with Workforce Australia funding a limited number of training places in White Card, Confined Spaces and Working at Heights courses for participants from the event.

Cr Moore said the initiative was designed to deliver tangible outcomes beyond the forum itself.

"It's about turning conversations into opportunities and giving people clear next steps, whether that's undertaking training, pursuing an apprenticeship or making a connection with a potential employer," she said.

"That benefits everyone — individuals have greater opportunities to build rewarding careers close to home, our industries gain access to local talent, and our whole community benefits from a skilled and resilient workforce."

Industry Pathways was developed in response to challenges identified through the Upper Hunter Employment Network, including a lack of awareness about local career opportunities and how to access them.

Delivered by Singleton Council in partnership with Workforce Australia, Industry Pathways will return with its next industry-focused forum in March 2027.

David Campbell, Marcus Jefferies, Matthew Haines, Lisa Harpley and Sarah Craven.



HMA

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NSW INVESTS IN THE FUTURE OF INNOVATIVE MANUFACTURING WITH NEW \$6 MILLION FUND

NSW manufacturers will receive support to adopt cutting-edge technologies, boost productivity and create the jobs of the future under a new \$6 million NSW Government initiative.

Applications are now open for the first stage of the NSW Government's Innovative Manufacturing Adoption Fund, a key part of the Minns Labor Government's plan to rebuild local manufacturing capability, strengthen supply chains and grow high-value industries across NSW.

The fund will help manufacturers invest in the technologies, skills and processes needed to compete in increasingly sophisticated domestic and global markets, supporting the government's commitment to building a more productive, resilient and innovative NSW economy.

The fund will be delivered in two stages:

Stage 1 – Discovery and Feasibility (now open). The first stage is a competitive grant program with \$1 million in available funding.

Grants of between \$10,000 and \$50,000 are available to help manufacturers assess new technologies and manufacturing capabilities. Projects may include feasibility studies, business case development, pilot projects, process testing, equipment assessments and certification activities.

Stage 2 – Implementation (opening early 2027). Stage 2 will provide \$5 million in competitive grant funding to help manufacturers implement new technologies and scale their operations.

The fund is open to manufacturers operating in NSW across a range of sectors, including construction, clean energy, transport, defence and aerospace, health and medtech manufacturing.

The fund is aligned with the local manufacturing mission of the NSW Industry Policy and the NSW Innovation Blueprint while building on a series of Government initiatives designed to strengthen advanced manufacturing and modern industrial capability, including the Housing Innovation in Construction Fund and Housing Innovation Network Grants Program.

Applications for Stage 1 of the Innovative Manufacturing Adoption Fund are open now and close on 6 October 2026, or earlier if funds are fully allocated.

NEW DESIGN FOR NELSON BAY ROAD UPGRADE

On 17 August the NSW Government unveiled a new and improved design for the Nelson Bay Road upgrade, delivering a smarter, more viable solution for Port Stephens locals.

Nelson Bay Road is a major corridor on the NSW east coast, connecting Newcastle, Newcastle Airport, Fern Bay and Nelson Bay. The 43-kilometre link carries more than 25,000 vehicles a day, with even higher volumes during peak holiday periods.

Informed by feedback from the Port Stephens community, the new design addresses the priorities and concerns raised by locals, improves access to Newcastle Airport, and optimises connectivity to the upgraded M1.

The three-stage plan includes a new four-lane road between Salt Ash and Bobs Farm and expands the project scope to include staged duplication between Fern Bay and Williamtown. It will also deliver immediate safety upgrades between Williamtown and Salt Ash. The safety improvements will start in 2027.

The new design reflects changing demand across the wider network, with the M1 to Raymond Terrace expected to ease pressure between Medowie and Richardson Roads, while growth around Newcastle Airport is expected to increase demand between Fern Bay and Williamtown.

The improved design replaces the former Liberal-National Government's proposal, a new road alignment from Bobs Farm to Williamtown, which Transport for NSW assessed as not feasible

due to significant engineering, environmental and property complexity, accessibility constraints and cost.

The NSW and Australian Governments have committed \$275 million towards the staged upgrade, with the new design to be formally submitted and reviewed by the Australian Government.

Stage 1 – Salt Ash to Bobs Farm will be a new 2.8 km four-lane road between to improve traffic flow, travel times and safety along one of the busiest sections of the corridor. The new road will support traffic travelling to Port Stephens via Richardson Road, which is expected to grow as a key access route to Sydney and the M1 following the imminent completion of the M1 to Raymond Terrace Extension.

Stage 2 – Fern Bay to Williamtown planning and staged delivery will commence for the duplication of 8km of road, increasing capacity and supporting growth around Newcastle Airport, and between Port Stephens, Fern Bay and Newcastle.

Stage 3 – Williamtown to Salt Ash short-term safety upgrades will be delivered while planning continues for the future duplication of this section of Nelson Bay Road, which has the lowest traffic volumes of the three sections. Some works will commence ahead of Stage 1 in 2027 to address community feedback, reduce crash risk and improve access.

THE HUNTER'S LARGEST FUNDRAISING BREAKFAST CELEBRATES 20TH ANNIVERSARY

The Breast Care Breakfast has been a staple event in the Hunter community for the past 20 years, and this year celebrates its second decade raising money for the breast care nurses of the Hunter Nurse Education Group.

The 2026 Breast Care Breakfast will be held on Thursday, 29 October 2026, from 7:00am to 9:00am at NEX Newcastle, with this year's event featuring inspiring guest speakers and special 20th anniversary celebrations, honouring two decades of generosity, strength, and support for the Hunter's dedicated breast care nurses.

What began as a morning tea to raise money following the tragic loss of a beloved late wife of one of the Partners at PKF Newcastle, has grown into one of the Hunter's largest and most meaningful fundraising mornings, with all funds raised staying in the region to support the Hunter Nurse Education Group.

Over the past 20 years, the breakfast has helped fund education, conference attendance, travel grants, professional development, and nurse-led breast care research projects for local breast care nurses. These opportunities help strengthen the care available to people facing breast cancer across the Hunter, ensuring nurses can continue to provide informed, compassionate, and life-changing support when it is needed most.

The 2025 Breast Care Breakfast raised an incredible \$68,299, and in 2026, is aiming to make the 20th anniversary event its most impactful breakfast yet. Tickets are on track to sell out. Guests can expect a memorable morning featuring insightful speakers, special anniversary moments, exciting raffle prizes, and the opportunity to directly support the Hunter breast care nurses who provide vital care, comfort, and guidance to patients and their families.



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SPEEDY DA SIGN-OFF SEES MAITLAND COUNCIL UNLOCK VITAL INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Maitland City Council's performance assessing development applications (DA) has helped secure a \$2 million funding injection through a NSW Government grant program.

An average DA assessment timeframe of just 85 days during the 2024/25 financial year sees Maitland Council sit well below the state benchmark of 115 days. This performance has been rewarded, with council able to bolster its coffers by tapping into the NSW Government's Faster Assessments Incentive Program, which recently announced more than \$54 million in local infrastructure spending.

Maitland Council secured \$2 million in funding for stage two redevelopment works at Max McMahon Oval in Rutherford. The proposed multipurpose facility is set to include a community event room, storage space, accessible toilets and fencing.

Maitland Mayor Philip Penfold says, "the new building will be a fantastic addition for local sporting clubs and residents in Maitland's west."

"This addition will be a great new multipurpose, event space that will build on recent improvements at Max McMahon Oval and support local clubs, now and into the future," Mayor Penfold said.

"As a Council, we're proud to partner with sporting groups like Maitland Saints Club, Western Suburbs Cricket Club and other levels of government to deliver improved facilities for our growing community."

Maitland City Council Director City Planning Trevor Ryan said the outcome was particularly significant "given the volume and complexity of development assessed in Maitland, including major greenfield subdivisions requiring substantial infrastructure coordination."

"Only three councils in the state – Sydney, Newcastle and Mid-Coast – assessed more DAs with a lower average assessment in the same timeframe."

Mr Ryan said council staff had streamlined internal assessment processes and worked proactively with applicants to identify issues and improve the quality of applications before they were lodged.

"Not only has this meant quicker resolutions and fewer refused applications, but more robust planning outcomes," he said.

In 2024/25, Maitland City Council assessed 858 DAs, totalling \$483 million in development cost.

The planned second phase of redevelopment works at Rutherford's Max McMahon Oval come hot on the heels of a \$3.1 million, grant-funded amenities building which opened in March of this year.

Mr Ryan said, "seeking out and securing similar grant opportunities in the future is core to Council's long-term financial sustainability strategy."

NEWCASTLE FRINGE FESTIVAL SEEKS BUSINESS LEADER TO HELP SHAPE ITS FUTURE

As Newcastle Fringe Festival prepares to return from 6-21 March 2027, the organisation behind Australia's Biggest Little Fringe is seeking a dynamic Business Development Manager to join its Board and help drive the next phase of growth for one of the region's most successful cultural events.

Newcastle Fringe Festival continues to deliver significant social, cultural and economic value to the Hunter region. In 2026 alone, the festival attracted more than 18,000 attendees and generated an estimated \$1.25 million economic impact for the local economy, demonstrating the growing influence of the independent arts sector as a driver of visitation, business activity and community engagement.

Part of a global Fringe movement that champions independent artists and creative expression, Newcastle Fringe provides a platform for emerging and established performers across diverse art forms. The festival has built a reputation for celebrating creativity, fostering inclusion and contributing to a vibrant cultural identity for Newcastle.

Behind the scenes, the festival is powered by an extraordinary network of more than 150 volunteers, supported by a volunteer Board of Directors and a part-time Festival Coordinator. As the event continues to expand, the organisation is focused on strengthening its long-term sustainability and deepening its connections with the business community.

To support this vision, Newcastle Fringe is recruiting a Business Development Manager to join the Board. The successful candidate will play a key role in securing the festival's financial future by developing strategic partnerships, attracting sponsorship opportunities and strengthening relationships with local businesses and stakeholders.

This opportunity is ideally suited to a business leader who is passionate about community impact, skilled in relationship management and excited by the prospect of helping shape the future of one of Newcastle's most beloved cultural events.

The organisation is also seeking a Treasurer who brings strong financial expertise and a passion for supporting the arts.

These appointments follow a significant leadership transition for the organisation. Outgoing Chair Brooke Twyford leaves a strong legacy after helping steer Newcastle Fringe Festival through a period of sustained growth, increasing its profile, audience reach and contribution to the local economy. Building on this foundation, Rebecca Fitzgibbons has stepped into the role of Chair, supported by Nikki Abercrombie as Vice Chair, as the Board focuses on the festival's next phase of strategic growth and sustainability.

In addition to Board recruitment, Newcastle Fringe is actively seeking values-aligned corporate partners for the 2027 festival and beyond. Businesses looking to increase their community impact, connect with diverse audiences and support the creative economy are encouraged to explore partnership opportunities.

For professionals seeking a meaningful governance role, or organisations interested in supporting a growing regional success story, Newcastle Fringe Festival offers the opportunity to contribute to an event that continues to enrich Newcastle's cultural and economic landscape.



HUNTER & CENTRAL COAST HOUSING APPROVALS STRENGTHEN IN 2025/26

Recent ABS figures on new home approvals indicate that housing construction activity across the Hunter and Central Coast performed strongly during 2025/26, according to the Housing Industry Association.

"During the past financial year, a total of 5,397 dwelling approvals were recorded across the Hunter, an increase of 4% compared to the 2024/25 financial year. On the Central Coast, a total of 1,317 dwelling approvals occurred, an increase of 8 per cent," said Craig Jennion, HIA Hunter Executive Director.

"During the 12 months to June 2026 detached housing approvals increased by 13% in the Hunter and 18% on the Central Coast. In contrast, multi-unit approvals declined by 7% in the Hunter and 6% on the Central Coast."

"Much of the residential building activity continues to occur in the statistical areas of Maitland, Central Coast, Lake Macquarie, Newcastle and Cessnock. Together, these locations accounted for 83.3% of all dwelling approvals," said Mr Jennion.

"Port Stephens recorded the largest increase in total approvals, with an additional 229 dwellings approved compared with the previous financial year. Most of this growth was driven by detached housing approvals."

"On a percentage basis, and from a smaller base, Singleton recorded the strongest growth, with approvals increasing by 206% during the financial year. The increase was driven by a 150% rise in detached housing approvals, supported by several multi-unit developments."

"Detached homes remained the preferred choice for home buyers, accounting for 61.3% of all approvals in the Hunter and 65.4% on the Central Coast."

"The value of approved major renovations and alterations remained relatively unchanged in 2025/26 with Hunter approvals easing 1% to \$315.4 million and declining by 4% to \$165.8 million on the Central Coast."

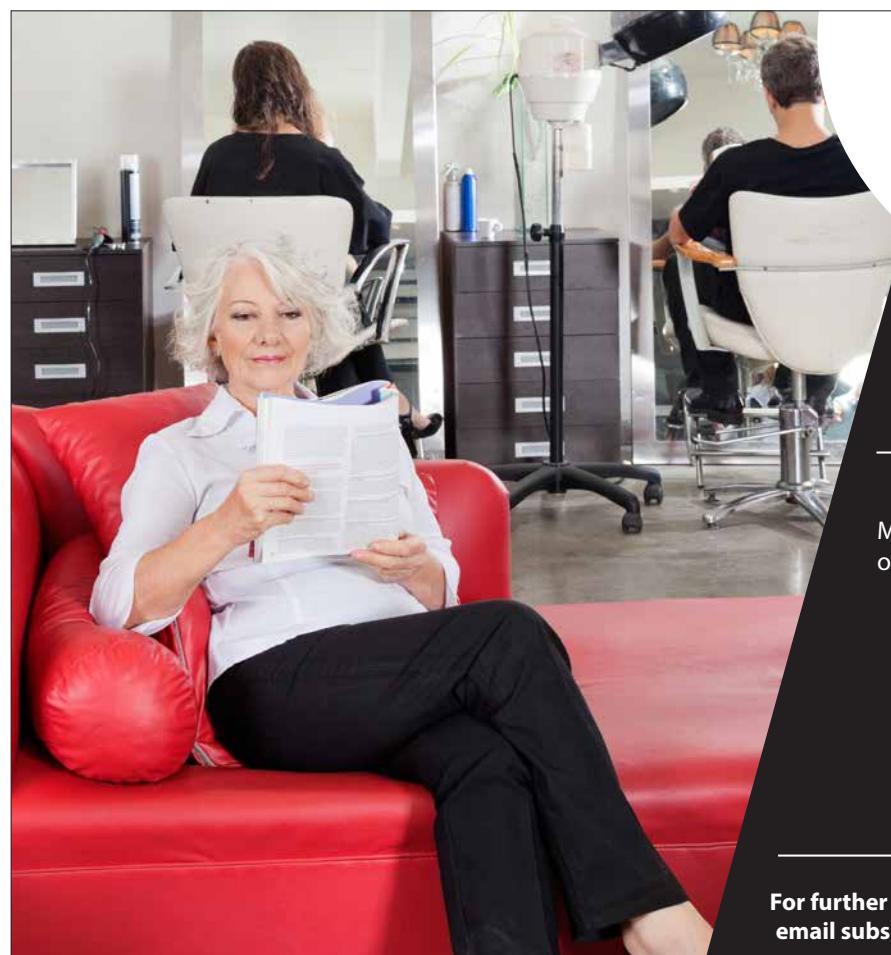
"Much of the approval data reflects market decisions made before the recent disruptions of interest rate hikes, Budget tax announcements and changes in economic conditions. However, looking ahead HIA is forecasting residential building activity to remain resilient."

"Underlying demand for housing remains strong across the Hunter and Central Coast. Continued population growth, internal migration and the region's relative housing affordability compared with metropolitan markets will continue to support demand for both new homes and renovation activity."

"Residential construction remains a significant contributor to the regional economy, and the outlook suggests the sector will continue to play an important role in supporting local jobs, investment and housing supply," concluded Mr Jennion.

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UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

The University of Newcastle has announced the appointment of **Nathan Towney** as Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Engagement and Equity. A proud Wiradjuri man, Mr Towney brings extensive leadership experience across higher education, government, sport and community to the role and to the University of Newcastle's Executive Leadership Team. An alumnus of the University of Newcastle, Mr Towney has a strong track record of building partnerships that deliver lasting impact and has played a pivotal role in positioning the University of Newcastle as a national leader in equity, inclusion and Indigenous advancement.



DELANEY ROBERTS

Delaney Roberts Specialist Family Lawyers has announced the promotion of Newcastle based **Clare McAteer** to Special Counsel. Clare has been with Delaney Roberts for 11 years, having first joined the firm as a Law Graduate. She is now an Accredited Specialist in Family Law, Team Leader and Special Counsel.



MORAY & AGNEW

Daniel Stoddart has joined Moray & Agnew as Partner. He specialises in catastrophic injury, indemnity disputes, fraudulent claims, media sensitive claims and complex economic loss litigation. Daniel advises many of Australia's leading insurers on compulsory third party (CTP), public liability, property damage recovery and section 151Z recovery claims, and has acted in many significant Court of Appeal matters. He is also a respected commentator and sought-after speaker on insurance litigation and claims management.



THE CFO CENTRE

Joe Oosthuizen has joined The CFO Centre Australia & New Zealand as Fractional CFO –Hunter & Central Coast Region. A Chartered Accountant with extensive strategic and commercial leadership experience across multinational and entrepreneurial businesses, Joe partners with SME owners to improve profitability, strengthen cash flow and drive sustainable growth through practical, commercially focused financial leadership.



UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

The University of Newcastle has appointed global technology executive and innovation leader **Dr William (Bill) Lyons** as its new Pro Vice-Chancellor Industry and Engagement. Bringing more than 30 years of experience across aerospace, advanced manufacturing, sustainability, research commercialisation and emerging technologies, Dr Lyons will play a key role in strengthening the University's industry partnerships, driving innovation and translating research excellence into real-world impact.



MORAY & AGNEW

John Deegan has joined Moray & Agnew as Special Counsel. John has more than a decade of experience conducting complex litigated disputes in the District, Supreme, Federal and appellate courts. His practice spans commercial litigation and dispute resolution, general insurance and professional indemnity. John has advised government entities and regulators on commercial and contractual matters and acted for insurers and professionals in complex construction and professional indemnity disputes.



DELANEY ROBERTS

Olivia Shedden has been promoted to Associate Solicitor in the Olivia Shedden to Associate Solicitor in Newcastle office. Shedden joined Delaney Roberts while completing her law degree and has continued to develop her legal career within the Newcastle practice.



MORAY & AGNEW

Roslyn Pavey has joined Moray & Agnew as Special Counsel. Roslyn is a highly experienced wills and estates practitioner with extensive expertise in estate planning, probate and estate administration. She advises high-net-worth individuals, families and business owners on succession planning, trusts, self-managed superannuation funds and intergenerational wealth transfer. Roslyn is recognised for delivering practical, client-focused advice on complex personal and financial matters.

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German engineering meets Australian longwall expertise

KRUMMENAUER has appointed CutBlack as its exclusive Australian partner, strengthening its long-term commitment to one of the world's leading underground coal mining markets.

For more than 100 years, KRUMMENAUER, a German family-owned manufacturer, is globally recognised for its mineral-cutting technology. It specialises in the design and manufacture of longwall shearer cutter drums, continuous miner cutting drums, cutting picks and wear components for underground coal mines worldwide.

Leading CutBlack Technology is respected underground coal mining executive Steven Chandler, whose career includes vast operational experience, equipment design and selection, along with senior management roles with major Australian mining companies. He is joined by Tony Lobb, who brings more than 40 years' experience in the manufacture of underground mining equipment, including longwall conveyors, roof support systems and stone dusting equipment. Together Steve and Tony offer more than 80 years of practical underground coal mining experience from CutBlack in Newcastle Australia.

Mr Chandler said Australian mines required cutter drums designed specifically for their mining conditions.

"Every longwall operation is different. The geology, mining equipment and production requirements all influence how a cutter drum performs. Best outcomes are achieved when the cutter drum is designed to suit the mine, rather than relying on a standard product."

The cutter drum is the primary coal-cutting component on a longwall shearer. A typical Australian operation uses two production drums, each around two metres in diameter, together with spare production drums and dedicated rock drums to maximise equipment availability.

Mr Chandler said the partnership gives Australian mine operators direct access to KRUMMENAUER's specialist design team, supported by local industry knowledge.

"Our role is to understand the mining seam conditions underground and work with KRUMMENAUER to deliver cutter drums that suit each operation. Small changes in drum design can make a significant difference to cutting efficiency, wear rates, maintenance, and longwall output."

Australian customers will have access to KRUMMENAUER's range of products and services through CutBlack Technology, including:

- Longwall shearer cutter drums
- Cutter drum dust suppression systems
- Continuous Miner cutting drums
- Cutting picks and wear components
- Repair and refurbishment services
- Spare parts and consumables

Supported by KRUMMENAUER's manufacturing facilities in Germany and China together with CutBlack Technology's Australian capability, customers will benefit from faster technical support, shorter repair turnarounds and closer collaboration through the life of equipment.



2026 Health, Safety, Environment & Community Awards

The NSW Minerals Council has announced the winners of the 2026 HSEC Awards.

The Awards shine a spotlight on the industry's commitment to new innovations and initiatives within the NSW mining industry, and are a highlight of the annual NSW Minerals Council Health, Safety, Environment and Community Conference held in the Hunter Valley each year.

NSW Minerals Council CEO, Stephen Galilee said "These Awards are a fantastic way of recognising the important innovations in our industry to enhance safety, manage our environmental responsibilities and invest in the future of the communities we operate in".

Winners were announced in four categories – Health Excellence, Safety Excellence, Environmental Excellence and Community Excellence.

"This year we received many impressive submissions, with all finalists and award winners demonstrating our industry's commitment to ongoing improvement, and to mine responsibly now and in the future," Mr Galilee said.

The 2026 Health Excellence Award was presented to Aurelia Metals for their Dustlight Personal Dust Monitoring initiative. Driven by the limitations of traditional gravimetric dust sampling, the Dustlight initiative introduced a real-time wearable dust monitor to give workers immediate visibility of respirable dust exposure during their shifts and see exposure as it happens. By providing immediate feedback and supporting targeted interventions, the initiative has strengthened on-the-ground risk management and improved health safety.

The Safety Excellence Award went to Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group for The Working in Right Places System. A technology-enabled safety control, the Working in Right Places Systems integrated a QR code verification into existing Permit to Work and isolations processes to provide positive confirmation before work begins. Impressively, since its site-wide implementation in July 2025, the initiative has achieved zero incidents involving incorrect isolations or work on the wrong equipment and demonstrates the effectiveness of embedding a reliable verification step into daily operations.

The Environmental Excellence Award was won by GM3 for their use of thermal drones in their joint Threatened Species Project. Traditional wildlife surveying methods are often labour-intensive, conducted at night and often produce less reliable data. In partnership with Symbio Wildlife Park, the University of Wollongong, Conservation Partners and government agencies, GM3 used thermal imaging and aerial verification across 47 sites covering more than 1,175 hectares to detect and estimate populations of endangered koalas and southern greater gliders. This work by GM3 has reframed the Illawarra Escarpment as an active conservation landscape and further demonstrates that mining and biodiversity outcomes can successfully coexist with appropriate management.

The Community Excellence Award was won by Glencore (Ulan) + Peabody (Wilpinjong) + Yancoala (Moolarben) for their Doctors 4 Mudgee Region. Motivated by the deepening healthcare crisis in the Mid-Western region, Glencore Coal, Peabody and Yancoala funded an ambitious six-year, community-led initiative to attract new General Practitioners (GPs) and to build the pipeline into the future. In just nine months, the program has attracted five new GPs to a region facing a GP-to-resident ratio more than double the national average, successfully reopened Gulgong Medical Centre after twelve months without a doctor, and enabled Mudgee Medical Centre to reopen its books to new patients after an eighteen-month closure.



Working in Right Places: Strengthening Critical Risk Controls Through Innovation

For Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group (NCIG), safety is built on a simple principle: every person should return home safely at the end of every shift.

That commitment has driven the development of Working in Right Places, an innovative digital verification system designed to ensure workers are on the right permit, the right isolation and the right piece of equipment before work begins.

Operating a large, complex industrial environment means managing significant sources of hazardous energy. While NCIG has long maintained robust Permit to Work and isolation processes, incident data identified an opportunity to further reduce the potential for human error during maintenance activities.

NCIG is a large industrial site, with significant amounts of similar-looking, parallel infrastructure. This can create confusion for workers, particularly those unfamiliar with the site. Working in Right Places was developed to provide an additional layer of verification, helping workers confirm they are working on equipment that has been correctly isolated before commencing work.

The system integrates with NCIG's existing digital maintenance and safety systems. Before beginning work, personnel use a dedicated Health & Safety app to scan QR codes linked to the Permit to Work, Isolation Plan and physical equipment. When all three elements align, the system confirms the worker is in the right place and ready to commence work.

Importantly, the process does not replace existing isolation procedures or the need for workers to understand their task. Instead, it strengthens one of the most critical points in the isolation process by providing positive verification before work begins.

A key feature of the initiative has been its collaborative development. NCIG's Engineering, Health & Safety, Information Technology, Maintenance and Operations teams worked together, with valuable input from employees and contractor partners. From the earliest concept through to site trials and implementation, the people who use the system helped shape its design, ensuring it was practical, efficient and easy to incorporate into existing work practices.

Working in Right Places was implemented across NCIG in July 2025. Since then, NCIG has recorded no incidents involving personnel working on incorrect equipment or isolations.

Beyond this measurable outcome, the initiative has strengthened confidence among workers, reinforced critical risk controls, and embedded another layer of protection into everyday maintenance activities.

It demonstrates how practical innovation, supported by workforce collaboration and continuous improvement, can strengthen safety in complex industrial environments.

Working in Right Places won the Safety Excellence Award at the 2026 NSW Mining Health, Safety, Environment & Community (HSEC) Conference Awards, recognising NCIG's commitment to developing practical safety innovations that reduce critical risks and support safer outcomes for its people and contractors.



Support programs for Mt Arthur Coal workforce

As part of BHP's preparations to cease mining at Mt Arthur Coal in 2030, they have introduced a range of support programs for their workforce, including paid training through any nationally recognised training program.

As of August 2026, more than 200 Mt Arthur Coal individuals had already taken up this opportunity for free study. They have enrolled in more than 160 different courses through more than 100 different training providers.

There are many options available, and everyone's pathway up to and post closure will be different. Some want to:

- train for a different career path or industry post closure
- redeploy to another BHP site
- work at another coal mine in the Hunter Valley
- undertake rehabilitation work post closure
- apply for a role at one of the future land use opportunities
- retire post closure.

To help the workforce set up their plans for post closure, BHP has also organised:

- Individual Pathway Plans where teammates discuss their individual plans with their Supervisor to ensure they are engaged, empowered and supported
- free Career Coaching sessions to help investigate and formulate ideal, personalised pathway options.

HVO continuation critical for the Hunter economy

Muswellbrook Shire Council has reaffirmed its strong support for the continuation of Hunter Valley Operations (HVO), warning that bringing major mining operations to an early end before replacement industries and jobs are established would have significant consequences for the Hunter economy.

Council believes the HVO Continuation Project should be determined on the merits of the application before the Independent Planning Commission.

Mayor of Muswellbrook Shire Jeff Drayton said the region was actively preparing for a more diverse economic future, but the pace of new investment needs to accelerate.

"We absolutely support the development of new industries and new employment opportunities across the Hunter, and Council has been actively working to attract investment and position our Shire for the industries and jobs of the future," Mayor Drayton said.

"But we must be realistic about where we are today. The investment is not happening quickly enough for major existing industries to be brought to an early end without significant consequences for workers, families, businesses and the broader regional economy.

"We are planning for the closures we know are coming, but preparing an entire regional economy for change takes time. We cannot afford to have that timeframe unexpectedly brought forward before the investment and opportunities are here."

Mayor Drayton said governments needed to match expectations for economic diversification with action to make regional communities more attractive and competitive places to invest.

"If governments want communities like ours to successfully diversify their economies, they need to remove barrier to investment, fast-track enabling infrastructure and approvals, and provide genuine incentives for new industries and businesses to establish in mining communities.

"We cannot transition away from thousands of established mining jobs today on the promise that replacement jobs may arrive tomorrow. We need new investment on the ground and delivering real opportunities before our region can afford to lose the industry it has today.

"I cannot make this point strongly enough: if existing operations are brought to an early end before new industries are established,

we risk dismantling the very foundations needed to support our region's economic future.

"We risk losing skilled workers from the region, weakening local businesses and supply chains, and eroding the confidence and trust of a community already facing considerable uncertainty about what the future holds."

Mayor Drayton said once skilled workers and business capability were lost from the region, rebuilding them would be extremely difficult.

"Attracting new industries becomes much harder if the skilled workforce, established supply chains and strong communities they need are no longer here," he said.

"The decisions being made now about HVO and other major mining operations will have very real consequences for workers, local businesses, contractors, suppliers and families across Muswellbrook Shire and the broader Hunter.

"That is why Council is actively pursuing new investment while continuing to support the industries that currently underpin our economy and employ our people.

"An orderly economic transition cannot be achieved simply by nominating an earlier closure date. It requires a coordinated approach that gives our region the time and investment needed to build a strong and sustainable economic future.

"We want the Hunter to emerge from this period stronger and more economically diverse. To achieve that, we need certainty for our existing industries and a far greater sense of urgency from all levels of government to attract and facilitate the investment that will underpin our future."



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NSW coal exports surge

NSW coal exports are increasing thanks to increased demand from global markets in Asia, delivering an economic boost to the people of NSW.

Data released by Coal Services reveals that coal exports out of NSW increased by 6% in the last financial year, a bump in coal export volumes of almost 9 million tonnes to a total of almost 162 million tonnes for the year.

The strong growth in demand for NSW coal in the last financial year was led by Japan, with increased coal exports of 6 million tonnes to a total of 71 million tonnes. This was followed by Taiwan with increased coal exports of over 4 million tonnes to a total of 19.6 million tonnes and South Korea with coal exports from NSW increasing by 3 million tonnes to a total 8 million tonnes.

In terms of long term demand growth, this latest boost represents an increase of 80% in NSW coal exports over the last two decades. Coal exports are worth over \$26 billion in export revenue to NSW each year and remain the most valuable export commodity.

Energy producing thermal coal was responsible for the lion's share of the increase in demand, up 6.5% in the last financial year as our regional trade partners lock in their energy security.

Welcoming the positive economic news, NSW Minerals Council CEO Stephen Galilee said, "Coal is our State's most valuable export so it's great for the NSW economy that demand for our high-quality resources remains strong."

"With strong coal export volumes, more coal mining jobs, and record coal mining royalties flowing to the NSW Government it is more important than ever to ensure a sensible and balanced approach is taken to policies impacting the sector."

"Right now, there are a number of coal mining projects in the NSW planning system waiting on approvals, including the critical Hunter Valley Operations Continuation Project. There are 1,500 direct mine workers, thousands more in 750 local supply businesses and the entire local community hoping and praying that this project will be approved."

"It's clear there is strong ongoing demand for NSW coal. Our state is in a good position to make the most of the opportunities afforded by this demand if we can approve these critical mining projects already in the planning system," Mr Galilee said.

Port Waratah's Global Award-winning Employee Intranet

Announced 19 August, Port Waratah has been recognised on the global stage, receiving a Silver Award in the prestigious Step Two Intranet and Digital Workplace Awards for its employee intranet, The Channel.

The award recognises organisations that deliver exceptional digital workplace experiences and highlights the growing role intranets play in supporting employee engagement, collaboration and productivity.

Port Waratah's submission was commended for its strong focus on frontline employee needs, bringing together key business information, safety and operational insights, mobile accessibility and a simplified publishing experience that makes it easier for employees across the business to contribute content.

Jennifer Murphy, Specialist Business Information, said The Channel has evolved beyond a communications platform to become a key digital workplace resource that supports how employees work and access information across the organisation.

"The Channel upgrade project in 2024 gave us the opportunity to reimagine our employee intranet and create an innovative, engaging and contemporary platform that is comparable to leading intranets from around the world," Ms Murphy said.

"The redevelopment was designed to address a range of complex digital workplace needs, including improving employee engagement and communications, providing targeted data and notifications, and supporting a highly mobile workforce operating across multiple locations.

"Our IT team consulted extensively across the business to understand the diverse needs of our people. Working closely with our implementation partner, Elcom, we delivered a solution that achieved those objectives.

"The end result is a modern, accessible and highly engaging platform that has become embedded in day-to-day operations and supports how our people work. We are very proud of that."

Port Waratah CEO, Hennie du Plooy, congratulated the teams involved in delivering the award-winning platform.

"To receive a global Step Two Silver Award for The Channel is an impressive achievement and our IT Team and respective business partners and contractors should be very proud of their efforts," Mr du Plooy said.

"The intranet enhancements have delivered clear benefits across our business. More employees are contributing relevant and timely content, while improved access and engagement have strengthened knowledge sharing, responsiveness and internal communication overall."

The award places Port Waratah among an impressive group of international organisations recognised for digital workplace excellence. Gold Award recipients included Adobe, Coca-Cola Europacific Partners and NAB, while fellow Silver Award winners included DTEK (Ukraine) and Smulders Projects Poland (Poland).

The Step Two Intranet and Digital Workplace Awards recognise organisations that are leading the way in intranet, digital workplace and employee experience innovation. The awards celebrate solutions that deliver measurable business value while providing employees with a trusted source of information that helps them stay informed, connected and productive.

Construction begins on landmark Hunter-Central Coast REZ solar farm and battery project

Thousands of Hunter homes will soon be powered by new renewable energy generated in the region, with construction starting on the first major solar and battery project to connect to the Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone.

Once operational, the 135 MW solar farm and 100 MW Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) will generate enough renewable energy to power around 52,000 homes while helping strengthen energy reliability in the region.

Construction commenced on 21 August at the former coal mine site 2.5 km east of Muswellbrook, marking the next chapter in the Hunter's long history as an energy-producing region.

Delivered by renewable energy generator OX2 and co-developed with Idemitsu Australia, the project reached financial close in May 2026 and is expected to support around 200 construction jobs.

The benefits extend well beyond the construction phase. Through an agreement with Muswellbrook Shire Council, OX2 will contribute \$115,000 each year to a Community Benefit Sharing Program, helping deliver lasting benefits for local communities.

The project is expected to connect to the upgraded grid in late 2027 and be operational by 2028.

With the first stage of the Hunter-Central Coast REZ network infrastructure complete, renewable energy generators like OX2 can immediately connect to the grid once construction is completed, delivering more affordable, reliable power for customers across the Hunter.

EnergyCo has commissioned Ausgrid to deliver the upgrade to its distribution network and unlock 1 GW of network capacity in the region by 2028. By building on existing infrastructure, the project will minimise impacts on land, local communities, the environment and consumer bills.

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

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Stratford Renewable Energy Hub: gains NSW Government Approval

The NSW Government has approved the potential development of the Stratford Renewable Energy Hub (SREH), which consists of a pumped hydro scheme and potential solar facility.

Yancoal will now progress with assessing the commercial viability of the SREH, and is also considering preferred ownership, funding and operating models for the project, which would be subject to Yancoal Board approval. While these options are being explored, our focus remains on advancing mine closure activities at both Stratford and Duralie in line with Government regulations and community expectations.

The topography and existing infrastructure at the Stratford site make it an ideal location for a pumped hydro project. Yancoal has conducted thorough investigations and detailed on-site studies to inform the design of the potential project and to avoid and minimise environmental impacts.

If the project proceeds to development, the SREH could inject significant investment into the region and contribute to NSW's renewable energy supply.

SREH has the potential to demonstrate how previously mined land can be sustainably repurposed to provide a beneficial future land use, which could contribute to State and National emissions reduction targets and the sustainability of local communities.

Maxwell Underground Mine

Malabar Resources Maxwell Underground Mine has officially moved into long-term production with the millionth tonne of coal recently railed out and the mine officially opened.

Malabar Resources Executive Chair Wayne Seabrook said this is what a diversified Upper Hunter looks like – mining, renewables, agriculture, horse-breeding, rehabilitation and local jobs supporting one another.

"We were here in November 2022 with shiny shovels turning the first sod for the project. We produced our first bord and pillar coal the following year. In April of this year, less than four years from turning that first sod, we brought a longwall operation online.

"We've created 430 permanent long-term jobs, and thousands of indirect jobs. Hundreds of thousands of shifts have already been worked, kilometres of roadways have been built and more than nine kilometres of new conveyor belts constructed above ground," Wayne said.

"The majority of coal we will produce is capable of making steel for building cities, rail lines, bridges, pipelines and renewables like solar farms and transmission towers. You can't build renewables without steel, and you can't make steel without metallurgical coal. We also produce high quality thermal coal that is suited to high efficiency low emission power stations that continue to be constructed throughout Asia.

"Here in the Upper Hunter there is plenty of work for those who want to roll up their sleeves and do it," he said.

"Recently we announced the Maxwell North project which is an expansion of our operations replicating the Maxwell Underground Mine creating hundreds more local jobs and support even more suppliers and contractors.

"We're also supporting the energy transition. We have the approved Maxwell Solar Farm. Our 350 MW Edderton Solar Farm and battery project is in the planning system, and we have partnered with Akaysha Energy on the Mayfield Mega Battery and datacentre.

"We own substantial rural land and have planted over 350,000 trees on our land.

"So, when people talk about a diversified Hunter this is what it looks like in practice. It's not a slogan, it's real investment.

"The Upper Hunter is a mining region, an agricultural region, a wine region, and a horse region. Maxwell has been designed to operate alongside those industries and to support the long-term strength of the region."

The official unveiling of the sandstone plaque overlooking the stockpiles of coal in July attracted the attention of plenty of politicians.

It was officially opened by:

- The Hon. Yasmin Catley MP – Minister for the Hunter
- The Hon. Courtney Houssos MLC – Minister for Natural Resources
- The Hon. Emily Suvaal MLC – Parliamentary Secretary for Trade and Small Business
- Mr Dan Repacholi MP – Member for Hunter
- Mr Dave Layzell MP – Member for the Upper Hunter
- Mayor Jeff Drayton – Muswellbrook Shire Council

HVO Community Grants Program surpasses \$1 million

Hunter Valley Operations has reached a major milestone, surpassing \$1 million in community investment through its long-running Community Grants Program.

Since 2018, HVO has backed more than 191 community projects, contributing \$1,001,345 to initiatives that strengthen wellbeing, participation, social connection and inclusion across the Hunter region.

In the first round of the 2026 program, HVO is supporting 22 new projects, providing funding for local organisations delivering everything from youth engagement and sporting development to cultural celebrations, community facilities and environmental initiatives.

Round 1 2026 HVO Community Grants recipients:

- Jerrys Plains Public School – Teachers' aide support and new playground
- Singleton Neighbourhood Centre – Annual community assistance
- Singleton PCYC – 2026 Book Fair supporting literacy and youth engagement
- Rotary Singleton – Singleton Art Prize, one of Australia's leading regional art shows
- Business Singleton – 2026 Singleton Business Awards
- Muswellbrook Chamber of Commerce and Industry – Going Country Festival
- Cessnock United Football Club – Replacement soccer goals for U10/11 teams
- Maitland Basketball Association – Replacement of 20-year-old seating used by 300,000 athletes annually
- Jerrys Plains Rodeo Association – Jerrys Plains Junior Rodeo
- Singleton Hospital Auxiliary – New cribs for the maternity unit
- Singleton Golf Club – New Year's Eve community fireworks event
- Hunter Valley Wine Country Landcare – Native seed propagation partnership
- Muswellbrook Football Club – Marquee replacement for match days and events
- New Vine Vineyard Church – Foodbank floor slab works
- Maitland Vale RFS – Brigade equipment and facility upgrades
- Glendon Brook Hall – Public toilet upgrades
- Singleton Preschool – Sensory play lounges for calming spaces
- Kurri Weston District Cricket Club – Major canteen upgrade
- Singleton Australian Football Club – Club rooms fit-out
- Australian Alpaca Association – Hunter Valley Alpaca Show venue hire
- Singleton NAIDOC Committee – Singleton NAIDOC Awards Night
- Kiray Putjung Aboriginal Corporation – Cessnock NAIDOC Family Day cultural activities





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As the 20-year-old sets up his tee shot to aim down the fairway, an old man comments, "When I was your age, we used to hit over the trees, not around to the side."

Feeling challenged, the young man readjusts and tries to hit over the trees... but he can't clear them and loses his ball.

He tries again. Same result — another lost ball.

The old man watches silently, then finally says, "Of course, when I was your age, the trees were only six feet tall."

After shopping for most of the day, a couple returns to find their car has been stolen. They go to the police station to make a full report. Then, a detective drives them back to the parking lot to see if any evidence can be found at the scene of the crime. To their amazement, the car has been returned.

There is an envelope on the windshield with a note of apology and two tickets to a music concert. The note reads, "I apologise for taking your car, but my wife was having a baby and I had to hot-wire your ignition to rush her to the hospital. Please forgive the inconvenience. Here are two tickets for tonight's big concert in town."

Their faith in humanity restored, the couple attend the concert and return home late. They find their house has been robbed. Valuable goods have been taken from throughout the house and there is a note on the door reading, "Well, you still have your car. I have to put my newly born kid through college somehow, don't I?"

A miner is driving to work and gets pulled over.

The cop asks, "Where are you going, whose car is this, what do you do for a living?"

The miner responded, "Mine."

A guy is just about to undergo surgery.

Just as the anaesthesia is about to be administered, he hears the doctor, surgeon speaking, "Don't worry, Bill. This is just a routine operation. There's absolutely nothing to worry about."

The guy looks over and says, "Thanks, but my name isn't Bill."

The surgeon says, "I know. I'm Bill."

A wife asks her husband, "If I died, would you remarry?"

He hesitates, thinks it over carefully, and says, "Probably, eventually."

She asks, "Would she live in our house?"

He says, "Most likely, yes."

She asks, "Would she drive my car?"

He says, "It's a good car, so probably."

She asks, "Would she use my golf clubs?"

He quickly replies, "No, she's left-handed."

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"I knew that if I failed I wouldn't regret that, but I knew the one thing I might regret is not trying"

- Jeff Bezos



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