



Committee for the Hunter

www.hunter.org.au

ceo@hunter.org.au

The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP
The Federal Treasurer of Australia

26 February 2021

Dear Treasurer

RE: 2021-22 Pre-Budget Submission

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission outlining the Committee for the Hunter's (the Committee) priorities for the 2021-22 Budget.

The Committee is an independent and inclusive champion for the people and their enterprises of the Greater Hunter. Representing over 60 organisations including some of the largest employers and institutions in the region, we provide a unified voice for the Hunter. Our members are drawn from the private and community sectors and all three levels of government. We come together with a shared interest in building a sustainable and prosperous future for our region. The Committee delivers on that promise through advocacy, thought leadership and providing a platform for collaborative action.

The most important priority for our members is the diversification and strengthening of the Hunter economy. Our economy, industries and communities are in transition because of the structural decline of mining and coal-fired energy generation.

The Australian economy and quality of life has greatly benefited from the resources, energy and revenues of the Hunter Valley. We are seeking recognition for this contribution through investment in our future in the 2021-22 Budget.

A fair go for the Hunter is not reason alone for Australian Government support. As the nation's largest regional economy generating \$60 billion in GRP and servicing a population of over 1 million, we have the scale and capacity to partner with you to accelerate the recovery of the national economy from COVID-19.

Newcastle Airport Runway Upgrade

The Newcastle Airport Code E Runway Upgrade will anchor the diversification of the Hunter economy through growing the visitor economy, new value-added export opportunities and high value jobs. The upgrade is shovel-ready and stands to deliver \$12 billion in economic activity and create 4,400 local jobs. Its benefits will be realised by the communities and businesses across the Greater Hunter, Central Coast and Northern NSW. That's why the Committee has prioritised this project for your consideration.

The Hunter's leaders and peak bodies are unanimous in their support for this project – we speak to the Australian Government with a unified voice. A voice that is backed by the inclusion of the Newcastle Airport runway upgrade on Infrastructure Australia's 2021 Infrastructure Priority List.

And it is what our communities are asking for. Research reveals that 89 per cent of those surveyed support the runway upgrade.¹ They know it will change lives and the outlook for their businesses, with 92 per cent agreeing the project will grow local jobs and the economy. Such is the grassroots support for this upgrade that almost 40 per cent of the local community indicate they are likely to change their vote based on support for the project.

Hunter Valley Diversification Plan

The Newcastle Airport runway upgrade is a relatively small project that delivers a big return. These returns would be multiplied if the project were to be undertaken as part of an integrated plan for diversification of the Hunter economy. This plan should also include the containerisation of the Port of Newcastle and incentivise the growth of industry and jobs building from the Hunter's competitive advantage. These include defence industries, energy, medical research and technology, and advanced manufacturing.

The Committee urges Government to commit resources to the development of such a plan and its implementation. Australia's economic and energy transition depends on the success of the Hunter – and we need your support. This does not only mean funding. The Commonwealth has tremendous powers of coordination to bring other levels of government, the private and community sectors together in a shared plan for jobs and growth in the Hunter, as demonstrated through City and Regional Deals.

The Committee for the Hunter with our region wide focus, cross-sector membership and unified voice is well placed to provide a supportive platform for this approach.

Our advocacy for strategic, coordinated investment in the Hunter is endorsed by Infrastructure Australia's advice to focus on economic development in regions and the National Farmers Federation's call for a well-resourced *Regionalisation Agenda*.

If you would like more information on the Newcastle Airport Runway Upgrade project, please contact Stephen Crowe, Executive Manager Corporate Affairs on +61 418 763 800 or scrowe@newcastleairport.com.au

To discuss an economic diversification plan for the Hunter Valley or for more information about this submission and the Committee for the Hunter, please contact Alice Thompson, CEO, on +61 490 688 125 or ceo@hunter.org.au and visit our website at hunter.org.au

Sincerely



Richard Anicich AM
Chair
Committee for the Hunter



Alice Thompson
CEO
Committee for the Hunter

¹ CT Group, October 2019, *Newcastle Airport Research* (1,000+ survey participants across the Port Stephens, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Cessnock and Newcastle LGAs)