



HUNTER AGENDA PRIORITIES FOR THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

Election 2022



HUNTER AGENDA

Priorities for the Australian Government

Federal Election 2022

1. More public investment to urgently improve and increase the stock of social and crisis housing in the Hunter.
2. Fund a program of enabling infrastructure to unlock over 40,000 homes and 590 hectares of employment land stuck in the planning pipeline.
3. Remove restrictions in the Port of Newcastle Port Commitment Deed impeding the development of the Newcastle Container Terminal.
4. A shared solution to fund the Newcastle Airport terminal upgrade to activate the full benefits of the runway Code E upgrade.
5. Commit to building high speed rail between Sydney and Newcastle with a long term travel time target of 45 minutes, including funding for early works to improve current services and corridor acquisition.
6. Improve telecommunication infrastructure and services, addressing mobile blackspots across the region and providing high service levels for decentralised business and remote working.
7. Sustainable funding for the Hunter's Regional Hydrogen Tech Cluster (NewH2).
8. Scope a National Hydrogen Training & Testing Centre located in the Hunter Hydrogen Hub.
9. Continued funding and support to develop the Hunter Hydrogen Hub as projects move through feasibility.
10. Co-fund a dedicated Hunter office to promote, attract and concierge investment in clean energy, hydrogen and low carbon futures.
11. Trial an APS Academy Campus and remote working hub in the Hunter.
12. Fund a package of scholarships, visa incentives and promotions to attract international students back to regional centres including Newcastle.
13. Undertake a workforce and skills gap assessment aligned to sectors of competitive advantage to design new pathways for learners in the Hunter.
14. Resource a place-based program to accelerate progress on the 17 Closing the Gap targets to improve the lives of Aboriginal people in the Hunter and surrounds within a generation.
15. Establish a dedicated office to provide tailored engagement, direction and services to SMEs affected by change in coal industries to help them diversify.
16. Partner with the NSW Government to resource programs and projects to support communities exposed to changes in coal mining and power generation industries.
17. Address the shortfall of funding and sustainable provision of the vital GP Access After Hours service in the Hunter and surrounding communities.
18. Contribute to funding the Hunter Medical Research Institute (HMRI) research facility at the New Maitland Hospital.
19. Improve services and access to mental health services for young people living in the Hunter.

The communities and businesses of the Hunter are affected more than most as the world moves to low carbon energy and Net Zero

We also have the most to gain.

There is an urgent need to **create new jobs** in the Hunter and **connect impacted workers and businesses** to these opportunities. This requires smart planning and investment, and partnerships across governments, business, industry and communities.

Hunter Agenda | Priorities for the Australian Government presents an ambitious vision to triple the number of jobs currently occupied by coal mining and energy generation (collectively, coal industries) in a range of sectors over the next decade.

This includes jobs in industries of national priority.

We identify the actions and investments that will unlock this vision and address issues that are getting in the way.

These recommendations have been informed by evidence, expert advice and consultation. It is a plan for the Hunter, by the people and enterprises of the Hunter.

These initiatives have been prioritised because they:

- Support the diversification and sustainability of the Hunter economy
- Will deliver significant employment, economic and social benefits
- Promote equitable development, benefiting communities across the Hunter region and beyond
- Leverage significant partner funding
- Align with national priorities
- Enjoy significant stakeholder support.

Through targeted investment leveraging the region's scale, infrastructure, capabilities and advantage, the Hunter will provide more jobs and prosperity for Australians, quicker and at lower cost

This advice identifies a portfolio of investments in the Hunter that will deliver, at scale, on national objectives for economic growth, Net Zero, improved living standards and recovery from COVID.

If these measures were actioned as part of an integrated plan, the benefits of individual projects would be multiplied.

We recommend that investments are coordinated in a tri-level intergovernmental agreement to achieve our shared vision for the Hunter:

- Triple the number of local jobs currently occupied by coal industries in a diverse range of industries over the next decade.
- Position the Hunter as a global centre for Net Zero and clean energy.
- Bring the socio-economic outcomes of Hunter communities on parity with Greater Sydney.

Recent announcements bringing forward the closure dates for coal fired power stations in the Hunter reveal that change is coming quicker than anticipated

The Hunter has the tools and local know-how to thrive from this disruption. It has done this before with the closure of BHP in the 1990s.

The region proudly stands on its own two feet because of this achievement and our substantial contribution to national prosperity. The Hunter also needs leadership from the Australian Government given the scale, urgency and significance of the challenge.

Australia's commitments to Net Zero and future competitiveness in a global economy depend on what happens in the Hunter.

Success will be forged from the people, assets and capabilities of traditional coal industries, creating an enduring connection between the Hunter's past and an even better future

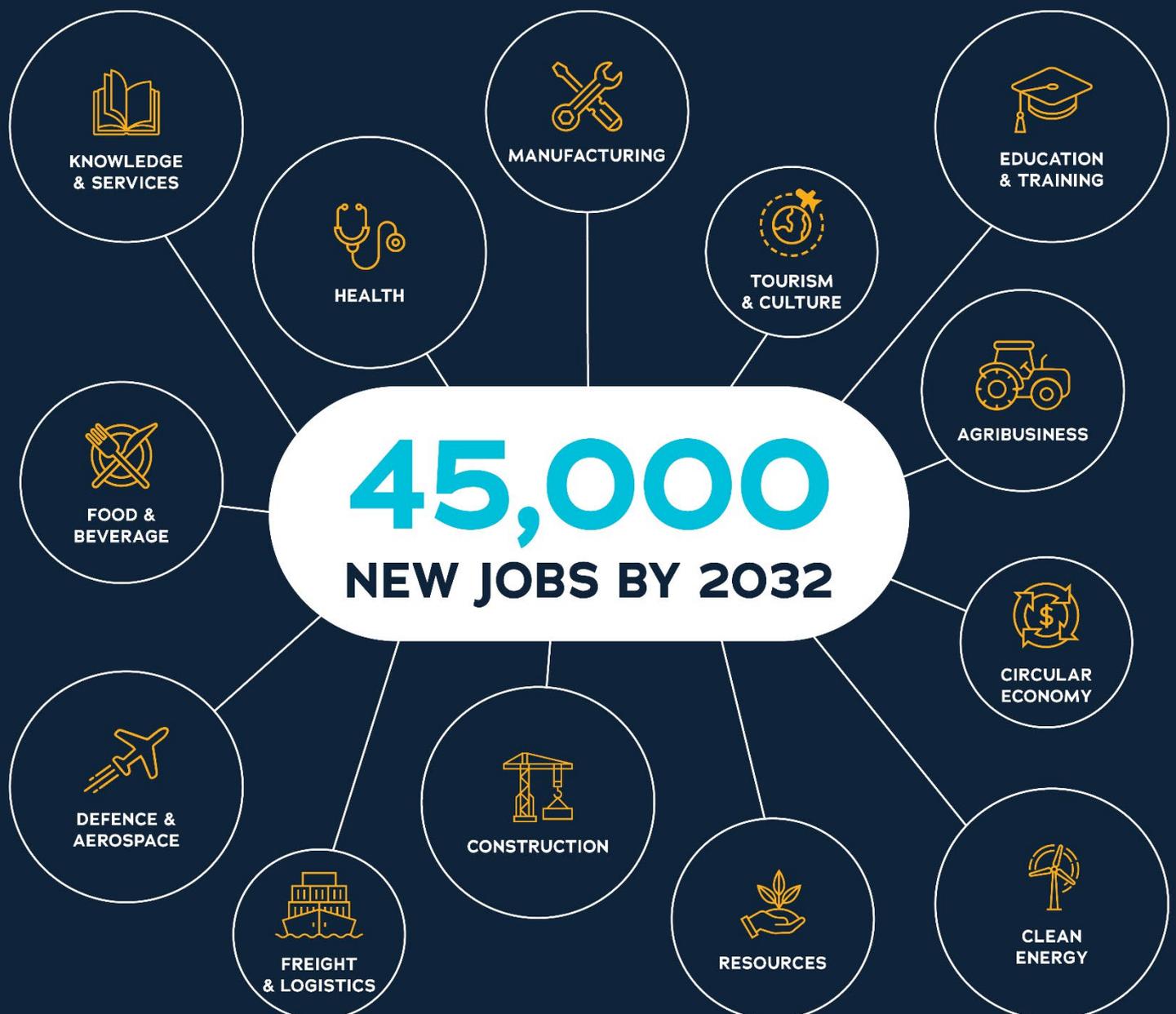


A VISION FOR THE HUNTER

Triple the number of local jobs currently occupied by coal mining and energy in a diverse range of sectors over the next decade

Position the Hunter as a global centre for **Net Zero & clean energy**

Bring the **socio-economic outcomes** of Hunter communities on parity with Greater Sydney



Address the housing affordability crisis

Priorities

1. More public investment to urgently improve and increase the stock of social and crisis housing in the Hunter.
2. Funding for a program of enabling infrastructure to unlock over 40,000 homes and 590 hectares of employment land stuck in the planning pipeline. For example, a \$40m upgrade to Mandalong Road in Morisset in Lake Macquarie will release \$1.2b in capital investment, 6,500 jobs, 4,500 new homes and 175ha of employment land.

The Hunter is in a housing crisis.

House and rental prices are increasing. Rental vacancy rates are decreasing, a trend that precedes COVID. Just 5.5 per cent of all rental properties advertised across the region are affordable for households on income support. A significant shortfall in the supply of new housing has been forecast over the next five years.

Housing problems are a symptom of the Hunter's growth and success. With targeted planning and investment, the Hunter can do more heavy lifting in the national solution to housing. Without intervention, housing affordability issues will increase inequality and impede our region's growth and competitiveness.

More than \$20 billion in development is being held up by transport infrastructure delays. Those developments could deliver over 40,000 homes, 590 hectares of employment land supporting 28,000 jobs and \$37 billion in economic benefits.

Development continues to be a significant source of economic activity and employment in the region. In the Hunter, the construction sector employs over 26,000 people and generates economic output of \$13 billion.



Unlock the Hunter's international gateways

Priorities

3. Remove restrictions in the Port of Newcastle's Port Commitment Deed impeding the development of the Newcastle Container Terminal.
4. A shared solution to fund the Newcastle Airport terminal upgrade to activate the full benefits of the runway Code E upgrade.

The international gateways of the Port of Newcastle and Newcastle Airport that connect the Hunter to the global economy are vital assets in our region's development. Focus and investment in these ports will leverage and strengthen the Hunter's export and import capabilities in [industries of national priority](#).

Regional leaders continue to assert how critical unlocking the Newcastle Container Terminal is to the Hunter's growth and diversification. This will unlock \$2.4 billion in private investment and 15,000 jobs beyond the boundaries of the region.

Our world-class Hunter manufacturers – a growth sector of national priority – are paying an additional tax in terms of increased costs and time by importing and exporting via Sydney. With further export opportunities for value-added food and pharmaceuticals opened up by a link to the Inland Rail, investments in the Port will deliver benefits beyond the Hunter to the communities and businesses of regional NSW.

The recent [Hunter Global summit](#) focused on partnerships between governments, business and communities on activating opportunities for the region's growth and development offered by the international upgrade of the Newcastle Airport.

These two projects will catalyse 20,000 new jobs in the Hunter region.

Improve inter-regional connectivity

Priorities

5. Commit to building high speed rail between Sydney and Newcastle with a long term target travel time of 45 minutes:
 - Funding for early works, including an interim program of upgrades to improve current rail services and reduce travel times in the short term
 - Funding for corridor planning and acquisition.
6. Improve telecommunication infrastructure and services, addressing mobile blackspots across the region and providing high service levels for decentralised business and remote working.

The Hunter is the northern anchor of the global Sydney megaregion – Australia's largest and most important growth corridor. The Hunter is not dependent on Sydney, but it benefits from proximity. Improvements to this connection – both transport and digital – as well as our connection to other centres in Australia will strengthen the Hunter's role in the NSW and national economy.

The impacts of COVID on work and settlement has provided a catalyst to rethink high speed rail along the Sydney – Newcastle corridor. This project would be truly region-shaping, setting the ambition and foundations for a population beyond 1 million.

Public transport is consistently identified as a key issue for citizens and was recognised as a gap in Infrastructure Australia's Regional Strengths and Infrastructure Gaps report. It is important to bring forward practical upgrades that speed up and improve services now, while building options for future high speed rail.

Grow green jobs and hydrogen

Priorities

7. Sustainable funding for the Hunter Regional Hydrogen Technology Cluster (NewH2) to continue to build the capacity of local businesses to participate in hydrogen value chains and service growing demand.

8. Scope a National Hydrogen Training & Testing Centre located in the Hunter Hydrogen Hub, delivering on a near-term priority in the Hunter Hydrogen Roadmap.
9. Continued funding and support to develop the Hunter Hydrogen Hub as projects move through feasibility.
10. Co-fund a dedicated Hunter office to promote, attract, and concierge investment in clean energy, hydrogen and low carbon futures. The clean energy business concierge will strengthen and coordinate investment attraction functions in the region by:
 - Promoting the region to the world as the most exciting place to live and invest to lead the low carbon economy, leveraging Government's decision for the Hunter to be a national Hydrogen Hub
 - Proactively attracting public and private investment, including through a dedicated investment concierge with high service levels and experience for investors
 - Facilitating investment decisions by brokering key relationships, tapping into regional networks, supply chains and government to unlock deals
 - Identifying and addressing blockages and enablers to strengthen the region's value proposition in clean energy.

Net Zero emissions must be built into the Hunter's development trajectory to remain competitive. There is also an opportunity to harness global appetite to invest in clean energy and Net Zero and direct that to the Hunter to create jobs.

An open invitation to business backed by a dedicated front door for investment inquiries and quality concierge service will accelerate and increase job-creating investment in the region in a competitive environment. The overwhelming response to the Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) confirms the strong appetite for investment in clean energy when proponents are provided with a streamlined pathway.

There is scope for a dedicated business concierge to strengthen and accelerate clean energy investment and demand for jobs across the value chain, including manufacturing, research, tech, retail, finance, education, critical minerals and generation.

The Hunter's coal capabilities give the region a head start to be a global hydrogen export hub. The [Hunter Hydrogen Roadmap](#) sets out the pathway, including the projects, infrastructure and enablers needed to get there. This includes sustainable resourcing for the Australian Government co-funded Hunter Regional Hydrogen Technology Cluster, building the capacity of local business to meet demand for hydrogen.



A smart and skilled workforce

Priorities

11. Trial an Australian Public Service (APS) Academy Campus and remote working hub in the Hunter.
12. Fund a package of scholarships, visa incentives and promotions to attract international students back to regional centres including Newcastle.
13. Undertake a workforce and skills gap assessment aligned to sectors of competitive advantage to design new pathways for learners in the Hunter that:
 - Cross high schools, vocational and tertiary education, industry and practice
 - Address current workforce shortages and build capacity for emerging opportunities and needs
 - Accelerate accreditation while strengthening standards
 - Identify and resource incentives to support coal industry workers seeking to retrain, including scholarships and course fee discounts.

In the new economy, people are our most important asset. We know this because access to a smart and skilled workforce is frequently cited by incoming business as a condition of investment.

The Hunter's smart and skilled workforce is recognised as a key strength. Most businesses in the region are now reporting difficulties in accessing workers to meet current demands.

While we work to address these shortages, it is important to cast our eye on future demands and opportunities to strengthen and increase the region's labour force to meet ambitious targets for the growth of high value jobs. Less than 50 per cent of our population have post-school qualifications, yet over 90 per cent of future jobs are expected to require such qualifications.

Regional leaders are aligned that this will require new pathways for learners across schools, vocational and tertiary education, industry, research and governments to achieve this.

Sharing the opportunities of growth

Priorities

14. A place-based program with a long-term funding commitment for services and projects to accelerate progress on the 17 Closing the Gap targets to improve the lives of Aboriginal people in the Hunter and surrounds within a generation.
15. Establish a dedicated office to provide tailored engagement, direction and services to SMEs affected by change in coal industries to help them diversify.
16. Partner with the NSW Government to resource programs and projects to support communities exposed to changes in coal industries, and the long-term diversification and sustainability of the Hunter economy.

Development and growth must be focused on improving living standards across the Hunter. This includes housing, infrastructure and services to support a growing population and vulnerable communities.

The disparity between the socio-economic outcomes of Hunter communities and our Sydney neighbours is not explained by being remote or a lack of resources. There are also considerable disparities in the outcomes experienced by people across the region, including lower outcomes for those living in the Upper Hunter and Indigenous communities.

With people being the most important resource in the new economy, we need to do better to share the opportunities and benefits of growth.

The people of the Hunter are impacted more than most as the world shifts to Net Zero. Special attention must be paid to supporting workers, their communities and SMEs in coal supply chains to diversify and prosper through economic change.

The Committee has identified a need for a dedicated office to provide tailored engagement, direction and services to SMEs in coal supply chains. Businesses have a strong understanding of the disruption ahead but say there is no clear pathway or support to help them diversify clients and services to protect jobs. Services and advice could include financial planning, e-commerce, trade and exports, legal advice and mental health.

Improve health services

Priorities

17. Address the shortfall of funding and sustainable provision of the vital GP Access After Hours service in the Hunter and surrounding communities. This includes no further reduction in funding for GP after-hours programs over the next five years.
18. Establish a Regional Health Research Hub in the Hunter, providing funding to build a \$40 million Hunter Medical Research Institute (HMRI) research facility at the New Maitland Hospital.
19. Improve services and access to mental health services for young people living in the Hunter.

Bringing the health outcomes of Hunter communities on parity with Greater Sydney is a priority in our region's development.

It also represents good economic policy. Health is a sector of competitive advantage in the Hunter. It is one of the largest employers in the region and in the top three sectors for incoming investment inquiries. Quality, accessible and affordable health services are critical in enhancing liveability and supporting the workforce we need to grow our economy.

Actions to improve health services for citizens will grow health industries and new jobs.

The HMRI Regional Health Research Hub will contribute \$193m to the economy, creating more than 700 jobs.



ABOUT THE HUNTER

With a service population of over one million, the Hunter is Australia's largest regional economy generating over \$60 billion in gross regional product

The Hunter is a centre of significant weight in the national economy, with a world-class international port, airport and university, and a vibrant, renewed CBD at our heart.

Generating 63 per cent of NSW energy needs and with our skilled workforce, infrastructure and natural resources, the Hunter has powered the nation's economy for decades delivering higher standards of living for Australians.

The Hunter provides essential supply chain services, connecting regional Australia to domestic and international markets opened up by free trade agreements.

We are home to two military bases including the nation's main fighter pilot training hub and base for the F-35A Joint Strike Fighters and the Australian Army School of Infantry.

With our connections to global energy customers, the region has been identified as a national Hydrogen Hub to supercharge the development of a multi-billion dollar export industry. With some of the nation's largest energy users and emissions intensive businesses in hard-to-abate sectors, domestic commitments to Net Zero depend on the Hunter. As Australia's Energy Capital, we can lead the way to address this global challenge and seize the benefits of the low carbon economy.

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE FOR THE HUNTER

The Committee is an independent and inclusive champion for the people of the Greater Hunter and their enterprises. Representing over 60 organisations including some of the largest employers, institutions and peak bodies 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, prosperous and equitable future for our region. The Committee delivers on that promise through advocacy, thought leadership and providing a platform for collaborative action between governments and the region.

The diversification of the Hunter economy is a [strategic priority](#) of the Committee.

For more information on priorities and projects visit www.hunter.org.au.

For more information on these priorities, please contact:

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