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WORKPLACE & EMPLOYMENT

From the Editor



It was pleasing to hear of the Economic Reform Roundtable being announced for August, particularly after last month's editorial about the sluggish economic performance and critical need to increase Australia's flagging productivity growth.

The Roundtable has the focus of lifting living standards with three main themes:

- Making our economy more productive.
- Building resilience in the face of global uncertainty.
- Strengthening the budget and making it more sustainable.

The success of the Roundtable will of course be determined by the actions that take place. It can't be a talkfest where attendees may feel a bit better by presenting their views and ideas, but little comes out in the way of positive actions.

It is essential that the Government approaches the Roundtable with an open mind and listens to the representatives from across the country.

With the Government having such a large majority and early in the election cycle, now is an excellent time to implement some measures that may not have immediate electoral rewards but will make a real difference in the long run to Australia's economic prosperity.

We all hope that this opportunity will be fully utilised and will eagerly await the action plans.

The NSW Budget released on 24 June was a low-key affair, with few surprises.

The Budget projects a deficit of \$3.4 billion in 2025-26 down from \$5.7 billion in 2024-25 and returning to surplus by 2027-28, although further actions will need to be taken for this to occur.

There were some positive measures, including the \$150 energy rebate, measures designed to boost housing construction, continuation of free TAFE training for trainees and apprentices, and an \$80 million funding initiative to encourage innovation.

Locally, there was substantial funding for a range of local projects, including \$115.5 million to build the Newcastle Logistics Precinct (see article in this issue), John Hunter Hospital redevelopment and a number of other local infrastructure projects, but these were all previously announced.

There was no further word on other important local projects, including the Broadmeadow Precinct.

All in all, it was pretty much a steady-as-you-go budget that will not have massive benefits or major negative impacts.

It would have been good to have seen more benefits for business, but at least it didn't have major negative surprises.

Garry Hardie
Editor and Publisher

ON THIS MONTH'S COVER

Image courtesy of Kongberg who are building a state-of-the-art missile manufacturing and maintenance factory at Williamstown. See page 24 for further information.



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Whiteley opens first-of-its-kind therapeutics plant in NSW

Australian family-owned manufacturer, Whiteley, has officially opened its new Human Therapeutics Plant in Tomago. The first-of-its-kind Therapeutics Plant will strengthen local manufacturing capability and deliver new jobs and innovation to the Hunter region.

The \$25 million purpose-built plant will manufacture alcohol-based hand rubs and over-the-counter medicines for use in hospitals and healthcare facilities across Australia and New Zealand.

Whiteley Executive Chairman, Dr Greg Whiteley, and NSW Member for Port Stephens, The Hon. Kate Washington MP, officially opened the new plant in ceremony attended by more than 100 key stakeholders and staff.

Once fully operational, the new facility will create 30 new jobs across research, manufacturing, compliance and operations, and will position Whiteley as significant employers in the Port Stephens local government area.

"This facility is a long-term investment in Australian science, Australian jobs and Australian manufacturing," said Dr Greg Whiteley, Executive Chairman of Whiteley.

"This sector has long been dominated by multinational corporations. This plant levels the playing field and puts the Hunter region at the centre of therapeutic manufacturing in Australia."

Whiteley is Australia's largest manufacturer of hospital-grade disinfectants and high-level infection control solutions. A 92-year-old family business, Whiteley has operated from Tomago since 1995 and continues to expand its footprint both nationally and internationally. Whiteley now exports to more than 35 international markets.



Whiteley Executive Chairman, Dr Greg Whiteley, and NSW Member for Port Stephens, The Hon. Kate Washington MP

The company recently achieved Medical Device Single Audit Program (MDSAP) certification, enabling it to export medical devices from Tomago to the USA and Canada, a milestone that supports the global growth of Hunter-made products.

The new facility is designed to Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) standards and is the only therapeutic plant in NSW to meet modern fire safety and engineering compliance benchmarks. It will also serve as a hub for collaborative research with leading Australian universities, including the University of Newcastle, University of Sydney and Western Sydney University, focused on tackling antimicrobial resistance and chronic biofilm-mediated infections.

"This is more than a factory. It's a platform for scientific innovation and global competitiveness," said Dr Whiteley.

"We're proud to be turning Australian research into real-world therapeutic products that are made in the Hunter to serve the healthcare system long into the future."

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NSW Budget delivers Newcastle Logistics Precinct to support energy investment

The NSW Government is investing \$115.5 million to build the Newcastle Logistics Precinct – a critical new hub that will support the delivery of more reliable and affordable renewable energy to homes and businesses across NSW.

The investment in the 2025-26 NSW Budget will see the Precinct developed next to the Port of Newcastle, at the former BHP Steelworks' Intertrade Site. It will provide portside storage for equipment, including wind turbines and transformers, that is needed to build renewable energy projects across the state.

Equipment will be stored on a newly paved laydown area before being loaded on to heavy vehicles. It will then be transported to energy projects using the state road network, sections of which are already being upgraded to deal with these heavy vehicle movements and build better roads for communities.

This investment delivers on the Government's commitment to ensure the build out of the renewable energy zones has the infrastructure it needs.

EnergyCo is working closely with the Port of Newcastle on the development which will streamline delivery and strengthen the supply chain between the Port and the renewable energy zones.

The Precinct is one of several projects being delivered in the Hunter region as part of the transformation of our electricity system. Others include the Port to REZ road upgrades, Hunter Transmission Project and the Hunter Central Coast REZ, which will deliver clean, reliable and affordable energy, create jobs and drive long-term economic growth.

The redevelopment also recognises the heritage features of the site and will protect the Newcastle Steelworks Memorial, which



adjoins the site. Some buildings on the site are being nominated for heritage recognition.

The Precinct is subject to planning and environmental approvals and will include an Environmental Impact Statement and a public exhibition period.

Mountain biking in Singleton boosted by \$500,000 upgrade

A \$500,000 project to upgrade Pioneer Road Mountain Bike Park has further cemented Singleton's place on the trail of must-visit mountain biking destinations thanks to a grant from the NSW Government's Regional Housing Fund.

Delivered in a partnership between the NSW Government, Singleton Council and the Singleton Mountain Bike Club, Mayor of Singleton, Cr Sue Moore has officially opened the completed project ahead of the first Singleton Mountain Bike Club race on the upgraded track.

After it was identified as the number one priority area in Singleton's Mountain Bike Feasibility Study adopted in 2021, works included upgrading 9.4 km of existing trails, construction of 1.7 km of new trails and closure and rehabilitation of 2.4 km of existing trails for biodiversity protection.


The upgraded trails are suitable for intermediate to advanced riders, and as well as accommodating local residents, are also expected to entice even more people to visit Singleton Hunter Valley.

The NSW Government's Regional Housing Fund (RHF) has provided \$1.4 million for five projects in the Singleton area with the Pioneer Road Mountain Bike Park being the final project to be completed by Council.


Singleton Mountain Bike Club vice president Dave Tattis, Secretary Alan Fletcher, Mayor of Singleton Cr Sue Moore and Singleton Council General Manager Justin Fitzpatrick-Barr



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New community facility and café at Blackbutt Reserve

City of Newcastle has delivered the last major milestone in a shared vision for Blackbutt Reserve after officially opening the doors on its new \$3.2 million multipurpose community facility.

Located in the Carnley Avenue recreation area, the environmental education, meeting and function space and cafe forms part of Blackbutt Reserve's Plan of Management, which was developed following community consultation.

An accessible path around the adjacent lawn area was also installed as part of the project, to create better connections between the play space, amenities, animal exhibits, café and community facility.

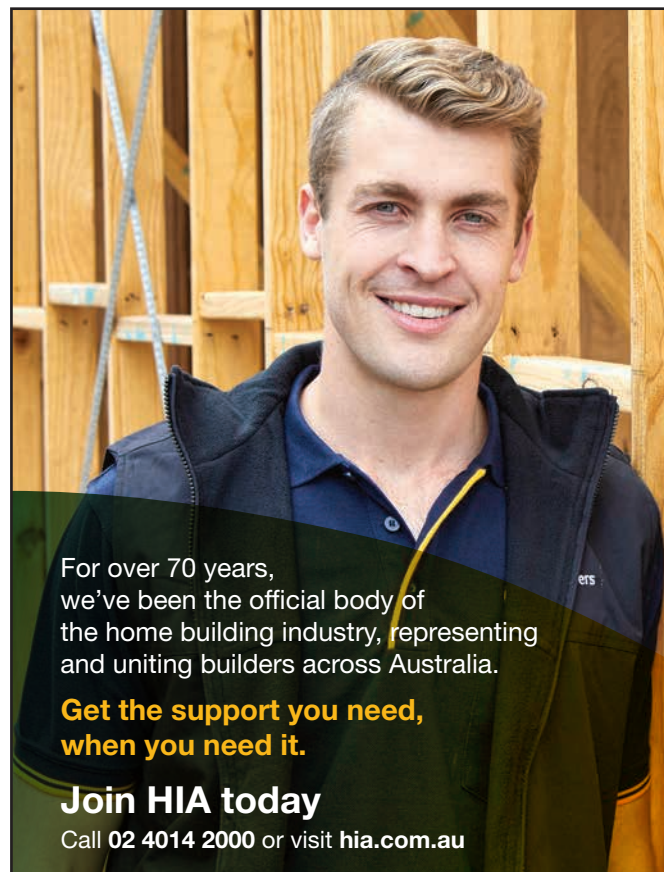
Executive Manager Environment and Sustainability, Marnie Kikken, said City of Newcastle is committed to protecting and enhancing the much-loved destination for the whole community.

"Blackbutt Reserve plays an important role in our vision of Newcastle as a smart, liveable and sustainable city where we celebrate our unique qualities and protect our natural assets," Ms Kikken said.

"Featuring pristine natural bushland, 12 km of walking trails, wildlife exhibits, playgrounds and picnic facilities, it offers diverse opportunities for social connection, active and passive recreation and interactions with nature.

"This will be enhanced with the opening of our new multipurpose community facility and café, which will further encourage residents and visitors to immerse themselves in the green heart of our city."

The project was partially funded by the NSW Government's Resources for Regions grant program.



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Seafarer Welfare Fund marks strong second year

The second round of Seafarer Welfare Fund recipients was announced at the annual Mission to Seafarers Parliamentary Lunch on 20 June, continuing vital investment for frontline organisations that support visiting maritime workers in New South Wales.

This year's recipients of the five-year, \$2.5 million agreement between Port Authority of NSW, NSW Ports and Port of Newcastle were Mission to Seafarers Eden, Mission to Seafarers Port Kembla, Mission to Seafarers Sydney, Apostleship of the Sea Sydney / Stella Maris, Tas Bull Seafarers Foundation, Hunter Workers Rehabilitation and Counselling Service, and Mission to Seafarers Newcastle.

Port Authority of NSW CEO John McKenna announced the recipients on behalf of the fund at the lunch and said he was proud of the impact the fund had already made.

"Our first year has demonstrated the enormous difference this fund makes to seafarers, who face some of the toughest working conditions in the world," he said.

"Last year's funding helped recipients hire additional staff and support significantly more seafarers with emergency care, mental health support, transport assistance, and communication access.

"Seafarers are the backbone of our global supply chain, and this fund shows our state's leadership in maritime welfare, making sure they get the support they need and aren't forgotten."

CEO of NSW Ports Marika Calfas said she looked forward to seeing the continued success of the program.

"We are proud to once again support initiatives and projects which enable these organisations to continue the wonderful work they do for seafarers visiting our ports," Ms Calfas said.

"The Seafarer Welfare Fund provides us all with an opportunity to come together as a port community and ensure visiting seafarers have access to the support and resources they need to make their stay a welcoming and positive one."

Port of Newcastle CEO Craig Carmody echoed the sentiment, highlighting the vital role the fund plays in safeguarding the wellbeing of visiting seafarers in NSW.

"Our economy relies on the hard work of visiting seafarers, and the Seafarer Welfare Fund continues to provide the assistance and support they need when they dock in NSW," he said.

"By joining forces as an industry, we've built a sustainable model that sets a suitable standard of how these maritime workers are cared for."

Mission to Seafarers Sydney CEO Clayton Strong, Port Authority CEO John McKenna, NSW Ports CEO Marika Calfas, Port of Newcastle Executive Officer Marine & Operations Glen Hayward, Mission to Seafarers Newcastle Principal Chaplain Rev Garry Dodd.





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City of Newcastle driving major EV charging expansion

A project to triple Newcastle's public electric vehicle (EV) charging network is nearing completion, with 34 new charging ports being added across 11 locations citywide.

Local and visiting EV drivers have already started enjoying the convenience of an expanded charging network, with new chargers operational at Lambton, Wallsend, Hamilton, Stockton, Adamstown, Mayfield, Newcastle, Newcastle East and Wickham. Sites at Beresfield and Georgetown will be completed in the coming weeks.

Executive Director Planning and Environment Michelle Bisson said the new public chargers installed by City of Newcastle will benefit the growing number of EV drivers and encourage others to make the switch.

"Our Newcastle Environment Strategy has a target of 52% of all new car registrations being EVs by 2030-31," Ms Bisson said.

"The signs are already encouraging, with more than 1,350 EVs currently registered in Newcastle, a number which has risen by more than 1000% in the past four years.

"One of the challenges, however, is that many drivers lack access to off-street parking to charge an EV.

"Increasing the availability of public chargers in different suburbs is an important step in achieving our goal of driving EV uptake and creating a cleaner, quieter, and lower emissions city."

The installation of the new chargers is co-funded by a \$270,000 grant from the NSW Government as part of the EV Kerbside Charging Grants (the program).

Minister for the Hunter Yasmin Catley said the NSW Government has approved \$4.1 million in co-funding to install 671 EV charging ports in 16 local government areas, including Newcastle, during round one of the program.

The 34 new chargers add to existing infrastructure at Wharf Road, No. 2 Sportsground, Laman Street and Perkins Street in the CBD, to create a public EV charging network of 50 ports across 15 locations across Newcastle.



Businesspeople band together to raise funds

The Bean Counters Ball has announced its 2025 committee for the Hunter region's biggest night in the accounting social calendar, set to take place on Saturday, 25 October 2025 at the Newcastle Exhibition and Convention Centre (NEX).

The event represents a joint initiative between local members of Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand (CA ANZ) and CPA Australia, bringing together the region's professional community for an unforgettable night out.

Heading up the committee this year is Chair Rebecca Brown (Manager, Finance Transformation at Hunter Water), alongside

continuing Co-Chair Daniel Drayton (Associate Director at SV Partners), who returns to guide the event that has raised over \$330,000 since its inception in 2011.

Alongside the Chair and Co-Chair, the committee consists of Cameron Burns (PwC Australia - Treasurer), Jackie Marriott (PKF), Katie Tierney (PKF), Sarah Scott, Lana Black (Osborn Law), Marcus Rodrigs, Rhiannon Cameron (SWS Lawyers), Taylah Parker (PKF), and Natalie Montgomery (PKF). They're also joined by representatives from TAFE and Samaritans, Kate Taylor and Rene Urbanowicz.

The annual fundraiser supports two vital charity partners: Samaritans and Hunter TAFE Foundation. All proceeds provide safe accommodation for adolescents living in the Samaritans Youth Accommodation in Newcastle and Maitland, while also funding scholarships for students studying accounting or finance at Hunter TAFE.

"We're incredibly passionate about supporting our charity partners and know that every dollar raised goes directly to a worthy cause that transforms young lives in our community," Rebecca said.

Following last year's successful arcade-themed event which raised over \$30,000, the 2025 Ball promises a garden party extravaganza featuring a three-course meal and entertainment throughout the night. Guests will hear from two inspiring guest speakers who have received support from the charity partners, overwhelmingly, at critical times in their lives.

"These funds go toward programs that provide stability, guidance, and hope to young people facing homelessness, family breakdown, or financial hardship," Daniel said.

Attendees will also have opportunities to win various prizes and participate in raffles and lucky dips throughout the evening to raise money for the cause.

"The generosity of our Hunter business community continues to amaze us," Rebecca added. "Every ticket purchased, and every donation made helps provide education pathways and safe housing for young people who need it most."

Tickets are available now through the Bean Counters Ball website at www.beancountersball.com.au.

2024-2025 Bean Counters Ball Committee



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Hunter Water to continue strengthening water security and supporting growth during 2025-2030

Hunter Water welcomes the release of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal's (IPART) final pricing determination.

The investment proposed by Hunter Water will allow us to keep delivering high-quality, reliable, and safe water and wastewater services, ensuring the Lower Hunter community will have a secure water future.

Hunter Water Managing Director, Darren Cleary, said the region continues to grow and a safe and secure water supply is more important than ever.

"Hunter Water is proud of its role as a foundation for regional prosperity and protecting our precious waterways.

"We've been very conscious of keeping customers at the heart of our decision-making as we focused our efforts on balancing the need to invest in critical infrastructure while keeping bills affordable for customers," Mr Cleary said.

"The costs of providing our essential water and wastewater services are rising. Prices will increase over the next five years to ensure we can continue to deliver reliable, high-quality services and secure our region's water future.

"Cost-of-living and its impact on our customers has been front of mind for us in ensuring we invest prudently and efficiently. This has included setting ourselves an ambitious cost efficiency target and extensively prioritising our investment program by focusing on the outcomes that matter most to our customers.

"During extensive community consultation with over 9,000 customers, the views and needs of our customers and community have helped to shape our new prices. We will recover most of the cost increases through our variable water charge.

"While no price increases are desirable, this approach provides the best opportunity for our customers to influence their bill by managing water use. The water usage price will rise from \$2.89 per kilolitre to \$4.40 per kilolitre by 2029-2030.

"We are investing almost \$1.6 billion in capital works, with the Belmont Desalination Plant a large part of that investment to improve water security for the region. We are also upgrading our existing infrastructure to ensure we can meet future growth and demand.

"In addition to the desalination plant and servicing growth, we will invest in improving service reliability for localised areas, carbon emissions reduction and water conservation, because our customers have told us these are important to them.


"We've strengthened our customer support programs, providing a range of assistance and services to help customers manage their bill, including flexible payment options with Easy Pay or providing extra time to make a payment.

"We will also continue to work with our large volume water users to develop Water Efficiency Management Plans (WEMPs) to maximise water efficiency and deliver water savings for their business."

Hunter Water will remain accountable to and transparent with the community through the newly created Community Committee comprising around 50 demographically representative individuals who will mark Hunter Water's 'report card' and ensure Hunter Water delivers on the promises in its pricing proposal.

Alongside the new group, the long-running Customer and Community Advisory Group is being refreshed and will evolve to become the Stakeholder Advisory Forum, continuing to represent a range of interest groups and constituents.

New prices come into effect on 1 July 2025. For further information, visit www.hunterwater.com.au/pricing

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Winarch Group Launches New Creative Division

Winarch Group has announced the launch of Winarch Experience, a new division dedicated to creating original live content, cultural platforms, and community-driven experiences across Australia. The move marks a significant evolution in the Group's strategy to invest in human-centred projects that shape how Australians engage with music, markets, and cultural moments.

Winarch Experience will bring together the Group's owned and operated platforms, including leading design market The Finders Keepers and Newcastle's premier art and design market The Olive Tree Market, under a renewed focus on content creation, community connection, and cultural impact.

In addition to managing existing platforms, Winarch Experience will lead the development of new original live content, with several projects in development and set to launch in 2026. These initiatives will further extend Winarch Group's role as a creator, not just a facilitator, of live, design and cultural experiences.

Ewen Craig, formerly Head of Winarch Live, will transition to lead Winarch Experience, bringing decades of experience across live events, touring, brand activations, and venue operations. His appointment supports the expansion of the Group's growing content and experiential portfolio.

Craig said "This is a unique opportunity to develop innovative live content that advances Winarch's vision through signature events, creative excellence, and lasting cultural impact. Our aim is to create experiences that genuinely connect with people. Winarch Experience is about working with communities, creatives, and partners to bring ideas to life in a way that feels fresh, inclusive, and unique."

The Group is now recruiting for two key leadership roles: a new Head of Winarch Live, who will lead several major venue, tourism, and hospitality projects; and a Head of Winarch Music, responsible for driving e-commerce and retail businesses, including the iconic Musos Corner in Newcastle and The Guitar Lounge in Sydney.

Winarch Group CEO Kyle McKendry said: "With Winarch Experience, we are building the next frontier of our business — one that champions creativity, deepens community connection, and creates content with lasting cultural impact. Ewen's appointment reflects the strength of our leadership and our confidence in this new direction. As we look to the future, Experience will play a key role in shaping how we tell stories, celebrate culture, and bring people together through shared experiences."

\$1 million funding boost to support new life for Lambton Park café

A renovation of a former café site at one of the city's most popular parks will kick off later this year as City of Newcastle breathes new life into the historic Lambton Park building.

Constructed in the 1940s as a baby health centre, the building will be modernised into an accessible café designed to become a hub for social connection and inclusion.

A development application for the upgrade was given the green light in March, with the project now receiving a \$1 million boost through the NSW Government's Crown Reserves Improvement Fund.

City of Newcastle's Executive Director of Corporate Services David Clarke said the project will enhance the community's use and enjoyment of the popular Lambton Park precinct.

"We are committed to delivering a range of projects that nurture connected, inclusive communities," Mr Clarke said.

"We thank the NSW Government for its significant investment into this project, which will help City of Newcastle deliver the first major adaptive reuse of this historic building since it's construction more than 80 years ago.

"The café upgrades will not only enhance the use of the building as an accessible and inclusive space but also encourage use of the wider park area and amenities."

The upgrade will include the installation of a new commercial kitchen, accessible bathroom facilities and the reconfiguration of the building into a more attractive and accessible open plan design.

Bi-fold doors from the café space will open onto a new rear deck extension overlooking the nearby children's playground, which will provide accessible ramp access for parents with prams and people with mobility issues.

A preferred tenderer for the construction of the project is expected to be confirmed mid this year, with work on the upgrade to begin in the final quarter of 2025.

LGNSW award win for Kurri Kurri Town Centre upgrade

Cessnock City Council has won the Asset and Infrastructure Award for the Kurri Kurri Town Centre and Col Brown Rotary Park upgrade at the Local Government Professionals Australia (NSW) Excellence Awards.

The award recognises outstanding infrastructure projects over \$1.5 million within the 50,000 to 150,000 population category.

The \$7 million city centre development transformed the heart of Kurri Kurri into a more accessible, pedestrian friendly and vibrant town centre that supports local businesses while enriching the experience of residents and visitors.

The project included upgrades to the commercial centre public domain, landscaping, footpaths and paving, pedestrian crossings, street furniture, lighting, line marking, street tree planting and signage.

Among the most significant enhancements was the transformation of Col Brown Rotary Park, crafted in collaboration with local historians, community groups and artists to ensure the revitalisation effort pays homage to the town's veterans and its mining history.

Cessnock City Mayor Daniel Watton says the recognition is a proud milestone, celebrating Council's hard work and vision in bringing this project to life.

"This award is a testament to our dedication in delivering impactful infrastructure that meets community needs and ensures long-term benefits," said Cllr Watton.

"This achievement was made possible thanks to the dedicated efforts of council teams, local business, contractors and funding support from the NSW Government's Restart NSW Resources for Regions Fund and the Australian Government's Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program."

In other recognition for Hunter councils, City of Newcastle took home the award for cities with population over 150k and Lake Macquarie City Council received a highly commended award in the same category.

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MORAY & AGNEW

Moray & Agnew has promoted **Erin Woodward** to Partner. Erin brings a wealth of expertise and over 20 years in personal injury law. Erin's current practice covers motor accident claims but her background includes workers compensation, public liability and medical negligence, which gives her a broad set of experiences to draw from. She has been a Law Society of NSW Accredited Specialist in personal injury law for close to 15 years and has appeared before all relevant NSW and national courts and tribunals.



MORAY & AGNEW

Erica Walter has been promoted to Senior Associate, and works as part of Moray & Agnew's workers compensation team, contributing to a broad range of matters involving both statutory and common law claims. She is an experienced workers compensation lawyer specialising in the management of both statutory disputes and work injury damages. She frequently appears in the Personal Injury Commission, NSW District Court and NSW Supreme Court on behalf of her clients.



MORAY & AGNEW

Bryce Crampton has been promoted to Senior Associate in Moray & Agnew's Compulsory Third Party (CTP) team, acting on behalf of insurer clients in complex and major claims. He advises insurers on a wide range of complex liability, indemnity, medical, quantum and procedural issues in claims for personal injury arising from motor vehicle accidents and regularly acts on behalf of his clients in the Personal Injury Commission, District Court of NSW and Supreme Court of NSW.



SKILDARE

HR consultancy, Skildare, has appointed respected local executive **Frances Obre** as its new CEO, marking a significant milestone in the company's 13-year journey of delivering HR support to businesses across the Hunter and beyond. A proud Novocastrian, Frances brings with her a deep understanding of the local business landscape and a proven track record of strategic leadership across finance and professional services, technology, and legal sectors. Known for her commercial acumen and people-first approach, her leadership

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MORAY & AGNEW

Johanna Ellem has been promoted to Associate at Moray & Agnew.. Her primary area of practice in compulsory third party (CTP) claims. Her role includes analysing and advising on liability, quantum and medical evidence; drafting court and tribunal documents; and preparing legal advice and written submissions. She regularly appears on behalf of clients in the NSW District Court and the Personal Injury Commission.

We would be pleased to receive information
about your new appointments.

Just email around 80 words on the employment plus a high resolution head shot to **editorial@HBRmag.com.au**

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



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

NEWCASTLE RENEWAL

Newcastle has undergone tremendous changes over the last decade or so, with many billions of dollars of public and private investment bringing new life to Australia's second oldest city.

With so many projects renewing the city, we sometimes forget how run down some parts of Newcastle were. It has certainly been a tremendous transformation.

Although the term of Newcastle Renewal may not be the headline term it was in past years, it is indeed still proceeding with vigour with a wide range of major projects from business and Government.

Following are some of the major projects and recently completed, in progress and planned include the following. This is only a small selection.

Dairy Farmers Towers

Dairy Farmers Towers marks the rebirth of one of Newcastle's most iconic locations with over 180 residences, 5 floors of commercial space, and some of the best views of Newcastle. The residences will be situated in two towers that will become a new landmark amongst Newcastle's city skyline. The North Tower will be 99 metres tall and the South tower will be 89 metres in height. Each tower will include layouts featuring 1, 2, and 3 bedrooms. The iconic glass bottle and clock remain and will continue to live on through the redevelopment into Dairy Farmers Towers. The project is expected to be completed by late 2026. Commercial spaces will be a prominent feature of Dairy Farmers Towers. It will also feature collaborative workspaces, precinct pools, wine bar and cellar, function rooms, green spaces and gym.

Dairy Farmers Towers



East End Project

The \$750 million East End project, the largest master-planned mixed-use site in Newcastle, is coming to completion. The master plan includes a mix of residential, retail and commercial uses across the 1.66 ha site (four distinct stages). The approved development application includes 47,800 sqm of residential floor space (approximately 500 apartments), 4,900 sqm of retail floor space and 2,700 sqm of commercial floor space. The \$250 million Stage One of East End, encompassing 155 apartments, was completed in 2021. Stage 2 (124 apartments) was complete in 2022. Stages 3 and 4 included 235 dwellings across five buildings, 1,731 sqm of retail floorspace and approximately 300 parking spaces.

University Honeysuckle Precinct

The Honeysuckle precinct is located within the University of Newcastle's Newcastle City campus and is part of the University's 10-year Master Plan to deliver a mix of innovative research and education spaces, places to collaborate with industry and community, and accommodation for students to enjoy the best of living and working in the heart of the city.

The first building in the Honeysuckle precinct, Q Building is situated on brownfield land, at the corner of Worth Place

and Honeysuckle Drive. Q is the UON new creative and entrepreneurial hub in the city and provides state-of-the-art facilities for the School of Humanities, Creative Industries and Social Sciences and Integrated Innovation Network (I2N). Q Building also has a range of flexible spaces available for venue hire by any individual or organisation external to the University of Newcastle.

UON have begun planning the second stage of development at the Honeysuckle site – a proposed student accommodation building on the western edge of the precinct.

The proposed City Campus Student Accommodation building will include:

- Ground floor student facilities, staff facilities, and retail.
- Level 1 to 8 consisting of Student Accommodation rooms, to accommodate 445 beds.
- Outdoor communal spaces.
- Landscaping and associated public domain works
- Connection and interface with existing Q Building and surrounding landscape.

The Store Site

The Store site at 854 Hunter Street in Newcastle is a \$200 million redevelopment that will take design and opportunity to new levels in the city's emerging West End. The redevelopment of the 12,000 sqm site will combine innovative design solutions to provide an integrated masterplan delivering a new 15,000 sqm standalone office, retail and two residential towers and structured carpark that is built over the NBI designed and approved by Transport for NSW. The office space is anchored by NSW Government tenants.

ONE Apartments

Located in Newcastle's CBD, ONE is a twin-tower development, offering one, two and three-bedroom luxury apartments with market-leading-sized floorplates and a selection of vistas. ONE Apartments feature a Scenic Lounge on the 22nd floor, providing 360° panoramas over Newcastle Harbour, Stockton, Merewether and the Watagan Mountains. Also located on the western side of the 22nd floor, the Sunset Room is a bookable function room. Both rooftops feature interior-designed indoor spaces with luxurious lounges and stylish dining areas. Outside are landscaped lawn terraces with undercover barbecues and seating and dining facilities. ONE will also have its own private cinema and private gym.

ONE Apartments



Swift on Hunter

Altim Property's newly completed Swift in Hunter is the first A Grade commercial office building in Newcastle which allows small businesses to own their own premises. Swift features five floors of sustainably designed commercial suites ranging in size. Suites range in size from 50 sqm to 196 sqm all with car parking included. The Swift building also features end of trip facilities, bicycle storage rooms, licence plate recognition and is targeting 4.5 Star NABERS rating.

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Approval granted for new City Campus Student Accommodation

The University of Newcastle has received formal approval from the NSW Government to proceed with the construction of its new City Campus Student Accommodation, located on the corner of Civic Lane and Worth Place.

This marks a major milestone for the project, which will be delivered by the appointed contractor, Hansen Yuncken, with construction expected to begin in the coming months, following the completion of site preparation.

University of Newcastle Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alex Zelinsky AO, welcomed the approval, describing it as a significant step forward in delivering an inner-city living experience for students studying away from home.

"This new student accommodation will provide high-quality, accessible housing in a vibrant location right in the heart of the Honeysuckle precinct. It will support our students while also strengthening connections with our community," said Professor Zelinsky.

"It's fitting that we're beginning construction during our university's 60th anniversary year—a time to reflect on how far we've come and to consider what we can offer current and future students to ensure their time away from home is spent in a comfortable and supportive environment."

Designed by renowned architecture firm Architectus, the new building will offer 445 student beds in a range of room types including micro studios, studios, twin rooms, and shared apartments for five or six students. Each option will include kitchen and bathroom facilities, along with access to shared living areas, an outdoor terrace, dining spaces, and laundry rooms.

"This development is not only about providing a student housing option in the city but also an investment for our region, boosting the local economy and creating more vibrancy and life in the surrounding Honeysuckle area," said Professor Zelinsky.

The City Campus Student Accommodation building is expected to be completed in early 2027.

Artist impression of the University Newcastle proposed city campus student accommodation and future domain space from south east.
CREDIT – ARCHITECTUS



Construction commences of playspace at Foreshore Park

Work has begun on the construction of City of Newcastle's highly anticipated regional level accessible playspace and waterplay area at Foreshore Park.

The project is the centrepiece of the Harbour Foreshore Masterplan and will deliver a flagship destination for inclusive recreation that celebrates the city's industrial, maritime and Indigenous heritage.

City of Newcastle awarded a tender for the detailed design and construction of the project to Regal Innovations at the March Council meeting, with the playspace expected to be completed by late next year.

Executive Manager Community and Recreation Lynn Duffy said City of Newcastle was committed to providing enhanced recreational opportunities for all members of the community.

"Providing access to quality community spaces is a key commitment in our Community Strategic Plan as we deliver our shared vision for Newcastle to be a liveable, sustainable, inclusive, global city," Ms Duffy said.

"Our flagship Foreshore Park Livvi's Place inclusive playspace and waterplay area will offer valuable opportunities for intergenerational community building, positively supporting the physical and mental wellbeing of residents and visitors."

The inclusive playspace project is the result of more than five years of input from the community. Feedback on the detailed design was received from the Guraki Aboriginal Standing Committee, an accessibility working group established by City of Newcastle for the project, and the Touched by Olivia Foundation, a charity dedicated to the creation of inclusive playspaces across Australia.

It was designed in accordance with the NSW Government's Everyone Can Play guidelines and will promote intergenerational, inclusive play, with opportunities for visitors of all ages and abilities.

Located at the western end of Foreshore Park, the playspace will feature four separate zones including junior and toddler areas, water and nature-based play areas and quiet spaces, connected via accessible paths, seating, shade, gardens and lawns.

Bespoke playground equipment will add to its distinctly Newcastle character, including a central whale-themed swing set and picnic area paying tribute to the city's Worimi and Awabakal heritage.

The waterplay area will be linked to Newcastle's maritime history and coastal ecologies, while an elevated "nuts and bolts" play structure will symbolise Newcastle's strong industrial ties and include an accessible ramp to the first level of the tower. An accessible slide, sandpit, carousel and sensory pathway are among the other key features of the inclusive design.

Navigation through the space will be made easier with a logical and accessible path of travel, while charging points for wheelchairs and mobility devices are also included.

The playspace will be complemented by a fully accessible amenities building and kiosk, which is currently under construction in Foreshore Park to serve the broader precinct. It includes unisex ambulant toilets, a parent's change room, and a Changing Places facility.

The Foreshore Park projects are supported by the NSW Government, Variety the Children's Charity, the Touched by Olivia Foundation and the Newcastle Port Community Contribution Fund.

Foreshore Park Water Play artist's impression





Every business, no matter the size or industry sector, relies on insurance protections for business assets, employees and operations.

Here are five common insurance mistakes that business owners should avoid when navigating the complexities of commercial insurance.

1. Underinsuring your assets

A business's assets and the cost of replacing them can increase dramatically.

With asset upgrades, stock purchases and especially during times of inflation, failing to account for changes in the value of assets and insurance coverage limits can leave your business underinsured (see <https://bit.ly/4lbdKW6>).

Regularly review your sums insured (see <https://bit.ly/4kd0ZsJ>) see to ensure the cover reflects increased values. Access up to date data on the total value of your property, equipment, inventory and liabilities to ensure the right level of coverage. These figures should reflect current replacement costs, not original purchase prices.

As your business changes constantly, its insurance needs to keep up. Failing to review and update your insurance policies regularly can leave you underinsured or with limitations and coverage gaps (see <https://bit.ly/46ofhDv>). Take the time to reassess your insurance needs annually or whenever changes occur.

2. Not creating the right insurance cover program

Simply opting for standard insurance policies may not cover all the unique risks your business faces. Consider additional coverage options such as cyber insurance, business interruption (BI) or public liability insurance.

If your business operates in an area prone to natural disasters such as floods, check that your insurance adequately covers these risks.

Insurance policies often have exclusions and limitations that define what is not covered, and these may vary according to the insurer. Carefully review your policy wording and access expert guidance from your insurance broker.

3. Overlooking the importance of risk management

In the complex landscape of modern business, being able to demonstrate effective risk management (see <https://bit.ly/44sGDG2>) is a necessity.

Overlooking the importance of a robust risk management strategy can make accessing insurance challenging or more expensive.

Risk management is the process of identifying, assessing and prioritising potential risks to your business, followed by coordinated efforts to minimise, monitor and control the probability or impact of those risks.

Without this, businesses may be inadequately prepared for unforeseen events ranging from natural disasters and cyber-attacks to employee injuries and supply chain disruptions.

4. Failing to analyse claims trends

Analysing claims data, trends and delving into past claims can help with identifying patterns that can inform future risk management and insurance strategies.

Conversely, a lack of awareness can result in settling for generic policies that may not be tailored to your operation's unique risk profile, potentially leaving critical exposures unaddressed.

5. Not consulting with an experienced insurance broker

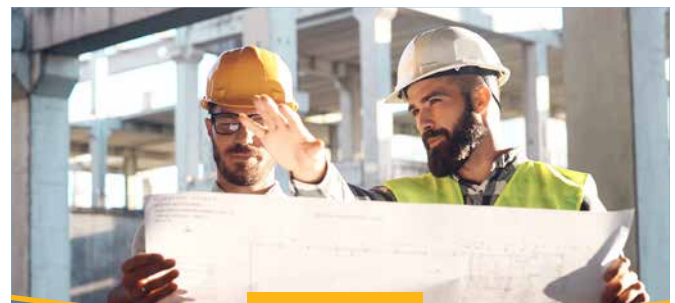
Insurance can be complex. Working with an insurance broker who understands your individual business and industry, who can provide detailed considerations around risk and insurance, can help guide you through the process of selecting the right cover for your enterprise to ensure your business is adequately protected.

Leverage Gallagher expertise

By working with knowledgeable, local insurance professionals and regularly reviewing your policies, you can avoid potential pitfalls and ensure your business is adequately protected.

Connect with Gallagher at <https://locations.ajg.com/au/nsw/charlestown/sky-central-ground-level-east-tower-123-pacific-highway>

To the extent that any material in this document may be considered advice, it does not take into account your objectives, needs or financial situation. You should consider whether the advice is appropriate for you and review any relevant Product Disclosure Statement and policy wording before taking out an insurance policy.



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Should you use an insurance broker?

In business it can often be more time and cost efficient to deal with suppliers direct.

Why would you want to complicate things by involving a middle person who also needs to make some money for their services?

While this may be sound logic for some areas of business, it is not the case for insurance.

An insurance broker offers a wide range of benefits to businesses.

Utilising insurance brokers' knowledge and skill

As a business owner you may consider yourself as an expert in your field and running your business.

An insurance broker is paid to be an expert in insurance, understanding the risks as well as the cover available to mitigate these risks.

The insurance broker industry is highly competitive which is good news for the customer, maximising the service levels provided.

And if for some reason you are not comfortable dealing with a particular insurance broker there are many others available that would be pleased to discuss your needs.

Having the right cover

The whole purpose of insurance is to provide some cover against risks to your business.

But it is common for business owners to not fully comprehend the risks to their business or fully understand what is and isn't covered in an insurance policy.

Because different policies can have quite different levels of coverage, inclusions and exclusions, it is not always easy to compare different policies.

The language used in policies can sometimes also be difficult to understand, even those that say they are written in plain English.

An insurance broker has many years of experience and can be an enormous asset in finding the best coverage to suit your needs and budget.

Accessing policy options from a range of insurance companies

Insurance brokers can often access policy options from a wide range of insurance companies and provide you with a much broader range of policies to choose from.

They also keep up to date with the latest offering from insurers.

This means that it is much more likely that an insurance broker will find the best policy for your business.

Saving you time

It can be extremely time consuming to try to find out what policies are available and try to compare them, even if you think you have the expertise.

Because insurance brokers deal with insurance policies every day, they can quickly and efficiently match your needs with available cover.

Saving you money

Insurance brokers can often access policies at better rates than individual businesses or negotiate costs and policy terms that would be difficult for the individual business to do.

Of course, the ultimate excessive cost is to pay for an insurance policy that doesn't suit your needs and an insurance broker will act in your interests to make sure this doesn't happen.

Insurance brokers work for their clients

Insurance brokers are legally bound to work in the best interest of their clients, not the insurance company.

Insurance company employees do not have the same legal obligation.



Helping with claims

If you need to claim, insurance brokers can help you with the process.

Making a claim can be time consuming and stressful.

They also know how to minimise problems if there are queries with your claim or some aspects are out of the ordinary.

The help on making a claim is even more valuable when the occurrence that triggered the claim requires other actions by the business, for example reorganising some aspects of the operations.

Insurance brokers will also be of considerable help if there is some sort of dispute regarding the claim.

They can often advise you of your position without the need for expensive legal advice and follow through on your behalf.

Even in straightforward claims, insurance brokers can often make the process of much faster, minimising business interruptions and helping operations to get back to normal more quickly.

NOVA CREDIT RISK IS HELPING BUSINESSES BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN RISK AND OPPORTUNITY WITH A NEW TRADE CREDIT INSURANCE BROKERAGE IN THE HUNTER

Company insolvencies are on the rise in Australia, with more than 11,000 companies entering administration for the first time in 2023-24 and the numbers continue to rise in 2025.

According to the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC), the number has increased by 39% since 2022-23. The subsequent loss of trade receivables can be devastating for suppliers.

Nova Credit Risk helps businesses to protect one of their biggest current assets – trade receivables – with Trade Credit Insurance (TCI).

Expert advice

With 40+ years' experience in trade credit risk, business information and debt collection, **Nova Credit Risk's** Graham Crozier has seen it all. And he's dedicated to increasing awareness of TCI and the protection it provides SME's and large organisations alike.

"Bad debts send businesses to the wall – everything that owners have worked so hard to achieve can go up in smoke with just one big hit – it happens," he said.

"Debtors on average make up around 40% of a business's total assets and, for just a couple of cents per \$100 of each invoice, they can protect themselves against this risk."

Despite TCI being available for "a hundred years", a significant percentage of the Australian market isn't aware of it, according to Graham.

And with business failures rising, it's now more important than ever to have the right protection in place.

Personalised protection

Working closely with clients, Graham can provide bespoke TCI solutions to help businesses manage credit risk, increase sales revenue and explore new markets with confidence.

"The product mix continues to develop, particularly in the SME segment which has traditionally been poorly serviced," he said.

"There is now at least one product in the local market which addresses this segment in a way no-one has previously been able to achieve."

To discuss your risk management and insurance requirements, please contact:
Graham Crozier M: 0410 625 991 E: graham@novacreditrisk.com.au



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Hunter Defence Conference to confront the changing nature of warfare

Against a backdrop of increasing global instability and rapid technological change, the 2025 Hunter Defence Conference will bring together over 220 senior leaders from across Defence, government, industry, and research to examine the future of warfare and Australia's strategic response.

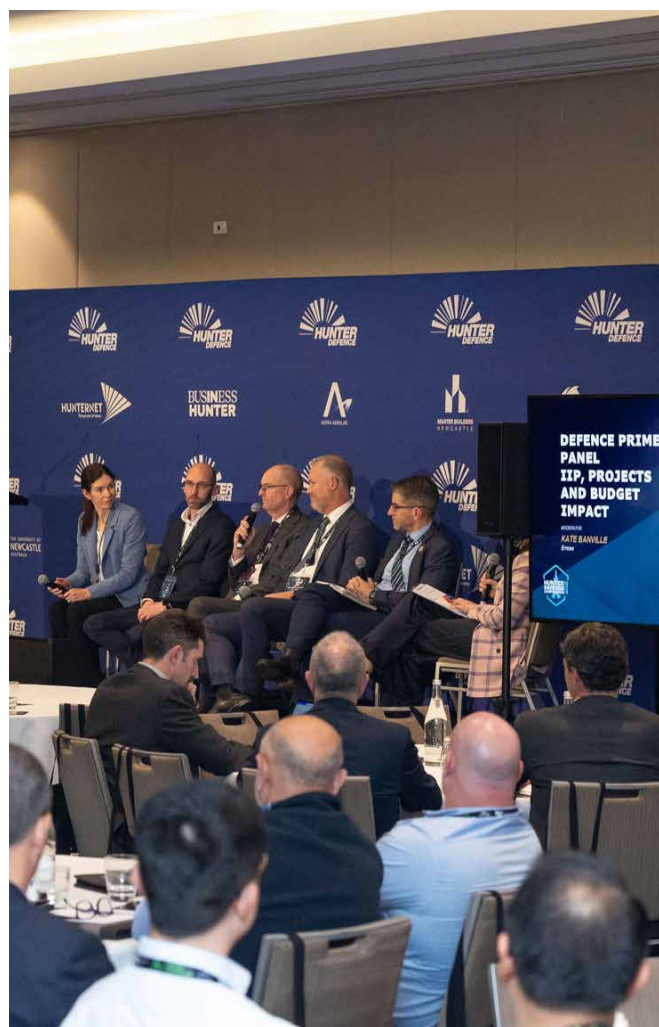
Returning to Rydges Resort Hunter Valley on 20–21 August, this nationally significant conference will explore how Australia can maintain a decisive capability edge in an era defined by integrated, fast-moving, and unconventional conflict.

"This is not a conversation about future threats, they are already here," said Tim Owen AM JP (AIRCDRE ret'd), Chair of the Hunter Defence Taskforce.

"From cyber to space, autonomous systems to long-range strike, we are entering a new defence paradigm, one that demands urgent collaboration, sovereign capability, and bold regional action."

Themed The Changing Nature of Warfare, the conference will feature perspectives from the Army, Navy, Air Force, Joint Capabilities Group, key political figures and leading defence primes, with a particular emphasis on

- the implications of AUKUS on capability, policy and workforce
- artificial intelligence, autonomous systems and dual-use technology



- prime/SME collaboration across sovereign supply chains
- regional defence infrastructure and innovation precincts
- the future talent pipeline and workforce transformation

One of the most popular elements of the 2024 program will return in 2025: interactive small-group discussions with senior defence leaders. Delegates will have the opportunity to nominate two preferred discussion groups during registration, creating rare, direct engagement between SMEs and top-level decision-makers in Defence.

"For SMEs, this is more than a conference – it's a chance to connect one-on-one with the people shaping the future of defence procurement, innovation and capability delivery," Mr Owen said.

With the Hunter home to fifth generation air combat F-35A Lightning II fighters at RAAF Base Williamtown alongside major defence initiatives including Kongsberg Defence Australia's missile manufacturing facility and Lockheed Martin's AIR6500-1 program – the event reinforces the region's pivotal role in Australia's national defence posture.

"The Hunter is no longer just a contributor – it is a strategic enabler," Mr Owen said.

"What we're seeing here is the realisation of a coordinated, long-term effort to secure sovereign defence outcomes, accelerate innovation, and build a defence-ready workforce."

The Hunter Defence Conference attracts is unique within regional Australia and key to promoting regional defence industry capability – presenting a strong and unified voice that is heard throughout NSW industry, the NSW Government, nationally, and importantly, by Federal Government representatives.

Registrations are encouraged early due to limited capacity.
For more information, visit: www.hunterdefence.org.au/hdc2025

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20-21 AUGUST

“BRINGING DEFENCE PRIMES, NSW SMES, SENIOR POLITICIANS, ACADEMIA, AND THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE SENIOR CAPABILITY MANAGERS TO THE HUNTER REGION.”

Returning to the Hunter Valley in August, this nationally recognised event will bring together over 220 defence, industry, and government leaders to explore the forces reshaping **AUSTRALIA'S STRATEGIC FUTURE.**

220+ delegates and presenters from across Australia

In its 15th year and a sold out event in 2023

A chance for regional SMEs to engage closely with major primes

New agenda format, topics, speakers, and networking opportunities

A percentage of the event proceeds will be donated to charities in support of local veterans



RYDGES RESORT - HUNTER VALLEY

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Hands-on aids boost F-35A maintenance

Aviation technicians will be able to hone their skills on the most accurate F-35A maintenance training aids, with the arrival of two new purpose-built pieces of equipment in April.

The Integrated Training Centre (ITC) at RAAF Base Williamtown has received an F135 Engine Maintenance and Borescope Trainer and a First Stage Blade Blend Trainer – the first of its kind to be delivered to a country outside the United States.

According to Corporal Daniel Jackson, an ITC instructor and aviation technician (ATECH) with seven years of F-35A experience, the equipment is almost identical to the real thing.

"If you didn't know what you were looking at, you'd think it was a real engine. A lot of the materials are genuine," Corporal Jackson said.

"The internals are mock but they are so realistic, down to the point where they have airbrushed wear pattern details to match a reference image of a real engine. It's pretty incredible."

Technicians can practise true-to-life engine maintenance including module splits, borescope inspections of the turbine, and diagnose induced faults with pre-damaged components.

They will also be able to train in hands-on repair of damaged fan blades; a task Corporal Jackson said was critical to get correct.

"We blend the blades with files back into a conformed aerofoil design. It's titanium so it takes a bit to get the material off and if

you go out of limits you'll make it unserviceable," he said.

"That's why it's such an important piece to train, because we want people to be confident and comfortable actually doing it in a real job."

Before the training aids arrived, aviation technicians relied on classroom and simulator learning, following up with on-aircraft maintenance.

Officer in Command of the Integrated Training Centre Squadron Leader Damian Richardson said having the equipment in Australia would result in better and more timely training.

An F135 engine specialist course, borescope course and first-stage blade blend course have been developed for the new equipment.

"We build up experience in the ITC and the ATECHs take that back out to the squadrons, so when the operational squadrons need to do engine changes or module splits on deployment, it's not the first time doing that task," Squadron Leader Richardson said.

"It's not too often in a command role that you get to see new capability delivered on time and without any issues."

This is the last significant maintenance training device delivery from the AIR6000 PH2A/B project, responsible for the acquisition of the F-35A.

Kongsberg missile factory to supercharge Hunter's high-tech future

A significant milestone for Australian sovereign defence capability continues to take shape in the Hunter region, with Kongsberg Defence Australia breaking ground on their missile manufacturing and maintenance factory at Williamtown.

The 9,000-square metre factory is scheduled for completion in 2026, with production to commence in 2027. This factory will produce Kongsberg's fifth generation Naval Strike Missile (NSM) and Joint Strike Missile (JSM) for the Australian Defence Force. The project marks a key milestone in the Federal Government's \$850 million investment, announced last year.

For the Hunter, this is more than a defence project—it's a transformative industrial development. Leveraging the region's skilled workforce, Kongsberg's new facility is being designed and built within Newcastle Airport's Astra Aerolab Precinct and in close collaboration with local construction and architect firms.

"We're committed to creating long-term jobs and new opportunities right here in the Hunter," said Kongsberg Defence Australia Managing Director John Fry.

Over 100 new jobs will be created at the Williamtown facility, with roles spanning across leadership and business operations, supply chain and logistics, production and engineering and quality and compliance. Recruitment is already underway and Kongsberg Defence Australia is actively working with the local education ecosystem to support workforce development.

That includes establishing a partnership with the University of Newcastle (UoN), where Kongsberg is supporting aerospace engineering initiatives and student-led innovation, such as the NU Rocketry team. The collaboration is at the early stages and hopes to evolve into a long-term partnership focussed on workforce attraction and potential R&D collaboration.

The plant's operations will be supported by an Australian supply chain with opportunities for Hunter based SMEs. Last year, Kongsberg

Defence Australia engaged Cardiff-based Nupress Group, who are already delivering precision-machined components for the Naval Strike Missile capability to Kongsberg for Royal Australian Navy's SEA 1300 Phase 1 – Navy Guided Weapons program.

"A number of supply chain activities are underway, with Kongsberg preparing to engage Australian suppliers. A dedicated sourcing team for the missile factory is being established locally, and I would like to see as many companies as possible from the Hunter become part of that supply chain," John Fry said.

The Kongsberg Missile Factory in Williamtown is common with Kongsberg's 'Nexus' missile plant in Norway, opened last year, and recognised as the world's most advanced missile manufacturing facility. While final integration of explosive ordnance will occur at Defence Establishment Orchard Hills in Western Sydney, the Kongsberg Missile Factory will carry out the majority of the missile manufacturing and maintenance activities.

"Our objective is clear: to deliver the best systems to the Australian Defence Force whilst establishing sovereign capability," John Fry said.

"We're proud to be building this capability in Williamtown that will serve the nation—and the Hunter community—for decades to come."





An Australian Government Initiative



PATHWAYS TO THE HUNTER'S FUTURE DEFENCE INDUSTRY WORKFORCE

RDA Hunter's ME Program is an industry-led Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) workforce development initiative designed and delivered to encourage students to continue studies and secure meaningful jobs in the Hunter.



Department of Defence support enables the ME Program to link industry with schools to make classroom learning workplace relevant and provide the local defence industry with engaged, motivated, and career aware candidates.



Since 2009, RDA Hunter has positively impacted the lives of thousands of students and professionals alike through initiatives including the ME Program.



In the 2023-2024 financial year alone, the ME Program has facilitated meaningful interactions with over 100 industry representatives while our school grants and events have influenced 16,488 students from 54 high schools. The ME Program has also bucked the national trend by registering increases in STEM participation by females and First Nations students.



This level of engagement highlights RDA Hunter's pivotal role in influencing opportunities for the region's future workforce and positively advancing STEM initiatives.

Find out more at meprogram.com.au



Australian Government

Defence



BUILDING THE HUNTER'S MOST ADVANCED AEROSPACE PRECINCT TO POWER THE FUTURE OF DEFENCE

Strategically located at Newcastle Airport, adjacent to RAAF Base Williamtown – home to Australia's largest fleet of F-35s – **Astra Aerolab** offers unmatched access to airside operations, global transport links, and real-time defence collaboration. The precinct is master planned to support research, development and advanced manufacturing, with a strong focus on defence and aerospace supply chains.

With around 1.25 million passengers travelling through Newcastle Airport each year, and international flights commencing from October, **Astra Aerolab** is strategically located alongside a \$250 million airport expansion which includes a major terminal and runway upgrade. The precinct is just 30 minutes from Newcastle CBD and directly connected to the M1, offering fast and efficient road access to Sydney and key logistics corridors across New South Wales and Australia.

Development is well underway at **Astra Aerolab**. The precinct has already secured two state significant development approvals and four local DAs, with more under review. These approvals position the precinct to support major defence primes including BAE Systems Australia and Kongsberg Defence Australia. Further opportunities are available across flexible office, industrial, and bespoke development sites.

Astra Aerolab offers more than infrastructure – it provides a high-performance environment designed for people. The precinct delivers secure, high-quality facilities, direct links to airport and base operations, and a connected landscape with amenities that support wellbeing, productivity, and workforce retention.

Beyond the workplace, **Astra Aerolab** offers access to an unrivalled coastal lifestyle. With beaches, vineyards, national parks and thriving regional centres nearby, companies can attract and retain talent by offering cutting-edge careers without compromising on lifestyle.

Backed by all levels of government, **Astra Aerolab** has secured major investment to accelerate its growth. With Stage 1 complete and further stages underway, it is fast emerging as a hub for global primes and ambitious SMEs.

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An aerial rendering of the Astra Aerolab Precinct landscape architecture. The image shows a large, modern building with a glass facade and a flat roof, surrounded by lush greenery, trees, and a paved road. A large green arrow graphic points from the top left towards the bottom right, partially obscuring the sky and the building. The sky is blue with a few clouds, and a small aircraft is visible in the upper left. The overall scene is bright and sunny, suggesting a clear day.

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Navigating defence's moving staircases; How Australian industry can find its footing in a shifting strategic landscape

Derrek Lush
PKF Sydney & Newcastle

If you've seen the Harry Potter films, you might recall the enchanted staircases of Hogwarts; constantly moving, changing direction just as students begin to ascend. For many Australian businesses engaging with Defence, the experience feels strikingly similar. A path appears clear...and then shifts underfoot.

Today's Defence and defence industry landscape is being redefined by global realignment. The recalibration of US defence spending, combined with AUKUS imperatives, is altering long-held assumptions. At home, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) is revisiting procurement processes, shifting priorities toward capability partnerships, sustainment, and sovereign resilience. Add to this the accelerating opportunities in Europe and across the Indo-Pacific, and the environment becomes less a roadmap and more a maze.

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) has offered blunt assessments of the moment "You call that a defence industry?", ASPI highlights Australia's lack of a clearly defined defence industrial base, warning that strategic ambiguity risks undermining industry confidence. Meanwhile "Australia is ill-prepared for war" delivers a direct call to action, suggesting that while threats evolve, capability development remains reactive and fragmented.

For many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), this shifting landscape raises more questions than answers with previously predictable procurement pathways now unclear, uncertain, and increasingly unfunded. Capability expectations are growing. Budgets are tightening. And new market entrants; including global defence firms and dual-use tech companies, are changing the game. Anyone following Palmer Lucky and Anduril will know exactly what we are talking about here.

It's no longer enough to simply "have something Defence might want." SMEs must be able to clearly articulate their value, align with Defence's evolving needs, and operate within increasingly rigorous frameworks of compliance, assurance, and delivery. Any business engaged in or having intentions to engage in the Defence supply chain; be that domestic or international, must know if it's on solid ground or in need of a recalibration.

Practical that means moving beyond hoping defence will buy what you have and genuinely considering:

- **Do we know who our actual customer is and how they buy?**
Defence procurement spans multiple layers: Defence itself, Primes, and sub-contractors. Misidentifying the buyer can waste time and resources.
- **Can we clearly align our product or service to Defence's stated capability priorities?**
Buzzwords won't cut it. Alignment must be operational, not just marketing-based.
- **Are we realistically capable of delivering within Defence's assurance, governance, and audit expectations?**
Defence requires maturity. Gaps in risk, quality, or reporting frameworks can derail even technically strong offerings.
- **Do we have the scale, partnerships, or certifications needed to compete?**
Many SMEs need to partner or certify to meet Defence requirements but don't know where to start.

- **Are we ready for export or regional opportunities, or are we overly reliant on the Australian market?**

With Indo-Pacific partnerships growing and a burgeoning European market, export-readiness is becoming essential for long-term relevance.

The Defence map is shifting, but that doesn't mean the destination is unreachable. For businesses willing to assess their position honestly and invest in clarity, the opportunity remains significant. The key is recognising when to walk confidently forward; and when to pause, reassess, and change tack.

For further information contact PKF Sydney & Newcastle on (02) 4962 2688 or email newcastle@pkf.com.au.

Young women test aviation waters

Young women from around Australia were immersed in Air Force life in May, undertaking the Women in Aviation Program at RAAF Base Williamtown.

The program is a Chief of Air Force initiative that gives girls over 15 and women up to 24 the opportunity to explore the exciting aviation and technical trade careers available in the Air Force.

Two programs, lasting four days each, took place over two weeks. The participants experienced the day-to-day routine of an Air Force base, and saw military aviation roles firsthand. They engaged with Air Force members as well as ADF Careers recruiting specialists to learn about careers in the military.

Flight Lieutenant Kirsty Lewis, a nursing officer in the Diversity and Inclusion team at the Directorate of Organisational Behaviour and Culture in Air Force, was the Officer in Charge of the program.

"We had a total of 24 participants over the two weeks, their ages ranging from 15 to 24. They came from as far as Victoria and the Sunshine Coast to participate in the program," Flight Lieutenant Lewis said.

"Our participants loved the program. From day one we heard all about how the girls couldn't stop telling their families about all the amazing things they had seen."

The program brings together a diverse representation of women serving in the Air Force to speak with the participants. They demonstrate the initiatives and support systems that exist – and continue to grow – as more women join the organisation.

"We had a few participants who firmed up their Air Force career aspirations and others who are now considering careers they didn't know existed before," Flight Lieutenant Lewis said.

"There is so much growth, learning and understanding developed in our next generation of women."

The Women in Aviation Program reflects Air Force's commitment to building capability through diversity, and the organisation's aim to be an employer of choice for young people.

"This program is integral to giving young women the opportunity to experience Air Force life and make informed decisions about subjects at school and fitness to prepare them for a career in the Air Force," Flight Lieutenant Lewis said.

The aviation programs have been running since 2013 and many participants have gone on to pursue a career in the ADF. The program forms part of Air Force's comprehensive workforce plan to meet the current and future needs of the ADF.

Jessica Sellers, a 16-year-old student from Berwick, Victoria, raved about the program.

"I felt empowered using and observing the Air Force equipment, and I felt a sense of comfort wearing the uniform and learning something new every day," Jessica said.

"Everyone seems to have this image in their head of what the Air Force looks like. I believe the real thing is so much better than the movies."

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"SECURE DESTRUCTION - GUARANTEED"

As a woman was leaving the bank, she suddenly remembered she had forgotten the car keys inside.

She went back and asked everyone, but no one had seen the keys. She searched her purse again.

"Oh no! I left the keys in the car!"

She ran to the parking lot in a panic—only to find the car missing!

She called the police, reported the car stolen, gave them the license plate number, and admitted the keys were left inside.

Trying to calm down, she nervously made the hardest call of her life - to her husband. Stammering, she told him the car had been stolen.

He thundered back, "I dropped you at the bank - you didn't take the car!"

She sighed in relief and thanked God, then asked him to come pick her up.

Her husband replied, "Sure I'll come... just as soon as I convince the police I didn't steal your car!"

Teacher: "If you have one dollar and you ask your dad for another dollar, how many dollars do you have?"

Billy: "One dollar."

Teacher: "I'm sorry, Billy, it seems you don't know your math."

Billy: "I'm sorry, Miss, it seems you don't know my dad."

A widower goes to a psychic to contact his late wife.

"Honey," he says. "Are you happy?"

"Yes, my husband," she says.

Relieved, the man asks, "Are you happier than when you were with me?"

"Yes, my husband," she replies, "I'm much, much happier."

The husband smiles. "Heaven must be an amazing place."

"I wouldn't know," she says. "I'm not in heaven."

Why does Batman wear such a dark suit?

Because Batman doesn't want to get shot.

Why does Robin wear such a colourful suit?

Because Batman doesn't want to get shot.

A man was sitting at the bar, looking dejectedly into his bottle of beer.

"You look pretty down," said the guy on the next stool. "Wanna talk about it?"

"I dunno," sighed the first man. "It's just that this time last year I had a fantastic job. I was making big money."

"So?"

"Well, that was the problem. People started noticing the bills were five millimetres too big!"

A Pharaoh asks his three priests to build him a tomb.

Each priest consults three stonemasons.

Each stonemason hires three overseers.

Each overseer enlists three labourers.

Sounds like a pyramid scheme to me.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Your unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning."

- Bill Gates



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