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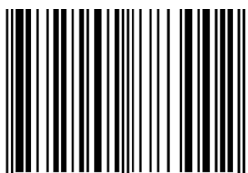
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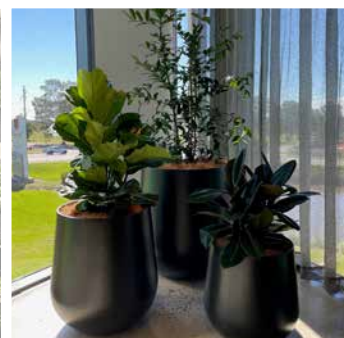
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From the Editor



The National Accounts for the December quarter released on 1 March indicate that the economy is slowing with GDP growth coming in at a lower than expected 0.5%.

This rate would have been even lower except for being propped up by very high terms of trade which rose another 0.6% in the quarter. For the Hunter, coal prices were very high for the quarter, but have eased since. Coal was Australia's highest value commodity export in 2022, so the easing of prices this year will have a significant impact on the balance of trade.

The toll of multiple interest rate rises is clearly taking its toll on households with the household saving ratio falling considerably from 7.1% to 4.5%. The growth rate of household consumption has also taken a dive, dropping from 2.2% in the June quarter to 0.3% in the December quarter.

There are indications that inflation is easing, falling to 7.4% in January, but still well above the Reserve Bank's target range.

There is now a distinct possibility that the Reserve Bank will overshoot with interest rate rises and push the Australian economy into a recession.

The problem with the rate rises is that they take some time to fully percolate through the economy and there can be a tipping point which results in a major drop in economic activity.

Secondly, the National Accounts data we use to monitor the economy are also delayed. For example, the data released on 1 March was 2-5 months old.

For these reasons it would be wise for the Reserve Bank to tread very carefully with further rate rises or risk forcing a recession we didn't have to have.

Looking forward, the Federal Budget to be released in May will have to be carefully crafted and targeted to support the economy without adding inflationary pressures. This is also with the backdrop of fiscal repair courtesy of the COVID pandemic.

This will be a real test of the ALP Government in the delivery of their first full budget since their election and will be an important factor in the economic health of the Australian economy for the remainder of the year and into 2024.

Garry Hardie
Publisher & Editor

Planning a business FUNCTION?

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View the 2022-23 Hunter Business Function Guide for information on venues and supporting services.

www.hbrmag.com.au/2022-hunter-business-function-guide

A new era for the Merewether Beach Hotel

Newcastle's iconic Merewether Beach Hotel has revealed plans for its future, with the first phase of its inspired restoration set to open in April. The new Beach Hotel honours Newcastle's history as a place where steel city meets laid-back coastal ease and puts Australian surf culture firmly at its heart.

An expansive multi-level corner pub that has been a local institution for over a century, the Beach Hotel was acquired by hotelier Glenn Piper in May 2022. Since then, he has taken time getting to know the community and its enduring spirit to help shape the venue's next chapter. The finished result is designed to be the ultimate Aussie seaside pub.

Glenn, an avid surfer who spent numerous holidays growing up visiting relatives in Merewether and who is now passing on the same passion to his three young children, said of the transformation, "The community has been gathering at The Beaches for generations, so taking on the custodianship of this landmark is a tremendous honour. With that comes great responsibility and it is incredibly important that we restore the Beaches to be a true reflection of its history and locals that have always made it their own."

"More than just its Art Deco architecture and iconic views, we want it to be a homage to the medley of cultures that have shaped this storied place - the friends and the family, the surf and the city, the nostalgic and the modern - all under one roof where everyone is welcome".

The first phase of the venue's historic redevelopment will see the opening of Larrie's, a hole-in-the-wall beachside kiosk reminiscent of the classic local milk bars of the 70s and 80s, in mid April.

Designed in collaboration with local architects EJE Interiors, Larrie's has taken cues from the classic Australian takeaway and bottle shops of decades past and paired them with an aesthetic that allude to the Merewether's history as the home of the



Glenn Piper owner of Merewether Beach Hotel

country's biggest surf carnival. Vintage brown and mustard tiled bars and aluminium-edged laminate countertops line the takeaway atop checkerboard floors, offering guests prime views of the beach as they share a plate of chicken-salt laden chips; the hum of retro-style fridges filled with the best Aussie brews and icy colas lure diners to grab a cold one to-go.

Due to the significance and scale of the venue, Glenn and his team are taking a gradual approach to the refurbishment of other areas of The Beaches. The second phase, set for late 2023, will see the introduction of a revitalised ground floor including its expansive main bar, as well as the introduction of a new coastal dining experience on the first floor. The vision is for The Beaches to continue to be intrinsically linked to its roots with a strong community-focus and connection to surf culture.



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I2N Accelerator returns

The University of Newcastle is calling on innovators across the Hunter region to take part in its I2N Accelerator program, which takes curious problem solvers and skills them up to become budding entrepreneurs.

Now in its second year, the I2N Accelerator offers a comprehensive program of activity designed to fast-track growth for early-stage ventures and provide continued support as they grow into later stage scaleups. This includes mentorship, networking opportunities, peer-to-peer learning, coworking, and a range of workshops led by founders and industry experts.

Delivered by the University's Integrated Innovation Network (I2N) and supported by Investment NSW through the Boosting Business Innovation Program, the I2N Accelerator is a three-phase program incorporating a pre-accelerator, accelerator, and incubator, providing founders the opportunity to refine and then scale their big idea.

Applications for I2N Accelerator are now open to innovators across the Hunter region and close on Sunday 30 April 2023.

Assistant Director, I2N Operations and Innovation, Siobhan Curran said the expansion of I2N Accelerator to incorporate all stages of the start-up journey reflects the Hunter region's maturing start-up ecosystem.

"I2N programs have consistently built capacity and established a strong community of founders, mentors, and facilitators," Ms Curran said.

"Now in our sixth year, the I2N is seeing a demand from tech-enabled entrepreneurs to not only determine if their idea has market potential and is sustainable, but to take it to the next level and scale their breakthrough products and services globally.

"This success reflects not only the level of talent here in the region, but the sustained contributions of time, expertise and funding from many supporters who help this community to thrive," said Ms Curran.



Ms Curran said the I2N Accelerator program would provide access to industry heavyweights and help founders validate, prototype, and then scale their business right here in the Hunter region.

"We connect start-ups to community, customers, coaching and capital to help them accelerate to market. It's this support that can make or break the success of a new business idea," said Ms Curran.

I2N Accelerator will be delivered out of the University's purpose-built Q Building in the Newcastle CBD - the epicentre for innovation and entrepreneurship in the Hunter.

Sustainability centre opened in Lake Macquarie

Lake Macquarie residents and visitors now have access to a one-stop shop to learn more about sustainability and caring for the environment, with the opening of the new Landcare and Sustainable Living Centre, umali barai-ku, at Booragul.

Parliamentary Secretary for the Hunter Taylor Martin and Lake Macquarie Mayor Kay Fraser opened the new facility, alongside volunteers from Lake Macquarie Landcare Network and the Sustainable Neighbourhood Alliance.

Cr Fraser said the \$2 million site upgrade would enable Council staff and volunteers to work together and engage with more people than ever before.

"Lake Macquarie Landcare and the Sustainable Neighbourhood Alliance already do fantastic work to help educate our community around how they can live more sustainably and care for the natural environments that make our city so unique," she said.

"With the upgraded facilities available at the new centre, I have no doubt the inspiring line-up of events and programming that Council and these groups deliver will continue to grow and thrive."

Built on the site of the former Landcare Resource Centre at Booragul, the Landcare and Sustainable Living Centre features new indoor and outdoor meeting spaces, updated kitchen and state-of-the-art collaborative office spaces for staff and volunteers. The Awabakal name for the centre, umali barai-ku, means 'to do for the earth'.

Lake Macquarie City Council Manager Community Partnerships Andrew Bryant said this commitment 'to do for the earth' was reflected in the building's physical form.

"We're extremely proud that this new facility has been designed and constructed with Green Star building principles to ensure the materials and architecture maximise environmental benefits," he said.


"We have 50 kW of solar on the roof, we're capturing and using rainwater in our operations, there are green walls to assist with cooling, and we're reducing waste through re-use of materials. The pavers you'll see around the centre were once used in Pearson Street Mall at Charlestown."

The NSW Government contributed \$202,118 to the project through Round Two of the Stronger Country Communities Fund, with Council contributing the remainder.

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Clean Manufacturing Precinct project launches in the Hunter

Energy intensive businesses in the Hunter region will gain access to clean infrastructure and technology to fast track their emissions reduction and attract low carbon industry investment, thanks to the NSW Government.

The NSW Government launched the Clean Manufacturing Precinct project, part of the \$55 million Low Carbon Foundations program. The first stage of the project will involve developing a decarbonisation pathway and implementation plan.

Parliamentary Secretary for the Hunter Taylor Martin said the precincts will be in the Hunter and Illawarra regions, which are the state's two largest industrial regions.

"This is a win for the Hunter's economic future, creating new jobs in low carbon industries and expanding onshore manufacturing," Mr Martin said.

"The Liberal and National Government is revitalising our industrial heartland by backing the Hunter to thrive as a global energy hub into the future.

"Decarbonising at large scale will need input from business and broad industry stakeholders. NSW has partnered with Environmental Resources Management's (ERM's) Go2Clean team to lead this collaborative project and develop the pathway to create the precincts."

Clean manufacturing precincts are clusters of geographically close businesses across multiple industries that share a goal of having low to zero energy and process emissions. They are vital to reducing our emissions by 70% below 2005 levels by 2035, and achieving net zero by 2050.

ERM is the largest global specialist sustainability consultancy, with local and international capabilities. Its Go2Clean team consists of Arup, HoustonKemp, MBB Group and GreenCollar, covering skillsets in decarbonisation pathways, engineering and finance.

Clean manufacturing precincts will help high-emitting industries achieve their decarbonisation commitments by prioritising planning and co-investment opportunities. The decarbonisation pathway and an implementation plan are expected to be completed by late 2023 in collaboration with local industry and economic development agencies. This will also help identify near-term investment opportunities in mid-2023.

Port welcomes appointment of valuer for container operations

Port of Newcastle has welcomed the announcement by NSW Treasurer Matt Kean that IPART has been appointed as the independent valuer under the Port of Newcastle Extinguishment of Liability Act 2022.

CEO Craig Carmody said, the appointment marks the final step in the legislative process, which will enable the Port to compete in container trade free from penalty.

"This announcement is momentous for the Port of Newcastle, the Hunter and Northern and Western NSW. That is why it has support from all sides of politics," Mr Carmody said.

"At the Port, we have never been shy in speaking about our need to diversify our trade in order to future-proof the Hunter and continue to drive jobs and investment in our region.

"I am incredibly proud to be part of an announcement that helps turn the vision of a diversified Hunter economy into reality."

The Newcastle Deepwater Container Terminal (NDCT), is a once in a generation opportunity and one of the region's most important development pathways since BHP, unlocking \$2.2 billion in economic activity in NSW alone and generating more than 15,000 direct and indirect jobs nationally; 12,000 of those being in the Lower Hunter.

Mr Carmody thanked Independent Member for Lake Macquarie Greg Piper MP and the Treasurer, Hon Matt Kean MP, for their strength of leadership in supporting the legislation, which passed Parliament in November last year.

"Greg Piper has shown great leadership in recognising the need for a container terminal in Newcastle and the benefits it would bring not just to the Hunter, but Regional NSW," Mr Carmody said.

"We also would not be here without the courage of The Member for Northern Tablelands, The Hon. Adam Marshall MP and The Member for Upper Hunter, Dave Layzell MP, along with the efforts from stakeholders across regional NSW, particularly NSW Farmers and their members.

"With this announcement, the NSW Government is providing manufacturers and agri-businesses with a cost-effective alternative to export their goods will drive growth and investment both here and in the regions. This will create new opportunities for exporters and importers, that will ultimately lead to benefits for consumers.

"Now that the Treasurer has appointed the independent valuer, we look forward to seeing the process through to completion over the next six months."

Once fully operational, the \$2.4 billion NDCT will have a throughput capacity of 2 million TEUs (standard twenty-foot containers), delivering benefits worth \$2.5 billion to the national economy.

Grants to help farmers invest in technology

Farmers could get a boost of up to \$35,000 to invest in the ag tech and connectivity solutions they need to drive increased productivity and position their business for the future thanks to the NSW Government.

Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional NSW Paul Toole said the NSW Government was backing the industry with \$20 million in grants as part of the Farms of the Future program to support investment in everything from soil moisture sensors to dashboards to help monitor the farm from your mobile.

"The ag sector is always innovating and this fund will help producers tap into the latest technology to drive productivity in the paddock and allow them to work smarter, not harder," Mr Toole said.

"A grant of up to \$35,000 could put some of these technologies in reach for hundreds of farm businesses and unlock multiple times that in cost savings and boosted productivity."

Minister for Agriculture Dugald Saunders said embracing on-farm technology will help take agriculture in NSW to the next level.

"Despite the challenges over the last few years, our primary industries sector continues to break records and is currently valued at a whopping \$23.1 billion, and we're confident we can boost this to \$30 billion by 2030," Mr Saunders said.

"Encouraging farmers to engage in widespread use of agricultural technology and digital connectivity will help drive substantial growth now and into the future, which is great news for our farmers and regional communities."

Farmers can use their grant to select devices from a dedicated Agtech Catalogue website that best suits their farming operation. The Catalogue features IoT devices, digital monitoring products and connectivity solutions from 50 suppliers who were selected through an Expression of Interest held in 2022.

The Farms of the Future program has been developed in partnership with Tocal Agricultural College, one of the leading providers in specialised training for agricultural and rural industries.

Full details of the grant funding opportunity are available on the NSW Government's grants and funding finder website at www.nsw.gov.au/fotfgrant. Applications close on 31 August.

Newcastle's Fort Scratchley awarded prestigious heritage marker

Fort Scratchley, the former coastal defence installation and historical tourist attraction on the Newcastle coast, has been awarded an Engineering Heritage Marker. On February 14, Engineers Australia and Fort Scratchley representatives gathered to reveal the Engineering Heritage Marker plaque for the Fort.

The fort is the largest and most diversified and intact coastal fortress barracks complex in Australia. It is set on Signal Hill in Newcastle and overlooks the city and coastline out to the South Pacific Ocean.

Fort Scratchley was built on the grounds of the traditional country of the Awabakal and Worimi peoples. Construction began on permanent fortification in 1882. The main elements were constructed in the late 19th century and represent civil construction methods of the era including small-scale unreinforced concrete construction, of which the tunnels are a great example.

Fort Scratchley's layout is innovative as the tunnels always run downhill in the direction of loading ammunition. The tunnels run into the central magazines or out of them to deep shell lifts. Construction evolution over the following 50 years is evident in various examples throughout the fort, most notably the changes as reinforced concrete was introduced.

Following its initial military use, the Fort was also used in the National Service Scheme for militia training in the mid-1950s. Convict coal mines have also been discovered below the Fort by the University's Coal River Working Party.

Today the inner fort holds gun emplacements, a battery observation post and associated fortress structures and underground tunnels, the commandants cottage, the barracks, and associated buildings on the lower section. The outer fort encompasses the Master Gunner's Cottage, a workshop, and a multipurpose centre.

Day to day the fort is now run by volunteers from the Fort Scratchley Historical Society who offer tours of the tunnels and access to the museum and military buildings.

Engineers Australia's Engineering Heritage Recognition Program recognises historical engineering achievements across Australia to raise the profile and understanding of the work of past engineers across the country.

Tim Crakanthorp - State Member for Newcastle, Stephen Palmer - Engineers Australia Newcastle Division President, Frank Carter - Fort Scratchley Historical Society, Cr Peta Winey-Baartz - Councillor | Ward 3 - City of Newcastle and Merv Lindsay - Chair Engineering Heritage Newcastle Division



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Ampcontrol rebrands Member Companies

Ampcontrol has announced the major rebranding of its Member Companies to meet the growth and response to industry needs for innovative power solutions and service. Wholly owned and operated by Ampcontrol, Austech, Burn Brite, Captech, CPS National and Verico have been rebranded to Ampcontrol including name, logo, and website.

The rebrand of its Member Companies comes as Ampcontrol accelerates its strategy to be at the forefront of developing and supplying advanced technology, products, and services to the resources, infrastructure, and energy sectors that enable a competitive advantage in a net-zero carbon environment.

“Our industry and customer needs are rapidly changing in the global low-carbon economy. Incorporating our industry-leading member companies into the Ampcontrol brand will result in our customers benefiting from a rapidly expanding portfolio of products and service capabilities, cutting-edge digital technology, and accelerated innovation to help solve some of the greatest challenges facing our future such as decarbonisation and renewable energy solutions”, said Ampcontrol Managing Director & CEO Rod Henderson.

The existing product and service offerings from Ampcontrol Member Companies will remain the same and form part of the trusted and reputable Ampcontrol offering.

“At Ampcontrol, we are committed to keeping manufacturing jobs here in Australia; we have the smarts, ingenuity, and advanced capability to lead the world in energy manufacturing. This next step in our strategic growth plan will allow us to take advantage of new synergies, partnerships, and expansion opportunities across new and emerging domestic and international markets that will better serve our customers, industry, and growing workforce”, added Mr Henderson.

Sportsground for Chisholm

One of Maitland’s fastest growing communities, Chisholm, is set for its first sportsground to help meet the demand for outdoor sporting facilities in Maitland. The NSW Government’s Accelerated Infrastructure Fund (AIF) Round 3 announced \$5.51 million in funding for the delivery and associated works.

Plans for the 4.565 ha site at Billabong Parade, Chisholm, are still being finalised but works will accommodate cricket or double fields for football/rugby, with subsoil drainage and irrigation. An amenities building, parking for approximately 80 vehicles, fencing, concrete paths and landscaping works are also included. The site’s size provides opportunities for future projects like a playspace, pending funding.

Council will contribute an additional \$2.1 million funded by development contributions from the Thornton North Section 94 Contributions Plan 2008 taking the project’s total cost to around \$7.6 million.

With the confirmation of grant funding, this major project will move into a detailed design phase. Council anticipates that the sportsground will be delivered by June 2026.

Newcastle Airport welcomes more direct flights to Cairns in 2023

Newcastle Airport has welcomed more direct flights to Cairns in 2023, thanks to Jetstar. The low-cost carrier has added new flights between 24 June and 28 October 2023, with three return flights per week on Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.

Newcastle Airport CEO Dr Peter Cock welcomed the announcement, saying it’s more good news for our region.

“We are thrilled to once again partner with Jetstar and Cairns Airport for a third season of this incredibly popular direct service. “People of our region love Tropical North Queensland. Cairns has

proven to be one of our most in-demand destinations over the past two years as travellers head north to escape winter.

“Not only does the direct connection offer ease and convenience, but a flight time of only 2 hours and 45 minutes means the popular destination is more accessible than ever.

“It also provides an exciting boost for tourism for both cities, the benefits of which cannot be underestimated after the challenges of the past three years.”

Dr Cock said Newcastle Airport is the better alternative to big city airports when it comes to venturing north and connecting to international destinations.

“From Cairns Airport, people from our region can connect to Japan, as well as more Australian destinations, including Darwin.

“Getting to Cairns is faster from Newcastle Airport with no tolls, easy parking, shorter queues and less stress. Less time waiting for connections or driving to Sydney means you have more time to start enjoying your tropical holiday sooner.”

Jetstar’s Chief Customer Officer, Alan McIntyre, said demand was strong since the route’s inception in 2021.

“We’re confident it will be just as popular this year,” he said.

Jetstar is the only airline operating this route, linking two of the country’s most spectacular tourist destinations. Flights are expected to fill quickly with the service carrying up to 6,000 passengers per month.

“Cairns is the first of many direct routes Newcastle Airport hopes to announce in 2023, with more destinations on the horizon over the coming 12 month.

Hunter Sports Centre expanded

A new practice and warm-up track is set to elevate Lake Macquarie’s Hunter Sports Centre to world-class status, paving the way for the venue to host national and international events.

The four-lane track, featuring a 110 m straight and a 40 m bend, was completed in time for February Regional Little Athletics Championships, which saw almost 1000 young athletes descend on the venue from the Hunter and Central Coast.

The \$2.7 million project also included construction of new warm-up areas for field events such as shotput, hammer throw and discus, with new state-of-the-art sports science space for athlete testing and performance monitoring still to come.

Project funding included \$960,000 through the Australian Government’s Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program, and \$1 million through the NSW Government’s Regional Sports Facility Fund. Lake Macquarie City Council funded the remainder.

Hunter Sports Centre General Manager Brendan Barrett said the track provided room for athletes to warm up and practice on 100 m sprints, with a 15 m ‘deceleration zone’, as well as a bend to practice other track events such as hurdles and relay.

“Having the warm-up and practice facilities is the last hurdle we have to clear to be certified as a World Class 1 facility,” he said.

“This will enable us to host national and international athletes and events, so it’s a very exciting period.”

Mr Barrett said the new facilities would be open to all Hunter Sports Centre users, including school groups, Little Athletics clubs, seniors and elite competitors.

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Port Stephens Oyster Reef Restoration project

The Sydney Rock Oyster (*Saccostrea glomerata*) is a bivalve mollusk and is Australia's only native rock oyster. It is found in the Port Stephens Estuary and while many Port Stephens locals find oysters to be delicious to eat, they also perform an important function for their local ecosystems. Oysters are filter feeders, they feed upon suspended particles in the water column helping to keep nutrient loads down and improve water quality. Their oyster reefs also provide habitat for fish and other invertebrates, helping to create a diverse ecosystem.

Just how important the Sydney Rock Oyster is to the health of the Port Stephens Estuary can be seen in the results of the Port Stephens Oyster Reef Restoration project. The project involved the construction of rock bases across 7.5 hectares of bare sand and mud in the Port Stephens-Great Lakes Marine Park and was conducted by DPI Fisheries and funded under MEMS (Marine Estate Management Strategy).

More than 55 million baby oysters (called oyster spat) were colonized on the reef base to create a living and growing oyster reef. It has now been 2 years since the reef restoration began and researchers have already seen significant changes taking place in the vicinity of the reefs including an increase in species diversity and type. Plus, they have calculated that the restored reefs are filtering the equivalent of three Olympic swimming pools of water every hour.

Unfortunately, Sydney Rock Oysters reefs are susceptible to disease, invasive species, poor water quality and overfishing. The extent of their reef beds has been significantly reduced as a result of these threats. Therefore, the Port Stephens Reef Restoration study is not only hugely promising in restoring ecosystem health and function but in increasing the numbers of the Sydney Rock Oyster.

\$40,000 of scholarships awarded

Port Stephens Mayor Ryan Palmer joined representatives from 16 local businesses to present a total of \$40,000 to support the most passionate local students at the Port Stephens Mayoral Academic Scholarships.

Twenty deserving young people each received \$2,000 to put towards their first year of tertiary education to help them achieve their career aspirations.

Mayor Palmer said he's impressed by the range of fields being studied, including mechanical engineering, aerospace engineering, data science, science, medicine, nutrition, biology, business, law and education.

"This is an opportunity to thank our future leaders for their persistence and hard work during a particularly stressful time completing their HSC," Mayor Palmer said.

"The \$2,000 can be used to buy a computer or laptop or maybe pay for accommodation or moving costs.

"These scholarships wouldn't happen without the investment of local business. Many of our sponsors have been involved with the Mayoral Academic Scholarships program for many years with some providing funding for 2 scholarships," he added.

This year's sponsors included Ampcontrol, BAE Systems Australia, Business Port Stephens, Club Lemon Tree (two scholarships), Destination Port Stephens, Hunter Land, Hunter Readymixed Concrete, McDonald Jones, MOJO Homes, Newcastle Airport (two scholarships), Raymond Terrace Bowling Club, Salamander Bay Recycling (two scholarships), Soldiers Point Bowling Club, The Wests Group (two scholarships), Tomago Aluminium and Weathertex.

"I want to thank all of the sponsors for supporting the future leaders of Port Stephens and for giving the students an opportunity to grow their network and connect with local leaders in their own time – invaluable for both business and students," Mayor Palmer said.

Pacific Aerospace Consulting and Pierce Aerospace partner to expand UAS Remote ID

Pacific Aerospace Consulting (PAC) Australia has partnered with Pierce Aerospace, a US-based leader in Remote Identification (ID) technology for commercial and government use. PAC has provided aerospace services since 2004, offering core capabilities in Cyber Security, Mission Systems, Information Domain Exchange, and Training and Simulation.

Pierce Aerospace's Flight Portal ID is an Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Remote ID technology suite that includes Remote ID receivers, broadcast modules, software, integration capabilities, and remote administration services. Flight Portal ID is a market-leading solution with integration services available for commercial unmanned traffic management (UTM), detect and avoid (DAA), and DoD command and control (C2) and C-UAS systems.

The partnership between PAC and Pierce Aerospace aims to deploy, integrate, and advance UAS Remote ID technology in Australia and New Zealand. The collaboration will also focus on business opportunities such as systems integration, engineering and scientific support, installation support services, and fielding of Pierce Aerospace technologies in the region.

Pierce Aerospace CEO Aaron Pierce said that PAC is a trustworthy and valuable partner to expand their global reach in the UAS market:

"PAC has the right capabilities and, most importantly, the right team to deliver innovation, especially as our Defence work expands. They're a great partner to bring our dual-use Remote ID technology into Australia and New Zealand, furthering our ability to bring trusted capabilities to our Five Eyes partners at a time when old alliances are more relevant than ever. We already have commercial relationships and opportunities for regional integration with Australian C-UAS leaders at DroneShield."

PAC AUS CEO Lee de Winton explained the importance of early detection and identification between cooperative and noncooperative UAS to protect aerodromes and critical infrastructure and assets.

"Previously, when employed as an Air Traffic Controller and Airspace Manager, this was a continual focus to ensure effective battlespace flexibility and integration. Hence, we are looking forward to continuing our support and relationship with the Pierce Aerospace team and bringing awareness and maturity of UAS Remote-ID technologies to the Australian market."

Grassroots Maitland projects set for \$2 million boost

Seven important grassroots community and recreation projects across Maitland will soon get underway after Council was awarded more than \$2 million from the NSW Government's Stronger Country Communities Fund Round 5.

Maitland Park is one of the big winners with the site receiving a combined \$725,000 to install new outer field lighting at the playing fields and install lighting around the park's shared pathway and facilities.

Norm Chapman Oval in Rutherford will receive \$384,555 for a shared pathway to improve connectivity to existing pathways in the area and the installation of exercise stations around the site.

A brand new playspace at Metford Oval (\$250,000), a universal toilet and car parking at Wirraway Park in Thornton (\$219,122), plus tennis court surface replacements in Rutherford and East Maitland (\$439,934) round out the seven projects which will come to fruition thanks to this funding.

Hunter Hospitality School launched

Leading hotelier and hospitality entrepreneur, Dr Jerry Schwartz, is teaming up with the University of Newcastle to address the hospitality skills shortage by establishing a new training academy for the Hunter Valley.

The private Hunter Hospitality School will be established in Dr Schwartz's property in Newcastle's Honeysuckle district and will offer courses in hospitality, IT, spa therapy and brewing.

In addition to providing job-ready graduates, the college's diploma programs provide pathways to higher education opportunities.

Dr Schwartz is seeking final accreditation for the training college. In the meantime, he is in discussions with the University of Newcastle to align the training college with the University's new Bachelor of Tourism, Hospitality and Events course.

The Cert IV course offered by the new Hunter Hospitality School will be structured so as to allow credits for the first year of the new three-year University course. As part of the courses, students from the college and university will be required to undertake mandatory on-the-job training.

Dr Schwartz owns three hotels in the Hunter Valley - Rydges Newcastle, Newcastle Novotel and Hunter Valley Crowne Plaza – as well as a brewery, luxury spa and other tourism interests. His operations employ over 1000 people in the region.

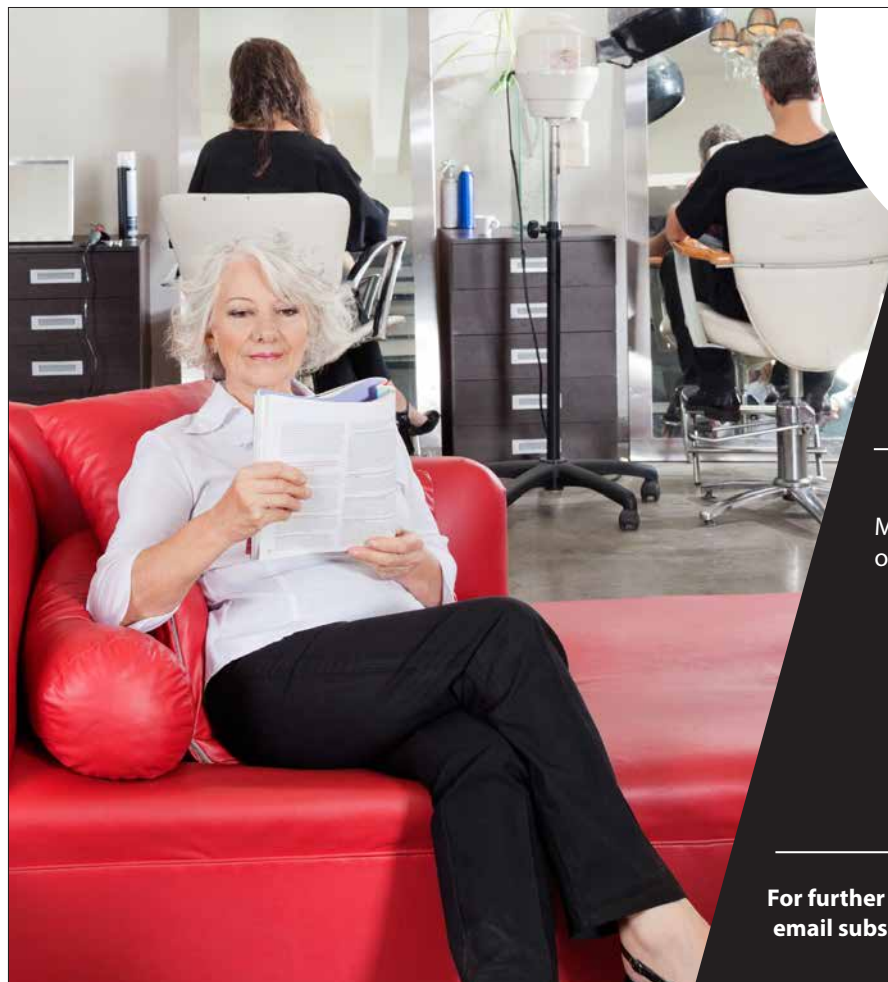
Dr Schwartz said that the emphasis of the courses would be on practical training, as the Hunter region and the rest of Australia were desperately short of job-ready hospitality personnel.

Dr Schwartz has also announced plans for a multi-purpose bar and function venue at the new Crossing apartment and retail complex in Honeysuckle. The venue will be complemented by an in-house brewery in Dr Schwartz's adjoining Centenary Drive property, which will also house the hospitality training college.



Dr Jerry Schwartz

Schwartz Family Company operates breweries in Lovedale and Sydney, aligned to food and beverage outlets and hotel accommodation. The Newcastle brewery is expected to be completed in 2024.



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COMING EVENTS

23 March 2023, 5:30 pm - 9:30 pm

**Newcastle Business Club
Members Only | March**

Venue: Newcastle Yacht Club

Cost: Free for members

www.newcastlebusinessclub.com.au

23 March 2023, 12:00 pm – 2:00 pm

**Myrtec
March Techshop | Newcastle Business Luncheon**

Venue: Myrtec

Cost: Free but registration required

www.eventbrite.com.au/o/the-myrtec-group-32460023681

29 March 2023, 12:00 pm – 3:00 pm

HIA-Highgrove Bathrooms Building Women Luncheon

Venue: Fort Scratchley

Cost: \$125 (members), \$250 (non-members)

hia.com.au/awards-and-events/events?pg=1&ps=12&cr=undefined&f=region=Hunter%20NSW

30 March 2023, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

HIA Builders Coach Workshop

Venue: Fort Scratchley

Cost: \$110 (members), \$220 (non-members)

hia.com.au/awards-and-events/events/workshop/hunter-nsw/2023/workshop-mayfield-west-mar30

30 March 2023, 9:00 am – 4:30 pm

**ActionCoach
ActionMEMBERSHIP Program**

Venue: NEX

Cost: Free

www.eventbrite.com.au/e/elite-membership-program-for-business-owners-newcastle-and-the-hunter-tickets-567164041917?aff=ebdsoporgprofile

31 March 2023, 12:30 pm - 3:00 pm

**Gen Collective
2023 International Women's Day Luncheon**

Speaker: Sam Bloom

Venue: Merewether Surfhouse

Cost: \$130 | Gen Collective members

www.gencollective.com.au/iwd

4 April 2023, 3:00 pm - 6:00 pm

**Cutcher & Neale
2023 Shirlaws Workshop: Asset Creation**

Venue: Cutcher & Neale

Cost: free

www.cutcher.com.au/events

18 April 2023, 4:00 pm – 6:00 pm

**University of Newcastle's Integrated Innovation Network (I2N)
Idea Workshop: Find a Co-founder**

Venue: I2N Hub Honeysuckle

Cost: Free

www.eventbrite.com.au/e/idea-workshop-find-a-co-founder-tickets-558411272147?aff=erelexpmlt

3 May 2023, 8:00 am – 9:00 am

**University of Newcastle
Integrated Innovation Network (I2N) Startup Stories**

Venue: I2N Hub Honeysuckle

Cost: Free

www.eventbrite.com.au/e/startup-stories-keiran-james-businesssales-tickets-536464418517?aff=erelexpmlt

4 May 2023, 3:00 pm - 6:00 pm

**Cutcher & Neale
2023 Shirlaws Workshop: Culture & Succession**

Venue: Cutcher & Neale

Cost: free

www.cutcher.com.au/events

26 May 2023, 11 August 2023 & 27 October 2023,
12:00 pm - 2:00 pm

**Business Hunter
The Business Hunter Infrastructure series**

Venue: McDonald Jones Stadium

www.businesshunter.com/hunter-business-events/our-events/business-infrastructure-lunch-series

23 June 2023, 8 September 2023 & 23 November 2023,
12:00 pm - 2:00 pm

**Business Hunter
The Business Hunter Energy & Resources Lunch**

Venue: McDonald Jones Stadium

Cost: \$110

www.businesshunter.com/hunter-business-events/our-events/business-mining-lunch-series

1 June 2023 & 9 October 2023

**Business Hunter
Business Hunter Innovation Series**

www.businesshunter.com/hunter-business-events/our-events/business-innovation-lunch-series

1 July 2023

**Business Singleton
Singleton Business Awards**

Nominations Close 27 March

www.businesssingleton.com.au/singleton-business-awards

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For queries or feedback regarding the **2023 Hunter Investment Prospectus**, please contact:

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Housing and infrastructure supply heading in the wrong direction

There is increasing concern around meeting Australia's housing and infrastructure needs with new home building approvals dropping to their lowest monthly figure in over a decade says Master Builders Australia CEO Denita Wawn.

"Despite the intention from governments and industry to reach a target of one million homes under the Housing Accord, today's data highlights that more needs to be done to tackle supply barriers and to speed up the delivery of new homes and attract investment.

"Without sensible fiscal levers being pulled, we are seeing the negative consequences of rising interest rates playing out," said Ms Wawn.

The ABS's January building approvals figures show that new home building approvals dropped by 27.6%, down 8.4% from a year earlier.

Detached house approvals have seen a substantial reduction and they are now about 12% lower than a year ago.

Ms Wawn said detached house approval volumes have fallen well below pre-covid levels. The figures suggest the increasing pace of a slowdown is a direct consequence of the sharp hike in interest rates and inflation over the past year.

"Insufficient supply of titled residential land, high developer charges and inflexible planning laws are preventing new home building projects from getting off the starting blocks.

"January saw a severe reduction in higher density home building approvals of 43.6% and while this is still level with figures a year ago, over the long-term high density home building is still playing catch-up," said Ms Wawn.

Rent prices have increased further in January from an annual rise of 4.1% in December to 4.8% in January, reflecting low vacancy rates and a tight labour market.

Ms Wawn said the latest inflation figures show growing pressures in the rental market and without a strong pick up in apartments and

units entering the pipeline, this will be difficult to neutralise.

"High inflation is threatening to add to housing supply and affordability challenges in the owner-occupier and rental markets.

"Builders are seeing evidence of declining sales, and we anticipate this slowdown will continue over the course of 2023.

"The pain of higher interest rates and high inflation is real and if we do not get it under control we could be in for a lengthy period of pain and depressed construction activity," said Ms Wawn.

Non-residential building approvals in January were about the same as a year earlier (-0.1%).

"With the vast majority of money for building projects coming from private sector investment, the stagnant conditions in non-residential building suggest that productivity-enhancing building work needs to be incentivised," said Ms Wawn.

Property Council finds new growth opportunities in education and precincts

The Property Council of Australia has released a Precincts Discussion Paper finding large amounts of income potential within the sector and better ways for industry and government to work together to add more value to projects.

The Property Council's Precincts Committee has worked over the past two years to showcase precinct case studies which show how they can be supercharged to create greater value through the property sector working more collaboratively.

Property Council's NSW Acting Executive Director Adina Cirson said the property industry should consider what it can do and how it can innovate as an enabler for these opportunities so they can ultimately share in the flow on benefits of precincts.

"Similarly, the NSW Government has a role to play in being an enabler in the initial establishment of precincts, providing clarity around taxation and planning pathways and encouraging precincts to develop their own governance structures as they mature through their life cycle," Ms Cirson said.

"In 2020 the value of the NSW education sector's property portfolio was approximately \$52bn and it currently consists of real estate assets that are primed for reapplication toward additional revenue generating ventures.

"More broadly, the education sector contains a weighty asset portfolio, with the book value of the NSW Department of Education alone totalling over \$33bn and NSW's top 10 universities making up a significant portion of the total NSW education sector.

"Despite recovering from the challenges of COVID, there is still much to be done for Universities to counterbalance the diminution of Federal Government funding and increasing costs, including of digitisation.

"The sector is presented with a significant opportunity to leverage capital locked up in asset holdings while concurrently revitalising education precincts and 'honing in' on core business operations.

"Co-investment in developments with the private sector can leverage the economic output of innovation districts and precincts more generally by combining the strengths of academia with commercialisation of industry partners."

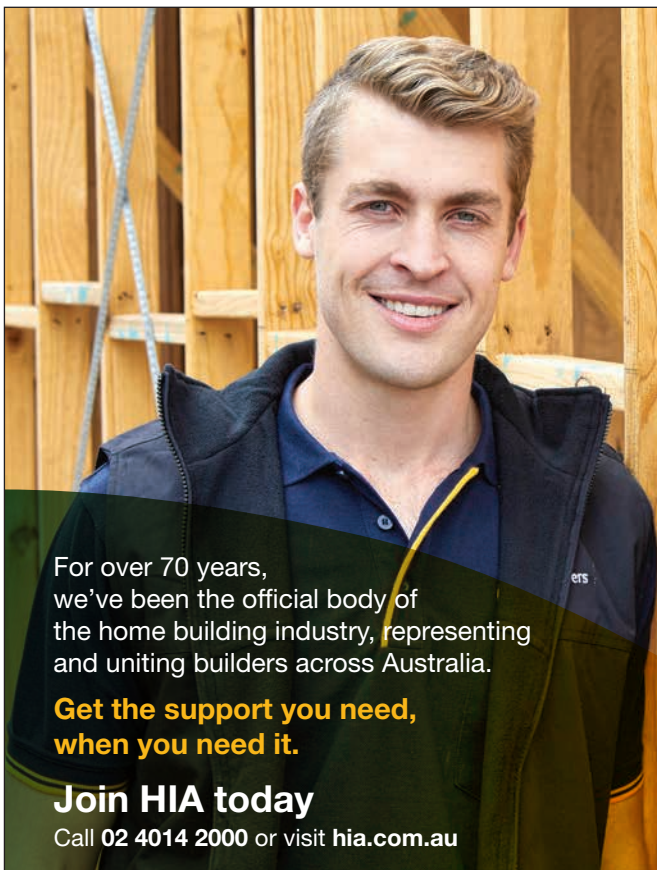
Hunter building approvals contract

Latest ABS figures on new home approvals indicate that detached home activity across the Hunter and Central Coast contracted in 2022, reported the Housing Industry Association.

"In 2022 detached dwelling approvals decreased 18% in the Hunter and 28% on the Central Coast compared to the 2021 calendar year," said Craig Jennion, HIA Hunter Executive Director.

"Accounting for 66.8% of all approvals in the Hunter detached homes remained the preference for home buyers, despite the decline. However, on the Central Coast they fell to 48.8% as a result of increased multi-unit approvals".

"In 2022 a total of 3,966 new dwellings were approved in the



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Hunter, a fall of 23% compared to the previous year. Dissimilarly 1,603 total approvals on the Central Coast ensured the region duplicated the number of residential homes approved for construction compared to 2021. This was a result of elevated activity in the south of the municipality”.

“Much of the heavy lifting for the residential sector continues to occur in the local government areas of Central Coast, Lake Macquarie and Maitland. These top three locations for approvals accounting for 65.4% of total approvals”, said Mr Jennion.

“The value of approved major renovations and alterations diverged, with Hunter approvals decreasing by 13% to \$276.2 million and the Central Coast increasing by 6% to \$157.5 million. Like detached and multi-unit dwelling approvals all growth on the Central Coast occurred in the south of the municipality, where the total value increased 12%”.

“The declines, particularly those in the latter half of 2022, were expected following the end of the HomeBuilder grant and a cooling market that was influenced by increases in the cost of construction. This was triggered by material and labour shortages”, explained Mr Jennion.

“Looking ahead, residential building activity will remain strong on the back of the large pipeline of work approved over the past 2 years, however the impact of increasing interest rates will keep demand for new homes at a level below that observed in recent years”.

“Pleasingly, the relative affordability advantages the region has over other locations will support continued demand for new homes, ensuring the important contribution residential construction provides the local economy continues in the near future,” concluded Mr Jennion.

Total Dwellings	12 months to Dec 21	12 months to Dec 22%	change
Central Coast	1,610	1,603	-0%
Cessnock	312	322	3%
Lake Macquarie	1,560	1,260	-19%
Maitland	1,211	781	-36%
Newcastle	1,042	591	-43%
Port Stephens	719	603	-16%
Dungog	46	43	-7%
Singleton	45	44	-2%
Muswellbrook	44	35	-20%
Scone	13	14	8%
Gloucester	18	27	50%
Great Lakes	151	246	63%
	6,771	5,569	-18%



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DIAMOND IT

Diamond IT has appointed **Jason O'Rourke** as System Engineer to their growing projects team. Jason has over 20 years of experience working across a range of industries, specialising in networks and telephony, security, virtualisation, Active Directory, unified communications, hybridisation, public cloud and Azure. In his role with Diamond IT, Jason delivers expert technology advice to customers, while building and implementing solutions to serve their evolving needs.



NORTH CONSTRUCTION & BUILDING

Nicole Redmond has been appointed Director – People, Culture & Corporate Services at North Construction & Building. Nicole has over 25 years senior management experience specialising in operations, human resources, marketing, finance, property and development, logistics and safety. She joined North in 2011 as Office Manager, transitioning to Corporate Services Manager and Company Secretary in 2016, then becoming a shareholder in 2018 to now take on her current role as Director.



NORTH CONSTRUCTION & BUILDING

North Construction and Building has appointed **Mark Chase** as Director – Business Operations. Mark was recruited into the business in 2019 bringing with him more than 25 years in the construction industry. Mark's industry experience and passion for construction have contributed immensely to the organisation through his initial role as Design & Construct Manger, then as Pre-construction Manager also becoming a shareholder this past year, to his current Director role.



SPARKE HELMORE

Sparke Helmore has appointed **Emma Gruschka** as Local Managing Partner of the firm's Newcastle office. A Hunter local and experienced workplace lawyer, she specialises in employment and work health and safety issues advising clients in diverse sectors, including mining, utilities, transport, financial services, insurance, health care and government. She supports clients at a local, state and national level. Emma joined the firm in 2007 and the partnership in 2021.

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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 contol.



MONICA CLARE NOW VERVE PARTNERS IN EXCITING REBRAND

Well-known local company Monica Clare Recruitment has announced an official rebrand and name change. Now, Verve Partners, the change represents how the business has evolved and who they are today.

"In the beginning, the business was about two people, but we're now in a very different position", says CEO and founder Clare Ferguson.

"We've grown so much over the years, and as a team of 20+, we wanted a new name and brand that reflected our diverse and collective strength and energy."

Verve was chosen as it means vigour, enthusiasm, vivacity and vitality, all words that sum up who they are, their true values and their approach to recruiting: growing vibrant careers, cultures and cultures and communities.

But while their name, look and feel have changed, Verve Partners' three Directors, Clare, Simon Rutten and Krystle Parker, are keen to stress that their clients and candidates will still experience the same quality, people-focused service they've come to expect from the team.

"We haven't changed what we do. This evolution is something that's been slowly happening over the past few years, says

Executive Director Simon.

"The main difference is in our physical offering and how we're representing what we now deliver.

"Over the past 12 months, we've grown and moved outside the Newcastle and Hunter region, including opening a new office in Wollongong. This gives us the opportunity to strengthen our relationships with clients, wherever they're located."

As the team has grown, they've added to their industry specialisms. They're also laser-focused on building longer-term relationships and offering clients holistic consulting and advisory services via a new HR Consulting arm and Partnership Package.

"I've never worked with a more experienced, high-calibre team in the 22 years I've been in recruitment," says Clare.

"I'm so proud of what we achieve every day and the passion and energy they bring."

"We're so excited for this rebrand and where the business is headed," says Executive Director Krystle.

"We're reimagining recruitment and believe we bring something different to the market. Our goal as Verve Partners is to continue to grow and see the business flourish. Watch this space!"

The team at Verve Partners





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Whether you're seeking exceptional candidates or ready for a positive career move, we dig deep to get to know you, so everything clicks.

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vervepartners.com.au



NEW RIGHTS TO REQUEST WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY

Elizabeth Radley & Matthew Parker
Moray & Agnew Lawyers

On 6 December 2022 the Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Secure Jobs, Better Pay) Act 2022 (Cth) (Secure Jobs Act) received Royal Assent, representing the most substantial legislative workplace and industrial relations reform since the introduction of the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth) (Fair Work Act) itself.

The Secure Jobs Act changes the Fair Work Act in many important respects and will impact the way employers manage both individual and collective employment issues – including in relation to requests for workplace flexibility.

New flexible work rights

From June 2023 more employees will have a right to request flexible working arrangements, and the process for dealing with such requests will change. In particular, the new laws:

- expand the group of employees who may request a flexible work arrangement to include pregnant workers and employees who themselves, or a member of their immediate family or household, experience family and domestic violence;
- require employers to meet with employees to discuss their request for a flexible work arrangement;
- require employers to propose an alternative arrangement if they intend to refuse the flexible work arrangement request (where this can be accommodated); and
- introduce a dispute resolution process to resolve matters where:
 - an employer and employee cannot agree to the terms of a flexible work arrangement;
 - the employer has refused an employee's request for a flexible work arrangement; or

- the employer has not responded to the employee's request for a flexible work arrangement within 21 days.

The Fair Work Commission will then be able to deal with a dispute about a flexible work request, including by conciliation, mediation or, if necessary, arbitration.

What to do if an employee makes a request?

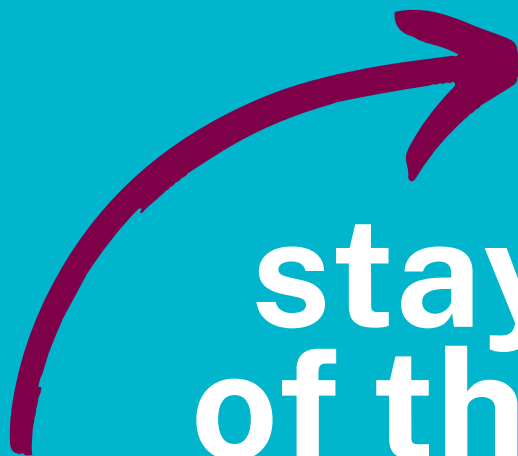
If an eligible employee requests a flexible working arrangement, their employer will need to consider its obligations under the Fair Work Act when determining how to manage and respond to the request.

An employer will still have 21 days to respond to a request for a flexible working arrangement, in writing. However, if an employer wishes to refuse the request, it must first discuss the employee's request with them, make a genuine effort to identify alternatives to accommodate the employee's circumstances and consider the consequences of a decision to refuse.

The reasons for the refusal then need to be provided to the employee in writing. An employer will also need to inform the employee in writing if there are any other changes to the employee's working arrangements the employer would be willing to make to accommodate the employee's circumstances, other than the changes the employee specifically requested, or, if there are no such changes available.

On what grounds can an employer refuse a request?

An employer will still be able to refuse a request on "reasonable business grounds" and the examples of what may constitute reasonable business grounds have not changed.



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The specific circumstances of the employer, including the size and nature of the employer’s enterprise, will be relevant to whether an employer has reasonable business grounds to refuse a request.

How can businesses prepare?

In preparation for these new laws to take effect in June 2023, employers should review their current processes for considering requests for flexible working arrangements and make changes, where necessary, to introduce a structured approach for dealing with such requests which includes considering alternatives. Associated policies will also need to be updated, and training carried out to ensure managers within the organisation understand how to manage flexible work requests in accordance with these new requirements.

For further information contact Moray & Agnew Lawyers on (02) 4911 5400, email newcastle@moray.com.au or visit www.moray.com.au

Elizabeth Radley is a Partner at Moray & Agnew Lawyers. For 20 years Elizabeth has specialised in all aspects of workplace law, including industrial and employment relations, work health and safety, and anti-discrimination.



Matthew Parker is Senior Associate at Moray & Agnew Lawyers. He is a workplace lawyer with over 10 years’ experience advising employers on all aspects of the employment relationship, industrial relations and work health and safety.



NSW GOVERNMENT STRENGTHENS CONSTRUCTION COMPLIANCE UNIT

The NSW Government is taking action to protect the 400,000 construction jobs across the state by strengthening industrial relations and procurement oversight for Government projects. The boost to the Construction Compliance Unit will further protect the state’s \$116.6 billion infrastructure pipeline and the jobs and families it supports.

The move comes after the Federal Government abolished the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) and the federal building code of conduct.

The NSW Government is stepping in to fill the void by:


- Boosting funding to the NSW Construction Compliance Unit (CCU) by \$1.3 million a year for proactive monitoring, reporting and compliance activities;
- Increasing unannounced site visits on NSW Government-funded infrastructure projects by the CCU and
- Commencing an open consultation with industry stakeholders to review the NSW Building and Construction Procurement Guidelines which regulate the conduct of building and construction work on NSW Government projects.

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LEADING PEOPLE TO SUCCESS IN THE HUNTER

Sam Robinson
LKS Quaero

Newcastle and the Hunter have a lot going for them, not least a lot of bright, skilled people in innovative organisations. As the economy transitions, however, organisational leaders shouldn't rest easy in the assumption that people will stay put because of the lifestyle. While our beautiful location and laid-back atmosphere are a drawcard, it's important to not take for granted that this will be enough to retain or attract workers seeking out new opportunities.

Shifting expectations

As we continue to shift away from traditional industries, and with the rise of the energy transition in particular, the demands on workers, organisations, and the broader economy are shifting too. As a leadership development and organisational transformation consultant, I'm seeing a growing demand for workers with different skillsets and experiences – and a demand from workers themselves to have the opportunity to gain new skills and experiences. People want the means to contribute more and to shape their own career paths and get frustrated or burned out when this call isn't answered.

Organisational leaders must be aware of these changes and ensure they are providing opportunities for workers to upskill and run with their ideas for change and improvement. Otherwise, they risk losing valuable talent to other organisations.

Getting clear on careers and culture

One way to do this is by providing clarity for people at work and a genuine career path. This means consistently articulating the company's goals and values and communicating how individual roles fit back into the overall strategy. We call this the "golden thread" – a link from your vision right down into the work of each individual role. To be happy at work, people need to be able to know what is expected of them and why, how they're going, and what is their future. With those three questions settled, I see a huge uptick in performance and team coherence. This also means providing opportunities for growth and development, whether that be through mentoring programs, training courses, or new roles.

Attracting and retaining the right workers necessitates fostering a positive, fair, and productive culture. This means creating a sense of belonging and supportiveness and providing opportunities for worker engagement and feedback. Leaders have to shape the culture by deliberate consistent behaviour that matches what they say – people watch this closely. The culture ultimately shapes the results you get, good or bad. It's not fluffy, amorphous stuff that you can't control; culture is something that the leaders of successful organisations work at and monitor reliably.

I love living in the Hunter and supporting local organisations with the tools to thrive, but organisational leaders mustn't take for granted that people will stay local. Providing clarity for people at work and a genuine career path, while fostering the right culture, are important factors in retaining workers. As the local economy continues to transition, it's crucial for organisations to stay aware of the changing needs of the workforce and adapt accordingly.

For more information on supporting leaders to build positive and productive organisations, contact LKS Quaero at enquiries@lksquaero.com or (02) 4910 4048.

Sam Robinson is Managing Director of LKS Quaero. He works in leadership development, change management, organisational structure, and culture. Sam helps leaders to succeed by connecting people, relationships, systems, and structures. He has worked across the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors.



LAW FIRM TO FOCUS SOLELY ON WORKPLACE AND EMPLOYMENT LAW

Leading law firm Australian Business Lawyers & Advisors (ABLA) has announced an overhaul to its practice to focus solely on workplace relations and employment law.

It closed its corporate and commercial practice from February 27, with that team's lawyers moving to another local firm.

ABLA Director and Head of the firm's Newcastle office, Kyle Scott, said the change will allow the firm to focus solely on providing businesses with workplace law and advisory services. Mr Scott said Hunter businesses will continue to have unrivalled expertise on all workplace law issues.

"Workplace and employment law has been ABLA's principal area of practice for more than a decade, and we have continued to grow significantly over that time," Mr Scott said.

"We can better serve our clients by having our energy and resources dedicated to this important and ever-changing area," he said.

"The Federal Government is introducing some of the most significant industrial relations reforms in more than a decade, and we are excited to be supporting our clients through this new era."

"There has already been huge demand for information from the business community on the Secure Jobs, Better Pay reforms, with ABLA's team speaking at many business events already this year to bring employers up to speed on the changes."

"While our focus has sharpened, our mantra 'experts make things simple' remains, as does our approach of mutual respect and collaboration with clients."

ABLA's workplace and employment law team has picked up a string of accolades over the last five years, including being a four-time winner at the Australian Law Awards, winner at the Australasian Law Awards and being named a Legal 500 Leading Law Firm for Employment law.

Mr Scott is a Law Society of NSW Accredited Specialist in employment and industrial relations law. He has more than a decade's experience in managing complex terminations, enterprise bargaining, award compliance, post-employment restraints and employment litigation. His expertise is demonstrated by the fact that he is recommended in the Doyles Guide and the Legal 500 Asia and Pacific lists of top employment lawyers.

ABLA provides a full range of workplace law services, including employment law, industrial relations, WHS, HR consulting, workplace investigations and workplace training.

ABLA Lawyers Kyle Scott, Claudia Simmons and Kate Thomson



CONTINUED GROWTH FOR HVTC GROUP

HVTC is a leader in the vocational education and training (VET) sector, providing specialist apprentice and trainee employment services and customised training and workforce solutions, having supported over 30,000 people through skills training and employment since 1981. As a generalist Group Training Organisation (GTO), HVTC maintains a vast network of internal staff, host employers, apprentices, trainees, students, and business partners, working across 27 different industries within NSW. In 2019, HVTC amalgamated with Registered Training Organisation (RTO), Central Coast Community College (RTO 90304) to expand its scope and develop both organisations' capability for delivering quality education across various vocations. The HVTC Group now operates across 11 regional branches and 3 training campuses in NSW.

This year, HVTC Group CEO, Sharon Smith, celebrates her 10th year leading the organisation. Since joining HVTC in 2013 with extensive experience as a Senior Executive and Non-Executive Director in utilities, regional development, education, and employment across the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors, Sharon has led the organisation through a period of continued growth and regional expansion. Sharon's leadership and expertise in the VET sector have allowed her to serve on multiple Boards, including the Boards for HVTC and Central Coast Community College. After serving as Deputy Chair for the National Apprentice Employment Network (NAEN) since 2015, Sharon was recently appointed as Chair of the NAEN and is proud to support the future direction of VET and the important role GTOs play in delivering skilled apprentices and trainees into the Australian workforce.

The high quality service and leadership at HVTC has allowed the organisation to be recognised for success across multiple programs and departments, particularly in work health and safety.



HVTC Group CEO, Sharon Smith

The Group's commitment to safety has earned multiple accolades, including being the 2022 Safe Work NSW WHS Champion for an Outstanding Solution to a Work Health and Safety Risk – Large Organisation (Non-Government), as well as a current 2023 Hunter Safety Awards finalist for Best Health and Wellbeing Program. Among other awards, HVTC was also presented with the Excellence in WHS and Excellence in Group Training awards at the 2021 Apprentice Employment Network NSW & ACT Group Training Awards.

The strong leadership at HVTC Group combined with its dynamic business structure supports the organisation's delivery of high quality skills training, education, and employment opportunities. HVTC strives to provide a better future for all by linking potential with opportunity and believes skills change lives.



For over 41 years, HVTC has worked with industry leading organisations to provide quality training opportunities for more than 30,000 people across NSW.

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CENTRAL COAST COMMUNITY COLLEGE ACE FUNDING ELIGIBILITY EXPANDED

The Central Coast Community College (RTO 90304) has recently been granted a waiver by the NSW Government to expand its eligibility criteria for ACE funded training until 30 June 2023.

The NSW Government's ACE (Adult & Community Education) funding program is designed to support disadvantaged students to up-skill or re-skill for employment or further education, as well as provide opportunities to learn and develop life skills.

Under the new waiver, more people are now eligible to undertake a range of ACE funded short courses and workshops with the Central Coast Community College.

College General Manager, Debbie Laarkamp, commented that the waiver is critical in supporting the local community and addressing skills shortages.

"Many industries have been impacted by the current skills shortage across the country, meaning it is essential that opportunities for further education and training are made accessible," Laarkamp said.

"With the waiver granted by the NSW Government, the Central Coast Community College can support additional students to upskill to start their careers, re-enter the workforce, pursue further study, or obtain valuable life skills for their futures.

"We have a number of courses that cover industries including hospitality and construction, which are priority occupations in the current landscape."

Training Coordinator, David O'Brien, said the range of ACE funded courses on offer with the College are a perfect stepping stone to future employment or further study.

"The Industry Essentials package delivered by the College, which includes Barista, RSA, RCG, White Card, and First Aid courses, allows people to gain accredited industry tickets needed to secure employment, particularly in hospitality or trade fields.

"Then we have our Confidence Builders, which are non-accredited life skills workshops designed to get disengaged learners back into education, providing a fun and supportive environment in course topics such as cooking, budgeting, art, music, and make up.

"Our expert trainers have experience delivering training to disadvantaged students and offer additional support to help people achieve their learning goals."

If you or someone you know is looking to re-skill or up-skill in 2023, visit the Central Coast Community College website to check your eligibility for ACE funded training.

ACE Open Day - Art Workshop



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Australia can be a leader in clean hydrogen and ammonia

Australia can become a world leader in the game-changing potential of low-cost, clean hydrogen and ammonia as these new, clean fuels will help realise the global task to deliver net zero emissions by 2050.

The MCA's new report, Australia's emerging hydrogen and ammonia industry, looks into these two energy carriers, their potential and the opportunities for Australia.

The International Energy Agency suggests clean hydrogen production will need to double by 2030 and increase six-fold by 2050 to meet this target from the current annual production levels of around 90 million tonnes (Mt) to more than 520 Mt.

Ammonia also offers real prospects for decarbonising global shipping fleets, fertiliser production and electricity generation. This will require development of new pipeline and storage infrastructure, including at ports.

With substantial carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) sites in Victoria and Queensland, competitive and accessible coal reserves, natural gas and significant renewable energy generation capacity, Australia is well placed to meet growing international and domestic demand for this important fuel from multiple supply chains drawing on the country's vast natural resources.

With Japan a significant investor in research, development and deployment, Australian industry is working to deliver long term supplies of clean hydrogen and ammonia, such as through the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain (HESC) project utilising gasified coal.

Glencore is investing in pre-feasibility studies for commercial scale hydrogen and ammonia production, while progressing environmental approvals for a CO2 test injection at its CTSCo CCUS project's storage site.

There is also great potential for Australia to develop hydrogen and ammonia production supply chains using renewable energy sources. These will be dependent on various metals that form the basis of new storage technologies and electrolyzers including copper, lithium, nickel, cobalt and rare earths.

The size of the prize could be very high with one estimate suggesting a new multi-billion dollar export industry of more than \$20 billion for hydrogen by 2050.

To realise this potential for Australia, federal and state governments need to focus on removing regulatory barriers, including expediting approval processes for associated infrastructure like pipelines, hydrogen fuel stations and ammonia storage.

Singleton and Muswellbrook call for statutory body to ensure region's prosperity

While mining continues to be a major economic generator for the Hunter, the mayors of Singleton and Muswellbrook say it is critical that more is urgently done to support the region's economic evolution, starting with a statutory body.

Mayor of Singleton, Cr Sue Moore and Mayor of Muswellbrook, Cr Steven Reynolds have joined forces in the lead up to the NSW election to call for a whole-of-region approach to ensure the ongoing prosperity of the Hunter is protected from market conditions in any industry.

As the local government areas responsible for producing 43% of the region's coal, Cr Moore said the best time to generate new opportunities and attract new industries is now.

"Coal mining will have a prominent place in the Hunter's economy for decades to come and we're proud of the vital contribution our region makes to the people of NSW. But we are not naive. We know change is coming, and we need to start the planning for our evolution now," she said.

"Our goal is for a vibrant, expansive and diverse industry base. We need opportunities for new and emerging technologies and innovation, building on all the attributes of our region including transport links, water, power, availability of land and the lifestyle opportunities for a skilled workforce, that will make the Hunter stand out as the best location to do business.

"The whole of the Hunter region will be affected by changes to the carbon economy. It is a regional issue, and needs a regional approach led appropriately by the next NSW Government to provide certainty and deliver the best outcomes for every person in the Hunter."

Mayor of Singleton Cr Sue Moore and Mayor of Muswellbrook Cr Steven Reynolds are calling for a statutory body.





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PORT WARATAH
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Survey confirms billions in spending and record mining jobs in the Hunter

Results from the latest annual NSW Minerals Council's latest Member Expenditure Survey have confirmed mining's central role in the Hunter economy continues.

Participating mining companies supported over 13,580 jobs in the Hunter, an increase of over 330 jobs compared to last financial year and the second highest number of jobs reported in the decade-long history of the survey.

The same companies also directly injected \$6.3 billion into the Hunter economy in the last financial year - an increase of \$200 million on the previous year and the equal highest result reported in a decade.

This is the third year in a row that direct mining spending in the Hunter has been over \$6 billion and the highest since the 2012-13 financial year.

The \$6.3 billion of direct mining spending in the Hunter last financial year included over \$1.6 billion on wages and salaries, and \$4.7 billion for goods and services purchased from over 3,000 mining supplier businesses across the Hunter region.

An economic analysis of these Survey results found the \$6.3 billion of direct spending of the 27 participating mining companies in the last financial year contributed almost 30% of the GRP of the Hunter region's economy during this period, up slightly from the previous year.

"These very strong results highlight the importance of mining for the Hunter's economy, and for mining communities across the region. Mining clearly continues to provide economic strength and stability to the Hunter, supporting thousands of Hunter families and businesses," NSW Minerals Council CEO Stephen Galilee said today.

"With an election approaching, these strong results are a timely reminder of the importance of a strong mining sector for the future of the Hunter. Thousands of Hunter locals will head to the polls on election day at least partially considering their vote based on who will best support a strong mining sector into the future."

EDF Renewables in Australia completes acquisition of Newcastle Offshore Wind project

EDF Renewables in Australia, a subsidiary of the French global energy player EDF, has announced the acquisition of the Newcastle Offshore Wind (NOW) Farm, a floating offshore project under development. Well situated near the Port of Newcastle and energy distribution networks, the project is proposed for the Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) as part of the NSW Government Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap. It will be developed in stages to support the Australian government's renewable targets and align with the progressive retirement of the ageing coal-fired power stations in the region.

Initial project developers Newcastle Offshore Wind Energy Pty Ltd (NOWE) have almost ten years' experience on the project, working closely with the EDF Renewables' team in Australia for the last 12 months. NOWE will continue to work on the project with EDF Renewables as a collaborative partnership that will be scaled up to meet the project needs, said CEO of EDF Renewables in Australia, Dave Johnson.

"NOWE, based in Newcastle, has put in a lot of effort to build up their local development expertise and connect with the community and stakeholders, which puts this project in a great position to succeed in the proposed location and especially within the local community," said Dave Johnson.

"It's always top priority for us to make sure the community and region benefit from our work and those benefits are clear, far-reaching, and impactful for the entire community."

Mr Johnson said both EDF Renewables in Australia and NOWE's

teams have previously worked extensively in the Hunter Region. "This landmark project will be developed in collaboration with a strong local team based in Newcastle, and will require the establishment of an entirely new industry in Australia. I am very confident that this project will play a crucial role in providing new opportunities for employment, establishing new business and the revitalisation of existing business looking to transition from existing industries".

With more than 10 years of expertise in offshore wind energy, EDF Renewables operates seven offshore wind farms globally and a further five under construction including one with floating technology in France. Mr Johnson said EDF Renewables and its partners are developing many offshore wind projects across North and Latin America, Europe, Asia and now Australia.

"We are a significant player in developing large, complex projects like the proposed Newcastle Offshore Wind Farm," he said.

NSW government helps the Hunter progress hydrogen production plans

The NSW Government will assist the Committee for the Hunter to turn its great ideas for a Hunter hydrogen industry into reality, thanks to the \$24 million Regional NSW – Business Case and Strategy Development Fund.

Member for Upper Hunter Dave Layzell said the program will provide funding that will enable the Committee for the Hunter and the Hunter Hydrogen Taskforce to engage experts to investigate new project ideas and assist with funding applications.

"I thank the Committee for inviting me to participate in the New H2 Symposium to announce the Business Case and Strategy Development Fund will contribute \$243,944 towards the Hunter Hydrogen Infrastructure Master Plan," Mr Layzell said.

"The Hunter Valley is a powerhouse of the NSW economy and as we restructure for the future I want the Upper Hunter to be an active participant in the clean energy industry."

Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional NSW Paul Toole said the regions are bursting with people full of ideas with the potential to create jobs, boost economies and attract investment.

"Any successful project starts with evidence-based planning and this program will help take great ideas and concepts a step closer to reality, benefiting entire communities," Mr Toole said.

"This is about helping make business cases stand out and be more competitive, it will help break down project costs, outline how projects will benefit the community and identify any challenges that need to be met."

The Committee for the Hunter and the Hunter Hydrogen Taskforce welcome the NSW Government grant to develop a regional hydrogen infrastructure masterplan.

CEO Alice Thompson said the grant expedites key priorities identified in the Hunter Hydrogen Roadmap and State ambitions in the NSW Hydrogen Strategy, including shared infrastructure and workforce development. "Hydrogen leverages the Hunter's strengths and capabilities, promising new opportunities for growth and jobs as our economy changes," Ms Thompson said.

"It promises to position the Hunter as a global centre for hydrogen, exporting our clean energy, services and products to the world. "The Hunter Hydrogen Hub will only be competitive through collaboration.

"The grant provides valuable resourcing to create enduring partnerships between hydrogen project leads, energy experts, national research institutes, tertiary education and Government to seize the opportunity offered by growing demand for hydrogen and green manufacturing."

The Regional NSW – Business Case and Strategy Development Fund is part of the \$3.3 billion Regional Growth Fund and will help create a pipeline of investment-ready projects for future funding opportunities.

Mining sustains Australia in uncertain times

The Minerals Council Of Australia Says Mining Continues To Support Jobs, The Economy And Government Spending On Essential Services During Difficult Times For Australian Families.

Trade data for 2022 reveals record export revenue which will generate substantial tax and royalty returns, higher wages and strong regional communities.

With a record high of \$461 billion in 2022, up 31% from the previous record set in 2021, global demand for Australia's resources continues to underpin economic activity.

This strong growth in revenue has also delivered Australia largest trade surplus (\$136 billion recorded in financial year 2022) at a time when it needed it the most.

Coal contributed \$141 billion (up 123%), iron ore \$123 billion, gold \$23 billion, aluminium (alumina and bauxite) \$15 billion (up 14 per cent) and copper \$12 billion.

The export result delivers benefits for all Australians through the significant tax and royalties the mining industry pays to federal, state and territory governments.

In the last decade, mining companies have contributed \$143 billion in company tax, equivalent to five years' spending on the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and \$112 billion of royalties – payments that help fund vital government services including mental health, aged care and childcare. They also pay for schools, hospitals and critical infrastructure.

The industry continues to pay the highest average wages, the most company taxes and is critical to supporting regions and communities – supporting 1.1 million jobs in the mining industry and its supply chains.

MCA says that this contribution cannot be taken for granted and governments must ensure that policies work to maintain international competitiveness, and to enable Australia to secure our share of the

additional US\$100 billion of global mining investment needed every year to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.

Quarry Mining celebrating 40 years

Hunter-based Quarry Mining & Construction is currently celebrating 40 years of serving industry.

It was established in 1983 as a small business of three people working to supply the quarry and mining industries with their consumable tools to ensure they could get on with the job.

40 years later, the company now employs over 85 technical, trades, engineering and management staff, and services all of Australia's large mining houses and tunnel infrastructure projects with state-of-the-art equipment for safety, reliability and longevity.

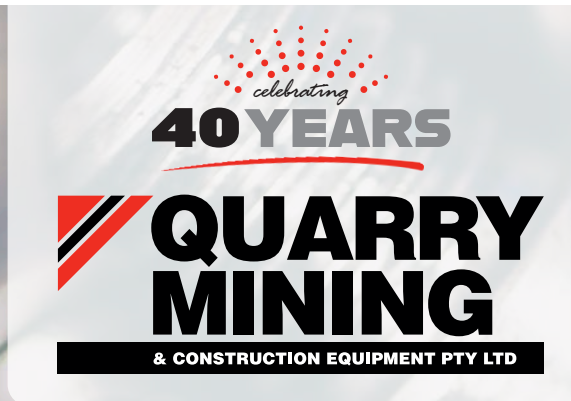
In order to better service its growing market, the company now has its head office and manufacturing base at Beresfield as well as facilities in Sydney, Mackay, Queensland and a heat treatment plant in Newcastle.

Bespoke parts, developed in partnership with clients, are one of their specialties and extend to handheld machinery that suit customers drilling and ground support activities.

Quarry Mining continually invests in the Research and Development of new products. Quality products with a safety-first approach. They use only the highest quality steels, tungsten carbide and PCD bits in the manufacture of drilling equipment and have a commitment to the success of customer projects.

Quarry Mining Managing Director Kari Armitage is proud that after 40 years of operation, the company still develops solutions and manufactures locally.

"We are proudly doing our part to keep innovative manufacturing alive and well in Australia," said Kari.



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Shell backs MGA thermal demonstration plant

MGA Thermal has been awarded funding by global energy provider Shell.

The funding, approximately US\$400K (AUD\$560K), provided under Shell GameChanger, is to accelerate the completion of the MGA Thermal Energy Storage pilot. Located at MGA Thermal's new commercial manufacturing facility in Newcastle, Australia, the pilot aims to gather valuable data amid the growing and urgent need for new longer-duration energy storage (LDES) solutions to replace ageing or increasingly expensive thermal and other conventional power stations.

The MGA Thermal Energy Storage pilot will demonstrate the firm's steam generation from stored intermittent renewable energy and has an expected total budget of approximately AUD\$3 million. The pilot will be located at the company's head office in Tomago, NSW and has a planned storage capacity of 5 MWh, with charging and discharging at up to 500 kW for 10 hours. The pilot unit, approximately 12 m long and 3 m wide, will produce valuable performance data and provide a tangible demonstration of the technology for prospective industrial and power customers. Data gathered will cover the charging and discharging behaviour, fluid dynamics and temperature distributions, and validate the efficacy of mid-to-long-term thermal storage in a practical system.

"MGA Thermal was selected from a pool of dozens of quality applicants to a long-duration energy storage call for solutions," said Matt McDonald, from Shell GameChanger.

"I am excited that Shell can support MGA Thermal's pilot project and their ambitions to enable the storage of renewable energy. We look forward to seeing their progress and to continue lending Shell support and expertise."



Mark Croudace, CCO of MGA Thermal said, "We are very pleased to have Shell's recognition and support for the MGA Thermal technology and pilot. Our technology is attractive for those looking to decarbonise, with a high potential impact in the medium to long-duration energy storage sector. Shell's funding, in conjunction with ARENA, allows us to accelerate our pilot, going live in 2023, gather additional data about our technology, and continue our rapid growth into commercial industrial and power markets."

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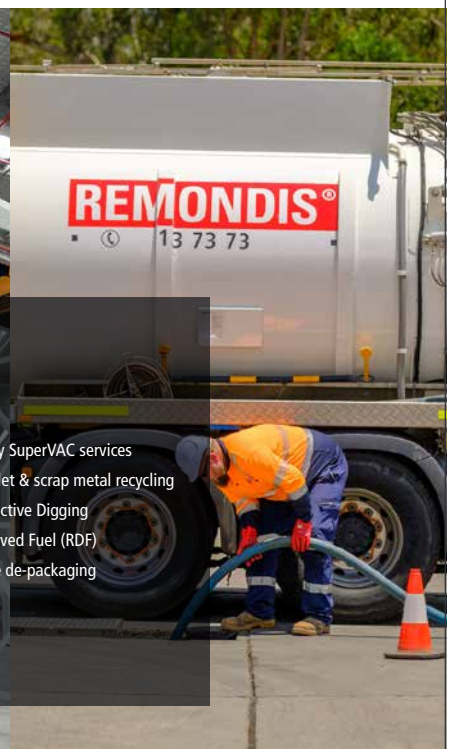
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Two crows were in a field when they noticed a figure that looked like a man in the distance.

"See that over there? What is that?," says the first crow.

The second crow takes a long look, "That's a scarecrow. Looks authentic, doesn't it."

"How can you tell it's a scarecrow and not a person?" replies the first crow.

"Look at its hand. No mobile phone," says the second crow.

A gorilla walks into a bar.

He sits down on a bar stool and orders himself a gin and tonic. The bartender looks on in total surprise and gives him a gin and tonic. The gorilla drinks his glass completely empty and asks how much to pay. The bartender, still amazed, curious about what will happen next asks him for \$20. The gorilla gropes its fur, takes \$20 out of it, hands it to the bartender and leaves the bar. The bartender cannot believe what just happened.

Next day, the gorilla walks into the bar again, sits down on the same bar stool, orders a gin and tonic, receives it, drinks it, asks what his debt is, pays it and leaves the bar. The bartender still cannot believe his eyes.

The next day, the gorilla enters the bar again. And again he orders a gin and tonic, drinks his glass completely empty and asks what he needs to pay. Again, \$20. While the gorilla is groping his fur to take out \$20, he sees the bartender looking at him carefully with full attention.

So the gorilla asks him: "Excuse me, is there something wrong?"

The bartender, totally amazed replies: "No, no, not at all. It's just that I don't often see a gorilla drinking at my bar".

"Doesn't surprise me," the gorilla says, "when you ask \$20 for a gin and tonic!"

"Back in the day," my grandpa started to say, "you could walk into a grocery store with \$1 in your pocket and walk out with a loaf of bread, a dozen eggs and a butter as well."

"Now however," he continued, "wherever you go there are those darn cameras."

A boy scout says to his scout leader, "Sir, is this snake poisonous?"

The scout leader says, "No, that snake's not poisonous at all."

So the boy picks up the snake, which bites him and the boy starts to spasm and foam at the mouth as the other kids look on in horror.

The scout leader says, "But that snake is venomous. Poison is ingested or absorbed, while venom is injected. Let's get it right next time, boys!"

Officer: Soldier, do you have change for \$10?

Soldier: Sure, buddy.

Officer: That's no way to address an officer. Now, let's try that again. Soldier, do you have change for \$10?

Soldier: No, sir!

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Train people well enough so they can leave. Treat them well enough so they don't want to."

- Sir Richard Branson

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