



ABN 19 949 536 343

59 Bonville Avenue | PO Box 3137 | Thornton NSW 2322
P (02) 4978 4040 | F (02) 4966 0588

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JOINT STATEMENT

HUNTER REGION MAYORS CALL FOR MORE DISASTER SUPPORT

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The Hunter region, including MidCoast, has seen recent devastation across all reaches of the region, with nine out of ten councils being declared as Disaster Zones. Many communities have seen irreparable damage, while being cut off from roads, shops, and power.

As one of the biggest growth areas and economic contributors in NSW, the Hunter needs support from other levels of government to recover from this disaster.

We acknowledge the recently announced \$1M grants for disaster declared LGAs. We welcome and are grateful for every additional dollar. In comparison with past disasters, we have seen an improved and more timely response, but this needs to be put into the context of this being a region that has faced many large-scale natural disasters but has continuously been underfunded.

We are still recovering from previous floods, coastal erosion, droughts, and bushfires and as a region, and a state, we are currently ill-equipped to get ahead. More than a quarter of all of the local government areas in NSW were declared disaster zones during the floods over the past two weeks and the immediate and future costs will be astronomical.

Our Councils are working together with our communities to address climate change, recover and take action, but we need more support. We are calling on both the State and Federal Government to provide more assistance to our region to address the urgent infrastructure repairs needed in the disaster declared Councils in the Greater Newcastle and Hunter region, in response to these floods and coastal erosion beyond the grants that are already provided.

Funding sources for Councils to respond to natural disasters need to be increased to help our communities recover, prepare, and adapt, while also allowing LGAs to 'build back better' to be more resilient to future disasters. Investment from State and Federal Government at this early stage will be crucial to ensuring our communities come out of this stronger.

This funding needs to include adequate financial support to resource both dedicated local emergency management committees and officers for each council. Dedicated and funded resources will improve responses to natural disasters. It will minimise the draw on staff with existing and ongoing responsibilities who cannot function for our communities when asked to cover disaster response and recovery for prolonged periods.

Local SES also need the ability to communicate more efficiently and effectively with our communities when an event, such as an evacuation alert, occurs. They need the authority to ensure that messages are appropriate for the context and needs of individual communities rather than all messaging coming from a centralised location.

This far-reaching event will take time to completely recover from, but our communities need support, and they need it now. With many of our communities still recovering from the March 2022



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floods, only four months ago, the current repairs are beyond Councils' capabilities. We need State and Federal Government to step up and deliver the funds, projects and resourcing that are needed. Local Government cannot do this alone.

From the Mayors of the Hunter Joint Organisation

- Cr Sue Moore, Mayor Singleton Council & Chair Hunter JO
- Cr Jay Suvaal, Mayor Cessnock City Council & Deputy Chair Hunter JO
- Cr John Connors, Mayor Dungog Shire Council
- Cr Kay Fraser, Mayor Lake Macquarie City Council
- Cr Philip Penfold, Mayor Maitland City Council
- Cr Claire Pontin, Mayor MidCoast Council
- Cr Nuatali Nelmes, Lord Mayor City of Newcastle
- Cr Steven Reynolds, Mayor Muswellbrook Shire Council
- Cr Ryan Palmer, Mayor Port Stephens Council
- Cr Maurice Collison, Mayor Upper Hunter Shire Council

Contact details

Please direct media inquiries to Kali Somerville, Media and Communications Officer, Hunter Joint Organisation. M: +61 429 564 111, E: kalis@hunterjo.com.au

Images are available for immediate use, please email request to Kali Somerville

About the Hunter JO

The Hunter Joint Organisation is a collaborative body that brings together the ten councils in the region to provide a united and local voice for our communities. As the hub for local intergovernmental collaboration, our statutory mandate includes identifying key regional strategic priorities, advocating for these priorities, and building collaborations around these priorities with other levels of government, industry and community. Find out more at www.hunterjo.com.au