

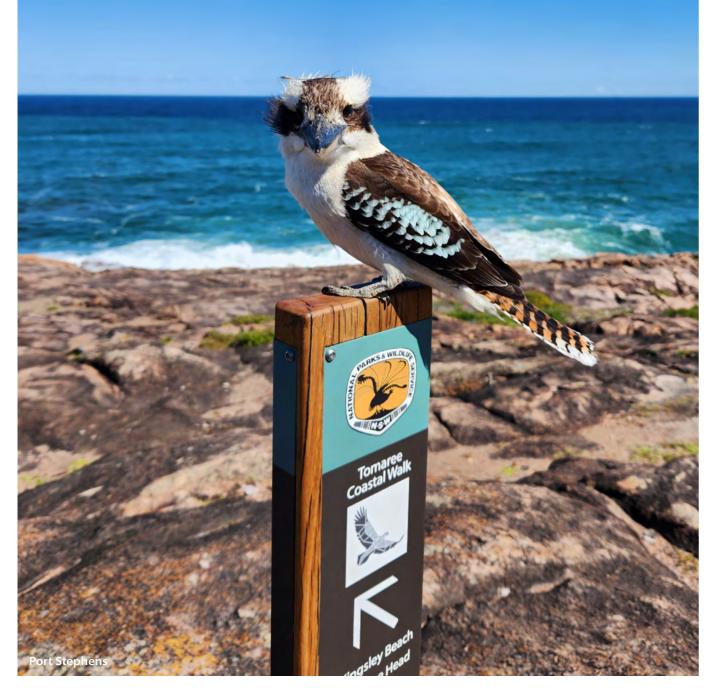
The Hunter JO Strategic Plan 2035 is our Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities (SSRP), an aspirational 10-year plan reflecting the shared vision of our ten Councils for the Hunter Region.

Acknowledgment of Country

Lands of the Awabakal, Worimi, Wonnarua, Geawegal, Biripi, Guringai and Darkinjung Aboriginal peoples.

The Hunter Joint Organisation acknowledges the country and history of the traditional custodians of the lands upon which we work and live.

We pay our respects to the Elders past, present and emerging, of our region, and of Australia.



Contact us at <u>admin@hunterjo.nsw.gov.au</u> or <u>www.hunterjo.nsw.gov.au</u> @Hunter Joint Organisation 2025
Front cover image credit Lake Macquarie City Council

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a message from the chair Cr Sue Moore

The Hunter JO Strategic Plan 2035 is a renewed and futurefocused vision for our region, developed in close collaboration with our ten Member Councils and their communities.

This Strategic Plan reflects a collective commitment by the region's Mayors to work together to shape a stronger, more resilient Hunter - one that is ready to meet the challenges of today and embrace the opportunities of tomorrow. It builds on Member Councils' Community Strategic Plans, aligning local aspirations with a shared regional purpose.

The Hunter is navigating a period of profound transformation. With population growth accelerating and global shifts in energy and industry impacting our region more than most, this Plan recognises the need for coordinated leadership, strategic advocacy, and meaningful partnerships. Together, we are laying the groundwork to ensure that our communities remain vibrant, liveable and economically secure into the future.

This strategy marks an important evolution for the Hunter JO itself. Alongside our core work in regional collaboration and project delivery, we are enhancing our capacity to lead on regional advocacy - ensuring that the Hunter's voice is heard clearly at the state and national level.

Importantly, this Plan is not just a roadmap for the Hunter JO - it is a shared regional agenda. It reflects the unity, ambition, and strategic foresight of our Member Councils, and positions us to drive real outcomes for our communities.

On behalf of the Board of Mayors, I thank everyone who contributed to the development of this strategy. We look forward to working with our partners to bring its vision to life.



a message from the director (executive officer) Steve Wilson

Our Plan outlines a clear, regionally aligned direction for addressing the most pressing issues facing our region.

Through strengthened collaboration across our ten Member Councils, this Plan reflects our shared commitment to achieving sustainable outcomes for the Hunter.

This Plan is guided by six strategic themes:

- · Housing and Population Growth
- Economic Transformation and Jobs
- · Infrastructure and Connectivity
- Environmental Sustainability and Resilience
- Financial Sustainability and Funding Reform
- · Community Liveability and Wellbeing

Each theme represents a core priority for the region, and through collaborative action, we aim to deliver lasting change. Throughout the Plan, you'll find case studies showcasing how the Hunter JO drives regional programs and advocacy, highlighting the significant benefits of working together as a region.

The Hunter JO is committed to facilitating connections, advocating for the region, and building capacity to ensure the Hunter thrives. I look forward to continuing this important work with our Board of Mayors, councils, and partners to deliver impactful, community-driven outcomes.

hunter jo strategic plan 2035

statement of strategic regional priorities

Cessnock City Council • Dungog Shire Council
Lake Macquarie City Council • Maitland City Council
MidCoast Council • Muswellbrook Shire Council
City of Newcastle • Port Stephens Council
Singleton Council • Upper Hunter Shire Council

our vision for the region

We harness our unique strengths to drive economic transformation, build resilience, and enhance community wellbeing for the Hunter region.

regional priorities and objectives



Housing & Population Growth

- **1.1** Housing affordability, density, diversity and availability
- 1.2 Integrated planning and enabling infrastructure to support housing development in priority growth areas
- 1.3 Supporting population growth and demographic shifts
- **1.4** Development planning to minimise environmental impacts



Economic
Transformation
& Jobs

- **2.1** Activate the reuse of mining related lands
- **2.2** Leveraging regional and global industries
- **2.3** Evolution towards renewable energy, circular economy and future industries
- **2.4** Business attraction, job creation and future skills development



Infrastructure & Connectivity

- **3.1** Safe and efficient road networks
- **3.2** Integrated cross-agency infrastructure planning
- **3.3** Multimodal, low-emission transport connectivity
- **3.4** Digital connectivity improvements



Environmental Sustainability & Resilience

- **4.1** Climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster resilience
- 4.2 Circular materials and waste management
- **4.3** Water security and waterway health
- **4.4** Protection of natural environments



Financial Sustainability & Funding Reform

- **5.1** Ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of councils
- **5.2** Securing reliable funding for place-based regional collaboration
- **5.3** Reforming grant funding processes to secure sustainable funding models



Community Liveability & Wellbeing

- **6.1** Enhancing access to health services and aged care facilities
- **6.2** Expanding open space, greening and public amenity access
- **6.3** Promoting community identity, culture and opportunities

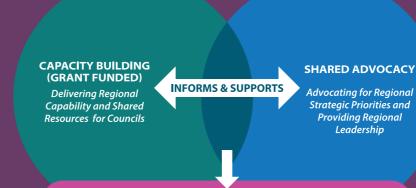


our principal functions

Strategic Planning and Priority Setting

Regional Leadership and Advocacy

Intergovernmental Collaboration



how we deliver our strategic objectives





our key partners and stakeholders





 Regional advocacy groups (eg. Committee for Hunter, Business Hunter, HunterNet)

DELIVERY PROGRAM

- University of Newcastle
- Regional Development Australia (RDA) Hunter
- Hunter Water

- Destination Sydney Surrounds North
- Newcastle Airport
- Port of Newcastle
- Central Coast Council



- NSW Premiers Department
- NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
- NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
- NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- NSW Reconstruction Authority
- NSW Environment Protection Authority

- NSW Health
- Transport for NSW
- Office of Local Government
- Future Jobs and Investment Authority
- Local Land Services
- Other relevant State Government dept's
- Joint Organisation Chairs Forum & Network
- Local Government NSW



- Net Zero Economy Authority
- National Emergency Management Agency
- High Speed Rail Authority

- Australian Local Government Association
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

the hunter region

gross regional product

\$91b

opportunities and challenges



Housing affordability, availability and diversity



Population growth



Economic diversification



Climate Change



State and federal investment in economic transformation



Repurposing of industrial and mining lands and infrastructure



Training and skills development for future economy



Shared vision for our region



Leveraging international opportunities through Newcastle Airport and Port

The Hunter Region is a diverse and economically significant area known for its agriculture, manufacturing, defence, tourism, mining and energy industries. We enjoy diversity in housing and lifestyle choice, from major city centres and their suburbs, through to peri urban lots, rural towns and villages and more isolated farming and bushland environments.

The Hunter Region boasts diverse natural landscapes and environments that underpin the liveability of our local communities and attract significant numbers of visitors to our region. With a Gross Regional Product of \$91b, the Hunter plays a vital role in New South Wales' economic, social and environmental landscape.

Collectively, our ten local government areas are entering a new and exciting phase with a growing metropolitan area, greater economic

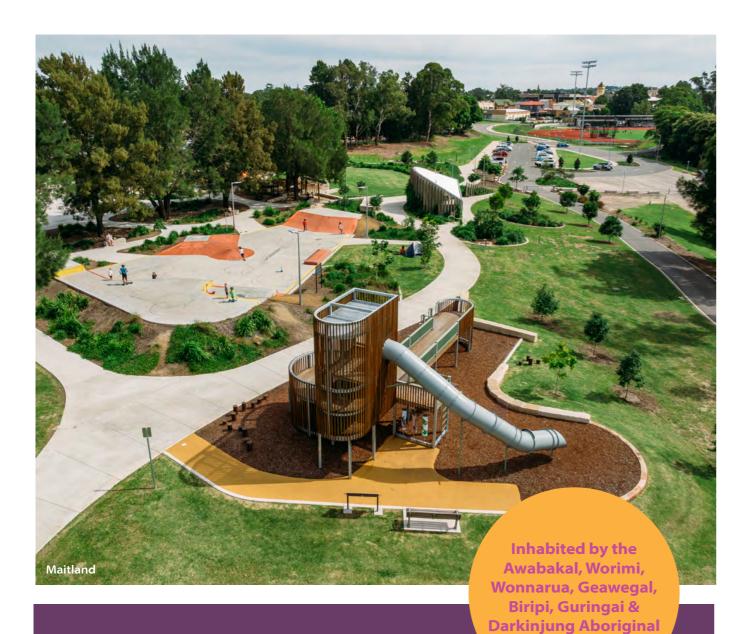
diversification and global gateways that will increasingly link the Hunter to the rest of the world

Our region hosts a newly opened international airport, deep sea port and industrial hub with a growing focus on clean energy and technology.

The Hunter's economy has traditionally relied on coal exports, but there is increasing investment in renewable energy, manufacturing, and agribusiness.

With its rapidly growing population, the Hunter Region is facing increasing demand for infrastructure, housing, and services. Collaboration with State and Federal Governments is essential for sustainable development, ensuring investment in transport, healthcare, and economic diversification.

Cessnock







10 local councils

- Cessnock
- Dungog
- Lake Macquarie
- Maitland
- MidCoast
- Muswellbrook
- Newcastle • Port Stephens
- Singleton
- Upper Hunter



11 state electorates

- Cessnock
- Charlestown
- Lake Macquarie
- Maitland
- Myall Lakes
- Newcastle
- Port Macquarie
- Port Stephens
- Swansea
- Upper Hunter
- Wallsend



6 federal electorates

peoples

- Hunter
- Lyne
- Newcastle New England
- Paterson
- Shortland



810,491

2025 **Population**



959,562

2041

Population Projection NSW Government 2024



32,748km² **Hunter Region**



41yrs Median age





69% Population who own their home or have a



26% **Population** who rent

of residents leave their LGA to go to work



Average people per household

mortgage



\$1.95b Value of tourism industry



12,993k **Annual tourist** visitors



283.5km Coastline



162,233ha Rainforest



12,664km **Roads**



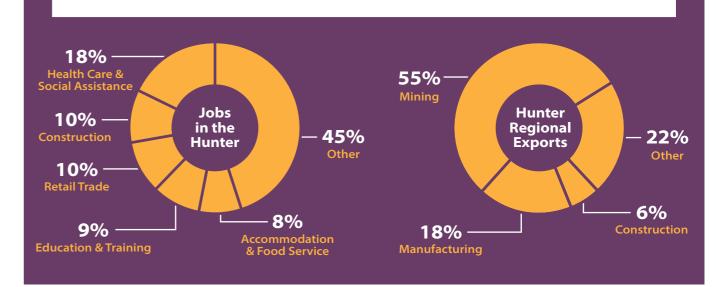
37,938ha Wetlands

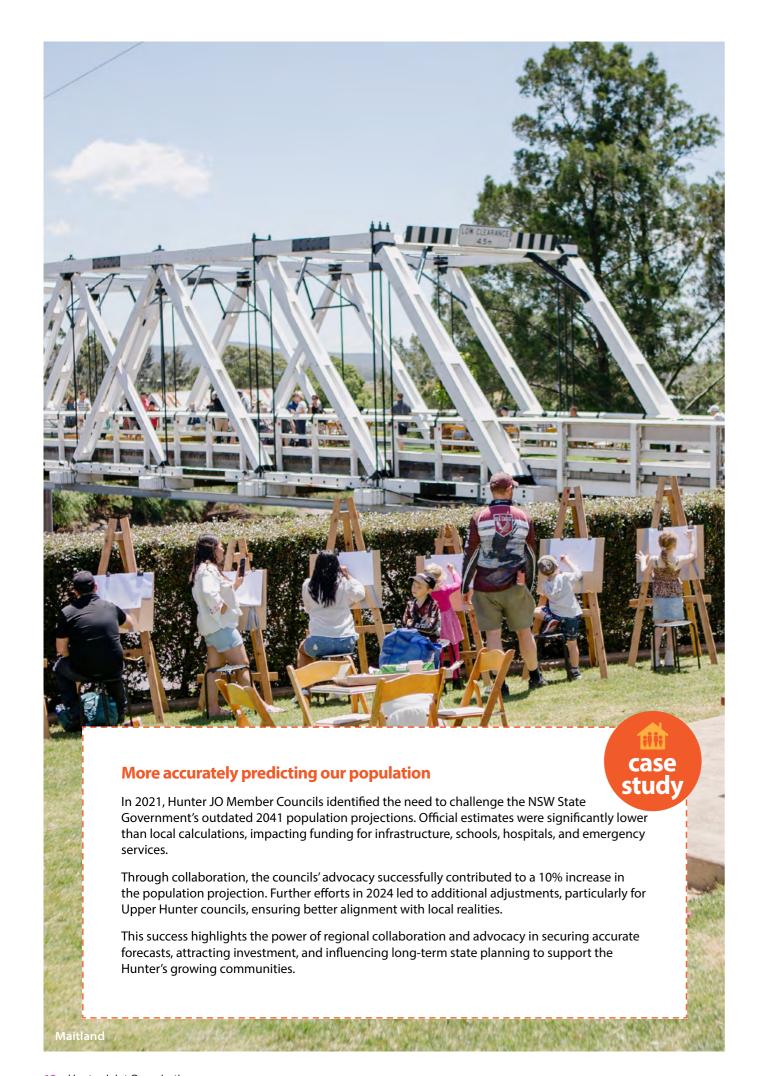


3,581 **Native plant** species



803 Native mammal, bird, reptile & amphibian species





PART 1

the hunter jo

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what is the hunter jo

The Hunter Joint Organisation (JO) 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 collaboration around these priorities with other levels of government, industry and community.

The Hunter JO Board determines the strategy and oversees the programs and advocacy priorities of the Hunter JO. The Board consists of the Mayor of each Member Council as Voting Representatives, with Non-Voting Representatives including General Managers (GM) and/or Chief Executive Officers (CEO) of each

Member Council, an employee of the public service nominated by the Secretary Department of Regional NSW, and a representative from the Office of Local Government.

Collaboration across the Hunter Region is the cornerstone of the Hunter JO. Since our beginning in 1955, the connection and coordination between our Member Councils has grown, developed and matured, delivering value for councils, our region and the Local Government sector as a whole.

The Local Government Act 1993 (NSW) sets out three principal functions for Joint Organisations:

Strategic Planning and Priority Setting

To establish strategic regional priorities for the joint organisation area and to establish strategies and plans for delivering those strategic regional priorities.

Regional Leadership and Advocacy

To provide regional leadership for the joint organisation area and to be an advocate for strategic regional priorities.

Intergovernmental Collaboration

To identify and take up opportunities for intergovernmental co-operation on matters relating to the joint organisation area.

























our board of mayors



Mayor Daniel Watton Cessnock City Council



Mayor Claire Pontin MidCoast Council



Mayor Digby Rayward Dungog Shire Council



Mayor Jeffrey Drayton Muswellbrook Shire Council



Mayor Sue Moore Singleton Council (Chair)



Mayor Adam Shultz Lake Macquarie City Council



Lord Mayor Ross Kerridge City of Newcastle



Mayor Maurice Collison Upper Hunter Shire Council



Mayor Philip Penfold Maitland City Council



Mayor Leah Anderson Port Stephens Council (Deputy Chair)

our general managers advisory committee



Ken Liddell GM Cessnock City Council



Adrian Panuccio GM MidCoast Council



Justin Fitzpatrick-Barr GM Singleton Council



Gareth Curtis GM Dungog Shire Council



Derek Finnigan



Greg McDonaldGM Upper Hunter Shire Council



Morven Cameron CEO Lake Macquarie City Council (GMAC Chair)



Jeremy Bath CEO City of Newcastle



Shaun O'Sullivan
Director North
Regional Coordination
Premiers Department NSW



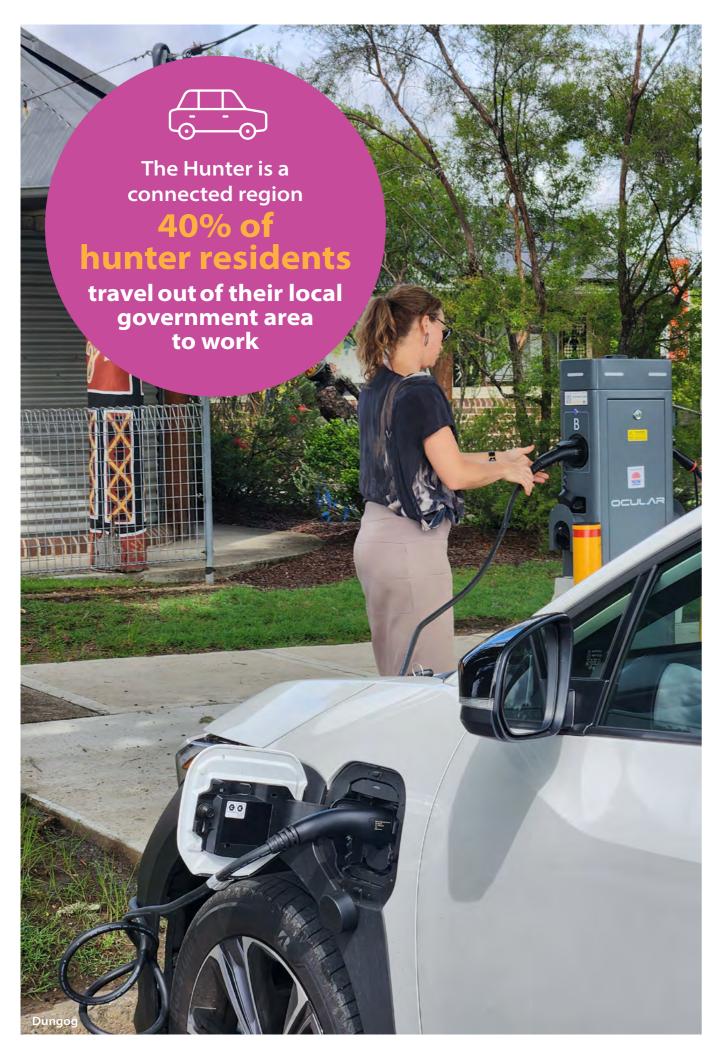
Jeff Smith GM Maitland City Council



Tim Crosdale GM Port Stephens Council



Virginia Errington Council Engagement Manager NSW Office of Local Government



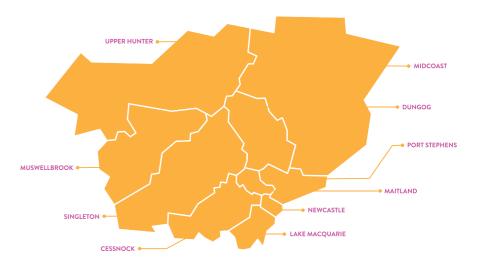
vision for the region

We harness our unique strengths to drive economic transformation, build resilience, and enhance community wellbeing for the Hunter region.

why work together

As the hub for local intergovernmental collaboration, we strengthen our communities by being the local voice on strategic issues in the Hunter Region.

Our region is significant, diverse and evolving. Collectively, our ten local government areas are entering a new and exciting phase with a growing metropolitan area, greater economic diversification and global gateways that will increasingly link the Hunter to the rest of the world.



The Hunter JO offers:

- The only place where the ten Hunter Mayors and General Managers regularly come together.
- The only democratically elected voice for the whole of the Hunter, expressing the needs and priorities of our local communities.
- The power of a united and aligned voice for the region, focusing on issues and opportunities we all share.
- A forum through which to engage, influence and collaborate with other levels of government to solve our shared challenges together.

Advocating for mining land reuse

As coal demand declines, the Hunter region faces mine closures that could affect up to 50,000 direct and indirect jobs by 2050.

Urgent action is needed to overcome the barriers to reusing former mining and buffer lands. Repurposing mine sites and infrastructure represents a cost-effective way to support new industries and jobs as the region transitions.

case study

Recognising this, the Hunter JO Board has made post-mining land use one of its top advocacy priorities, initially focusing on delivery of four pilot projects to map former mine sites, developing action plans, and creating master plans for redevelopment.

With ten democratically elected Mayors representing the Hunter Region, our collective voice is stronger and more influential.



PART 2

about our plan

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what is the hunter jo strategic plan?

The Hunter JO's Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities (SSRP) is called the **Hunter JO Strategic Plan 2035.**

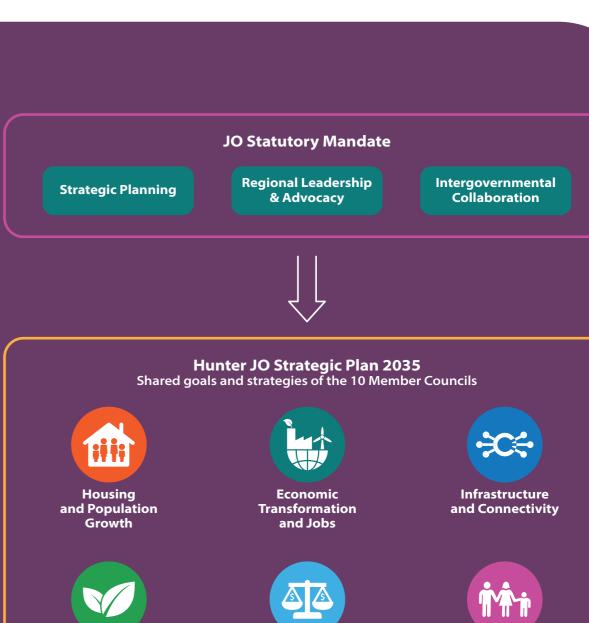
JOs are required to develop a Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities (SSRP) which sets out a vision for the region and provides an overview of the strategic actions required to deliver the vision. The SSRP draws from the Community Strategic Plans (CSPs) of Member Councils, regional-level plans and other state strategic documents to clearly identify the highest regional priorities. It is a four-year document that aligns with the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) cycle and must be prepared within 12 months of ordinary election of councillors for all Member Councils.

Hunter JO engages directly with Member Councils to ensure our Strategic Plan is a synthesised, representative view of local communities' voices from across the region.

Hunter JO and Member Councils take a leading role in the implementation of the Strategic Plan, however collaboration and advocacy with other levels of government, industry and key stakeholders is crucial to achieving our long-term goals.

Our Strategic Plan is supported by the Hunter JO Delivery Program 2025-2029, which identifies the projects and advocacy priorities Hunter JO will deliver to achieve the objectives of the Strategic Plan.









Sustainability and

Funding Reform

Community Liveability and

Wellbeing



Delivery Program Delivering our Strategic Objectives

Capacity Building Program



Advocacy Program

Building resilient communities: Integrating climate action into council strategies

Hunter JO is a leader in developing guidance documents that align with the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) Framework. The <u>Climate Change IP&R Package</u> and <u>Resilience IP&R Support Package</u> are the first of their kind, providing councils with practical tools and templates to embed climate resilience into everyday operations.

Recognising the region's diversity, spanning large regional centres to smaller rural councils, Hunter JO's IP&R Support Packages offer flexible templates tailored to different commitment levels: **Committed, Motivated,** and **Leading.** This approach allows councils to choose templates that best suit their resources, priorities, and community needs.

The adaptability of these Packages has also enabled their uptake by councils right across NSW, further strengthening climate resilience and long-term planning by Local Government.

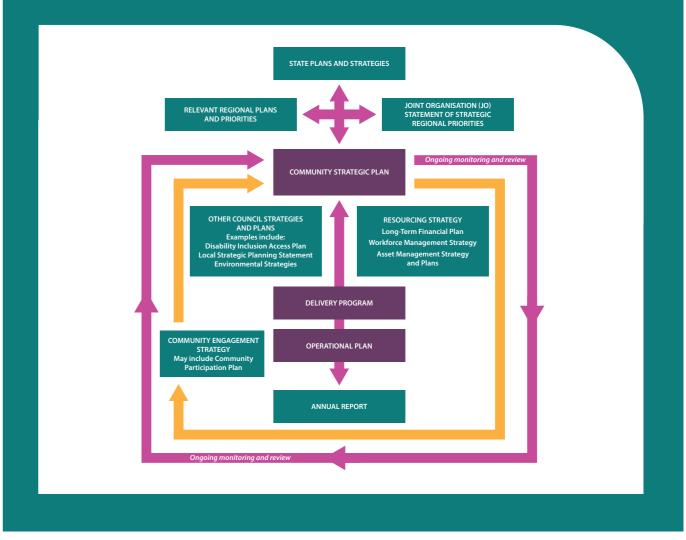


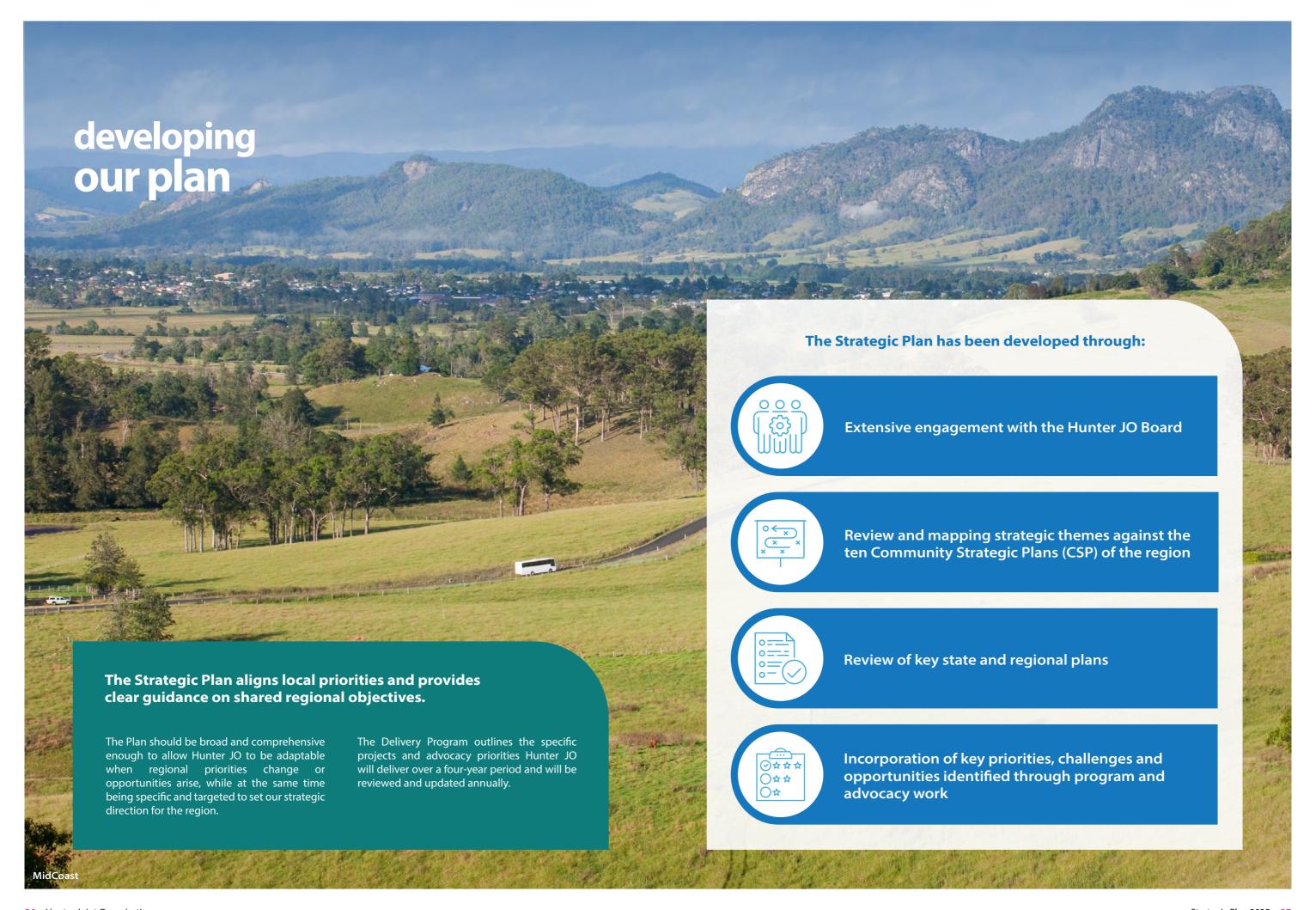
integrated planning and reporting framework

The Local Government Act 1993 (NSW) requires Councils to be consistent with the Local Government Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) Framework, which aims to ensure a more sustainable Local Government sector. This requires Councils to take a long-term view and consider social, economic and environmental aspects and the needs of the current and future generations when making decisions.

Joint Organisations (JO) also have streamlined planning and reporting requirements under the Local Government (General) Regulation 2021 and Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines for Local Government in NSW. This includes compliance with the relevant section of the IP&R Guidelines.

The JO Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities (SSRP) strengthens the linkages between the JO, its Member Councils, state agencies and key partners, providing better support to Councils.





strategic line of sight

aligns at the local level

- Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework
- Member Councils Community Strategic Plans
- Cessnock Community Strategic Plan 2040
- Dungog Shire Community Strategic Plan 2025-2035
- Lake Macquarie City Community Strategic Plan 2025-2035
- Maitland's Future Community Strategic Plan 2025-2034
- MidCoast 2035 Community Strategic Plan
- Muswellbrook Shire Community Strategic Plan 2025-2035
- Newcastle 2040 It's Our Future
- Port Stephens Community Strategic Plan 2025 2035
- Create Singleton 2035
- Upper Hunter 2035

aligns at the regional level

- Hunter Regional Plan 2041
- Hunter Central Coast Regional Leadership Executive (RLE) Priorities
- Regional Disaster Adaptation Plans (under development)
- Regional Economic Development Strategies for Central Coast and Lake Macquarie, Hunter and MidCoast
- Draft Hunter Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan
- Hunter Central Coast Circular Economy Roadmap
- Hunter Local Jobs Plan
- Regional Development Australia (RDA) Hunter charter

aligns at the state level

- NSW Premier's Priorities
- NSW Performance and Wellbeing Framework
- NSW Net Zero Plan
- State Infrastructure Strategy
- NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy
- NSW Circular Economy Policy Statement
- NSW Future Transport Strategy
- NSW State Disaster Mitigation Plan
- NSW State Health Plan
- Future Jobs and Investment Authorities Issues Paper 2024
- NSW housing targets
- Local Government NSW Advocacy Priorities

aligns at the national level

- Powering Australia Plan
- Net Zero Plan (under development)
- Annual Climate Change Statement
- Net Zero Economy Authority focus areas
- Future Made in Australia
- Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024–2030
- National Housing Accord
- Australian Local Government Association Advocacy Priorities

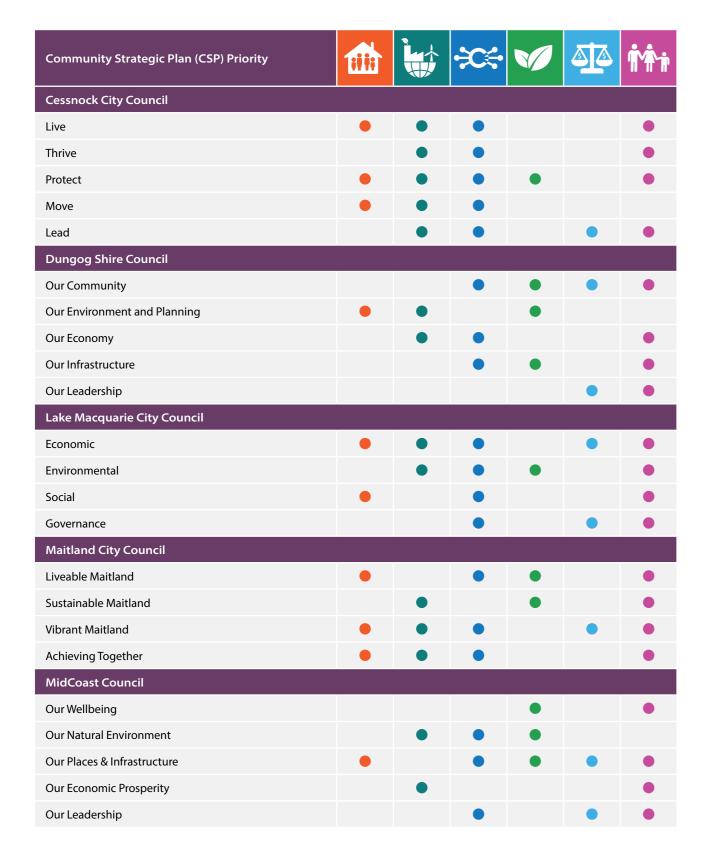
aligns at the global level

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



community strategic plan mapping

The ten Community Strategic Plans adopted in June 2025 have been mapped against the six themes of the Hunter JO Strategic Plan 2035, to identify aligned priority areas and collaboration focus areas.





Community Strategic Plan (CSP) Priority	1111		; C≑	W		ŤŤi
Muswellbrook Shire Council						
We are a strong community						
We are a regional centre	•	•	•			
We are a thriving economy		•				
We are a great place to live	•	•	•	•		
We are working together		•				
City of Newcastle						
Liveable	•					
Sustainable		•		•		
Creative		•				
Achieving Together		•				
Port Stephens Council						
Our Community						
Our Place	•	•		•		
Our Environment		•	•	•		
Our Council		•			•	
Singleton Council						
Our Community	•	•			•	
Our Places	•	•		•		
Our Environment		•		•		
Our Economy		•				
Our Leadership						
Upper Hunter Shire Council						
A Connected Community			•	•		
Protected Environment	•	•		•		
Thriving Economy	•	•			•	
Quality Infrastructure	•	•	•	•	•	
Responsible Governance		•	•		•	



Corridor, and enhanced rail services to drive economic growth.

The Hunter JO submission supports the plan but calls for clearer project prioritisation, better walking and cycling infrastructure, stronger climate resilience, improved mobile connectivity, and recognition of regional airports like Cessnock.

By working together, Hunter JO strengthens its influence on state transport planning to ensure local needs are met.

Newcastle

PART 3

our plan

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Boosting our global reach – Hunter Global

The Newcastle Airport precinct is undergoing a once-in-a-generation redevelopment and expansion to enable international connectivity. Leveraging the benefits of the investment and upgrades, Hunter JO and key partners facilitated a 2022 Hunter Global summit to boost collaboration, planning and advocacy to capitalise on the runway and terminal upgrade.

case

study

Acting on the summit recommendations, Hunter JO led two grant-funded projects to develop <u>Business Cases</u> exploring economic opportunities in air freight and international tourism.

With input from regional stakeholders, the Business Cases identified key priorities - establishing an air freight cargo terminal at Newcastle Airport to boost freight capacity and developing a unified 'Hunter region' brand to attract international tourists.

This research has strengthened our advocacy efforts by demonstrating the potential benefits and returns on investment for the broader Hunter region.



our plan



Housing & Population Growth

Inclusive, affordable, and sustainable housing that supports population growth through integrated development, efficient land use, and the protection of natural environments.



Economic Transformation & Jobs

The evolution of our region toward renewable and future focused industries, maximising our mining related and industrial lands and leveraging our regional strengths to drive economic growth, create jobs and protect our natural assets and environment.



Infrastructure & Connectivity

Seamless, multimodal connectivity powered by modern transport networks, enhanced digital infrastructure, and integrated planning to support sustainable mobility and regional growth.



Environmental Sustainability & Resilience

A future focused on long-term resilience, where disaster preparedness, climate mitigation and adaptation, sustainable water management, and circular economy practices work together to protect ecosystems and build holistic resilience for future generations.



Financial Sustainability & Funding Reform

Financial sustainability achieved through reformed funding processes and secure financial models that ensure the long-term viability and success of local councils to deliver services to communities.

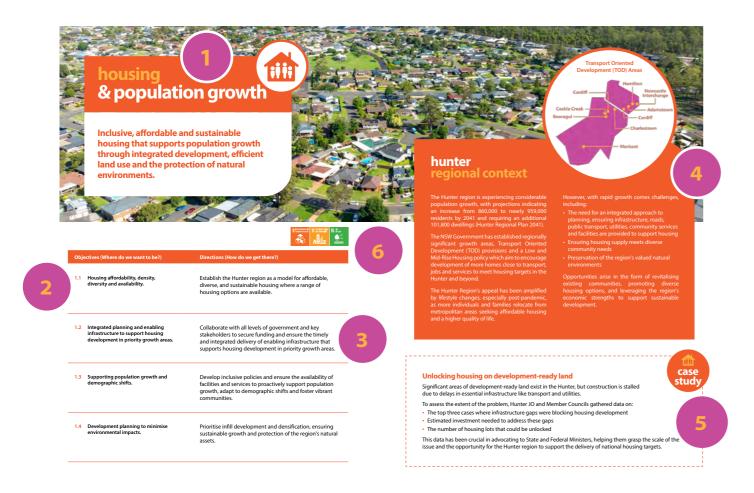


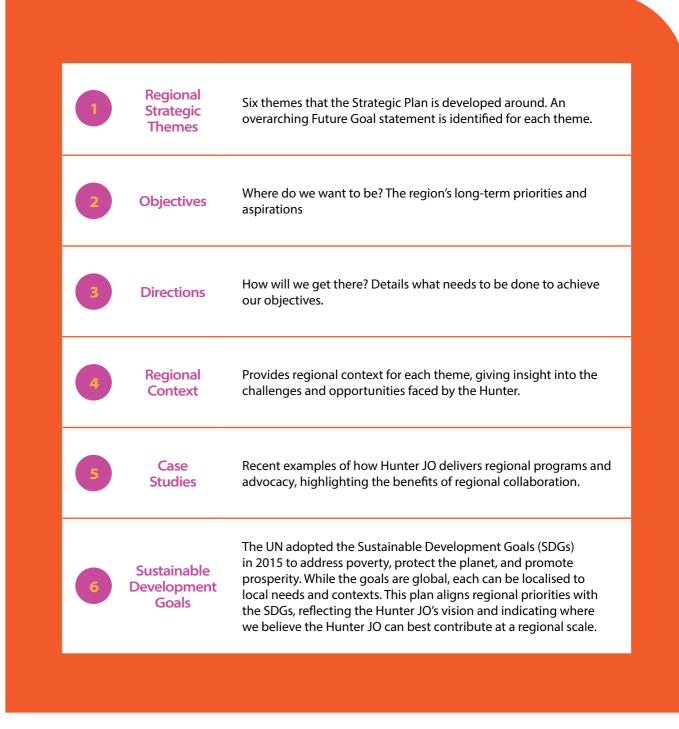
Community Liveability & Wellbeing

A community where enhanced access to health services, improved public spaces, and a strong sense of identity and opportunity promote wellbeing and a high quality of life for all.



how to read this plan





housing & population growth

Inclusive, affordable and sustainable housing that supports population growth through integrated development, efficient land use and the protection of natural environments.



The Hunter region is experiencing considerable population growth, with projections indicating an increase from 860,000 to nearly 959,000 residents by 2041 and requiring an additional 101,800 dwellings (Hunter Regional Plan 2041).

The NSW Government has established regionally significant growth areas, Transport Oriented Development (TOD) provisions and a Low and Mid-Rise Housing policy which aim to encourage development of more homes close to transport, jobs and services to meet housing targets in the Hunter and beyond.

The Hunter Region's appeal has been amplified by lifestyle changes, especially post-pandemic, as more individuals and families relocate from metropolitan areas seeking affordable housing and a higher quality of life. However, with rapid growth comes challenges, including:

- The need for an integrated approach to planning, ensuring infrastructure, roads, public transport, utilities, community services and facilities are provided to support housing
- Ensuring housing supply meets diverse community needs

Transport Oriented

Development (TOD) Areas

Cockle Creek

Preservation of the region's valued natural environments

Opportunities arise in the form of revitalising existing communities, promoting diverse housing options, and leveraging the region's economic strengths to support sustainable development.



Objectives (Where do we want to be?)

Directions (How do we get there?)

1.1 Housing affordability, density, diversity and availability.

Establish the Hunter region as a model for affordable, diverse, and sustainable housing where a range of housing options are available.

1.2 Integrated planning and enabling infrastructure to support housing development in priority growth areas.

Collaborate with all levels of government and key stakeholders to secure funding and ensure the timely and integrated delivery of enabling infrastructure that supports housing development in priority growth areas.

1.3 Supporting population growth and demographic shifts.

Develop inclusive policies and ensure the availability of facilities and services to proactively support population growth, adapt to demographic shifts and foster vibrant communities.

1.4 Development planning to minimise environmental impacts.

Prioritise infill development and densification, ensuring sustainable growth and protection of the region's natural assets.

Unlocking housing on development-ready land

Significant areas of development-ready land exist in the Hunter, but construction is stalled due to delays in essential infrastructure like transport and utilities.

To assess the extent of the problem, Hunter JO and Member Councils gathered data on:

- The top three cases where infrastructure gaps were blocking housing development
- Estimated investment needed to address these gaps
- The number of housing lots that could be unlocked

This data has been crucial in advocating to State and Federal Ministers, helping them grasp the scale of the issue and the opportunity for the Hunter region to support the delivery of national housing targets.

case study



The evolution of our region toward renewable and future focused industries, maximising our mining related and industrial lands and leveraging our regional strengths to drive economic growth, create jobs and protect our natural assets and environment.











Objectives (Where do we want to be?) Directi

Directions (How do we get there?)

2.1 Activate the reuse of mining related lands.

Transform former mining-related lands into vibrant, economically productive areas that deliver new and sustainable jobs, maximise land use potential, drive long-term economic growth and minimise environmental impacts.

2.2 Leveraging regional and global industries.

Leverage the region's key economic assets including port, airports, tourism and freight networks to drive industry diversification and strengthen the Hunter region's position as a leading globally connected economic hub of state and national significance.

 Evolution towards renewable energy, circular economy and future industries. Transform the Hunter region towards net zero to become a hub for renewable energy, circular economy and future industries, driving innovation, creating sustainable jobs, and fostering economic diversification.

2.4 Business attraction, job creation and future skills development.

Position the Hunter region to attract businesses and new industries and strengthen our role as a leader in skills and workforce development through strong partnerships with TAFE, universities and other educational institutions.

hunter regional context

The Hunter region is undergoing enormous economic transformation, shifting from traditional coal, energy and manufacturing toward renewable energy, health, and advanced manufacturing. With over 343,000 jobs and \$173.9 billion in current annual output (REMPLAN), the region faces both significant opportunities and challenges.

22 coal mines in the Hunter are forecast to close in the next few decades, mpacting nearly 50,000 jobs (Future Jobs and Investment Authorities), including around 12,000 jobs by 2030 alone (Muswellbrook Shire Council). Urgent action is needed to ensure alternative jobs can be provided.

The reuse of former mining land and infrastructure presents a major opportunity,

with sites potentially being repurposed for renewable energy projects, circular economy precincts, industrial hubs, smart manufacturing, tourism, freight and logistics, and conservation. Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) and initiatives like the proposed TAFE Energy Centre of Excellence aim to address retraining challenges, skill shortages and infrastructure demands, and over 70% of residents have expressed they are open to retraining (University of Newcastle Institute of Regional Futures).

Strategic regional planning is essential to balance industry transition while ensuring economic stability. With proactive workforce development and investment, the Hunter region is well-positioned to drive sustainable job growth in a rapidly evolving economy.

Advancing a Circular Economy in the Hunter Region

Hunter JO's <u>Circular Economy Precincts Project</u> supports the region's economic evolution through new efficient, resilient, net zero approaches to economic development. Funded by the NSW Government, the project delivered concept plans for four Circular Economy Precincts and an operational framework for a coordinating body - the Futures Hub.

The precincts were designed using extensive research and stakeholder input, focusing on integrating circular principles locally by leveraging waste streams, adopting new technologies, and coordinating logistics and energy systems. The Futures Hub is designed to be a trusted entity to guide precinct development, assist circular system development, foster innovation, and attract investment.

The project developed a hybrid model concept to develop the local circular economy, through combining place-based precincts with a broader network of circular businesses. It has identified key sites, validated business models, and outlined governance structures, positioning the Hunter as a potential national leader in circular economy innovation, with the capacity to unlock up to \$2 billion in economic value and significantly reduce emissions.



Seamless, multimodal connectivity powered by modern transport networks, enhanced digital infrastructure, and integrated planning to support sustainable mobility and regional growth.







Objectives (Where do we want to be?)	Directions (How do we get there?)
3.1 Safe and efficient road networks.	Support a safe and efficient road network across the Hunter region by advocating for equitable and sustainable road funding.
3.2 Integrated cross-agency infrastructure planning.	Foster integrated infrastructure planning that coordinates efforts across all levels of government and sectors to create a seamless, efficient, and future-ready region.
3.3 Multimodal, low-emission transport connectivity.	Ensure sustainable movement of people and goods and enhance regional transport connectivity through diverse, multimodal and low-emission transport solutions, including infrastructure investments in air, rail and active transport infrastructure.
3.4 Digital connectivity improvements.	Drive digital connectivity improvements across the Hunter region to support economic development, education, and community engagement.

hunter regional context

The Hunter region's infrastructure, transport networks, and digital connectivity are central to its ongoing development and future growth. Key road projects, such as the \$700 million Singleton bypass and the \$2.1 billion M1 Pacific Motorway extension to Raymond Terrace are improving safety, reducing congestion, and enhancing the region's connection to Greater Sydney and key industrial hubs including the Renewable Energy Zones. Public transport and active transport solutions are also evolving, with ongoing initiatives to improve accessibility and connectivity within the region.

However, challenges remain, including the need for more efficient and safer road links, better public transport options, and reliable digital infrastructure. The region faces increasing demand for high-speed internet and mobile coverage, especially in rural and remote areas. Opportunities exist in coordinating infrastructure planning, supporting the growth of innovation hubs, expanding digital infrastructure, and leveraging new transport technologies to further connect communities and improve economic resilience. Effective planning and investment in these areas will be essential for the Hunter's future.

Supporting electric vehicle readiness in the Hunter

Hunter JO is working with the NSW Government to build capacity and confidence among councils to lead the transition to net zero transport solutions.

With funding support from the NSW Government, Hunter JO organised electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure feasibility assessments for across the region. These assessments have supported councils in applying for grants to expand the local charging network, advancing the region's shift to low-emission transport.

We also hosted the 2023 *Plugging into the Future: Electrifying Council Fleets* event, which provided practical guidance on EV fleet transition for councils - covering topics such as total cost of ownership, charging infrastructure, and transition planning.

These collaborative efforts are helping to lay the groundwork for a cleaner, more sustainable transport future across the Hunter Region.



environmental sustainability & resilience

A future focused on long-term resilience, where disaster preparedness, climate mitigation and adaptation, sustainable water management, and circular economy practices work together to protect ecosystems and build holistic resilience for future generations.



The Hunter is predicted to experience increased extreme weather and natural hazards, with the effects of this already impacting the region. Many of the region's communities are struggling to recover from the continual and combined impacts of more frequent and severe natural hazards. The NSW Reconstruction Authority's State Disaster Mitigation Plan 2024 has identified the Lake Macquarie, Newcastle and MidCoast LGAs among the most at-risk from natural hazards now and into the future, and Port Stephens was identified in the top three LGAs for coastal erosion and inundation risk. These challenges mean climate change adaptation measures such as enhancing flood resilience and protecting vulnerable infrastructure are becoming essential, but Local Government, especially regional and rural councils, are often under-resourced in this area.

The Hunter is also at the forefront of circular economy initiatives, with councils, businesses, and communities working to create economic value, while reducing waste and maximise resource recovery. Programs focused on repurposing industrial by-products, expanding recycling infrastructure, and supporting sustainable manufacturing are positioning the region as a leader in innovative and sustainable economic development and waste solutions.

Hunter communities value and enjoy the lifestyle provided by our diverse ecosystems, rich biodiversity, clean air, water, and natural resources. As the region grows, balancing development with the protection of these critical ecosystems remains a key challenge.





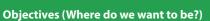












Directions (How do we get there?)

4.1 Climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster resilience. Develop and implement comprehensive strategies for climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster resilience, strengthening the long-term resilience and wellbeing of the region.

4.2 Circular materials and waste management.

Promote a circular economy and enhance waste management practices, focusing on regional waste opportunities, maximising resource value, reducing landfill reliance, and fostering circular waste solutions that support environmental and economic sustainability in the Hunter region.

4.3 Water security and waterway health.

Ensure a reliable, safe and secure water supply for the Hunter region through coordinated and sustainable water management practices, infrastructure investment, and proactive measures that safeguard waterways and water resources for current and future generations.

4.4 Protection of natural environments.

Protect and enhance our natural environments and open space including bushland, estuaries, waterways, beaches and biodiversity.

Planning for the future: Increasing disaster resilience in the Hunter

The NSW Reconstruction Authority has developed the Disaster Adaptation Planning (DAP) process to help NSW communities better manage natural hazard risks and reduce the impact and cost of disasters. Stakeholder engagement has strongly supported a regional approach to implementing DAPs across the state.

Hunter JO and its Member Councils have a long history of disaster resilience collaboration, dating back to the 1955 Maitland floods. This long-standing collaboration has been recognised with Disaster Ready Fund support, enabling Hunter JO to coordinate disaster adaptation planning with councils in the region.

In the coming years, delivering DAPs will be a key priority, strengthening the Hunter's long-term resilience.

financial sustainability & funding reform

Financial sustainability achieved through reformed funding processes and secure financial models that ensure the long-term viability and success of local councils to deliver services to communities.



Like many councils across the state, councils in the Hunter are facing challenges in financial sustainability exacerbated by rising expenses, cost shifting and limited revenue streams, particularly in rural areas where financial disparities with metropolitan councils are more pronounced. The 2024 NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Ability of Councils to Fund Infrastructure and Services and the 2024 Federal Inquiry into Local Government Sustainability have recognised the need for reform to improve council financial sustainability, providing numerous recommendations.

One of the main issues Hunter councils face is the reliance on grant funding which has become

more competitive, complex, administratively burdensome and with significant co-contribution requirements, making it harder for councils to secure necessary funds to deliver key infrastructure and community services. Road funding is an ongoing and significant challenge, requiring systems reform across all three levels of government and a renewed focus on ensuring greater equity, certainty and sustainability in funding across regional and metropolitan communities.

There are significant opportunities for more equitable, efficient, and sustainable funding models, flexible rate-setting mechanisms, and exploring alternative revenue sources.

case

study



Objectives (Where do we want to be?)

Directions (How do we get there?)

5.1 Ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of councils.

Advocate for more equitable and efficient funding models that enhance the long-term financial capacity of Local Government to deliver essential services to Hunter communities.

5.2 Secure reliable funding for placebased regional collaboration. Advocate for consistent, long-term and non-competitive NSW Government funding to deliver effective place-based regional collaboration under the Joint Organisation / Regional Organisation of Councils model.

5.3 Reforming grant funding processes to secure sustainable funding models.

Advocate for reforms to grant funding models, systems and processes to support improved efficiency and impact of council-led programs.

Helping councils save on energy costs and transition to renewables

In 2024, Hunter JO helped 13 councils across regional NSW secure a renewable electricity supply agreement through a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA), extending to 2030. The group includes four Hunter JO Member Councils - Maitland, MidCoast, Muswellbrook, and Upper Hunter.

The agreement delivers over 390 gigawatt hours of electricity to 163 council sites and streetlighting, with 83% sourced from NSW renewable projects. Maitland, MidCoast, and Muswellbrook have committed to 100% renewable energy.

Key benefits include:

- Emissions Reduction: Avoiding 185,000 tonnes of CO₂, supporting net zero targets.
- Cost Savings and Stability: Councils will save an estimated \$5.3M and gain protection from energy price volatility.
- **Regional Economic Support:** The deal supports NSW wind and solar projects, creating jobs and boosting local economies.

Through <u>JO-led collaboration</u>, councils leveraged collective buying power to secure a competitive price and reduce procurement costs.



Objectives (Where do we want to be?)		Directions (How do we get there?)	
6.1	Enhancing access to health services and aged care facilities.	Enhance access to health services, ensuring that the community, particularly the vulnerable, can access high-quality care and support in a timely and equitable manner across the region.	
6.2	Expanding open space, greening, and public amenity access.	Expand access to open spaces, green areas, and public amenities, fostering vibrant, healthy communities and enhancing the quality of life for the community through sustainable and inclusive urban design.	
6.3	Promoting community identity, culture and opportunities.	Promote and celebrate the region's unique community identity and culture, fostering opportunities for cultural expression, community engagement, and social inclusion for the community.	

The Hunter Region's liveability and community wellbeing are shaped by access to essential services, public spaces, and strong local identity. While the region benefits from expanding health infrastructure, including the new Maitland Hospital and upgrades to John Hunter Hospital, challenges remain in meeting growing demand, particularly in aged care, mental health, and specialist services in rural areas.

Access to quality open spaces and public amenities varies and communities face gaps in green space and social infrastructure, especially in the face of increasing development. There may be opportunities to take a regional-scale

approach to improve community access to facilities and services as the Hunter grows.

The lands of the Hunter Region cross 15 Local Aboriginal Land Councils. Our region's cultural identity is a key strength, with vibrant arts, heritage, and First Nations initiatives fostering community pride and social cohesion.

Opportunities exist to further invest in accessible healthcare, expand public amenities, and support local cultural initiatives to strengthen community resilience and wellbeing as the region continues to grow.

case

Tackling illegal dumping across the Hunter

Hunter JO's Regional Illegal Dumping (RID) Program, funded by the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) over five years, helps Member Councils address and reduce illegal dumping in their communities. The program provides coordinated regional support through initiatives such as a social media education campaign, a legal support desk for councils, staff training, and provision of equipment like road signs, personal protective equipment, surveillance cameras, and educational materials.

This regional approach is delivering strong value for money and operational efficiencies for both participating councils and the NSW EPA. It also fosters collaboration among council officers across the Hunter, resulting in more effective and consistent outcomes for local communities.

More effective regional-scale program delivery

Joint Organisations increasingly depend on competitive, time-limited state and federal grants to deliver essential regional programs and achieve Strategic Plan objectives. These grants often involve complex administration and require financial co-contributions, leading to uncertainty and fragmented program delivery.

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To address these challenges, a more sustainable and effective approach would involve codesign funding models in partnership with government. One successful example is the NSW Government's Joint Organisation Net Zero Acceleration (JONZA) program, which collaborates with JOs and councils to identify and fund regional-scale net zero initiatives. Co-design of the JONZA program has ensured the more successful and efficient delivery of NSW Government policy and funding into regional NSW in a way that better reflects place-based needs and opportunities in each JO region.

Similarly, the NSW EPA's Sustainability Partnerships program worked with the Hunter JO to co-design and implement the Landfill Emissions project. This partnership improved how Local Governments measure carbon emissions from landfill, delivering better outcomes through collaboration, with outcomes now being used more broadly across NSW.



PART 4

collaborating, delivering and reporting on our plan

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key existing and emerging collaboration partners

10 member councils























hunter region

- Regional advocacy groups (eg. Committee for Hunter, Business Hunter, HunterNet)
- University of Newcastle
- Regional Development Australia (RDA) Hunter
- Hunter Water
- Destination Sydney Surrounds North
- Newcastle Airport
- · Port of Newcastle
- · Central Coast Council
- NSW Premiers Department
- $\bullet \ \ NSW\ Department\ of\ Climate\ Change,\ Energy,\ the\ Environment\ and\ Water$
- NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
- NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- NSW Reconstruction Authority
- NSW Environment Protection Authority
- NSW Health
- Transport for NSW
- Office of Local Government
- Future Jobs and Investment Authority
- Local Land Services
- Other relevant State Government departments
- Joint Organisation Chairs Forum and Network
- Local Government NSW



national

- Net Zero Economy Authority
- National Emergency Management Agency
- High Speed Rail Authority
- Australian Local Government Association
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

how we deliver and report on our plan

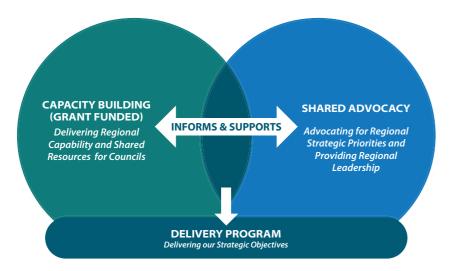
capacity building and advocacy

Capacity Building

Hunter JO's Capacity Building program (including the Environment Program) delivers policy and program development, collaboration and capacity building activities for Member Councils to directly achieve the objectives of the Hunter JO Strategic Plan 2035. Hunter JO seeks out State and Federal Government grants to fund our Capacity Building program.

Advocacy

Hunter JO's Advocacy program is predominately funded through Member Council contributions and is supported by the Capacity Building program. Each year, the Hunter JO Board prioritises the advocacy focus areas within the resources that are available.



The Advocacy and Capacity Building programs support and inform each other. Council insights, findings and recommendations from grant-funded project work directly inform the Advocacy program, while advocacy efforts also attract grant funding for capacity building initiatives.

hunter jo delivery program 2025-29

Hunter JO's Delivery Program 2025-29 is our plan for achieving the objectives outlined in the Hunter JO Strategic Plan 2035. It identifies the projects and advocacy priorities that the Hunter JO will deliver between 2025 and 2029 based on available resources. The Delivery Program will be reviewed and adopted by the Hunter JO Board each year.

reporting our progress

Our progress on delivering the Hunter JO Strategic Plan and Delivery Program will be reported through:

- Annual audited financial reports
- Annual Performance Statement
- Six-monthly Performance Statement

reviewing the plan

A review will be undertaken annually and a complete update of the Strategic Plan will be carried out within 12 months of each ordinary election of councillors for all Member Councils (normally every 4 years).



Keeping communities cool: Regional collaboration on heatwave communication

Hunter JO's Beat the Heat Communications Support Package was developed in collaboration with councils and NSW Health to engage communities about the impacts of heatwaves. Based on NSW Health's Beat the Heat resources, it adapts key messages into various formats to address at-risk communities and highlight important issues.

The package includes customisable content such as key messages, email alerts, newsletters, SMS/text alerts, social media posts, and website materials to support councils in creating their communications.

These resources ensure consistent messaging across platforms, helping avoid miscommunication and duplication of effort. This means that residents across the region receive the same important information, no matter where they are.

By working together, councils can develop shared, regionally consistent resources, making it easier to communicate with the communities across the Hunter region.

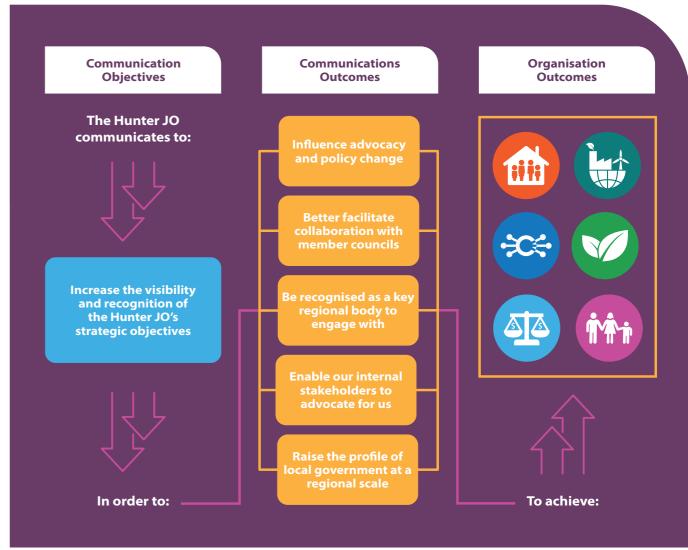
communication and engagement strategy

The Communication and Engagement Strategy enables clear communication about the delivery of the Hunter JO Strategic Plan 2035 and provides consistent messaging aligned to our strategic priorities, statutory functions and communications objectives.

In a collaborative organisation like the Hunter JO, implementing effective communications campaigns using a variety of methods is essential in achieving our desired outcomes of:

- · Advocating to influence policy and funding decisions for the benefit of the region.
- Building capacity within the region (particularly within Local Government and the community) through the delivery of grant-funded projects and programs.

Maintaining a positive reputation and strong brand recognition by increasing our visibility and demonstrating our value will contribute to the successful delivery of the Hunter JO Strategic Plan 2035. A strong communications strategy can assist in encouraging partnerships with, and support from, key industry bodies and other levels of government, supporting our advocacy function.





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methods for communicating

Our Communication and Engagement Strategy will drive communications activities on the progress of our strategic priorities, including the achievement of key milestones and successes. This includes:



Websites

Providing updates on our website including project updates and latest news.



Newsletters

Publishing a bi-monthly corporate newsletter to share updates on our key projects and advocacy priorities.



Mayors Digest

A monthly newsletter sent to Mayors and General Managers outlining political engagements, media, strategic engagements, events and key project and program updates.



Social Media

Posting social media updates that link to our projects and advocacy activities.



Traditional Media

Coordinating radio, newspaper and TV media opportunities to promote key project milestones, strategic objectives and advocacy priorities.



Meetings and Events

Hosting or attending meetings and events that are relevant to our strategic priorities, including with Ministers and MPs.



Presentations and Publications

Providing reports and updates in the form of presentations and publications on the progress of our strategic priorities.



Direct Email Distributions

Sending emails to stakeholders on the progress of our strategic priorities.



