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MEDIA RELEASE

Hunter Mayors take united voice to NSW Parliament

Date: Monday 13 October 2025

Ten Hunter mayors will meet with the NSW Premier, Treasurer, senior Ministers and senior members of the state opposition this week with an agenda that includes post-mining land use and a new Tri-Government Agreement for the region.

The meetings at NSW Parliament House will also cover commitments to deliver jobs, safer roads, housing and better natural disaster resilience in the Hunter.

The Hunter Joint Organisation delegation of Mayors will be led by Chair and Singleton Mayor Sue Moore and Deputy Chair and Port Stephens Mayor Leah Anderson, and will engage in a series of high-level meetings from Wednesday.

The agenda reflects the region's shared priorities, including:

- Tri-Government Agreement for economic transformation (Hunter Region Deal)
- Post-mining land use
- Housing supply and enabling infrastructure
- Financial sustainability of local government
- Roads, transport and connectivity
- Airfreight and tourism
- Disaster resilience
- Water infrastructure

A Unified Advocacy Agenda

Mayor Sue Moore said the delegation is determined to ensure the voices of Hunter communities are heard at the highest levels of government.

“The Hunter is home to a population approaching one million people and an economy worth \$91 Billion. Our councils are on the frontline of housing growth, climate impacts, and the transformation away from coal. We are heading to Sydney to press the case for urgent and coordinated action to support our region's communities, jobs and industries.”

Key advocacy asks include:

- Establishing a **Tri Government Agreement (Hunter Region Deal)** to create 50,000 new jobs to offset those expected to be lost from the global decline in coal over the coming years and urgently accelerating post mining land use.
- **Unlocking 61,000 new homes** by funding enabling infrastructure such as roads, water and sewer services.
- Addressing **cost shifting from State to Local Government** to ensure councils' financial sustainability to maintain roads, waste and other services.

- Investment in the **Newcastle Airport Airfreight Precinct** to boost exports, diversify the economy and grow international tourism.
- Delivering **disaster resilience funding** aligned with councils' planning cycles to ensure long-term community safety.
- Urgently upgrading and co-funding **regional water infrastructure** to support growth and public health.

Mayor Leah Anderson said collaboration is at the heart of the Hunter JO's approach. "The ten councils of the Hunter are working together with one voice. By partnering with the NSW and Federal Governments, we can deliver practical solutions that will strengthen our communities and ensure the Hunter remains one of the most prosperous and liveable regions in Australia."

Advocacy Priorities

Economic Transformation

The Hunter region faces profound disruption from the closure of coal mines. By 2030, nearly 12,000 direct and indirect jobs will be lost in the Hunter region with the closure of two mines. Over the next few decades, 22 further coal mines are due to close with no mining approvals currently granted beyond 2048.

With an economy of \$91 Billion annually, the Hunter requires urgent, coordinated action to diversify and grow new industries. The Hunter JO is calling for a Hunter Region Deal; a tri-government agreement to create 50,000 new jobs to offset losses, attract business investment, and ensure a fair, planned transition for workers and communities.

Quote (Jeffrey Drayton, Mayor of Muswellbrook):

"Muswellbrook and the Hunter have a legacy of powering the country and powering the economy. We need to lock in that legacy and make it the future.

A Hunter Region Deal, if it's done right, could deliver our region the benefits of similar agreements like the Western Sydney City Deal. A deal for the Hunter needs to lock in a share of mining royalties to support delivery to our Hunter communities.

We'll be speaking with the Premier Chris Minns and Treasurer Daniel Mookhey about a deal for the Hunter, to shift the economic focus onto our region and fuel investment and jobs."

Post-Mining Land Use

With 22 mines due to close in the coming years, the Hunter must urgently repurpose mining lands into new employment and industry precincts. The NSW Government has supported all recommendations of the Post-Mining Land Use Inquiry, but councils need funding and governance clarity to act. Unlocking this land for new industries such as clean energy and advanced manufacturing is vital to sustaining the region's future.

Quote (Sue Moore, Mayor of Singleton & Chair Hunter JO):

"The closure of just one mine recently has already shaken our communities. We're speaking to the NSW Treasurer, the Hon Daniel Mookhey on the need for urgent funding and coordinated

delivery by the NSW Government so we can repurpose mining land for new industries that will keep our communities in work.”

Housing

The Hunter can deliver tens of thousands of new homes, but enabling infrastructure such as water, sewer, transport, and flood mitigation is holding projects back. Councils estimate \$938 million in investment could unlock 61,000 homes across the region. Councils are urging the NSW Government to directly fund enabling infrastructure, streamline biodiversity offsets, support housing diversity, and incentivise infill development to meet housing targets.

Quote (Cr Adam Shultz, Mayor of Lake Macquarie):

“We have land ready to go and communities eager to grow, but the pipes and roads just aren’t there. We want to discuss partnering with the NSW Government with Minister for Housing, the Hon Rose Jackson, on enabling infrastructure being the key to unlocking tens of thousands of homes in the Hunter.”

Financial Sustainability of Local Government

Cost shifting from state governments, inequitable funding distribution of grants, and restrictive rate-pegging have left councils in financial distress. In 2023–24 alone, NSW councils absorbed \$1.5 billion in cost-shifting from NSW Government, the equivalent of \$500 per ratepayer. Hunter JO is calling for reform to reduce cost-shifting, fairer grant distribution, sustainable road funding, and non-competitive block funding to give councils certainty.

Quote (Cr Digby Rayward, Mayor of Dungog):

“Local government is carrying the cost of services without the funding to back it up. We’re meeting with the Hon Ron Hoenig, NSW Minister for Local Government while in Sydney, because our communities deserve fairer funding and less red tape so councils can stay financially sustainable.”

Roads and Transport

Hunter councils manage 126,500km of local roads – vastly more than metropolitan councils – yet funding formulas fail to reflect this. Critical regional connector roads are deteriorating, while councils face a \$3.4 billion backlog in road repairs across NSW. The Hunter JO is calling for direct, recurrent investment, reclassification of key regional roads as state roads, and transparent delivery of the Hunter Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan.

Quote (Cr Dan Watton, Mayor of Cessnock):

“In Sydney, renewing 5% of the road network each year costs around \$75 per ratepayer. In the Hunter, it’s more than \$250 in Newcastle, \$1,800 in Singleton and over \$3,800 per ratepayer each year in Dungog. This clearly disadvantages the affordability and capacity of regional and rural councils and their communities to maintain their road networks. We want to discuss these issues with NSW Minister for Regional Roads and Transport, the Hon Jenny Aitchison because we need funding formulas that reflect the true scale and cost of our road networks.”

Airfreight and Tourism

With a \$250m upgrade to Newcastle Airport complete, the Hunter is poised to boost exports and international tourism. But without an airfreight precinct, \$500 million in NSW exports will continue to leak interstate each year. The Hunter JO is advocating for \$49m in cargo

infrastructure and for \$3.85m over three years to implement a united Hunter tourism marketing strategy, unlocking jobs, exports and international visitation to the Hunter.

Quote (Cr Leah Anderson, Mayor of Port Stephens & Deputy Chair Hunter JO):

“With the support of the State and Federal Government, we have now delivered a brand-new international terminal.

We see our next opportunity to benefit the entire region would be to deliver an air freight precinct. We’re meeting with the Hon Steve Kamper, NSW Minister for Tourism and Jobs because we are seeking to partner again with both State and Federal Government for further investment in Newcastle Airport’s cargo capacity to turbocharge exports, attract airlines, and grow tourism across the whole Hunter.”

Disaster Resilience

The Hunter faces increasingly severe floods, storms and fires. Councils bear the brunt of recovery yet remain under-resourced, with 97% of disaster funding going to response and recovery rather than resilience. Councils are calling for streamlined, ongoing funding aligned with long term planning cycles, “build back better” provisions, and permanent regional capacity-building roles to strengthen disaster adaptation.

Quote (Cr Philip Penfold, Mayor of Maitland):

“Our communities shouldn’t be rebuilding the same vulnerable assets after every flood. We’re speaking with Minister for Recovery, the Hon Janelle Saffin, because we need funding to build back better where appropriate, and invest in resilience.”

Water Infrastructure

Outside Hunter Water’s service area, regional councils struggle with ageing water and sewer infrastructure, sometimes leaving communities on months-long boil-water alerts. Strict planning controls in Dungog’s catchment also limit growth without compensation. The Hunter JO is calling for increased state investment in regional water upgrades, fairer distribution of Hunter Water dividends, and better governance of waterway health.

Quote (Cr Maurice Collison, Mayor of Upper Hunter):

“Safe, reliable water is the foundation of every community, yet many Hunter councils are left to manage multi-million-dollar upgrades with decreasing levels of support from NSW Government. We’re meeting with the Hon Rose Jackson, NSW Minister for Water to raise awareness of the need for urgent state investment to secure our region’s water future.

Mayors represented by the Hunter Joint Organisation

- Sue Moore, Mayor of Singleton Council and Chair of the Hunter Joint Organisation
- Leah Anderson, Mayor of Port Stephens Council and Deputy Chair of the Hunter Joint Organisation
- Dan Watton, Mayor of Cessnock City Council
- Digby Rayward, Mayor Dungog Shire Council



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- Philip Penfold, Mayor of Maitland City Council
- Jeffrey Drayton, Mayor of Muswellbrook Shire Council
- Adam Shultz, Mayor of Lake Macquarie City Council
- Ross Kerridge, Lord Mayor of City of Newcastle
- Maurice Collison, Mayor of Upper Hunter Shire Council
- Claire Pontin, Mayor of MidCoast Council

Contact details:

Please direct media or project inquiries to comms@hunterjo.nsw.gov.au or contact Kim Carland on 0460 034 614.

About the Hunter Joint Organisation:

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

The Mayors provide a united and local voice for our communities, working across council boundaries to ensure that the diverse needs and aspirations of the Hunter region are effectively represented and addressed. The councils of the Hunter have been working closely together for nearly 70 years.

The Hunter JO includes the following councils: Cessnock, Dungog, Lake Macquarie, MidCoast, Maitland, Muswellbrook, Newcastle, Port Stephens, Singleton, and Upper Hunter.