4 Sandringham Avenue, Thornton,
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www.hunterjo.nsw.gov.au

# MEDIA RELEASE

## New leadership, shared purpose: Hunter JO advances election priorities with new Chair

22 October 2026

The Hunter's ten councils have reaffirmed their commitment to working together for the region, appointing Mayor of Muswellbrook Shire Jeff Drayton as Chair of the Hunter Joint Organisation Board and re-appointing Mayor of Port Stephens Leah Anderson as Deputy Chair.

As strong advocates with a clear focus on action, Mayors Drayton and Anderson are well-positioned to drive our region into its next chapter.

Mayor Drayton takes over the role from Mayor Sue Moore of Singleton Council, whose leadership over the past four years has substantially strengthened collaboration between the Hunter's councils and advanced a strong regional advocacy approach targeting both state and federal governments.

Hitting the ground running, the Chairs will spend another day at Sydney's Parliament House today leading a delegation of Hunter Mayors, meeting with Ministers, Shadow Ministers and crossbenches to push our election priorities.

Incoming Chair Mayor Drayton said it was critical the Hunter's priorities remained front and centre as the countdown to the March 2027 NSW State Election continues.

"Whether you're the government, opposition or a candidate, we'll be knocking on your door," he said.

"We've identified our priorities for the Hunter and it's time the region gets the attention it deserves."

The Board's election priorities focus on key areas that will help unlock the Hunter's next phase of growth and prosperity.

**Economic diversification**

With the Future Jobs Investment Bill legislation now passed in Parliament, the Board is advocating for urgent investment to support economic diversification. The NSW Government receives over $3 billion in coal mining royalties per year, with no funding being made to the coal mining communities of NSW currently.

The Hunter JO Board is seeking an increase to the NSW Future Jobs and Investment Fund from $22.5 million per year to $150 million per year, to invest in identified catalytic projects that will drive economic diversification across the region.

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“For our community, this isn't just a policy figure, it means creating high-quality local jobs, backing new industries, and making sure our children don't have to leave the Hunter to build rewarding careers." said Mayor Drayton, Chair of the Hunter JO.

**Housing Availability & Infrastructure**

Deputy Chair and Port Stephens Mayor Leah Anderson said the Hunter is facing critical challenges regarding housing supply, diversity and long-term affordability, and delivering new homes requires more than land alone.

“If we’re serious about unlocking development-ready land, we need government to back us with a long-term infrastructure program valued at $100 million per year to fund essential roads, water and power.

“We also need to look for innovative solutions, like planning ahead to repurpose the 1,000 temporary worker homes expected for the Hunter Transmission Project into permanent housing once construction wraps up. This balanced approach is exactly what our region needs to build homes faster and keep them affordable for local families," Mayor Anderson said.

**Fixing Council Funding & Protecting Ratepayers:**

Chair Mayor Drayton continues to emphasise that council rates cover on average about half the cost of providing the infrastructure and services of our communities;

"Local rates should fund local community benefits, not cover state government responsibilities. We are demanding a fairer share of the state waste levy returned to our towns, funding for reliable water and sewer systems, and state takeover of major regional freight roads. For residents, this means better-maintained neighbourhood streets, upgraded parks and facilities, and protection against unfair rate increases." Mayor Drayton said.

Mayors are also advocating for reforms that strengthen the financial sustainability of local government, including a greater return of waste levy funding, a fairer funding model for council-owned water and sewer infrastructure, and the re-categorisation of state-significant road corridors that currently place significant maintenance burdens on councils.

Deputy Chair Mayor Leah Anderson said the priorities reflect both the diversity of the Hunter and the shared challenges facing communities across the region.

“The Hunter region is the engine room of regional NSW. We have world-class experience, innovative industries and ambitious businesses. But we need urgent government investment. Whether it's supporting tourism, creating new opportunities through economic diversification, or ensuring communities have the infrastructure and services they need to grow, our councils are united in advocating for outcomes that benefit the entire region," Mayor Anderson said.

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By speaking with a united voice, the Hunter's councils are working to ensure the region's opportunities and challenges remain front and centre as parties develop their policies and priorities ahead of the next State Election.

"The Hunter has long been an economic powerhouse for New South Wales, but we can't take that for granted," Mayor Drayton said.

"Our message in Parliament House is simple: the Hunter's priorities deserve more than acknowledgement. We're seeking meaningful commitments and investments that deliver tangible outcomes that will help our communities thrive."

HUNTER JOINT ORG.
COLLABORATION OF HUNTER COUNCILS

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**Mayors represented by the Hunter Joint Organisation**

- Jeffrey Drayton, Mayor of Muswellbrook Shire 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
- Adam Shultz, Mayor of Lake Macquarie City Council
- Philip Penfold, Mayor of Maitland City Council
- Alan Tickle, Mayor of MidCoast Council
- Gavin Morris, Lord Mayor of City of Newcastle
- Sue Moore, Mayor of Singleton Council
- Pat Ryan, Mayor of Upper Hunter Shire Council

**Contact details:**

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**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 City Council, Dungog Shire Council, Lake Macquarie City Council, Maitland City Council, MidCoast Council, City of Newcastle, Muswellbrook Shire Council, Port Stephens Council, Singleton Council, and Upper Hunter Shire Council