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Hunter JO Chair, Cr Bob Pynsent, retires after long career in local government OP-ED

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Author Line – Councillor Bob Pynsent has served in local government for over two decades. As the longest serving Mayor, he has served two terms at Cessnock City Council and has chaired the Hunter Joint Organisation for the past four years. He is now retiring after a long and successful career.

This week marks the end of my final term as a Councillor for Cessnock City Council, Mayor of Cessnock, and Chair of the Hunter Joint Organisation. I have enjoyed my time serving the communities of Cessnock and the Hunter region immensely. As I reflect, I am amazed by how our region has transformed since I first began my career in local government and I'm excited by what the future holds.

I was first elected as a Councillor with Cessnock City Council in 1999, a year that saw the closure of BHP in Newcastle. This significant event was both symbolic and transformative for the whole Hunter region and its economy. The closure of the BHP not only reshaped our industrial landscape, it also reinforced the interconnectedness of the Hunter's people and places. My experience working with other councils, through the Hunter Joint Organisation, has demonstrated how the impact of significant events - whether economic, social or environmental - are never isolated to a single local government area. The BHP closure sent ripples across the Valley and up and down the coast.

Recent natural disasters experienced by our MidCoast neighbours, or the economic challenges facing mining and energy based communities across the Hunter, are also felt in the Hunter's metropolitan core. This connection across the region is not a weakness - it is a strength.

Many saw the closure of the steelworks as the end of an era. It marked the start of a significant economic decline for our region. What I have seen during my time in local government is a



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region that can evolve and innovate to attract and develop new opportunities. This is a region capable of reshaping its identity and leveraging its strengths while maintaining its renowned liveability. We are resilient and resourceful and our future is bright.

My final term as Mayor of Cessnock, and Chair of the Hunter Joint Organisation, has been marked by the continuing pandemic, natural disasters, and a changing global energy economy. These experiences have galvanised collaboration between communities and councils and has served to strengthen these relationships. It has heralded a new era of collaborative local government leadership as together we seek to reshape our region.

Working with elected leaders, industry, and the community, I have seen this new collaborative way of working emerge as an effective platform to transform tomorrow's Hunter and take advantage of the many opportunities that are before us. These new opportunities will see this growth continue through the Renewable Energy Zone, Royalties for Rejuvenation and the growth of innovative and emerging industries.

We have seen people moving to the region for the lifestyle offered, and also because of the continuing impact of the pandemic. There is increasing opportunity in the region for international connectivity, economic diversification and the development of a Circular Economy. Greater Newcastle has also grown to become a genuine second city to Sydney, and it will be important for local councils to capitalise on this through the Hunter Joint Organisation to ensure local decisions remain with local people.

Seeing our region adapt and change, while remaining united with one voice speaks to the spirit of collaboration and community that runs through the Hunter. While we are still living through an unprecedented period of history, I hold great confidence that the future of the Hunter - and its communities: Cessnock, Dungog, Upper Hunter, MidCoast, Maitland, Newcastle, Muswellbrook, Lake Macquarie, Singleton and Port Stephens – will be a positive one.



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It has been an honour to serve as the Mayor of Cessnock and the Chair of the Hunter Joint Organisation, and to deliver for my community in Cessnock, as well as the wider region. It has not always been easy – but it has always been worth it.

Finally, I am excited to be able to enjoy our region as a retiree, to see new opportunities realised across the Hunter for our diverse and growing communities, and I am thankful to the large group of Councillors and Mayors I have had the pleasure to serve with during my 22 years on Council. I am excited to see what this new group of Councillors will bring.

Contact details

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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

