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Joint Op-Ed from 10 Mayors of the Hunter Region

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In just two years, the Hunter will host an international airport. This is a game changer for industry, business and communities, and the 10 councils of the Hunter are collaborating on readying the region to capitalise on unprecedented access to the global economy.

Federal Government support of \$66 million to upgrade the runway at Newcastle Airport to Code E status was announced in May 2021. Once completed, the airport will be able to accommodate longer range wide -bodied aircraft.

This is not just infrastructure for our region – it is a critical enabler for a significant boost in economic activity. This upgrade is set to generate 4,410 full time jobs, and deliver \$12.7 billion in regional economic benefit through increased freight and stimulation of the visitor economy.

Planning and collaboration will be key to realising the potential this development offers our region – and the time to work together is now. With change and disruption to the Hunter’s traditional international markets (such as energy), greater access to the global economy will both maintain and enhance the liveability of our region.

The Mayors of the Hunter are 100% committed to supporting the region to capitalise on this unique opportunity.

Through the Hunter Joint Organisation, the region’s Councils have launched *Hunter Global: Our International Future*. This whole-of-region initiative is designed to provide a platform for collaboration, planning and advocacy to ready the region for an international airport; and we are calling on the Hunter’s industry, business and communities to get involved.

We are energised about the prospects that the runway upgrade offers and excited to work with the region as the Hunter prepares to go global.

The opportunity of having an international gateway on the Hunter’s doorstep opens up unparalleled possibilities for the entire region; from travel and tourism to education and innovation, all walks of life in the Hunter are set to see the benefits of this upgrade.

As a first step to the Hunter Global initiative, over 50 industry experts from across the region came together in November at a virtual roundtable to identify the international opportunities and priorities for the region. This highlighted key sectors including manufacturing, tourism, agribusiness, defence, and business education and research.



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So, where to from here? Yes, the opportunities the runway upgrade offers the Hunter are many. But there is still much to be done to ensure the region is ready to hit the ground running at the end of 2023.

The *Hunter Global: Our International Future* summit to be held at Newcastle City Hall, on 17 and 18 February, will test and refine these priorities. Through the summit, delegates will hear from leaders in government and industry on connecting into global markets and co-designing our future.

The summit aims to identify and prioritise the opportunities arising from the runway upgrade that the region can get behind. A unified region-wide voice will be critical to attracting the capability and support we need to truly capitalise on the opportunities an international airport offers.

Trends in international air freight demand suggests that the region's manufacturing sector will gain significant benefit from the runway upgrade. Estimated total output will increase to \$280.7 million and provide for an additional 1,408 FTE jobs in manufacturing over the next 20 years.

The runway upgrade also offers direct access to the region for international visitors. From 2024, the increase in international visitors is estimated to contribute \$82.8 million to Gross State Product annually. Coordination across the region's tourism and visitors, friends and relatives sectors will be key to realising the international opportunities.

International trade in agribusiness is also a major opportunity and growth area as freight export is diverted from Sydney's Kingsford Smith Airport and Brisbane International Airport. Well-designed and specialised infrastructure will be crucial to the success of reaching new export markets.

Connecting to global markets and enterprises offers almost limitless opportunities for the region's business, education and research sectors. With strong capability in these areas, there is enormous scope to develop relationships and international collaboration further.

Further significant opportunity lies in Astra Aerolab - Australia's newest defence and aerospace precinct – part-funded by the NSW Government. The Department of Defence also has significant work underway at the RAAF Base at Williamtown.

The 10 Councils have prioritised fostering a collaborative export culture among the Hunter's industry, business and communities to establish a diverse and growing ecosystem of trade supply in the region, and to reap the benefits of this once-in-a-generation opportunity.

Attendance at the summit is free. Register or find out more by visiting <https://www.hunterjo.com.au/projects/hunterglobal/>



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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

