



Inquiry into the future role and contribution of regional capitals to Australia

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Introduction

The Hunter Region has long held the reputation as the powerhouse of the NSW economy and ranks highly as one of the most valued, diverse and resilient regions in Australia.

The Hunter Business Chamber is the largest regional business chamber in Australia and was established in 1886. The Chamber represents over 1800 member businesses to all levels of government. The Chamber is the peak industry association in the Hunter which represents all sectors of business in the region.

The Hunter Business Chamber welcomes the opportunity to provide a brief submission to this Inquiry.

Key Points

The Hunter is well recognised as the home to Australia's most resilient and diverse regional economy. The Hunter Region in NSW just north of Sydney covers over 31,000 square kilometres and is home to over 650,000 people or 9% of the state's population.

An unparalleled cross section of industry calls the Hunter Region home. Newcastle is the 8th largest city in Australia and is renowned for being the world's largest coal export port. The contribution to the region and state from the port's operation has grown exponentially over the past 10 years. It will be important to ensure that future growth and diversification is not hindered by poor planning processes and lacking infrastructure.

Newcastle, as the second largest city of NSW and the capital of the Hunter, has the ability to be a world class city, given its coastal location and close connections to the resource engine room of the Hunter Valley. A range of complementary and emerging industries, such as renewable energy technologies, medical research, the defence industry, tourism and the digital economy also have a bright future with the right platform for growth in place.

The NSW Defence Strategy acknowledges the Defence presence in our region, its specialist and extensive services and its significance to the national defence program overall. It is supported by a highly collaborative industry network of primes as well as small to medium enterprises specialising in defence industry support and manufacturing. Along with this, the Hunter is home to a significant army of Reserves and a supportive employer base.

The Hunter also has world class education and research institutions in the Hunter Institute (TAFE) and the University of Newcastle.

In recognising the important role of our regional capital, progress has been seen with the following projects:

- relocation of part of the University of Newcastle's operations to the city;
- relocation of state and federal justice facilities to the Civic Precinct;
- a better public transport system including removing the heavy rail line to west of Stewart Avenue and the creation of a new transport interchange at Wickham; and
- infrastructure investment across a range of health, education and transport projects for the Hunter Region.

It is vital to realise that the process of urban renewal will need to be ongoing. Ongoing infrastructure investment is going to be critical to the future contribution of our region to the state and nation. Importantly there needs to be a more cohesive approach between all levels of government but particularly federal and state, in ensuring that a positive economic climate is encouraged and supported. This includes realistic and clear planning processes, a transport strategy that promotes both accessibility and connectivity and a commitment to progressive urban renewal.

Conclusion

It should be acknowledged that the Hunter Region contributes significantly to the wider state and national economies. Government needs to consider how appropriate ongoing infrastructure and planning facilitates the ability of businesses and individuals to operate and contribute competitively.

The Hunter has significant untapped capacity to grow in a sustainable manner and provides a highly desirable lifestyle and strong employment opportunities.

The Hunter Business Chamber works as an integral part of the Chamber network in NSW and represents business at local, state and federal level to advocate for an improved operational climate for businesses in this region and it will continue to do this.

Contact

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