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## **Budget promises new energy momentum**

The region's peak business organisation, **Business Hunter** has welcomed a Federal Budget that places the energy transition front and centre as a key driver of growth and intense source of pressure for business and the community.

Business Hunter Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Sheena Martin said the Budget both stimulated opportunity in the new energy economy and protected vulnerable businesses and communities from surging energy costs.

"We welcome confirmation of the Net Zero Authority, Small Business Energy Incentive and Energy Price Relief Plan, and news tonight of a \$2 billion Hydrogen Headstart program to scale up production of renewable hydrogen is of keen interest here in the Hunter," said Ms Martin.

"The Albanese Government's vision to make Australia a "renewable energy superpower" is very much in line with the Hunter's efforts to diversify and transition to new energy economies. We are ideally placed to support the nation in this ambition," said Ms Martin.

"As a region leading the charge in Hydrogen in Australia, we look forward to exploring the opportunities in the Hydrogen Headstart program in more detail. Connected to this, we welcome the reaffirmed support for the Port of Newcastle's hydrogen-focused Clean Energy Precinct, which aims to accelerate both domestic and global decarbonisation efforts," said Ms Martin.

Ms Martin said the task of energy diversification was enormous and collaboration across all levels of government, business, industry, investment, and the community was key to increasing the pace.

"As a nation we recently marked the closure of Liddell, and as these traditional assets are retired renewables must arrive to take their place. Currently this isn't happening quickly enough."

"A national authority will play a role in coordinating and accelerating transition in key energy production regions like ours and we look forward to hearing more as it gears up in the coming months," said Ms Martin.

Ms Martin said the \$20,000 energy efficiency and decarbonisation package for small business, announced back in May, had been well received.

“Our research shows 50% of SME’s want to decarbonise, but for a variety of reasons, are not in a position to do so. This package will place support where it’s desperately needed, helping small businesses take practical and meaningful steps such as electrifying their cooling and heating systems, installing batteries and heat pumps, and upgrading fridges and other appliances,” said Ms Martin.

**Summary of key energy measures:**

- \$23M National Net Zero Authority
- \$2B Hydrogen Headstart
- \$20,000 Small Business Energy Incentive
- \$650 Energy Price Relief Plan for small business

Ms Martin said key roads projects including the M1 to Raymond Terrace, Mandalong Road, Muswellbrook Bypass, Singleton Bypass, were absent from the budget documents.

“We had hoped to see these crucial roads projects reaffirmed tonight, but we remain optimistic, per Minister King’s recent advice that they would be quarantined from the national infrastructure review,” said Ms Martin.

Business Hunter welcomed continued support for high-speed rail, with funding for a new High Speed Rail Authority of \$13.58 million over the next three years.

Business Hunter also welcomed the commitment of \$100 million over four years to expand the number of maintenance bays for the F-35A Joint Strike Fighters at Newcastle Airport.

“Williamtown is a world class defence and aerospace precinct set to become an increasingly important driver of economic growth and connection for the region. This investment is reflective of that,” said Ms Martin.

Business Hunter also welcomed a broad range of measures that will help to ease the cost of doing business amid a turbulent economic environment, including:

- **A new \$20,000 instant asset write-off** for small business allowing those with aggregated annual turnover of less than \$10 million to immediately deduct eligible depreciating assets costing less than \$20,000.
- Introducing practical measures to guard small businesses against **cyber threats** through a \$23.4 million program to help them train in-house cyber wardens.
- **300,000 new fee-free TAFE places** to train Australians in critical and emerging sectors.
- **Housing** - A new focus on rent relief and unlocking additional funding to build 1 million new affordable homes.
- **Ease of doing business** - \$2 billion in initiatives to simplify the interface between businesses and government services.

“As always, the devil will be in the detail, and we look forward to unpacking the budget documents in greater detail in the coming days and weeks,” said Ms Martin.

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