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Energy skills must be in the mix

The region's peak industry body **Business Hunter** has welcomed the announcement of a Hunter based manufacturing centre of excellence to boost domestic manufacturing.

Unveiled yesterday by Labour leader Chris Minns, the proposed centre will train, retrain and upskill at least 300 apprentices and workers in traditional manufacturing, including trains, buses and ferries, as well as advanced manufacturing techniques.

Business Hunter Chief Executive, Bob Hawes said the initiative would help reinforce traditional industries and skills in the Hunter, however it was important to consider the skills required to meet ambitions in the new energy economy.

"This centre of excellence backs in the skills and professions that exist here in the hunter, which helps to ensure that our traditional industries continue to prosper. Equally, we must have one eye on the future, and the skills and capability we'll need in new energy generation," said Mr Hawes.

"We've called for a blended training centre, modelled on the Institute of Applied Technology at Meadowbank, which could serve as the flagship training centre in renewable energy for the benefit of the state. We need the skills coming online as the jobs materialise."

A specialty STEMM high school is another recommendation put forward by Business Hunter to help meet the needs of students who have identified an early interest in roles in the new energy economy.

"To ensure we cover the full vertical, a STEMM High School will form another part of the solution in the enormous task of skilling our region's future workforce," said Mr Hawes.

According to Mr Minns, more than 1000 manufacturing jobs will be created in alignment with the centre, building trains, buses and ferries. Mr Hawes said these workers will require affordable housing close to where they work.

"Our members have consistently identified a lack of affordable housing as a major barrier to growth. We risk the prospect of not being able to meet our ambitions in local manufacturing or other industries if housing shortages aren't addressed," said Mr Hawes.

This election, Business Hunter is calling on the next state government to:

Ensure our community can grow and thrive by housing key workers close to where they work:

- Deliver on planning actions and fund economic and social infrastructure consistent with the strategic plan objectives and priorities to facilitate the opportunity for diversity in the housing supply pipeline.
- Create a Hunter Growth Infrastructure Fund and commit \$500m to the delivery of enabling infrastructure to unlock the existing pipeline of 41,800 dwellings.
- Resolve biodiversity issues to unlock existing pipeline and grow capacity of the development-ready pipeline.

Rapidly accelerate sovereignty in manufacturing and capture opportunities in the new energy market:

- Strengthen sovereign manufacturing by providing support and 'preferred supplier status' to local industry in relation to government procurement and supply chains.
- Provide the same priority and support for business and industry wishing to establish or diversify into manufacturing of materials required in renewable energy production such as solar panels and wind farms.
- Ensure great ideas that emerge across our wealth of research institutions and start-up ecosystem can stay in our region, by providing incentives for regional manufacturing.

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