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11 August 2026

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Submission: Mt Arthur Coal Mine Transformation Precinct Master Plan and Rezoning Proposal

Business Hunter welcomes the exhibition of the Mt Arthur Coal Mine Transformation Precinct Master Plan and associated rezoning proposal and congratulates the NSW Government, Muswellbrook Shire Council, BHP and the Net Zero Economy Authority on the collaborative work undertaken to date in preparing this important framework for the future of the site. The master plan represents a significant milestone in the Hunter Region's transition planning and provides an important opportunity to demonstrate how former mining lands can continue to support employment, investment and economic prosperity for regional communities.

Business Hunter has consistently advocated for the productive and beneficial reuse of mining lands as a key component of the Hunter's long-term economic development and diversification. As mining activity evolves over coming decades, it is critical that communities that have supported the resources sector continue to benefit from employment opportunities, investment and economic activity generated on these lands.

The Mt Arthur proposal is particularly important because it represents one of the first large-scale pilot projects in New South Wales specifically designed to demonstrate how post-mining land can be transitioned to future employment-generating uses through coordinated planning and land-use reform. The lessons learned through this process will help shape future approaches to mine land reuse across the Hunter and other regional economies.

Strategic importance of mining land reuse

Business Hunter strongly supports initiatives that enable former mining lands to be repurposed for industrial, commercial and emerging industry uses.

Across the Hunter, substantial areas of mining land are currently operational, under rehabilitation or approaching closure. These sites represent a valuable economic asset. Unlike many greenfield locations, former mining lands generally can offer significant advantages for future industrial development, including:

- existing infrastructure such as roads, water supply, electricity connections and communications networks
- established transport connectivity to freight networks, major roads and rail infrastructure

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- existing industrial land-use history and associated buffer zones
- large landholdings capable of accommodating major projects and industrial clusters
- access to a skilled workforce with transferable capabilities as mining operations wind down.

For these reasons, Business Hunter considers the Mt Arthur site highly suited to future employment-generating development and believes its successful transformation can make a substantial contribution to the Hunter's economic diversification while supporting communities that have historically relied on mining activity.

Importantly, productive reuse of already disturbed land allows economic growth to occur without unnecessary pressure to develop additional greenfield sites. This supports both sustainable land-use outcomes and responsible regional development.

Master Plan structure

Business Hunter supports the master plan's approach of identifying specific development precincts and priority activation areas for future investment.

In particular, we support the division of the developable land into precincts and the identification of approximately 950 hectares for early activation within the broader 5,400-hectare rezoning area. This staged approach provides a practical pathway for development while retaining flexibility to respond to future market opportunities and investment interest.

The identification of priority development areas provides confidence to prospective investors and industry partners while establishing a clear vision for the precinct's long-term evolution.

Proposed rezoning framework

Business Hunter supports the proposed rezoning pathway, including the creation of a dedicated planning framework through the State Significant Rezoning process and the application of the SP4 Enterprise Zone.

Given the pioneering nature of this project, flexibility will be essential. As one of the first major post-mining transformation precincts in NSW, the project will inevitably encounter challenges and opportunities that are difficult to fully predict today. A dedicated planning framework provides the capacity for the master plan to evolve as knowledge improves, industries emerge and market demand becomes clearer.

Business Hunter believes this approach delivers several important benefits:

- greater certainty for investors, industry partners and the broader community regarding appropriate future land uses
- a more consistent and efficient development assessment framework
- clear zoning and land-use controls tailored to the unique characteristics of the precinct

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- ability to balance employment generation with environmental and community outcomes
- flexibility to adapt the precinct over time as development opportunities emerge.

This planning certainty will be critical to attracting long-term private investment and supporting the successful redevelopment of the site.

Addressing land transfer and regulatory barriers

Business Hunter understands from stakeholders involved in the process that development of the master plan has been highly collaborative and constructive. We welcome this approach and encourage governments, industry, local councils, traditional owners and community representatives to continue working together as the project progresses. The complexity of post-mining land transformation requires coordinated decision-making and strong stakeholder engagement, and the collaboration demonstrated through this pilot project provides a positive model for future initiatives.

While Business Hunter strongly supports the master plan, we note that further work is required to address regulatory and planning barriers associated with the future transfer of land from mining lease holders to subsequent owners and operators. We understand discussions are continuing across relevant government agencies and stakeholders to identify practical solutions to these issues and are encouraged by reports of strong commitment from agencies involved.

Regardless of future ownership arrangements, investors will require confidence that land can be repurposed without unnecessary regulatory complexity or future uncertainty. Clear, efficient and transparent pathways for land transition will be essential to attracting investment and ensuring the precinct achieves its economic potential.

We therefore encourage governments to maintain momentum on reforms that support mine closure, rehabilitation certification, land transfer processes and future redevelopment opportunities.

Economic, environmental and social outcomes

Business Hunter welcomes the balanced approach reflected in the master plan to economic, environmental and social outcomes. While the proposal enables significant employment-generating development opportunities, the land identified for future development represents only a portion of the broader mine holding. We note that approximately 5,400 hectares have been identified for rezoning from a mine site of around 14,000 hectares, with only 950 hectares nominated for early activation. Significant rehabilitation and environmental restoration activities will continue across the broader site.

This demonstrates that economic development and environmental stewardship are not mutually exclusive outcomes. The master plan appropriately balances future employment

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opportunities with rehabilitation objectives, environmental considerations and landscape outcomes.

Business Hunter also welcomes the focus placed on social and community benefits, including improved active transport connections, enhanced access to recreational areas, preservation of heritage buildings and protection of culturally significant places and artefacts.

These measures will help ensure the transformation of the site delivers benefits not only for businesses and investors, but also for residents and future generations.

Conclusion

Business Hunter views the master plan as an important and positive first step in the transformation of the Mt Arthur site. However, planning and rezoning alone will not guarantee success.

The next phase must focus on investment attraction, industry development and the removal of remaining regulatory and planning barriers to redevelopment. Continued cooperation between all levels of government and industry will be necessary to secure transformational projects and convert the vision outlined in the master plan into long-term jobs and economic activity.

The Hunter has the workforce, industrial capability, infrastructure and expertise required to lead Australia's next phase of economic development. Unlocking the potential of former mining lands such as Mt Arthur will be critical to achieving that future.

Business Hunter supports the exhibited master plan and rezoning proposal and encourages the NSW Government to continue progressing the reforms, investment attraction activities and implementation measures needed to deliver enduring economic, environmental and community benefits from this landmark project.

Yours sincerely,



Bob Hawes
CEO Business Hunter