

## *Enacting positive change in the Hunter*

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The Hunter is an incredibly special place. We have the ability to change and adapt, provided we keep control in our own grasp.

My first experience of change came in 1983 when Dr John Paterson introduced user-pays to Hunter Water. It was thought to be revolutionary and the Hunter led the way. We changed the way people used water by saying you had to pay for it. The doom-sayers predicted it wouldn't work but average demand fell by 30 per cent, peak demand fell by 50 per cent.

Don't think that the Hunter hasn't led change. The Hunter Valley coal chain is the most efficient in the world. We've been successful but we've also had a few stuff-ups. We imploded in recent years over the railway line. We lost sight of where we could be, and allowed others from outside the Region to treat us somewhat disrespectfully in the things that they've brought to us.

At the Hunter Development Corporation (HDC), I came in eight years ago with a dream. Our dream combined three key factors. Firstly, we think that the western side of Lake Macquarie is the ideal spot to become the Silicon Valley of this nation. You need lots of broadband width, you need a talented workforce, you need amenity; you couldn't think of a better place than Lake Macquarie. It is a dream to create an industry that will employ the next generation.

Secondly, we thought about connecting communities from the west to the east for an ageing population. Older people are drawn to flatter landscapes to walk and recreate. They should be able to do this right along the growth corridor from Glendale to Nobby's Beach.

The third thing that we thought about was a connected world up the Valley. We are still about mining and manufacturing and will be for the next 30 years. One of the real risks we have is that most of the mines survive on water that is not secure. We need a connected grid to protect our Valley in times of drought and to use our water resources in a sustainable way.

At HDC we've tried to dream big, so that the next generation can see and understand the connectedness we were trying to create. Once we get that right, start to dream and paint those pictures, then we establish the future for the generations to come.

But we need to retain control over the decisions that affect us. We're losing control in lots of little ways. The prime example is the loss of the public voice of the Hunter. The Newcastle Herald and ABC radio are wonderful institutions and we're lucky to have them. The powers of a community rely on the ability to be exposed publicly for their actions. It is something that we should protect. Don't let our kids have to reinvent the ultimate force for information and debate in our modern society. Social media will never be able to bring forth one view, which might form the cornerstone of growth.

We've never feared change, we've been more than happy to lead change and our success is driven by the fact that we don't rely on hand-outs from others to make us successful.

***Paul Broad was one of three speakers addressing the theme of change at the Hunter Research Foundation's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary Lecture Series event at Newcastle City Hall on 16 November. This is an excerpt of his speech. To read the full transcript of his talk or those of Marcus Westbury or Genevieve Clay-Smith go to [www.hrf.com.au](http://www.hrf.com.au)***