

LG NSW : Destination and Visitor Economy Conference 2026

Maitland Town Hall

Day 1 | Wednesday 23 September 2026

11.45am	Registration
11.45am	Lunch and Networking
12.30pm	Conference Welcome
12.50pm	Live Workforce Pulse Check Connect with fellow HR professionals as you explore the collective experience and insights of HR in local government through interactive activities and live polling.
1.00pm	Local Government at a Turning Point Explore the latest insights into employee engagement, retention, leadership and workplace culture and hear practical actions to strengthen employee experience, develop talent and build a future-ready workforce.
1.40pm	PANEL DISCUSSION: Navigating the Workforce Imbalance This panel will explore how councils are responding to skills shortages, an ageing workforce and changing employee expectations, with practical strategies to attract, retain and develop talent.
2.25pm	Beyond the Numbers: Telling Your Council's Workforce Story with Data Discover how workforce data, visualisation, benchmarking and emerging tools can inform better decisions, strengthen workforce planning and communicate your workforce story.
3.00pm	Afternoon Tea and Networking
3.30pm	Local Government Employer of Choice Program Hear the latest update on the Local Government Employer of Choice Program and what's coming next. Learn how to engage with the program and maximise its value for your organisation
3.40pm	CASE STUDY: Focused People Strategies That Work Hear how a regional council is strengthening workforce capability through practical succession planning and retirement readiness initiatives.
4.10pm	What It Takes to Lead at the Executive Level Explore the realities of executive leadership and gain practical insights to strengthen leadership pipelines and prepare future leaders.
4.55pm	MC Summary Day 1

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Enclosure 1

5.00pm	Welcome Reception and Networking Event <i>Meet, connect and network with industry peers in a relaxed setting</i>
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Day 2 | Thursday 24 September 2026

9.00am	Welcome to Day 2
9.10am	Shape, Shift and Lift Culture <i>Culture isn't a project—it's shaped by everyday actions. This keynote explores the role of leaders in driving culture change and provides practical steps to make culture work.</i>
10.00am	CASE STUDY: Where People Practices Create Real Impact <i>Hear how a regional council is using innovative, people-focused HR practices to navigate workforce pressures and enhance the employee experience, with practical approaches you can adapt in your organisation.</i>
10.30am	Morning Tea and Networking
11.00am	Financial Wellbeing at Work <i>Explore the role of financial wellbeing in the modern workplace and its impact on employees and organisations.</i>
11.25am	CASE STUDY: Beyond Tokenism – How to Make DEI Impactful with Limited Resources <i>When resources are stretched Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) often becomes an afterthought. Hear how one Council is embedding inclusion into everyday practice, earning recognition as one of only two councils in Australia named an Inclusive Employer by the Diversity Council of Australia.</i>
12.00pm	Roundtable Discussion: HR Hot Takes – The Issues Shaping Local Government in HR <i>An interactive roundtable exploring the key challenges facing HR in local government. Participants will share perspectives, challenge assumptions and reflect on real-world council practices.</i>
12.30pm	Lunch and Networking
1.30pm	Panel Discussion: AI is Here – What Now for HR? <i>Using the MAV AI Roadmap as a practical guide, this panel explores how HR can build workforce capability, reduce administrative pressure and support safe, responsible AI adoption while protecting privacy, consultation and trust.</i>
2.25pm	CASE STUDY: Where Technology Meets Humanity <i>Hear how a council is using AI to support its people, augment roles and reduce administrative burden to enable HR teams to focus on more strategic, human-centred work.</i>

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3.00pm	Afternoon Tea and Networking
3.30pm	Strategic wellbeing: Healthy people, stronger organisations A data-informed approach to wellbeing is critical. What predicts injury and illness in local government, and how can we influence it?
3.40pm	The Corporate Athlete Performance expectations continue to rise while time, focus and energy are stretched thin. The Corporate Athlete explores a new approach to sustaining performance, building resilience and leading with purpose.
4.40pm	MC Summary Day 2
4.50pm	Conference Break
6.30pm	HR Conference Dinner and Entertainment

Day 3 | Friday 25 September 2026

9.00am	Welcome to Day 3
9.10am	CASE STUDY: How Early Resolution Reduced Grievances by 45% Learn how an organisation equipped frontline managers with Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) skills to shift from reactive processes to early mediation-based conversations that resolve issues before they escalate.
9.40am	PANEL DISCUSSION: Embedding Early Resolution in Local Government Practice This panel explores the complexities of managing conflict in council workplaces, sharing practical strategies for early resolution, effective grievance management and reduced workplace risk.
10.30am	Morning Tea and Networking
11.00am	Building Inclusive Psychological Safety Hear how HR leaders can foster fair processes, inclusive leadership and speak-up cultures to prevent psychosocial harm and build organisational trust.
11.45am	Gold Medal Excellence – The Mindset of a Champion This inspiring keynote reveals the winning mindset, strategies and practical that empower individuals and teams to achieve excellence under pressure.
12.45pm	Final Remarks
1.00pm	HR Conference Event Close

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Enclosure 1

Port Stephens Site Visit & Nelson Bay and Shoal Bay Paid Parking Review

Prior to the conference, the delegation visited Nelson Bay and Shoal Bay to examine the operation and integration of paid parking systems.

The visit provided valuable insight into:

- Parking technology and enforcement approaches
- Communication and community education programs
- The role paid parking revenue plays in supporting destination management initiatives

The experience demonstrated how paid parking can be implemented as part of a broader strategy to manage visitor demand, improve amenity and contribute to tourism-related infrastructure investment.

Meeting with Visitor Information Centre Staff

The delegation also met staff operating the Port Stephens Visitor Information Centre, which is managed by council-employed personnel.

Discussions focused on:

- Visitor servicing models.
- Staffing arrangements.
- Integration with tourism marketing activities.
- Digital visitor information services.
- Data collection and visitor insights.

This provided a useful comparison for visitor servicing approaches and reinforced the ongoing importance of quality visitor information services despite increasing digital engagement.

On site meeting with Port Stephens Tourism Marketing Team at Conference

The team met with Jo (CEO of Port Stephens Tourism) involved in destination marketing for Port Stephens to better understand:

- Their destination marketing structure
- Funding arrangements & strategic partnerships
- Marketing priorities and campaign delivery.

The discussion highlighted the value of long-term investment in destination marketing and strong alignment between tourism promotion and economic development objectives.

Meeting with Port Stephens Economic Development Leadership

Meetings were held with the Port Stephens Council Economic Development Manager and to better understand:

- The governance relationship between council and tourism body.
- The development and implementation of paid parking.
- Stakeholder engagement processes.
- Lessons learned during implementation.

Of particular interest was understanding how paid parking was introduced, how community concerns were addressed, and how revenue generation was linked to ongoing improvements in visitor infrastructure and destination management outcomes.

Port Stephens Council's Smart Parking system

Purpose of the System

Introduced to:

- Improve safety and accessibility.
- Increase parking turnover in high-demand areas.
- Provide a revenue source to fund improvements in town centres and public spaces.
- Support fair and flexible access to parking.

Where It Operates

The system was first introduced in the Nelson Bay CBD in 2020 and has since been expanded to locations including:

- Nelson Bay CBD
- Shoal Bay CBD and foreshore
- Laman Street and Fly Point
- Additional locations such as Little Beach and Fingal Bay have subsequently been added.

How Visitors Pay

Visitors can:

- Pay using the Park'n'Pay mobile app.
- Pay at parking meters.
- Parking is managed through a smart parking platform rather than paper tickets.

Free Parking Allowance

Port Stephens Council provides a 15-minute free parking period for everyone.

Park Free Permits

Eligible local users (residents and ratepayers) can obtain a Park Free Permit. Employees working in businesses within the Nelson Bay and Shoal Bay town centres are also provided a permit. The permit is linked to the vehicle registration and allows eligible users to park free in Smart Parking areas, subject to applicable parking rules and time restrictions.

Enforcement

Smart Parking uses sensors and digital monitoring technologies to manage parking occupancy and compliance. Parking officers and rangers use the system when enforcing parking regulations and issuing infringements.

Revenue

All revenue generated from Smart Parking is reinvested into local projects such as the delivery of public space improvements and infrastructure upgrades.