

# HILLS SYDNEY

DIGITAL MAGAZINE - NEWS & INTERACTIVE

MAY 2025

*Exclusive*

## LABOR WINS IN A LANDSLIDE VICTORY

*A Seismic Shift in  
Western Sydney &  
The Hills*

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YOUR RATEPAYER FUNDS  
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# Should our Council be Spending \$120,000 of your Ratepayer funds on a petition?

By Rajiv Chaudhri

The Hills Shire Council's "Fight for a Fairer Hills Future" campaign has drawn criticism for being more political theatre than constructive action. Rather than delivering critical infrastructure, Council appears to be diverting resources into a misleading and partisan campaign timed with the federal election and an upcoming state election. While infrastructure in The Hills Shire urgently needs attention, all levels of government must collaborate – not play blame games. The Hills Shire council had over a decade under the former Liberal State Government to address our local issues and now residents are paying a heavy price!

The campaign wrongly shifts responsibility for longstanding local issues onto a new state government. Many of Council's demands fall within its own jurisdiction – yet progress has stalled for years. Key intersections, parks, the Rouse Hill hospital and sports fields in high-growth areas like Box Hill remain incomplete despite promises stretching back over a decade. Residents of The Hills of Carmel still lack basic facilities, while Council's pace remains frustratingly slow.

In contrast, the Labor State Government is delivering new schools at:

- The Gables
- Box Hill High School
- Box Hill Public School, and

Major Upgrades at:

- Rouse Hill High School
- Excelsior Public School
- Castle Hill Public School
- Matthew Pearce Public School (increased capacity from 647 to 1,200 students)
- Baulkham Hills High School (permanent classrooms with \$42 million in upgrades now completed)



Building the Rouse Hill hospital with \$700 million that is budgeted for with an additional \$120 million from the Federal Government for the additional birthing and maternity ward, and a further \$220 million to upgrade Windsor Road – all without help from this campaign. Nonetheless, Council falsely claimed credit for that announcement, revealing the campaign's true nature.

Meanwhile, residents report Council has spent significant public funds on campaign advertising, including targeted emails to library members – a misuse of resources and community trust. One Councillor who raised concerns was publicly attacked, showing how dissent is punished in this politicised environment.

Ultimately, this campaign distracts from the real work Council should be doing – delivering parks, roads, and community infrastructure. **Residents deserve action, not spin!**

It's time for The Hills Shire Council to stop gaslighting the community and start delivering on its core responsibilities.

**SHOULD COUNCIL BE SPENDING  
\$120,000 OF YOUR RATEPAYER  
FUNDS ON A PETITION?**

HAVE YOUR SAY HERE





# Liberals Hold Mitchell Despite Significant Swing

By Rajiv Chaudhri

## Alex Hawke retains Mitchell

The 2025 Australian Federal Election in the Division of Mitchell, located in Sydney's north-west, marked a significant shift in the political landscape, with the Liberal Party experiencing a notable decline in support. Despite retaining the seat, the substantial swing against the Liberals reflects broader challenges facing the party both locally and nationally.

Incumbent Liberal MP Alex Hawke, who despite being a back bencher, was scarcely visible in the Hills at local & community events, successfully defended his seat in Mitchell; however, the victory was tempered by a considerable swing against him. With 82.5% of the vote counted, Hawke led by 8,589 votes, securing 60.69% of the two-candidate-preferred vote – a significant decrease from the previous election.



This nearly 8% swing away from the Liberals is particularly striking in a seat long considered a party stronghold. The redistribution prior to the election, which slightly reduced the Liberal margin from 10.7% to 10.5%, may have contributed to this shift.

## 🔍 Campaign Dynamics and Key Issues

The campaign in Mitchell was influenced by several factors contributing to the Liberal Party's diminished support:

- **National Party Challenges:** The Liberal Party faced internal criticism for its campaign strategies, including spending approximately \$1.5 million on polling that failed to predict the election outcome accurately.
- **Policy Positions:** Controversial policy announcements, such as proposed public service cuts, were perceived as alienating to voters, particularly in urban electorates like Mitchell.
- **Demographic Changes:** The electorate's evolving demographics, with increasing diversity and younger populations, may have contributed to shifting political preferences.

## 📊 Historical Context and Electoral Trends

Mitchell has been predominantly held by the Liberal Party since its creation in 1949, with only brief periods under Labor control. The recent swing against the Liberals, despite retaining the seat, indicates a potential erosion of the party's traditional base.

## 🧠 Implications for the Future

The results in Mitchell mirror a broader national trend of the Liberal Party losing ground in urban electorates. Former Liberal minister Christopher Pyne emphasised the need for the party to address internal issues, such as gender imbalance and divisive messaging, to reconnect with voters.

The significant swing in Mitchell serves as a warning sign for the Liberal Party, highlighting the necessity for introspection and strategic realignment to regain competitiveness in future elections.





# Labor Wins Greenway With Increased Majority

By Rajiv Chaudhri



## Michelle Rowland retains Greenway

The 2025 Australian Federal Election in the Division of Greenway, located in Sydney's western suburbs, reaffirmed its status as a Labor stronghold, with incumbent MP Michelle Rowland securing a decisive victory. This outcome reflects both her entrenched local support and the broader momentum of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) across New South Wales. With 84.2% of the vote counted, Michelle Rowland led by a substantial margin of 23,212 votes over her nearest rival, maintaining a commanding 61.53% share in the two-candidate-preferred count. Michelle Rowland won each booth in Greenway despite taking over liberal stronghold areas through redistribution or relevant candidate with community runs on the board serving to regain competitiveness in urban electorates. of Greenway increasing her overall margins substantially.

This result not only solidified Rowland's position but also contributed to the ALP's overall success in the 2025 federal election, where the party secured a majority government.

## 🔍 Campaign Dynamics and Key Issues

Throughout the campaign, Rowland emphasised her commitment to local infrastructure projects, healthcare improvements, and education funding. Her track record and focus on community engagement resonated with voters, reinforcing her appeal in the electorate.

The Liberal Party's campaign was overly aggressive & intimidating, left a poor taste for voters in Greenway as it faced challenges, including a lack of clear policy direction and internal party divisions at the local, state & national level. These factors, coupled with the ALP's targeted messaging and grassroots mobilisation, contributed to the swing towards Labor in the seat.

## 📖 Historical Context and Electoral Trends

Greenway has been held by the ALP since 2010, with Rowland first winning the seat in that year's federal election. Over successive elections, she has increased her margin, reflecting growing support in the electorate. The 2025 result continues this trend, indicating sustained confidence in her representation.

The electorate's demographics, characterised by a diverse and growing population, have aligned with Labor's policy priorities, particularly in

areas such as multicultural affairs, social services, and urban development.

## 🌐 Implications for the Future

Rowland's re-election positions her as a prominent figure within the ALP, potentially influencing policy directions and party strategy in Western Sydney and beyond. Her continued presence in Parliament ensures that Greenway's interests remain integral to national discussions, particularly concerning infrastructure and community services.

For the Liberal Party, the result in Greenway underscores the need for introspection and strategic recalibration and a more relevant candidate with community runs on the board serving to regain competitiveness in urban electorates.



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*Michelle*

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# Hills District Entrepreneurs Revolutionise Recruitment with JobScreener AI

By Abish Ghimire

In an era when businesses are flooded with job applications, two Hills District entrepreneurs with a decades-long friendship have developed an AI solution that's transforming how companies hire talent. **JobScreener AI**, founded by Abish Ghimire and Sid Kumai, represents a remarkable journey from schoolmates in Kathmandu to tech innovators in Sydney.



Remarkably, their friendship began in Year 7 at a Kathmandu high school, long before either envisioned a future in Australia's tech landscape. "We've known each other since we were teenagers," shares Ghimire, who spent 15 years working in Silicon Valley before launching his own software company and eventually relocating to Sydney. "Our paths converged again in the Hills District, where we both chose to settle for its family-friendly environment."

Kumai, who moved to study at UTS and subsequently worked at NBN for many years, adds, "The Hills District provided the perfect balance for us—a supportive community for our families and a strategic location to build our technology venture."

The inspiration for JobScreener AI emerged from their shared frustration with traditional recruitment processes. "As employers, we experienced the overwhelming challenge of sifting through hundreds of applications that would flood in within days of posting a job ad," explains Ghimire. "The repetitive nature of phone screening seemed particularly inefficient—asking the same canned questions to dozens of candidates is exactly where AI can make a significant difference."

Their platform employs a unique "hub-and-spoke" design that centralises recruiting activities and incorporates sophisticated voice analysis to objectively evaluate candidates' communication skills. This technology aids recruiters with AI to make smarter hiring decisions, faster, during every step of the hiring process—from creating optimised job descriptions to final hiring decisions, all with human oversight. "We've designed the system to handle the repetitive, time-consuming aspects of recruitment while keeping humans in the loop for the critical decision-making," explains Ghimire. "It's about augmenting recruiters' capabilities, not replacing their judgment." The comprehensive approach can reduce hiring time by up to 60% while improving the quality of hires through consistent, objective candidate evaluation.

"Sydney has a particularly high concentration of recruiters managing contract roles, and many are still conducting screening calls the old-fashioned way," notes Kumai. "Our system is designed to address these local market dynamics while also serving universal recruitment challenges."

JobScreener AI has already caught the attention of both local Sydney businesses and international organisations, including one of the largest employers in New York State.

The co-founders' connection to the Hills District extends beyond their business. Both are actively involved in the community, coaching local soccer teams for their children. "Being a soccer coach has given a deeper connection to the families here," says Kumai. "It's reminded us of the importance of teamwork—something we've carried into our business approach."

Infrastructure developments have also supported their entrepreneurial journey. "The metro expansion from the Hills District to Sydney CBD has been a game-changer for us," Kumai explains. "We can now easily travel to client meetings in the city while maintaining our base in this family-friendly area. It's given us the best of both worlds."

The duo hasn't built their success alone. They've received valuable support from the NSW state government, including access to a business coach who has helped refine their sales and marketing strategy. Additionally, they've strengthened their leadership team by bringing on two influential local advisors to their board.

"We're committed to creating local, high-paying, skilled jobs right here in Sydney," says Ghimire. "Our vision extends beyond building a successful company—we want to demonstrate that global innovation can emerge from Australia and specifically from the Hills District."

The co-founders believe Sydney offers unique advantages for tech startups. "There's a genuine hunger for innovation here, particularly in AI technologies," Kumai explains. "Between the talent coming from universities and companies eager to adopt valuable AI solutions, we found Sydney to be an ideal launching pad before we expand to the U.S. market."

The local community has played a vital role in their entrepreneurial journey. "Rouse Hill library has become our go-to place for brainstorming sessions," shares Ghimire. "The ease of meeting potential customers at nearby cafés and the supportive nature of the community toward local businesses has been invaluable."

As interest in AI continues to grow among Sydney employers, the founders are reaching out to the community. "We're looking for support from local businesses to help us refine our platform," says Kumai. "In return, we're committed to helping them drive more efficient hiring processes that save both time and resources."

As JobScreener AI continues to grow, Ghimire and Kumai remain committed to their roots in the Hills District, hoping their success will inspire the next generation of local entrepreneurs to think globally while building locally. "We want to show that you don't need to be in Silicon Valley to create world-changing technology," concludes Ghimire. "Sometimes, the path to innovation begins with a friendship in a Kathmandu classroom and flourishes in a Sydney suburb."



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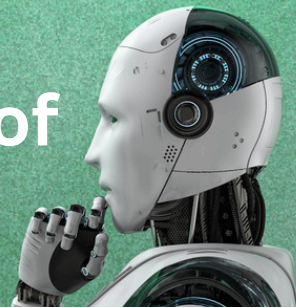


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# The Advent of Voice AI: A New Era of Human-Machine Interaction

By Rajiv Chaudhri



In the last decade, artificial intelligence has moved from research labs into our homes, workplaces, and pockets. Among the most transformative applications is Voice AI technology that enables machines to understand, interpret, and generate human speech. Once confined to the realms of science fiction, Voice AI is now embedded in everything from smartphones and virtual assistants to customer service systems and healthcare devices. This shift signals not just technological progress, but a redefinition of how humans interact with machines.

## The Roots of Voice AI

The foundation of Voice AI lies in natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning (ML). Early attempts at speech recognition date back to the 1950s, but it wasn't until the explosion of data and computing power in the 2010s that systems became reliably accurate. Apple's Siri, launched in 2011, marked a watershed moment, showing that voice-activated digital assistants could be both functional and consumer-friendly. Google Assistant, Amazon Alexa, and Microsoft Cortana soon followed, each refining the technology and expanding its applications.



## Why Voice AI Took Off

Several factors converged to enable the rise of Voice AI:

- Advances in deep learning: Neural networks, especially deep learning models like transformers, significantly improved speech recognition and language understanding capabilities.
- Proliferation of smart devices: The rise of smartphones, smart speakers, and wearables created new touchpoints for voice interaction.
- Cloud computing and big data: These provided the necessary infrastructure for real-time voice processing and continuous model training.
- Changing user behavior: As people became more comfortable talking to machines, developers saw more incentive to invest in better voice interfaces.

### Applications Across Industries

Voice AI has quickly evolved from novelty to necessity in many sectors:

- Consumer tech: Smart speakers and home assistants use Voice AI to control lights, play music, and manage calendars.
- Customer service: AI-powered voice bots now handle millions of calls daily, offering 24/7 support with improving accuracy.
- Healthcare: Voice AI assists doctors with dictation, patient data retrieval, and even remote monitoring.
- Automotive: Voice-enabled controls are making driving safer by allowing hands-free navigation and communication.

**Accessibility:** Voice AI empowers people with visual impairments or mobility challenges to interact with digital content more easily.



# The Best Interests of the Children

By Nicole Gangemi



When parents separate, one of the most important decisions is how to best support their children. Many ask:

## Will my children be okay? Am I doing the right thing?

Most parents reach their own parenting arrangements, but if needed, they can apply to the family court. Parenting arrangements generally cover how much time children spend with each parent and who makes major decisions about their lives.

Recent changes to the [Family Law Act \(effective 6 May 2024\)](#) aim to ensure children's best interests are at the centre of these decisions. One key change is the removal of the presumption of equal shared parental responsibility, which was often misunderstood and misused, sometimes compromising children's safety. Now, parents can agree – or the court can order – either joint or sole responsibility for major decisions like health, education, and religion. If joint, parents must consult each other and make genuine efforts to agree. Importantly, the law does not guarantee a 50/50 time split between parents. Time arrangements must reflect what is best for the individual child.

## Factors considered include:

- The child's relationship with each parent
- Safety and wellbeing
- Each parent's ability to meet the child's needs
- The child's views and cultural background
- Practicality and cost of time-sharing
- Any history of family violence

There's no one-size-fits-all. Common parenting schedules include week-on/week-off, alternating weekends with midweek visits, or one parent having primary care with the other seeing the child on holidays or special occasions.

Nicole Gangemi is the founder of [Agree With Me](#). Nicole is a Nationally Accredited Mediator and Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner.





# Voices of The Hills

By Kaitlyn Farquhar



'Voices of the Hills' is a segment of the Hills Sydney Digital Magazine created by Kaitlyn Farquhar where she interviews everyday members of our local community who make an impact in the Hills Shire. This segment isn't about the politicians, or already mass publicised figureheads of our community, but the underdogs who are vital to making the Hills Shire such an amazing community. Whether they be teachers, scientists, local business owners, or even students, these people have been underrepresented in our Hills Shire media and deserve to have their stories told. In doing so, Kaitlyn wants to share our community's stories because every Hills Shire's voice matters, and deserves to be heard.

"Matheticin". Therapist. Artist. Pilot. Builder.

These are the dreams of just a few children within our Hills Shire. With ambition, boldly spoken, even if the pronunciation is not quite right yet.

Every Tuesday afternoon in The Hills Shire when most kids are trekking their way home, a small group lingers in a classroom. They aren't staying back for homework help. They're here to learn something much harder: how to speak with purpose. Confidence. Clarity. Courage.

At the centre of this is local educator Priya Wani, a woman who understands the difference one little voice can make.



"I want to learn more like her..." Each child in this program has a different reason for joining. For some, she says, "... my mum says that I need to get better at speaking in public and making better speeches." I want to be good at speaking because I want to grow up to be a matheticin."

Another wants to improve what she's already good at: "I joined because I've always been a good public speaker but I can be better." She continues, "My mum is a very good public speaker and I want to learn more like her." "Because I like to do speeches and learn more speeches."

They aren't being told what to say, rather, they're learning how to say what they mean. They made me feel like I was more than my circumstances..." Priya's journey started far away from The Hills, in India. She grew up surrounded by structure, where education was seen not only as a priority, but as a pathway.

"From a young age, I was taught the value of learning and resilience," she says. But what shaped her most wasn't just the curriculum. It was the people around her.

"There were definitely a few key adults who made a difference—teachers, family members, and even community leaders... They made me feel like I was more than my circumstances." She continued, "Growing up, I've experienced first-hand how much of an impact one caring, supportive adult can have on a child's self-worth and future...it's definitely has shaped the way I approach working with kids now..." It is that feeling that she now works to pass on. After moving to Sydney in her twenties, Priya found herself volunteering during university. Then, she taught children how to use computers, something that was popular and simple at the time, but the impact of that was anything but. "I watched them transform as they gained confidence and began to believe in themselves. That's when I knew I wasn't just helping them learn. I was helping them grow." "She always says, keep going and keep trying..."

That's how Alaina describes Priya. It's a small phrase but one that encapsulates everything about how Priya teaches.





Before each session, Priya takes the time to ask her students how they are feeling or if they have anything on their minds. “For them, I think those first moments set the tone for the session. They know that it’s a safe palace where they can focus and engage without pressure” she notes.

Priya builds relationships where her students know they can express themselves without fear of judgement. Priya identified that, whilst academic success is important, emotional resilience and self-confidence and a sense of belonging is “just as crucial”. Whether that be the structured activities, or even the informal conversations, Priya ensures they know that they not only know they are heard, but their feelings matter.

“There’s a warmth and sense of belonging here that makes it easy to connect and feel valued...”

Although Priya doesn’t live in the Hills, she spends most of her weeks here, and has so for nearly two-and-a-half decades, with her work centred in the Hills Shire local school community. “There’s a warmth and sense of belonging [to the Hills Shire] that makes it easy to connect and feel valued” she blissfully recounted.

Such schools have become very familiar to Priya as they see her as a trusted figure who listens first and encourages students to speak with confidence and intention. It’s clear the Hills Shire means something to her. “There’s a warmth and sense of belonging here,” she reflects. “It makes it easy to connect, to feel valued.”

That connection runs deep. Priya speaks about the area with genuine affection: “People in the Hills genuinely want to see each other succeed.” It’s that spirit of encouragement, she says, that makes her work here so fulfilling.

“There’s a shared understanding in this community,” she explains, “a common belief in creating spaces where children feel supported, not just academically, but emotionally too.” And it shows in the classrooms she teaches, where teachers and parents work side by side. “That kind of partnership really changes things for kids,” she says.

Even though her home is not in this community, Priya’s sense of belonging here is undeniable. “The families, the schools, the children...they’ve made me feel like this is my community too.”

And as the sun starts to dip lower on the horizon of another Tuesday afternoon, the children begin to gather their things to be returned to OOSH to reunite with their parents. It’s quick and routined but something lingers in the room...something more than a mere lesson or speech. It’s the echo of giggles, the spark of innovation, and the undeniable energy of young voices learning to seize their own power.

Whilst today they are school students at a local Hills Shire school, tomorrow they will be artists, pilots and even “matheticin(s)”. For these children, these are not only dreams today, but their, and our, futures, tomorrow. In the centre of it all stands Priya Wani quietly building a future where every child believes in the strength of their own voice for the betterment of them, the Hills Shire, and the world tomorrow.

If you have anyone you would like to nominate anyone who either lives or works in the Hills Shire to become next week’s ‘Voices of the Hills’ interviewee, please email the author, Kaitlyn Farquhar, [kaitlyn@dreamscape.com.au](mailto:kaitlyn@dreamscape.com.au)

**Please include in the subject line:**  
Voices of the Hills Nomination: (Insert Name of Nominee)



# Managing the Cost of Living in The Hills Shire: A Practical Guide for Residents

By Rajiv Chaudhri

The Hills Shire, nestled in Sydney's north-west, is known for its leafy suburbs, excellent schools, and strong sense of community. However, with rising property prices, increasing utility costs, and the general inflationary pressure across Australia, managing the cost of living in this desirable region has become a growing concern for many families and individuals.

Whether you're a long-term resident or a newcomer to the area, here are practical strategies to help manage and potentially reduce your cost of living in The Hills Shire.

## 1. Housing and Rent: Explore Affordable Alternatives

Housing remains one of the biggest expenses in The Hills. While suburbs like Castle Hill and Baulkham Hills command premium prices, nearby areas such as North Kellyville or Box Hill may offer more affordable options for buyers and renters alike.

### Tips:

- Consider downsizing or rentvesting (renting where you want to live and investing where it's more affordable).
- Use local Facebook groups or community boards to find private rentals or share accommodations.
- Investigate housing assistance through the NSW government if you're experiencing financial hardship.

## 2. Reduce Energy and Utility Costs

Electricity and water bills can add up quickly, especially in large family homes.

### Tips:

- Switch to solar panels – The Hills Shire receives plenty of sunlight, making solar a viable long-term cost-saving option.
- Compare electricity and gas providers via the Energy Made Easy website to find better rates.
- Install water-saving appliances and take advantage of rebates offered by Sydney Water.

## 3. Transport: Use Public Options or Car Share

With Sydney Metro North West serving suburbs like Castle Hill, Norwest, and Bella Vista, public transport is more accessible than ever.

### Tips:

- Use an Opal card to cap daily and weekly travel expenses.
- If you drive infrequently, consider car-sharing services or joining a community carpool group.
- For regular commuters, explore multi-modal travel options (e.g., combining bike and metro) to save on fuel and tolls.

## 4. Shopping and Groceries: Shop Smart Locally

Supermarkets and local shops in The Hills can vary significantly in price.

### Tips:

- Shop at local markets like the Castle Hill Farmers & Fine Food Market for fresh, often cheaper produce.
- Use discount stores such as Aldi, or buy in bulk at places like Costco (located nearby in Marsden Park).
- Download apps like Half Price, Frugl, or Shopfully to track grocery deals in real time.

## 5. Family and Childcare Costs

With many families residing in The Hills, childcare and schooling are top of mind.

### Tips:

- Check eligibility for the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and find centres with flexible hourly rates.
- Take advantage of free local libraries, council-run playgroups, and school holiday programs.
- Many local schools offer extracurriculars at reduced rates compared to private providers.

## 6. Entertainment and Dining Out

While The Hills is home to a range of excellent cafes, restaurants, and entertainment venues, dining out can quickly become expensive.

### Tips:

- Make use of BYO restaurants and mid-week dining specials.
- Explore the region's many free or low-cost outdoor spaces such as the Bidjigal Reserve, Castle Hill Heritage Park, Fagan Park or Rouse Hill Regional Park.
- Follow local community pages for free weekend events, workshops, or cultural festivals.

## 7. Financial Assistance and Advice

If you're struggling with expenses, don't hesitate to seek help.

Resources:

- NSW Fair Trading provides information on managing utility bills, tenancy, and budgeting.
- Local councils also provide workshops on money management and cost-saving techniques.

## Final Thoughts

Living in The Hills Shire offers many lifestyle benefits, from its green spaces to its top-rated schools. While it's true that the cost of living here can be high, with a proactive approach and local know-how, it's possible to enjoy all the region has to offer without breaking the bank. Careful budgeting, smart choices, and making the most of local resources can help residents maintain a comfortable lifestyle while keeping costs under control.



# Charity in Focus: Hawkesbury's Helping Hands

By Rajiv Chaudhri

**Hawkesbury's Helping Hands** is a volunteer-driven charity based in South Windsor, New South Wales, providing vital support to individuals and families experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, or crisis. Founded in 2011 by eight-year-old Cassidy Strickland and her mother Linda after seeing a man searching for food in their bin, it has grown into a cornerstone of compassion in the Hawkesbury region.

Hawkesbury's Helping Hands offers a range of services, including free weekend community meals, emergency food hampers, toiletries, clothing, sleeping bags, tents, and pet supplies. Their Drop-in Hub, open Wednesday to Friday from 8am to 1pm, provides showers, breakfast, internet access, and a welcoming space for connection. In collaboration with Mastercard, it established a Technology Hub, offering computer and Wi-Fi access to those without it.

Beyond daily support, it responds to emergencies, providing relief during floods, bushfires, and the COVID-19 pandemic. They also run initiatives like a school backpack drive and a free formal wear program, ensuring students can attend significant events with dignity.

Entirely self-funded and operated by volunteers, Hawkesbury's Helping Hands relies on community donations and support. To contribute or learn more, visit their [GiveNow page](#).

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# Businesses in The Hills: Navigating Post-COVID Recovery

By Rajiv Chaudhri

The Hills District in Sydney has long been a vibrant hub for small businesses, ranging from family-run cafes to tech startups. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, these enterprises have faced unprecedented challenges. Recent data from the 2024 Hills Shire Business Performance Sentiment Index (PSI) reveals that businesses in The Hills are encountering significant economic headwinds.

## Most Impacted Sectors

**Retail and Hospitality:** These sectors have been among the hardest hit. Factors such as reduced consumer spending, rising inflation, and increased operational costs have contributed to their struggles. The PSI report indicates that businesses in these industries are facing their most significant economic challenges to date.

**Construction:** The construction industry has also faced difficulties, with rising material costs and supply chain disruptions impacting project timelines and profitability. These challenges have been exacerbated by the broader economic uncertainties post-COVID.

## Least Impacted Sectors

**Professional Services:** Sectors such as legal, accounting, and consulting services have shown resilience. The shift towards remote work and digital transformation has allowed these businesses to adapt more readily to the changing landscape.

**Technology and IT Services:** The demand for digital solutions and IT support has grown, benefiting businesses in this sector. Their ability to operate remotely and provide essential services has positioned them favorably in the post-pandemic economy.

## Support Measures and Outlook

The Hills Shire Council and the NSW Government have implemented various support measures to assist small businesses during this period. These include financial assistance programs, business advisory services, and initiatives aimed at boosting local economic activity.

While challenges persist, the resilience of The Hills' small business community is evident. With continued support and adaptation to the evolving economic environment, there is cautious optimism for recovery and growth in the coming years.





# Collaboration: The Key to Building a Better Community for All

By Warren Kirby MP - Member for Riverstone

Six years ago, I saw the flaws in the proposed Rouse Hill Hospital - a \$300 million plan that excluded emergency and maternity services, despite Riverstone's rapid growth and rising number of young families.

Our local business chamber raised concerns, and Michelle Rowland MP championed the cause, pushing from opposition for an emergency department. Strong community support followed. Though the government eventually committed, progress only came after the last election.

When I was elected, I met with Health Minister Ryan Park to welcome the expanded \$700 million investment, which included 250 extra beds and broader clinical services. I also raised the need for full maternity care. Budget concerns threatened delays - until Michelle Rowland helped secure additional federal funding. Now, thanks to this collaboration and community advocacy,

Rouse Hill Hospital will deliver the comprehensive care our growing area needs. This success story shows what can be achieved when all levels of government work together.

For years, the North West's infrastructure needs were ignored by former Liberal-National governments. Despite being one of the fastest-growing regions in Australia, our roads lagged. That is now changing.

We are investing in long-overdue upgrades. The Richmond Road upgrade between the M7 and Townson Road will relieve congestion in the Northwest Growth Area. Planning for the Bandon Road corridor at Vineyard - backed by \$150 million in joint funding — is also underway. And the \$440 million upgrade of Garfield Road East is now in detailed design.

We're finally seeing the roads, hospitals, and services our community deserves. There's more to do - but together, we're building a better future.







As your local Member,

I'm here to help

*Michelle*

**The Hon. Michelle Rowland MP**

✉ PO Box 8525, Blacktown NSW 2148

☎ (02) 9671 4780 @ Michelle.Rowland.MP@aph.gov.au

🏠 Level 1, Suite 101C, 130 Main Street, Blacktown

🌐 michellerowland.com.au

📱 @mrowlandmp

Authorised by Michelle Rowland MP, Australian Labor Party, Blacktown NSW 2148



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**WARREN KIRBY**  
MEMBER FOR RIVERSTONE

✉ riverstone@parliament.nsw.gov.au

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**MARK HODGES MP**  
MEMBER FOR CASTLE HILL

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- Assist in accessing NSW Government services, assistance or Grants.
- Assist in accessing NSW Government services, assistance or Grants.
- Provide Justice of the Peace services.
- Arrange congratulatory messages.



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### Operation Raid VI: Hills Police and Hills Highway Patrol in Action

From Thursday 15 May until the weekend, Hills Police and Hills Highway Patrol are conducting **Operation Raid VI** targeting driving offences. Over the past 24 hours, almost 2000 Random Breath and Drug Tests have been conducted.



### Road Safety Reminder

Despite our best efforts to conduct as many **\*\*Random Breath Testing (RBT)** and **Random Drug Testing (RDT)** operations as possible, there's one thing we can't control—momentary inattention.

Two crashes occurred over the weekend:

**Memorial Ave:** A car pulled in front of a bus—a momentary misjudgment that could have had serious consequences.

**Old Windsor Rd & Seven Hills Rd:** A Yaris driver, believing they had time to make a left turn, was rear-ended by a truck. Thankfully, there were no life threatening injuries.\*\* But these incidents are a timely reminder:

Always double-check before turning

Be mindful of larger vehicles—they need more space to react

Never assume you have enough time—take that extra moment to judge the gap properly

**Stay alert. Stay safe.**



### Drink Driving Arrest: Middle Dural

At approximately 2am on 12/05/25, Hills Police conducted a random breath test at the intersection of Old Northern Road and Garemyn Road, Middle Dural. The vehicle involved was a white Maserati.

The driver, a 52-year-old male, allegedly returned a positive road side test. He was arrested and conveyed to Castle Hill Police Station, where he returned a blood alcohol reading of 0.095. The driver was supposed to have an interlock fitted to the vehicle but did not. Consequently, the driver was issued with a Court Attendance Notice for mid-range PCA and no interlock, to appear in Parramatta Local Court next month, and, his licence was also suspended on the spot.

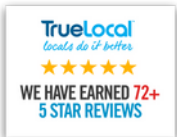






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## What is National Reconciliation Week?

The dates for NRW remain the same each year; 27 May to 3 June. These dates commemorate two significant milestones in the reconciliation journey – the successful 1967 referendum, and the High Court Mabo decision respectively. Reconciliation must live in the hearts, minds and actions of all Australians as we move forward, creating a nation strengthened by respectful relationships between the wider Australian community, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We all have a role to play when it comes to reconciliation, and in playing our part we collectively build relationships and communities that value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures, and futures.

## A brief history

National Reconciliation Week (NRW) started as the Week of Prayer for Reconciliation in 1993 (the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples) and was supported by Australia's major faith communities.

In 1996, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation launched Australia's first National Reconciliation Week.

In 2001, Reconciliation Australia was established to continue to provide national leadership on reconciliation.

In the same year, approximately 300,000 people walked across Sydney Harbour Bridge as part of National Reconciliation Week-and subsequently across bridges in cities and towns-to show their support for reconciliation.

Today, National Reconciliation Week is celebrated in workplaces, schools and early learning services, community organisations and groups, and by individuals Australia-wide.

[Check out the factsheet on National Reconciliation Week.](#)  
[Translated Resources are available here](#)

## Soroptimists International of The Hills – Local heart-global voice.



By Cathy Tracey

Every day, for over 100 years around the world, Soroptimists International has made a positive difference to the lives of women and girls. Soroptimist International of The Hills District has been active in the Hills since 1980. We are part of a global movement of women leading change. We support education, take action on big issues like domestic violence and homelessness for older women, and make real change happen right here in our community. Local heart, global voice—we are women stepping up for women and girls. With gender equality at our heart, we are dedicated to finding solutions that empower women and girls to be their best. It's a big job, but we are up to the task.

Working within our local communities and beyond, members carry out practical, hands-on projects and raise funds that create a direct and immediate impact. Looking to the future, we champion key issues, advocating for change at all levels of government, right through to the United Nations.

Our members are a remarkable group of women. Come join us. Get involved. Discover how you too can make a difference. Together, we are building a brighter future, one step at a time.

**We meet on the third Wednesday of the month at 6.30pm in the Hills community.**

**Contact Us at [sithehills@siseap.org](mailto:sithehills@siseap.org)**



# What can sport learn from economics and economics from sport?

By Tim Harcourt

At first glance, it may seem that economics and sport are of little relevance to one another. But economic analysis can inform big sporting decisions from signing players to specific plays to performance assessment; while sport can shed light on fundamental economic questions. If you look closely at your favourite sport nowadays, it is hard to miss the influence of economics. Its impact is evident from the way that players are drafted or how much they are paid, through to individual coaching decisions and even strategic shifts across entire leagues.



In Australia, the broadcast rights for the AFL and National Rugby League (NRL) are each valued in billions of Australian dollars over the life of a six- or seven-year contract. So these games involve big money and this doesn't count the merchandise that can be sold to fans.

[\*\*Click here to read the full article\*\*](#)



# Olympic Champion Ariarne Titmus Rallies Aussies to Back Local for Australian Made Week

Olympic swimming gold medallist Ariarne Titmus OAM is urging Australians to show their support for homegrown businesses by choosing Australian-made products.

As the official ambassador for Australian Made Week 2025, Titmus is drawing on the same team spirit and national pride that powered her performances on the world stage to encourage shoppers to back local producers.

"I've been incredibly lucky to have the support of Australians throughout my swimming career - it's meant everything to me," Titmus said. "Now, I'm asking everyone to get behind Team Australia by choosing Australian Made. Because when we support each other, we all win."

Running from **Monday, May 19 to Sunday, May 25**, Australian Made Week is a celebration of locally made and grown products, and a call to action for consumers to think more carefully about their purchasing choices.

## Why Buying Australian Made Matters

Choosing local isn't just about quality - it's an investment in Australia's future. Buying Australian Made supports local jobs, strengthens communities, and reduces our reliance on imports.

In fact, if every household spent just \$10 more a week on locally made products, it could inject an extra \$5.6 billion into the economy and create around 10,000 new jobs.

Australian Made Week is also a great opportunity to learn how to identify genuine Australian products and discover the difference your dollar can make when it stays onshore.




  
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OF THE HILLS DISTRICT

## WINTER WARMERS APPEAL

We are collecting 'winter warmers' for families in need.


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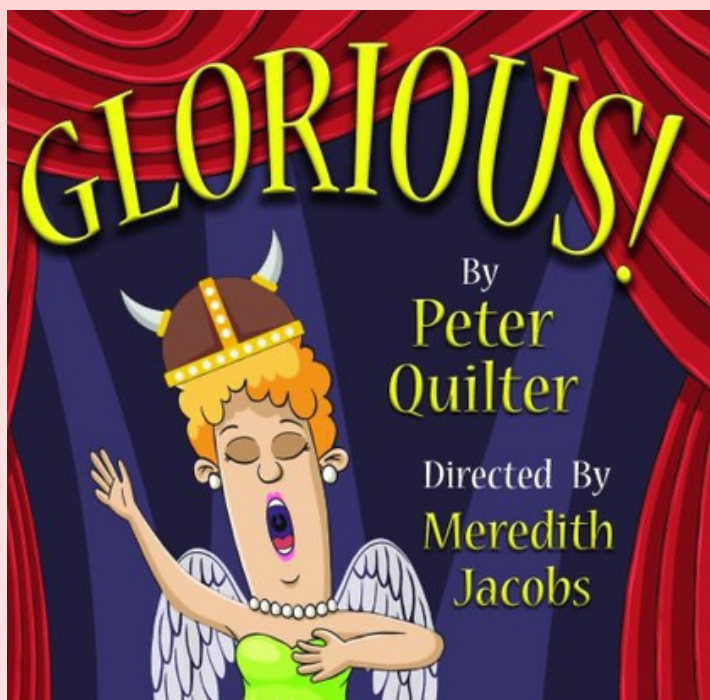
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# A Glorious Play Not to be missed

By Robyn Dalton

With plenty of entertainment available on free to air and streaming on Television... it is easy to sit back and let it all happen in our lounge rooms.....but I would like to advocate for the thrill of live performances!



Whether it is watching and listening to live music...pop, blues, jazz or classical or going to the ballet, the opera or especially live theatre.... there is nothing as exciting or even visceral as experiencing human talent when it exceeds the normal or humdrum. I have been a theatre addict for many years and have attended some of the most memorable stage performances on stages all over the world.... but last week I attended a theatrical performance in our very own Hills Shire which made me smile with pride ...not just at the sheer entertainment of the event but that such talent was evident in our own community.

We once had a very large Concert Hall in this Shire....on the site of the now very successful Castle Hill Showground Train Station....but its design limited the opportunity for the full variety of cultural events. However, many in this Shire are not aware of another very successful live theatre venue in Castle Hill Showground...not the Harvey Lowe Hall...but The Pavilion Theatre.

This theatre is used by the Castle Hill Players, an organisation now over 70 years old and for years has been one of the most successful community theatres in Sydney. Converted from an old chook shed on the showground, it boasts a raked theatre, full stage proscenium, a large foyer and the latest in high tech stage lighting and sound facilities.

This theatre has been the training ground for many well-known professionals both nationally and internationally. It has had a subscriber system for years for people to attend a six-play season and is still able to keep prices as low as \$30 a ticket (\$25 for concessions).

The play I saw at the Pavilion last weekend was "Glorious" by Peter Quilter...a hilarious true story now converted to a play (and a film starring Meryl Streep). It is the tale of Florence Foster Jenkins, an elderly, rich, New York lady who truly believed she had a great operatic voice. This was not the opinion of many who heard her.... however, she continued to sing in public (badly!!) and gave a performance to 3000 people at Carnegie Hall in New York. The performance by Kate Mannix as Florence in the Pavilion production was outstanding, never overacted, a beautifully nuanced performance that nearly brought tears to your eyes at the end. Her supporting actors were also excellent...even the Mexican maid spoke in Spanish with a brilliant and rapid flair!

The staging, lighting, costumes and sound in this production were very professional...even using the modern theatrical video to set scenes...and the use of a full grand piano on set was most impressive!

Credit must be given to the Director of this play, Meredith Jacobs... a professional actor, singer and Director who has proved to be a longstanding asset to the Castle Hill Players for some years...her shows are not to be missed!

Castle Hill Players at the Pavilion Theatre are busy rehearsing their next production, "Rehearsal for Murder" based on a teleplay by William Link and Richard Levinson. Packed with red herrings, thrills and wit.... is this a rehearsal for a new play? or a rehearsal for murder? The play opens on 30<sup>th</sup> May with evening performances and matinees until 21<sup>st</sup> June.

**A show not to be missed!**

**Book now on the website [www.paviliontheatre.org](http://www.paviliontheatre.org) or**

**ring 9634 2929.**

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# 15 lenders cut home loan rates ahead of RBA meeting



RBA Governor Michele Bullock during a press conference. Picture: NewsWire / Nikki Short

Fifteen Australian lenders have trimmed their variable mortgage rates since the start of April, adding to the momentum created by the Reserve Bank's cash rate cut in February. The wave of reductions comes as competition intensifies in the lead-up to next week's RBA board meeting.

Although the precise impact of further rate cuts on housing prices remains uncertain, modelling by Centre for Independent Studies chief economist Peter Tulip suggests that a 1 percentage point cut could drive property prices up by around 6% within the first year.

According to Canstar's latest rate tracking, major banks and lenders that have introduced new variable rates since April 1 include Commonwealth Bank, Westpac, Bank of Queensland, Newcastle Permanent, Greater Bank, AMP Bank, Aussie, Bank of China, Bank of Melbourne, BankSA, BankVic, Defence Bank, Macquarie Bank, St.George, and Summerland Bank.

Currently, the lowest advertised variable rate sits at 5.59%, with 35 lenders now offering at least one variable rate below 5.75%. By Tuesday's RBA meeting, Canstar predicts that over 30 lenders could advertise variable rates under 5.50%, with the most competitive potentially dipping below 5.40%. Meanwhile, the average existing owner-occupier variable rate may drop to 5.81%.

## What It Could Mean for House Prices

Should the RBA deliver a further three rate cuts by the end of 2025 — as some economists anticipate — property prices across major cities could see substantial increases. Based on Tulip's model, projected median price rises include:

Sydney: +\$87,600 → \$1,547,600  
Brisbane: +\$55,200 → \$975,200  
Adelaide: +\$49,620 → \$876,620  
Hobart: +\$42,300 → \$747,300  
ACT: +\$57,480 → \$1,015,480  
Darwin: +\$34,200 → \$604,200

These forecasts underline the potential ripple effect of monetary policy on the housing market, as falling rates fuel buyer demand and lift property values nationwide.





## A new era in stability and security for renters has been introduced with three key changes coming into force as a result of the Minns Labor's Government's reforms to make renting fairer in NSW.

Delivering on a key election commitment to the state's 2.3 million renters, the following legislation comes into force:

- Ending of no-grounds evictions – owners will now be required to provide a valid reason to end all lease types, set out in legislation, increasing security and transparency for renters. Longer notice periods will apply for some leases, giving renters greater certainty and time to find a new home, while ensuring investors can still effectively manage their properties. Renters who find a new property after receiving an evictions notice will also have improved rights to end a lease early.
- Pets in rentals – tenants will be able to apply to keep a pet in their rental home, with owners only able to refuse for specific reasons, such as the owner living at the property or failure to comply with local council laws. A standard application form and process has been developed to make the system clearer and more efficient for both renters and owners. Approval will be automatic if owners do not respond to pet applications within 21 days.
- Fee-free ways to pay rent - owners and agents must enable renters to pay their rent using certain fee-free rent payment methods such as direct bank transfer, ensuring there are convenient and modern payment methods available without extra cost.

These important changes come alongside other key initiatives from the Minns Labor Government:

- Limiting rent increases to once per year – Rent increases are limited to once per year across all lease types – including fixed-term and periodic leases.
- Ending tenants having to pay for their own background checks - Clarifying that rental applicants can't be charged fees before entering a tenancy, for example costs for background checks.
- Portable Rental Bonds Scheme – The Minns Labor Government is investing \$6.6 million to develop and deliver the nation's first Portable Rental Bonds Scheme. This means eligible renters can move homes and digitally transfer their existing bond with them. The scheme is expected to be up and running by the end of the year.
- Rent Check – A new, free website – Rent Check helps renters to understand how the rent they're being asked to pay compares to other similar homes.

Penalties are now in place for agents or owners who do the wrong thing, with the changes to be enforced by the Minns Labor Government's Rental Taskforce, with inspectors and support teams to help renters and act on serious breaches of rental laws.

People are encouraged to visit the NSW Fair Trading website for clear, up-to-date guidance on the new rental laws and their rights and obligations here:

The Government has undertaken a comprehensive consultation and engagement process to inform and communicate these new reforms.

These important changes ensure that the rights between renters and owners is balanced, and the rental system in NSW is fairer.

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Your skin is more than just a surface - it's your body's largest organ, and it absorbs much of what you put on it. That's why the ingredients in your skincare products matter more than you might think. Many everyday cosmetics and personal care items contain chemicals that have been associated with serious health risks, including hormonal disruptions, respiratory problems, and even links to cancer and birth defects.

In contrast, [Purest Elements](#) natural skincare products are crafted with ingredients sourced straight from nature. They're not only free from harmful additives but are also rich in nutrients that nourish your body - like antioxidants, vitamins, and essential oils. Using natural products means supporting your skin's health from the inside out. They help maintain balance, improve tone and texture, and promote overall wellness - because real beauty starts with ingredients that care for your skin and your health.





# How you can support those impacted by Domestic Violence

By Peter Gangemi – Former Mayor of the Hills Shire



Unfortunately, far too many families in The Hills are impacted by Domestic Violence.

On the positive side, we are a community that is committed to standing against Domestic Violence, and a question I am asked by many residents very often is “how can I help those in need of assistance here in The Hills”.

For those who are in a position to help, my personal recommendation is to lend support to the leading two organisations providing front line services to local women who have experienced Domestic Violence, [The Sanctuary](#) and the [Lisa Harnum Foundation](#).

**The Sanctuary** is the only 6 bedroom shelter in The Hills, providing short-term crisis accommodation to women and children who are leaving domestic violence. Over the last ten years, The Sanctuary has provided an unparalleled service in The Hills to help hundreds of women and families get back on their feet. You can assist The Sanctuary by volunteering, donating or fundraising here.



The [Lisa Harnum Foundation](#) provide crucial support to women and families impacted by Domestic Violence in The Hills and beyond, providing Safe Rooms, case management, counselling, education and monthly group support. In particular, the Safe Rooms provide a unique service to allow women and families to get the support that they need. You can assist the Lisa Harnum Foundation by volunteering here.

The Council I led as Mayor was proud to support both The Sanctuary and The Lisa Harnum Foundation, and I am also proud to continue to assist as a board member of The Lisa Harnum Foundation.

If you are looking to make a difference to local women and families escaping Domestic Violence, please consider supporting The Sanctuary or the Lisa Harnum Foundation





# A positive forward-looking agenda for North West Sydney

By The Hon Michelle Rowland - Attorney- General of Australia

To the good people of Greenway, serving as your local member in the Federal Parliament is the greatest honour of my life.

It is with heartfelt thanks, humility and gratitude that I will continue to represent our local community in a second term Albanese Government.

It is also an honour to be appointed Attorney-General and to be part of a majority female Cabinet.

Our Labor Government is driven by fairness, hard work, aspiration and opportunity for all.

I will stay true to these values as we work together to build a better future for the families, households and businesses of North West Sydney.

No matter who you voted for, your postcode, background or beliefs, I will work every day for each of you with commitment and dedication.

Just as the Albanese Government will work for every Australian.

Throughout the election campaign, countless constituents shared their priorities and aspirations with me.

You want better mobile connectivity, local parks and playgrounds. Labor is delivering this.

We are upgrading Windsor, Richmond, Burdekin, Townson, Garfield and Bandon Roads to make it easier to get around and spend more time with those you love.

Hard-working mums and dads want work from home flexibility, cheaper childcare and fully funded schools, like the high school we have fast-tracked for Box Hill.

Our community wants a bulk billed Medicare Urgent Care Clinic, cheaper medicines and full maternity services at the Rouse Hill Hospital.

Young people want fee-free TAFE, HECS relief and a leg-up into the housing market.

Workers want another tax cut and households another round of power bill relief and renewable energy solutions like the home battery subsidy.

Labor took a positive program to the election but we take nothing for granted.

We will deliver our agenda, provide cost-of-living relief and build a better future for North West Sydney.

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# State of Origin Teams Announced

## 2025 State of Origin Game 1 Teams Announced: New Halves, Injury Clouds, and Debutants Headline Selections

Laurie Daley and Billy Slater have officially named their squads for Game 1 of the 2025 State of Origin series, with both states unveiling bold selections, surprise omissions, and a host of fresh faces.

For New South Wales, Mitchell Moses has edged out Jarome Luai to partner Nathan Cleary in the halves. Moses, a standout in last year's series win, has been named in the No.6 jersey, forming a new-look playmaking duo with Cleary.

Despite recent injury concerns, Stephen Crichton and Payne Haas have both been named in the starting side, while Dylan Edwards retains the fullback position, keeping out James Tedesco despite his impressive NRL form.

With Jake Trbojevic sidelined due to a concussion suffered during Manly's weekend clash, Isaah Yeo will captain the Blues. Meanwhile, Max King is set to make his State of Origin debut from the bench.

Over in the Maroons camp, coach Billy Slater has been forced to reshuffle due to injuries to key players, but has also seized the opportunity to blood new talent. Robert Toia (Roosters), Beau Fermor (Titans), and Trent Loiero (Storm) have all earned their first Maroons jerseys.

Notably absent are Reece Walsh (knee) and Ben Hunt (hamstring), while Dolphins skipper Tom Gilbert is also out after suffering a pectoral injury in Saturday's loss to the Warriors.

Slater, however, welcomes back star forward Tino Fa'asuamaleaui, who missed last year's series due to an ACL tear, and Cameron Munster, who returns after sitting out 2024 with injury.

Veteran Kurt Mann (Canterbury) has been named as 18th man. Should he take the field, the 32-year-old would become Queensland's oldest debutant since the legendary Arthur Beetson made his Origin bow 45 years ago.

Queensland Maroons	Number	NSW Blues
Kalyn Ponga	1	Dylan Edwards
Xavier Coates	2	Brian To'o
Robert Toia	3	Stephen Crichton
Hamiso Tabuai-Fidow	4	Latrell Mitchell
Valentine Holmes	5	Zac Lomax
Cameron Munster	6	Mitchell Moses
Daly Cherry-Evans (c)	7	Nathan Cleary
Moeaki Fotuika	8	Mitchell Barnett
Harry Grant	9	Reece Robson
Tino Fa'asuamaleaui	10	Payne Haas
Reuben Cotter	11	Liam Martin
Jeremiah Nanai	12	Angus Crichton
Patrick Carrigan	13	Isaah Yeo (c)
Bench		
Tom Dearden	14	Connor Watson
Lindsay Collins	15	Spencer Leniu
Beau Fermor	16	Hudson Young
Trent Loiero	17	Max King



Game 1 promises to be a fierce contest as both teams look to assert dominance early in the 2025 series.





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## By Rajiv Chaudhri

In a landmark achievement, the New South Wales Blues secured their first-ever Women's State of Origin series win, overpowering the Queensland Maroons 26–6 in Game 2 at Sydney's Allianz Stadium on Thursday night.

The match, played under challenging wet conditions, saw the Blues dominate both halves, leading 12–6 at halftime before adding 14 unanswered points in the second half.

Olivia Kernick delivered a standout performance, scoring two tries and earning the Player of the Match accolade.

The Blues' victory in Game 2 follows their impressive 32–12 win in the series opener at Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane, where Jesse Southwell's playmaking and kicking game were pivotal. With this win, NSW has clinched the series ahead of the third and final game scheduled for May 29 in Newcastle.

This triumph marks a significant milestone for the NSW women's team, reflecting their growth and determination in the State of Origin arena. The series win not only breaks Queensland's dominance but also sets the stage for a potential series whitewash, a first in women's Origin history.



# Suicide

is the leading cause of  
death for Australians

aged 15 – 44



**Black Dog**  
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