

# LEEP

# ANNUAL

# UPDATE 2025



## Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Wiradjuri First Nation Peoples and their Elders past and present, who are the First Nations' Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work, learn and live. We are honoured to recognise our connection to the Wiradjuri lands, and their history, culture, and spirituality and we strive to ensure that we operate in a manner that respects their Elders and ancestors. We also acknowledge the other First Nations lands across Australia in our collaborations, travel, and networking.

We recognise the task First Nation Peoples have in the protection and healing of Country throughout the economic transition process and strive to ensure greater First Nation economic inclusion and empowerment as part of Lithgow's emerging economy.

Cover: Multi-school site excursion with Barrinang Aboriginal Corporation, Portland Central School, and Lithgow High School



## LEEP Annual Update 2025

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## Lithgow Emerging Economy Plan (LEEP)

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Australia transitions towards net zero targets, the next decade will see significant change in Australia’s energy sector. For Lithgow, a region with an economy traditionally reliant on coal and coal-fired electricity production, the impact of this transition will be substantial.

**Opposite: Honorary LEEP team member Michelle Zeibots delivers a staff update on project work undertaken during her secondment to the LEEP team.**

**Below: LEEP + Lithgow Business Chamber Networking event (August 2025).**

The *Lithgow Emerging Economy Plan Transition Report (LEEP Transition Report, 2023)* explores opportunities to reinvent and reinvigorate the Lithgow LGA’s economy by developing new opportunities and attracting new investment to expand industries and businesses. This is a task that will require coordinated action from all three tiers of government, affected industries, and the Lithgow community; in the interim, early efforts are being led by Lithgow City Council’s LEEP team.

During 2025, the LEEP team delivered a variety of events and activities designed to inform, educate and engage the community, from Business Roundtables to regular Speaker Series events. The LEEP team established and brought to life a social media presence on Facebook and LinkedIn, set up a YouTube channel to house a growing video library of speaker talks and local stories, and engaged with stakeholders and media on issues that matter, such as Pacific National’s proposed sale of the Lithgow Railyards. The LEEP website has grown to almost double its size, with more than 15 new pages added during the course of 2025; this site also houses the e-newsletters which are regularly sent to a growing database of interested stakeholders.

During 2025 the LEEP team has made formal submissions to the Energy Industry Jobs Plan Review, the Jobs and Skills Roadmap, and the Draft Central West & Orana Strategic Regional Transport Plan. The team has also delivered a lively advocacy program, meeting with agencies such as the Net Zero Economy Authority, the Minerals Council of Australia, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, the Regional Australia Institute, and the Climate Change Authority.





A major achievement for LEEP this year is the establishment of the Central West Adaptive Skills Hub, made possible by a successful bid for \$830,000 in grant funding from the National Priority Fund. During 2025, the Adaptive Skills Hub hosted two highly successful pilot programs designed to deliver a marked increase in STEAM skills in local students ran through the Adaptive Skills Hub – the Lithgow STEAM Uplift Pilot Program (primary schools) and the Lithgow Drone Pilot Program (secondary schools); as well as tailored training opportunities including a Transitions Management Certification and a Business Growth Masterclass. In 2025 the Adaptive Skills Hub was also a conduit for local people to complete micro credential courses in subjects such as Lifecycle Assessment, Green Supply Chain Management, Data Analytics, Renewable Energy Sources in Construction, 2D CAD & 3D Models in Construction, and Auditing Environmental Management Systems.

Another major step forward for the LEEP implementation in 2025 was the delivery of the *Planning for Market Change and Energy Transition in Lithgow Report*, by the University of South Australia. Embedded in local research which included consultation with around 50 stakeholders, this report builds on the Lithgow

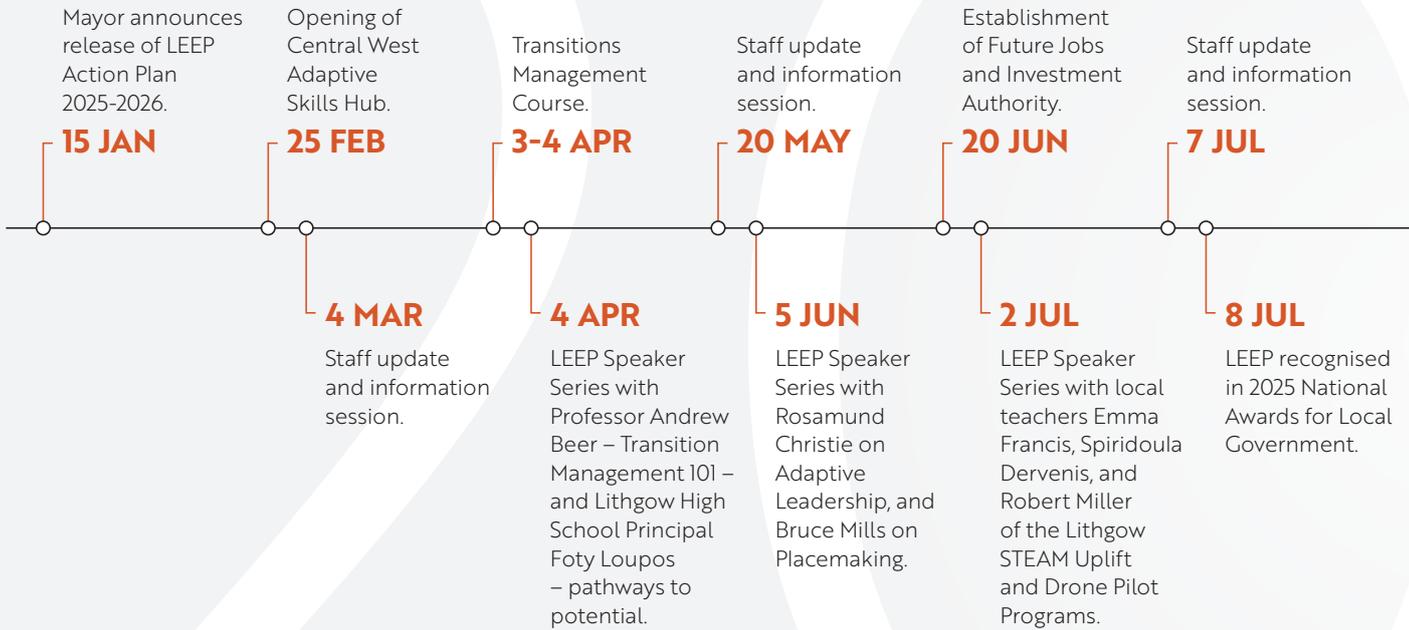
Emerging Economy Plan (LEEP) Transition Report, and includes Lithgow-specific detailed audits, adaptive capacity planning, long-term workforce and education strategies, and a rapid response plan for unanticipated closures.

This document provides a short summary of the LEEP team’s activities during 2025. Further information about the LEEP team’s work is available on the LEEP website – [leep.lithgow.com](https://leep.lithgow.com), or by emailing [leep@lithgow.nsw.gov.au](mailto:leep@lithgow.nsw.gov.au).

**During 2025, the LEEP team delivered a variety of events and activities designed to inform, educate and engage the community, from Business Roundtables to regular Speaker Series events.**

# LEEP 2025 ACHIEVEMENTS AND MILESTONES

## A TIMELINE



The LEEP Transition Report explores opportunities to reinvent and reinvigorate the Lithgow LGA's economy as the Australian energy sector transitions to Net Zero. During 2025, the following activities were taken to progress the recommendations of the LEEP Transition Report.



## ADVOCACY FOR LITHGOW'S FUTURE

In 2025 LEEP met with the:

- Future Jobs and Investment Authority
- Net Zero Economy Authority
- Energy Industry Jobs Plan Review
- Minerals Council of Australia
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
- Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Transport for NSW
- Sydney Trains
- First Nations Clean Energy and Facilitation Branch - Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
- Regional Australia Institute
- Climate Change Authority



Above: Todd Jones and Mark Jenkins (MEU), Ben Reeves and Professor Roy Green (Energy Industry Jobs Plan Review), Peter Compton (MEU), Royce Chiu (NZEA) and Jacqui Woods (MEU) at Wallerawang tour the Lithgow region as part of the Energy Industry Jobs Plan Review (Oct 2025).

# LEEP ACTION PLAN AND ACTION PLAN REFRESH

### 2025 in review and the year ahead

This year marked a decisive start to implementing the recommendations of the *LEEP Transition Report (2023)*, with a strong focus on engagement and workforce readiness. The Lithgow Emerging Economy Plan (LEEP) Action Plan 2025-2026 has been the cornerstone of Council's transition strategy throughout 2025.



## The year that was – 2025

In January, the Mayor launched the inaugural LEEP Action Plan 2025–2026, signalling Council's commitment to lead the transition with an annual allocation of \$1.1 million for economic transition management. The establishment of the Future Jobs and Investment Committee (FJIC) and its supporting networks was intended to provide a governance framework to coordinate action across government, industry, unions, and education partners; this Committee has been paused pending direction from the newly-formed Future Jobs and Investment Authority.

The LEEP team is proud to have achieved many of the milestones outlined in the LEEP Action Plan 2025-2026, including delivering an extensive engagement and advocacy program, and the opening of the Central West Adaptive Skills Hub which hosted a range of programs such as the Lithgow STEAM Uplift (primary schools), Drone Pilot Program (secondary schools), micro-credential courses, and tailored training opportunities. These initiatives have begun to build the adaptive capacity identified as critical in the Planning for Market Change and Energy Transition in Lithgow report, released in October 2025 – another important milestone in the delivery of the LEEP Action Plan. This report provides a robust evidence base for workforce planning, education pathways, and rapid response protocols, ensuring Lithgow is better prepared for transition.

Left: Lithgow Mayor Cassandra Coleman reviews the LEEP Action Plan 2025-2026 with Director of Infrastructure and Project Delivery, Jonathon Edgecombe.

The LEEP team is proud to have achieved many of the milestones outlined in the LEEP Action Plan 2025-2026.

## The year ahead – 2026

The **LEEP Action Plan Refresh**, completed late 2025 in close collaboration with Lithgow City Council's leadership and Councillors, sets a bold course for the next decade, with 2026 positioned as a critical year for deep transition.

Key priorities in the next two years include:

- **Governance and transparency** – Launching a public-facing LEEP Scorecard and dashboard, and strengthening collaboration through new working groups in health, skills, tourism, and advanced manufacturing.
- **Workforce resilience** – Finalising the Regional Workforce Adaptive Capacity Plan and rapid response protocols with coal employers and unions, while expanding the Adaptive Skills Hub and STEM Academy.
- **Industry and precinct development** – Progressing feasibility for employment land activation, health and ageing precincts, and adventure and eco-tourism hubs, alongside masterplans for redundant mine and power sites.
- **Community engagement** – Embedding annual workshops and a digital storytelling portal to ensure transparency and inclusion.

The refreshed Action Plan ensures the region is not only preparing for disruption but actively shaping a future built on innovation, collaboration, and opportunity.

View the Plan at [leep.lithgow.com/action-plan](http://leep.lithgow.com/action-plan)

# THE CENTRAL WEST ADAPTIVE SKILLS HUB

In February 2025 the LEEP team opened the doors to the Central West Adaptive Skills Hub at 176 Mort Street, Lithgow.

This innovative workshop, maker space and laboratory is designed for the delivery of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths (STEAM) subjects for local students, as well as micro-credential courses to provide the greater Lithgow community with access to skills training in topics to support workers in the transition to net zero.

The Central West Adaptive Skills Hub is a community-centred educational space which provides an avenue to build the Lithgow community's adaptive capacity by providing access to capacity-building and industry-

aligned training to support workers in learning the skills they'll need for the jobs of the future. It will also help pivot the education and training of the emerging workforce to STEAM skills – including a focus on leadership, teamwork, and innovation. STEAM is not just about university education and high-end technical jobs. STEAM skills are applicable to all jobs from primary production through to retail. STEAM skills create an adaptive workforce that is resilient to automation and the changing nature of work.

The Central West Adaptive Skills Hub is a collaboration of local schools, industries, and all levels of government working together to create sustainable growth and long-term opportunities for the region.

The Central West Adaptive Skills Hub and STEAM Pilot program in Lithgow were made possible by funding from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' Local Jobs National Priority Fund.



Left: Senator Deborah O'Neil, who opened the Adaptive Skills Hub, pictured with special guests the Member for Calare Andrew Gee, the Candidate for Calare Julie Cunningham, Lithgow Mayor Cassandra Coleman, Lithgow City Council Director of Infrastructure and Project Delivery Jonathon Edgecombe, and students from Lithgow High School, La Salle Academy, and Portland Central School.



Right: Professor Andrew Beer of the University of South Australia delivering the Transition Management Certification in April, 2025. Photo Credit: Sandy Horne, UniSA.

## 2025 training and education opportunities at the Adaptive Skills Hub

During 2025 more than 30 people completed courses or training programs which ran in or through the Adaptive Skills Hub, including a Transitions Management Certification with Professor Andrew Beer from the University of South Australia, and a Business Growth Masterclass with entrepreneur Lee Munro of the Australian Centre for Business Growth.

The Adaptive Skills Hub was also a conduit for local people to complete micro credential courses in subjects such as Lifecycle Assessment, Green Supply Chain Management, Data Analytics, Renewable Energy Sources in Construction, 2D CAD & 3D Models in Construction, and Auditing Environmental Management Systems.

Information about the primary and secondary pilot programs run through the Adaptive Skills Hub is available on the following pages.

## COURSE FEEDBACK

'The course was presented very well. The collaboration and networking was amazing. Being able to meet incredible people found great things in the community. The information was great and very thought provoking.'

**Transition Management Certification**

'The course was delivered well and was highly pertinent to the Lithgow context. Also lots of opportunity to engage with the facilitator and learn from each other.'

**Transition Management Certification**

'The whole 2 hours was good and reflective.'

**Business Growth Masterclass**

'The coaching models were very helpful and relevant, in particular the growth stages, and red flags were enlightening.'

**Business Growth Masterclass**

# LITHGOW STEAM PILOT PROGRAM

## PRIMARY SCHOOLS

In 2025, the Primary STEAM Pilot Program delivered high-quality, engaging learning experiences designed to spark student interest in STEAM fields including digital creation, coding, gamification, and robotics – while upskilling local teachers in 21st-century teaching practices.

By offering multiple pathways for schools to choose from, the program enabled teachers to select approaches most relevant to their classes. This flexibility ensured students could strengthen skills in areas of greatest need, while teachers gained confidence and inspiration to embed STEAM practices in Stage 3 classrooms.



Right: Local students eagerly engaged with the Primary STEAM Pilot Program curriculum.

### Participation and inclusion

Approximately 340 students from nine public schools in the Lithgow Local Government Area took part, with strong representation from groups traditionally underrepresented in STEAM:



23% First Nations students



43% female students

These figures reflect the program’s emphasis on culturally relevant pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and strong community partnerships – helping to break down barriers and create equitable pathways into STEAM education and future careers.

## Impact and outcomes

Between October 2024 and November 2025, teacher surveys showed:



A **10%** increase in students demonstrating strong enthusiasm for STEAM subjects and related career pathways



**86%** of students developed foundational competencies including creativity, problem-solving, and collaboration – skills aligned with regional workforce needs in health, digital technologies, renewable energy, and advanced manufacturing

Teachers also noted increased enthusiasm among students and highlighted the value of collaborative projects and real-world applications in reinforcing STEAM concepts.

## Building real-world skills

Educators report that embedding skills such as collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving – aligned with local workforce priorities – boosted student engagement and motivation.

These competencies, highly valued by employers, are being cultivated early through the Lithgow STEAM Uplift Pilot Program, connecting classroom learning to tangible career opportunities and strengthening community ties.

Student surveys in November 2025 reinforced these findings:



**70–75%** expressed enjoyment or strong interest in STEAM subjects, particularly robotics, coding, science experiments, art and design, and building projects.



**86%** felt confident in their STEAM skills, attributing growth to hands-on, industry-aligned activities.



**80%** reported confidence in problem-solving and teamwork



**65%** recognised STEAM's relevance to future careers, with many aspiring to science, engineering, and technology fields

## Teacher development

Across participating schools, 90% of teachers reported greater confidence in delivering STEAM content, supported by collaborative planning sessions, team-teaching opportunities, and tailored resources. This has enabled educators to embed STEAM principles across subjects, fostering interdisciplinary learning and real-world skills.

## Looking ahead

The Lithgow STEAM Uplift Pilot Program has successfully nurtured essential workforce skills and a mindset of innovation and collaboration. Local schools now enjoy improved access to quality resources aligned with key regional industries – health, digital technologies, renewable energy, and advanced manufacturing – contributing to a positive shift in both student and teacher outlook. These results demonstrate the program's success in preparing future-ready students equipped to thrive in Lithgow's evolving economic landscape.

# STEAM DRONE PILOT PROGRAM

## SECONDARY SCHOOLS

In 2025, the Drone STEAM Pilot Program gave students from Lithgow High School, Portland Central School, and La Salle Academy the chance to explore cutting-edge technologies while building, programming, and piloting drones.



Across 2025 students explored a curriculum which culminated in 'Lights Over Lithgow', an incredible drone light show designed and choreographed by the students, reflecting the past, present and future of the region. Pictured here is one of Lithgow's native inhabitants, the goanna, lighting up the night sky in the drone light show display.



This hands-on, project-based learning experience integrated scientific method, computer-aided design (CAD), programming, engineering, robotics, and mathematics.

Students developed skills essential for future industries, including:

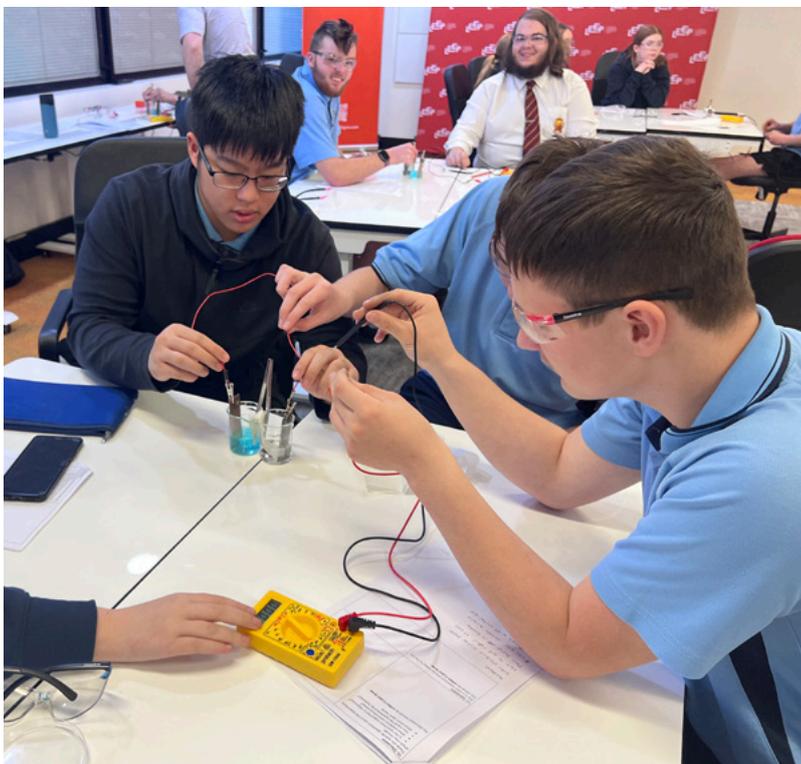
- **Scientific concepts** – Aerodynamics, motion, forces, and material properties.
- **Engineering and CAD** – Designing and prototyping drone components.
- **Programming and robotics** – Creating flight paths and formations.
- **Mathematics and data science** – Understanding flight dynamics and algorithms.
- **Innovation and creativity** – Choreographing drone performances.

## Benefits of cross-school collaboration

Bringing students together from three different schools created a dynamic learning community that extended beyond individual classrooms. This collaboration fostered peer-to-peer learning, broadened perspectives, and encouraged teamwork among diverse groups. Students gained confidence working with new peers, developed stronger communication skills, and built networks that reflect the collaborative nature of modern workplaces. Teachers also benefited by sharing expertise and resources, strengthening professional connections across schools.

Beyond technical expertise, participants strengthened workplace skills such as project management, teamwork, communication, and problem-solving – all critical for careers in aviation, robotics, AI, data science, and engineering.

With STEM jobs projected to grow by 14% – twice the rate of non-STEM roles – the Lithgow Emerging Economy Plan (LEEP) is investing in programs such as these to help future-proof local students and prepare them for the careers of the future.



## 2025 LITHGOW STEAM PILOT PROGRAM IN NUMBERS

**364.5**

students from 12 primary and secondary schools in the Lithgow region actively engaged in the Lithgow STEAM Uplift pilot program.

**25+**

local teachers were supported to integrate STEAM education within their classrooms.

**53%**

of student participants were female.

**23%**

of primary student participants were of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent.

**90%**

of participating primary school teachers reported increased confidence in delivering STEAM content.

**70%**

of primary school students reported that participating in STEAM projects helped them envision careers in STEAM fields

**\$86,000**

worth of equipment (including 80 drones, two 3D printers + filament) donated to Lithgow High School for the continuation of the Drone Pilot Program in 2026 and beyond.

**\$80,000**

worth of equipment retained for use in ongoing STEAM programs at the Central West Adaptive Skills Hub.

# PLANNING FOR LABOUR MARKET CHANGE AND ENERGY TRANSITION IN LITHGOW REPORT

The release of the *Planning for Market Change and Energy Transition in Lithgow Report* in October 2025 marked a major milestone for the LEEP implementation.

Commissioned by Lithgow City Council using funding from the Department of Workplace Relations' National Jobs and Priority Fund, and prepared by the University of South Australia, the report was led by Professor Andrew Beer – one of Australia's foremost experts in regional labour market transitions.

The *Planning for Market Change and Energy Transition in Lithgow Report* builds on the *LEEP Transition Report (2023)* to provide a practical framework for workforce development, education reform, and rapid response. It outlines opportunities for industry diversification, workforce reskilling, and community resilience, with a focus on building Lithgow's adaptive capacity – its ability to respond to change by leveraging its financial, human, institutional and natural resources.

Embedded in local research which included consultation with around 50 stakeholders, the report outlines a place-based, community-led approach to managing this change, and contains five strategic documents that address workforce readiness, training infrastructure, long-term planning and rapid response to premature mine or power station closure.



Left: Preparing the Lithgow for a major economic shift as transformation reshapes the region's labour market requires new skills, stronger education pathways, and coordinated support for affected workers and industries. This report provides a strategic framework to guide the Lithgow region through its transition.

Each of these addresses a critical component of Lithgow's workforce transition, ensuring that planning is both strategic and responsive to local needs:

01

### Regional Manufacturing Industry Skills and Training Audit

Identifies current and emerging skills gaps in manufacturing, helping align training programs with industry needs and investment opportunities.

02

### Regional Workforce Adaptive Capacity Plan

Assesses the region's ability to respond to economic change, focusing on resilience, transferable skills, and systems that support workforce agility.

03

### Long-Term Regional Workforce Plan

Provides a strategic roadmap for workforce development over the next 10–20 years, ensuring alignment with future industries and demographic shifts.

04

### Long-Term Education and Training Pathways Plan

Maps out clear, accessible pathways from school to employment, helping young people and career changers navigate evolving job markets.

05

### Rapid Response Plan

Ensures the region is prepared to act quickly in the event of sudden closures or job losses, minimising disruption and supporting affected workers.

## Strategic priorities

These documents work together to guide investment, strengthen collaboration, and ensure Lithgow's workforce is equipped for the future. Collectively, they plot a pathway to help the Lithgow region address key strategic priorities identified in the *Planning for Market Change and Energy Transition in Lithgow Report*, including:

- Building a resilient and diverse economy.
- Strengthening education and training pathways.
- Supporting workforce transition through targeted programs.
- Improving regional connectivity and infrastructure.
- Promoting inclusive, collaborative governance.

The evidence base, strategic analysis, and workforce insights in the *Planning for Market Change and Energy Transition in Lithgow Report* directly shape the timelines, priorities, and focus areas of the annual LEEP Action Plan. With strategic investment and strong local leadership, the *Planning for Market Change and Energy Transition in Lithgow Report* identifies that Lithgow can navigate change successfully and emerge as a model for regional resilience, innovation, and inclusive growth.

The *Planning for Labour Market Change and Energy Transition in Lithgow Report* and associated fact sheets are available on the LEEP website – [leep.lithgow.com/documents](https://leep.lithgow.com/documents).

**The *Planning for Market Change and Energy Transition in Lithgow Report* builds on the *LEEP Transition Report (2023)* to provide a practical framework for workforce development, education reform, and rapid response.**

# LEEP SPEAKER SERIES

The LEEP Speaker Series was conceived as a way to bring the LEEP story to life for the local community, offering an avenue to collectively share about topics that relate to Lithgow’s future and bring experts and local champions together to share knowledge and inspire action.

## 4 APRIL

### Transition Management 101

Insights into economic transition from leading Australian economic expert, Professor Andrew Beer.

### Excellence in Education

Pathways to potential at Lithgow High, which was recently made a NSW Department of Education High Potential Gifted Education Partner School, with Principal Foty Loupos.

Below: Lithgow Mayor Cassandra Coleman, Aerologix CEO and drone expert Tom Caska, and LEEP Primary STEAM Coordinator, Emma Francis.



## 5 JUNE

### Leadership Through Complexity

How we can all be leaders in our own communities, with adaptive leadership expert and executive coach Rosamund Christie.

### Practical Placemaking in a Time of Transition

The role placemaking can play in transforming communities, with Lithgow Emerging Economy Plan Manager and Place Leaders Asia Pacific Director, Bruce Mills.

### The Future of Drone Tech

Drones are fast-becoming the world’s most critical source of acquiring information, and solving big industry problems, with Tom Caska, Founder and CEO of Australian-based drone data platform Aerologix.

## 2 JULY

### The Lithgow STEAM Uplift Pilot Program (Primary)

Delivering high-quality and engaging STEAM programs to help local students become 21st century problem solvers, and supporting teachers to integrate STEAM learning in classrooms, with LEEP STEAM Education and Skills Coordinator Emma Francis.

### The Lithgow Drone Pilot Program (Secondary)

A program about mastering technology, problem-solving, and teamwork to prepare for careers in a very different future job market, with Lithgow High School teacher Robert Miller, and Acting Head Teacher, Spiridoula Dervenis.



## 17 SEPTEMBER

### World-First Solar Train

The inspiring story of how a team of bright-eyed enthusiasts transformed a historic train to run entirely on solar power (made right here in Lithgow!), with leading railway engineer Tim Elderton.

### Energy Literacy 101

Why are electricity prices rising if renewables are the cheapest form of energy? What is a 'BESS' and why are they critical to the grid? Answers to common Energy questions from trusted energy expert, Ashley Bland.

## 14 NOVEMBER

### Focus on First Nations

Aunty Leanna Carr (Wiradyuri Traditional Owners Central West Aboriginal Corporation) on the 2024 Dhuluny Truth Telling events in Bathurst, Aunty Sharon Riley (Mingaan) on the Ranger Program, and a Welcome, Smoking Ceremony and dance by Barrinang Aboriginal Corporation.

### The Australian Wars

Understanding the Australian Frontier Wars and exploring the Lithgow regions' historic past – an author talk with historian Dr Stephen Gapps.



Top left: Aunty Sharon Riley of Mingaan, historian and author Dr Stephen Gapps, and Aunty Leanna Carr of the Wiradyuri Traditional Owners Central West Aboriginal Corporation.

Top right: Rick Slaven of Barrinang Aboriginal Corporation welcomes guests to the First Nations Speaker Series event with a Smoking Ceremony.

Above: Bruce Mills, Ashley Bland and Tim Elderton taking questions from the crowd at the 17 September LEEP Speaker Series event.



## Most of these talks were recorded!

visit the LEEP YouTube channel to watch at your convenience – [www.youtube.com/@LEELithgow](https://www.youtube.com/@LEELithgow)

## BACK STORY

# LESSONS FROM

# 'A CASE FOR ECONOMIC CHANGE'

Five years ago at the instigation of the Lithgow City Council, a group of local leaders came together to write *A Case for Economic Change* – a blueprint for Lithgow's future in the face of an inevitable energy transition and the potential to integrate with the Western Sydney economy.

Today, their message remains as urgent as ever: without decisive action, collaboration, and a willingness to embrace change, Lithgow risks being left behind.

### The 'Case for Economic Change' report

The 2020 *Case for Economic Change* report, authored by Council-appointed working group members and Lithgow locals Renzo Benedet, Robert Swinton, Glenda Anthes and Rich Evans, was clear-eyed about the challenges ahead. It foreshadowed that coal mining and coal-fired power – industries that have underpinned Lithgow's economy for generations – will disappear within 20 years. It warned that the ripple effect on jobs, businesses, and community life would be immense: "The Lithgow Region economy will not survive unless there is a concerted effort to bring about meaningful change underpinned by new investment and jobs." (*A Case for Economic Change*, p.3)

The document authors' vision was bold: leverage Lithgow's strategic location on Sydney's doorstep, its industrial heritage, and its natural assets to create a diversified economy built on seven growth sectors –

health and education, renewable energy and technology, agri-business, advanced manufacturing, tourism, creative industries, and digital innovation. They projected up to 4,000 new jobs over two decades if these opportunities were seized.

### Where are we now?

Fast forward to 2025, and progress has been slower than hoped. In a recent conversation, the report's authors reflected on why momentum matters.

"Lithgow has enormous potential – proximity to Sydney, affordable land, water security, and a skilled workforce," says Robert Swinton. "What we need now is traction – visible wins that show the community what's possible. Even just one run on the board would show that Lithgow is capable of success, and help change the narrative."

"Lithgow has not moved an inch – in fact, some would say it's probably gone backwards," says Renzo. "There's a lot of talk, but I don't see the wherewithal to get Lithgow into any form of development phase. What we need is a circuit breaker – something bold that interrupts the pattern and blasts change."

Rich agrees, pointing to missed opportunities: "We earmarked renewables, IT, energy-from-waste – all strategically good options. But there's not really anyone pushing that vision."

The working group shared a concern that the loudest voices in the room often drown out progress.

"Negativity and apathy are two significant issues," Glenda says. "That creates a risk that Lithgow is perceived as anti-development. That culture has to change."



### **The case for an independent Authority**

The authors reflected that one recommendation from the original report stands out: establish an independent Economic Development Authority.

“Lithgow’s future does depend on a coordinated leadership,” Renzo says.

“To me that is bringing together the various stakeholders in Lithgow in a grassroots Development Corporation or Development Authority that has representatives from business, industry, government – including Council – the unions, the Business Chamber of Commerce, the education sector, and the community.”

“We can’t just rely on LEEP and its two or three individuals – to me what is required is a development corporation with a set agenda and a timeframe aggressively pursuing the interests of the area, because all other townships which are in similar situations are also wanting government support and funding, in whatever form that is. If we don’t speak up, we won’t be heard.”

“Councils aren’t commercial – they’re not set up for it,” Robert adds. “We need a Lithgow-based, independent authority with the power to cut through red tape and drive investment.”

Such a body could unite business, government, and community around a common goal: jobs. “Jobs create community,” Rich says. “Every project needs to answer that question: how does this meet a need? How does it create jobs for Lithgow?”

### **A legacy that lives on**

While some recommendations remain aspirational, the legacy of *A Case for Economic Change* is clear. It laid the foundation for the *Lithgow Emerging Economy Plan* (LEEP) – which is now driving housing and employment land enablement, workforce transition, skills development, and industry diversification. Through initiatives like the Central West Adaptive Skills Hub and STEAM education programs, LEEP is building the adaptive capacity the report called for.

The authors’ closing message is simple: get traction. Lithgow’s future depends on turning vision into reality. The blueprint exists. The talent exists. Now is the time to lead.

**Above: Renzo Benedet, Rich Evans, Robert Swinton and Glenda Anthe, authors of the 2020 Case for Economic Change report.**

# WORKING TOGETHER FOR LITHGOW'S FUTURE

At the heart of the Lithgow Emerging Economy Plan (LEEP) is collaboration – because successful economic transition cannot be achieved by any one organisation alone.

Throughout 2025, the LEEP team worked closely with industry leaders, local businesses, education providers, unions, and community members to ensure that Lithgow's voice is heard and its priorities are acted upon.

These conversations have shaped the way forward. Feedback from stakeholders has reinforced the importance of transparency, inclusion, and urgency in implementing transition strategies. By embedding engagement into every aspect of the LEEP program we are building trust and ensuring that the community has a genuine role in shaping its future.

The benefits of this work are already visible. In 2025, the opening of the Central West Adaptive Skills Hub created a dedicated space for

skills development and innovation, delivering micro-credentials and STEAM programs that prepare students and workers for the jobs of tomorrow. Local businesses have gained access to training and networking opportunities, while advocacy efforts have positioned Lithgow as a proactive partner in state and national transition planning. These initiatives strengthen our adaptive capacity – the ability to respond to change with resilience and confidence.

Looking ahead, the LEEP Action Plan Refresh sets an ambitious agenda for 2026 and beyond. It prioritises investment in employment lands, health and aged care precincts, and tourism initiatives, alongside programs that build workforce agility and attract new industries. These actions are not just about mitigating the impacts of coal's decline; they are about creating a thriving, diversified economy that offers opportunity for all.

The journey is complex, but the vision is clear: a future where Lithgow leverages its strengths – location, infrastructure, and community – to become a model for regional innovation and sustainability. By continuing to work together, we can ensure that the benefits of transition are shared widely and that Lithgow remains a great place to live, learn, work, and invest.

Right: First Nations Art Workshop with Wiradjuri artist Brett Groves, for Year 11 Arts students from La Salle Academy, Portland Central School, and Lithgow High School (November 2025).





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