



# HUNTERNET

The power of many



[hunternet.com.au](http://hunternet.com.au)



**DEFENCE**



**ENERGY**



**AGRIBUSINESS**



**MANUFACTURING**



**EXPORT**



**MEDTECH**



**INFRASTRUCTURE  
& ASSET MANAGEMENT**



**ENVIRONMENT  
& SUSTAINABILITY**

# 2026 HunterNet Industry Outlook

## *The Big Picture*

A resilient and optimistic Hunter business community despite complex macro-economic challenges:

**Growth and Investment:** Growth projections remain broadly positive, with most stakeholders expecting revenue to increase and workforces to either grow or remain stable over the next 12 months. Capital investment is primarily being directed toward new technology, automation, and workforce training and development

**Top Challenges:** Businesses are currently grappling with the increased cost of doing business, market uncertainty, and persistent skills shortages. Sourcing skilled technical trades (especially fabrication, machining, and electrical), engineering professionals, and capable leaders remains a critical pain point

**Energy Transition:** Nearly 40% of respondents report experiencing a moderate to significant impact from the energy transition. While just over half feel prepared, others view the transition - and the decline of coal - as a major risk due to grid instability, poor planning, and the potential for replacement industries to lag behind regional job losses.

- Hunter businesses remain cautiously optimistic
- Revenue and workforce growth are expected across much of the region
- Skills shortages remain the biggest structural challenge
- Technology and automation are attracting investment
- Confidence in the Hunter is strong—but workforce capability remains a concern

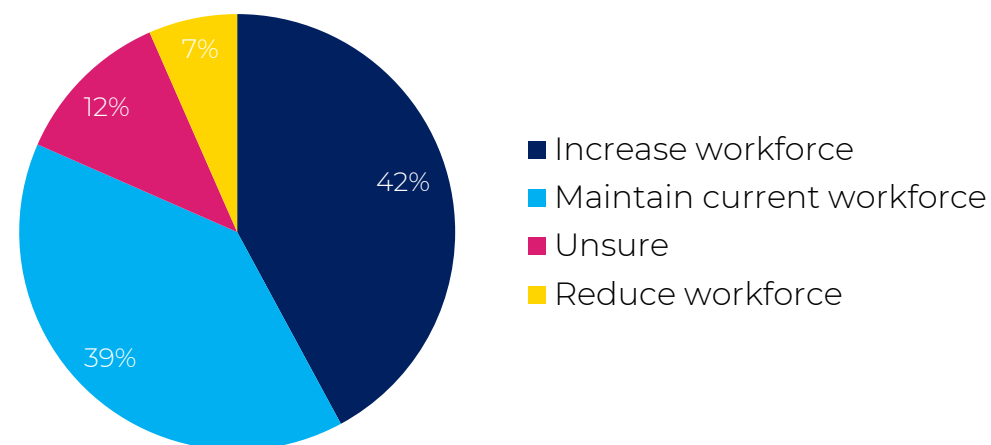


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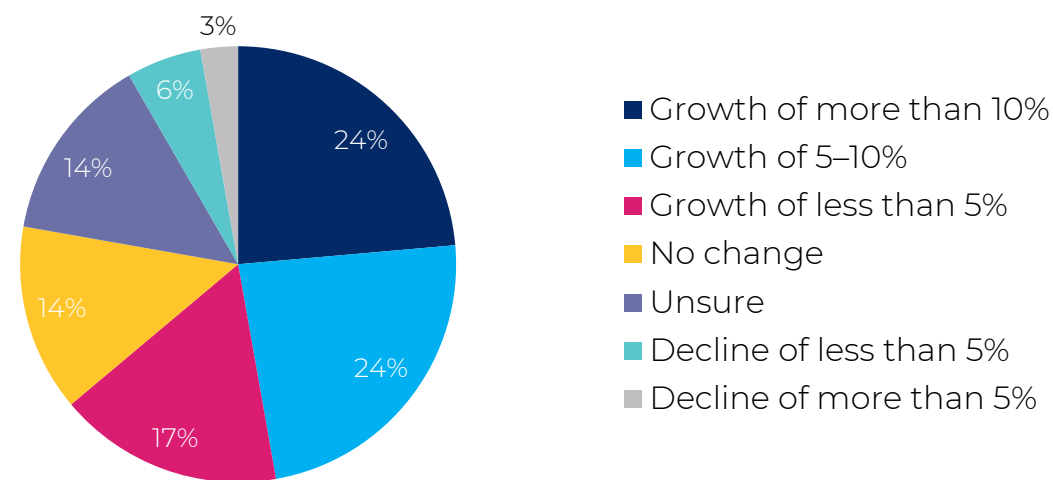
## *Business Confidence*

**Most organisations expect growth or stability over the next 12 months.**

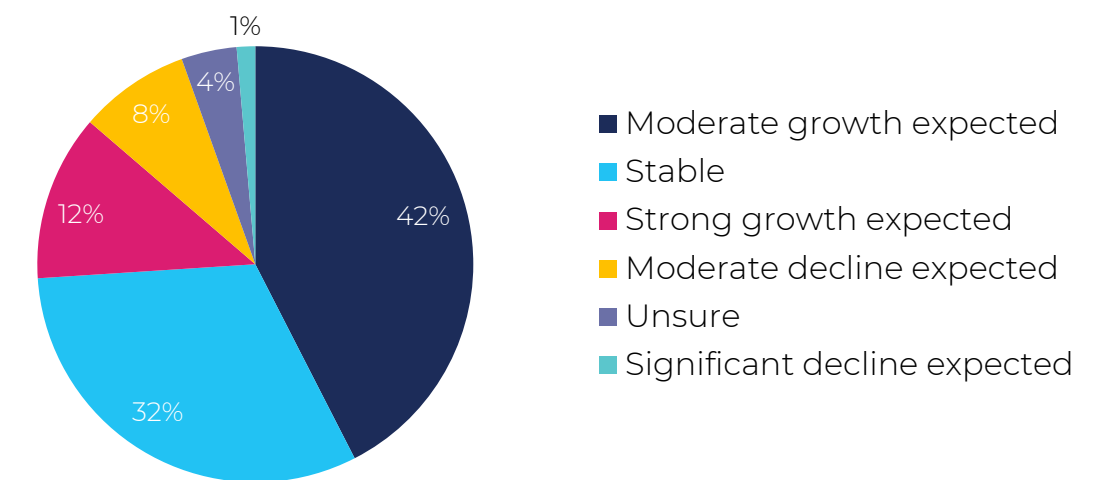
Do you expect to increase, maintain or reduce your workforce in the next 12 months?



What level of revenue growth (or decline) do you expect over the next 12 months?



How would you describe your organisation's outlook for the next 12 months?

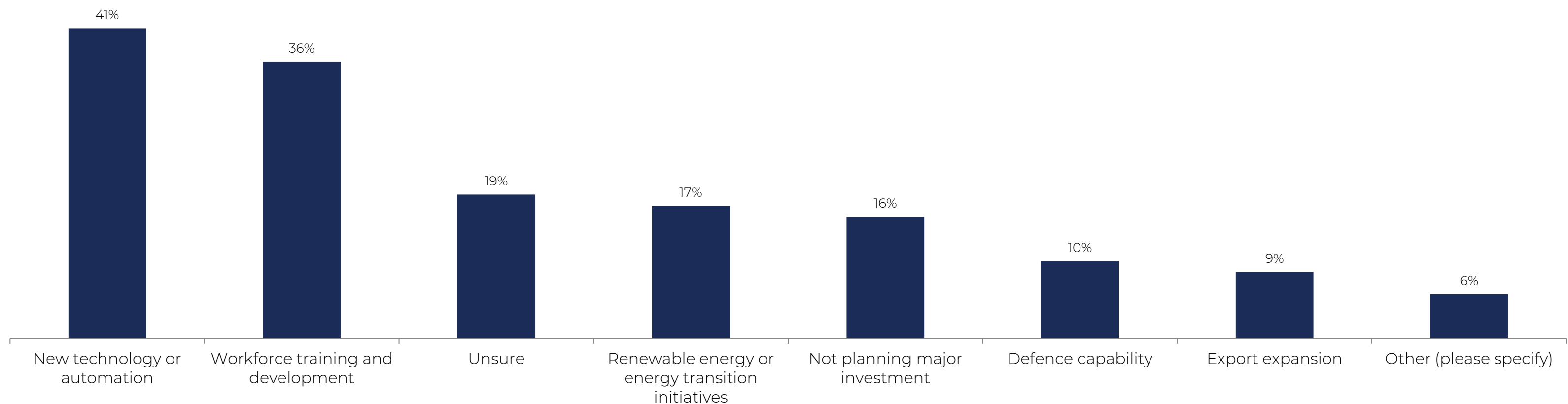


# 2026 HunterNet Industry Outlook

## *Where Businesses are Investing*

**Investment will primarily be focussed on new technology or automation, and workforce training and development**

Is your organisation planning to invest in any of the following in the next 12 months?

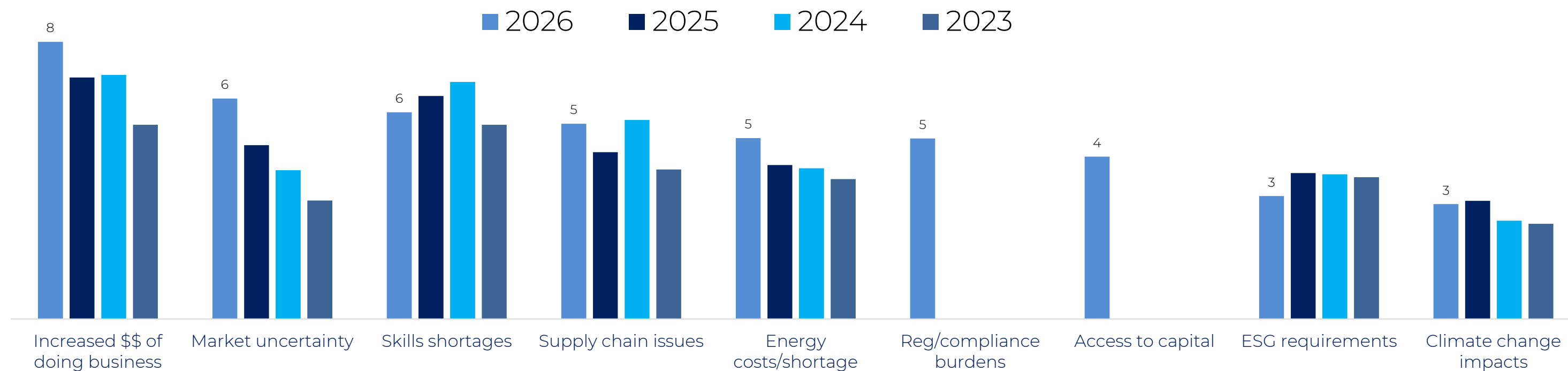


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## *What is Keeping Business Leaders Awake?*

**Increased cost of doing business, market uncertainty, and skills shortages are keeping stakeholders awake a night**

Which of the following challenges is your organisation finding most difficult to navigate?



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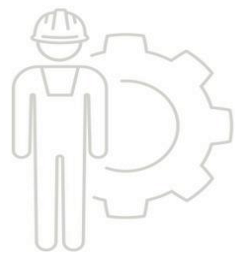
## *Workforce and Skills*

When asked what roles or capabilities are currently hardest for organisations to source, stakeholders cited:



### **1. Skilled Technical Trades...** a significant need for specialised skills across:

- Machining and Fabrication: CNC Machinists, CNC folding, Boilermakers, and Fitters/Machinists
- Electrical and Mechanical: Electricians, Electrical Technicians, Hydraulic Technicians, and general mechanical trades



### **2. Engineering and Specialised Professionals...** a clear struggle to recruit for highly qualified roles such as:

- Engineering: Senior Engineers, Electrical Engineers, and Client Engineering
- Specialised/Tech Capabilities: IT, Procurement, Strategy, AI, and ISO27001/42001 auditors
- Professional Services: Experienced consultants, accounting professionals, and health professionals



### **3. Leadership, Management, and Supervisory Roles...** a prominent challenge to find roles such as:

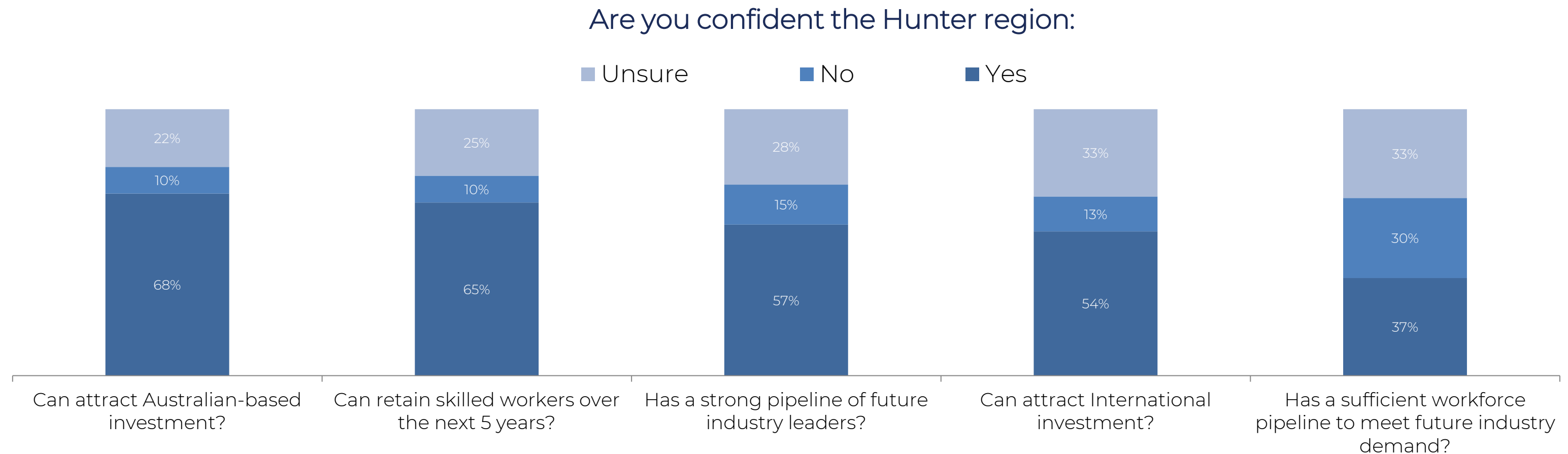
- Capable Managers, Team Leaders and Supervisors
- Project Managers and Engagement Managers



# 2026 HunterNet Industry Outlook

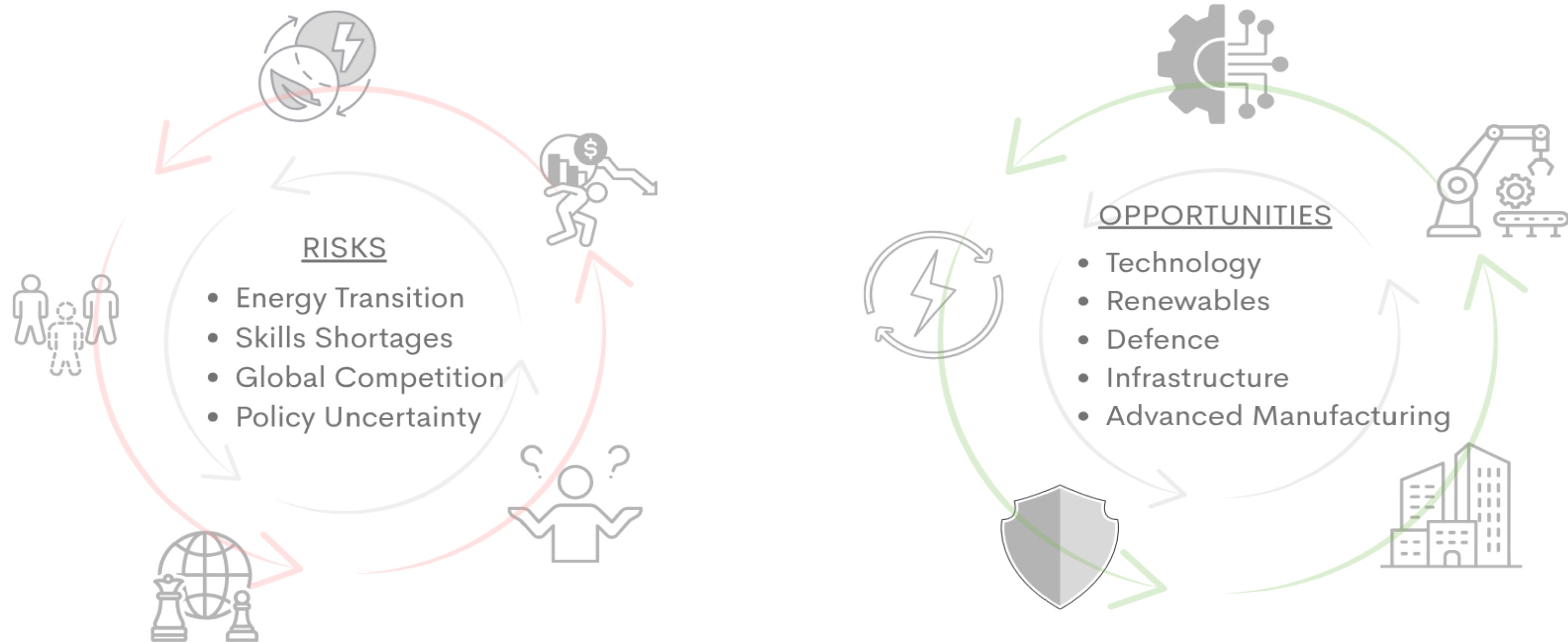
## *Confidence in the Hunter*

**Only 37% believe the region has sufficient workforce to meet future demand.**



# 2026 HunterNet Industry Outlook

## *Biggest Risks & Opportunities*



# 2026 HunterNet Industry Outlook

## *What this means?*

The 2026 Industry Outlook reinforces something we see every day through our engagement with members: **the Hunter has enormous capability, ambition and opportunity.**

The challenges are real, but so is the experience, expertise and collective strength within our business community. HunterNet has spent 30 years building connections across industry, developing people, supporting businesses and advocating for the Hunter. The Strategy Day was another example of that work in action — listening to industry, bringing people together and turning shared challenges into potential areas for collective action.

The survey gives us the evidence.

Our members give us the experience.

And together, we can help shape what comes next for the Hunter.

### **This is The Power of Many.**

- Hunter businesses remain optimistic despite economic uncertainty.
- Investment is continuing, but organisations need access to skilled people to realise those opportunities.
- Collaboration between industry, education and government will be critical to ensuring the Hunter capitalises on its next phase of growth.

**HunterNet thanks all participants for contributing to the 2026 Hunter Industry Outlook.**

