

# Chapter 1 Introduction

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*This chapter presents the background to the proposed upgrading of the Pacific Highway between Moorland and Herons Creek (the Proposal), which is part of the overall Pacific Highway Upgrading Program. The objectives for this Program and the Proposal are presented, the scope and structure of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are described, and information is provided on the exhibition of the EIS and opportunities for public comment.*

## 1.1 Scope of the Pacific Highway upgrading

The Pacific Highway between Sydney and Brisbane forms part of the recently announced AusLink National Network (Australian Department of Transport and Regional Services 2004). It links two State capital cities and passes through coastal regions which feature high population growth rates and increasing economic importance, particularly through the development of tourism. The Pacific Highway Upgrading Program outlined in *Upgrading the Pacific Highway: Ten Year Pacific Highway Reconstruction Program* (RTA 1997) provides a ten-year commitment to develop the existing highway between Hexham and the Queensland border. The objective of this \$2.2 billion program is to significantly improve the standard of the highway, with the result that accident 'blackspots' be eliminated and travel times reduced. The agreed Program ends in June 2006, however the State and Australian Governments have both committed to extending the program. Through the AusLink White Paper (see Section 4.1.3), the Australian Government has committed \$160 million per year for the three years after the current program, thereby matching the State commitment over that period. Further agreements are expected for years beyond that time.

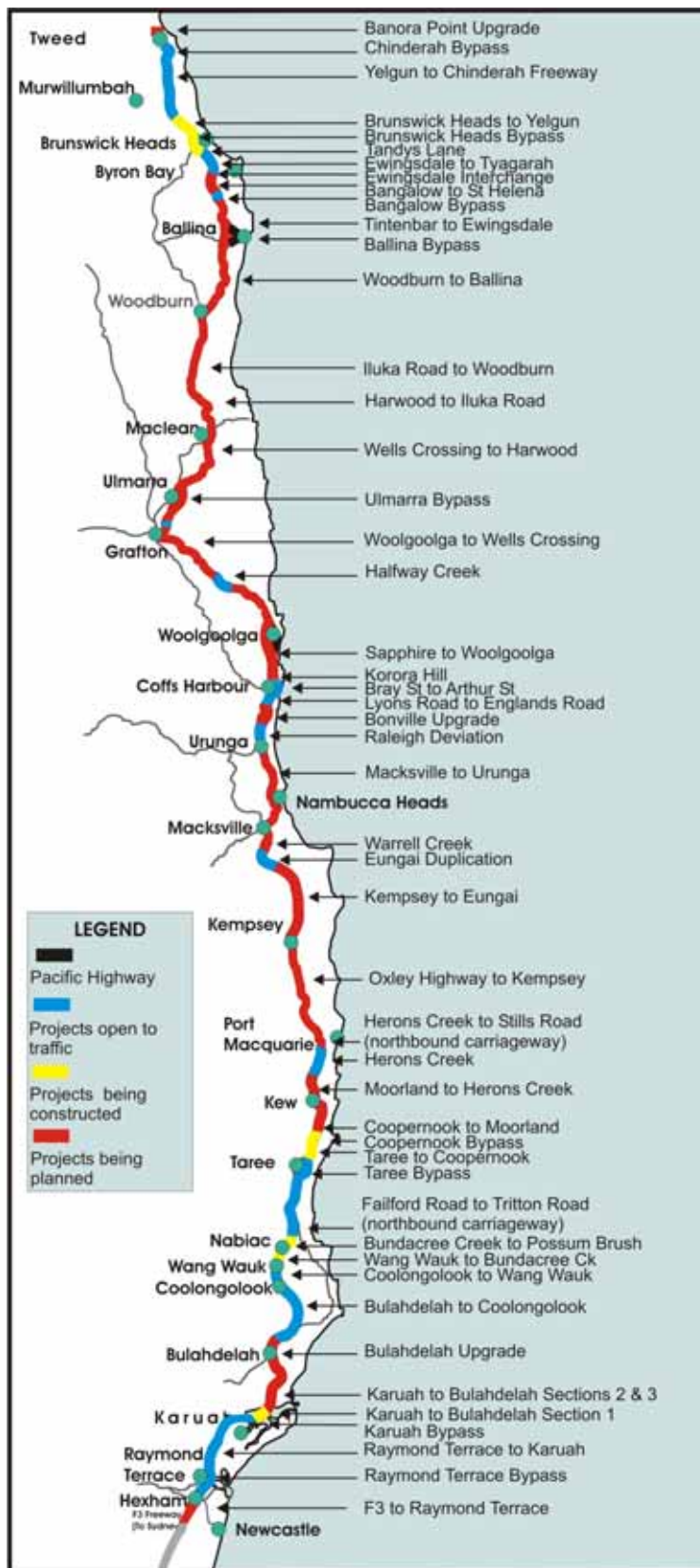
The Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) is proposing to upgrade a 22.2 km section of the highway between Moorland and Herons Creek as part of the NSW Government's contribution to the Program. As indicated in Figure 1-1, this section of highway is located on the NSW Mid North Coast between Taree in the south and Kempsey to the north. The Proposal is proposed to extend from 2.4 km south of Johns River to the existing dual carriageway at Bobs Creek Road just north of Herons Creek. The Proposal would also include highway improvements at the townships of Johns River and Kew.

## 1.2 The Pacific Highway between Moorland and Herons Creek

The existing highway between Moorland and Herons Creek is single carriageway roadway, generally with one lane in each direction, but with a third lane for overtaking in some areas. The existing speed limit on this section of the highway is 100 km/h except through the townships of Johns River (80 km/h speed limit) and Kew (60 km/h speed limit).

There is only one major intersection between Moorland and Herons Creek – the crossroad in Kew where MR538 (Kendall Road and Ocean Drive) intersects the highway. This intersection is controlled by traffic signals that were commissioned in late 2001. The northbound and southbound Pacific Highway approaches to this intersection each consist of a single through lane, a right turn storage bay and a separate left turn lane. All other intersections on the length of highway proposed to be upgraded are simple priority-controlled arrangements.

Kew has developed a highway servicing role with three service stations and other businesses with a reliance on highway-related trade. The township also serves as the southern gateway to the Camden Haven tourist region. Johns River has several commercial enterprises that serve both local and highway-related needs.



(source: NSW Roads and Traffic Authority)

Figure 1-1 Pacific Highway Upgrading Program

## 1.3 Objectives

### 1.3.1 Pacific Highway Upgrading Program objectives

The Proposal would satisfy the objectives of the Pacific Highway Upgrading Program, which are:

- to significantly reduce road accidents and injuries
- to reduce travel times
- to reduce freight transport costs
- to develop a route that involves the community and considers their interests
- to provide a route that supports economic development
- to manage the upgrading of the route in accordance with Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) principles
- to provide best value for money.

### 1.3.2 Moorland to Herons Creek Proposal objectives

The key objectives addressed in the development of the Proposal are:

- to develop a dual carriageway road with potential to reduce crash rates to 15 crashes per 100 MVK (million vehicle kilometres) over the Proposal length
- to develop a Preliminary Engineering Design that meets or exceeds B-Double requirements, including at intersections, where required
- to maximise the use of the existing road reserve, where possible
- to integrate input from local communities into development of the Proposal through the implementation of a comprehensive program of community consultation and participation
- to minimise adverse impacts on the local aural environment
- to preserve, enhance or restore ecological systems by implementing measures that maintain the integrity of native vegetation communities, wildlife corridors, natural drainage systems and waterways, cultural heritage values, and the local climate and airshed
- to consider the needs and impacts of existing and potential land use and development patterns
- to satisfy the technical and procedural requirements of the RTA with respect to design of the Proposal
- to provide transport developments which are complementary with land use
- to allow for all connections, modifications and improvements necessary to upgrade the existing highway where it is retained as part of the Proposal
- to consider delay management strategies to minimise disruption to local and through traffic and maintain access to affected properties and land during construction
- to provide flood immunity on at least one carriageway for a 1:100 year flood event north of Kew and for at least a 1:20 year flood event south of Kew
- to provide intersections designed to provide at least Level of Service (LoS) C thirty years after opening for the 100th Highest Hourly Volume
- to develop a solution for the intersection of the Pacific Highway with Ocean Drive/ Kendall Road at Kew that meets community expectations

- to retain or replace existing rest areas within the study area
- to develop a Preliminary Engineering Design generally meeting the criteria for a 100 km/h design speed for the vertical alignment and a 110 km/h design speed for the horizontal alignment. Adoption of a lower design speed of 80 km/h may be acceptable in specific urban locations, depending on the alignment of the Preferred Option.

## 1.4 Study area

The study area for the investigations for the development of upgrade options for the Proposal is shown on Figure 1-2. At its southern end, the Proposal would connect with the northern end of the proposed Cooperbrook to Moorland upgrade approximately 2.4 km south of Johns River. At its northern end, the Proposal would connect to the existing dual carriageway highway near Bobs Creek Road north of Herons Creek.

The eastern and western extent of the study area varied according to the nature of the environmental or engineering aspects being investigated but was contained within the area shown on Figure 1-2. Key features within this area and which influenced the design and location of upgrade options and the preferred option include:

- the townships of Johns River, Rossglen, Kew, Kendall and Herons Creek
- the North Coast railway line which closely parallels the existing highway for approximately 12.5 km from Camp Obadiah to Rossglen
- the Middle Brother National Park (formerly known as Yoorigan National Park and which includes Middle Brother Mountain) and the adjoining Middle Brother State Forest
- Watson Taylors Lake which forms the western part of Crowdy Bay National Park and which extends eastwards to the coast
- Queens Lake, located to the east of the highway between Kew and Herons Creek, and which forms part of the Camden Haven River Catchment Area
- extensive areas of wetland protected by the provisions of *State Environmental Planning Policy No. 14 - Coastal Wetlands* east of the highway and the North Coast Railway.

## 1.5 Relationship of the Proposal to adjoining sections of the Pacific Highway

To the south of the Moorland to Herons Creek section of the Pacific Highway, substantial improvements to more than 36 km of the Pacific Highway have been completed or are completing environmental determination (see Figure 1-1). These improvements or proposals are:

- Cooperbrook to Moorland – the proposal to upgrade the 10.2 km section of the highway is progressing through the environmental impact assessment determination process
- Cooperbrook bypass – this 3.8 km dual carriageway highway bypass is under construction
- Taree to Cooperbrook – duplication and upgrading of 7.5 km of the highway between the northern end of the Taree bypass and Cooperbrook – this project is under construction
- Taree bypass - completion of the first stage of the 14.5 km dual carriageway highway bypass of Taree in 1997 with the duplication of the bridge over the Manning River completed in 2000.

North of the Proposal section of the highway, the duplication and upgrading of approximately 19 km from Herons Creek to north of the junction with the Oxley Highway (west of Port

Macquarie) was completed in 1993 (i.e. before the start of the Pacific Highway Upgrading Program).

Completion of the remaining proposed improvements to the south of the study area would leave the proposed upgrade of the highway between Moorland and Herons Creek as the 22 km 'missing link' in a 77 km stretch of the Pacific Highway between Taree and the Oxley Highway linking to Port Macquarie.

## 1.6 Objectives of this Environmental Impact Statement

The objectives of this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are:

- to provide a detailed description of the Proposal, the need for it, the likely environmental impacts and measures to mitigate any adverse impacts
- to provide a description of how the Proposal meets the need of all modes of road transport, including cars, trucks, buses, bicycles, and pedestrians
- to facilitate community responses to the Proposal through the presentation of clear and comprehensive Proposal information
- to enable consideration of the Proposal in the context of the overall Pacific Highway Upgrading Program
- to ensure compliance with relevant statutory requirements for the planning and implementation of the Proposal in the Mid North Coast region
- to examine the Proposal in relation to ESD principles
- to provide a framework for the development of appropriate environmental management measures during the Proposal's construction and operation
- to provide input to strategic planning processes for the townships of Johns River and Kew if they are bypassed by the Pacific Highway.

## 1.7 Scope and structure of this EIS

This EIS is presented in three volumes. This volume (Volume 1) is the EIS, while Volumes 2 and 3 contain supporting Working Papers.

Volume 1 of the EIS is divided into seven parts:

- **Part A** describes the background to the Proposal, and outlines the objectives for Proposal and the decision-making process. The consultation undertaken with the community and other stakeholders during the EIS preparation is described, together with liaison with government authorities.
- **Part B** covers the need for the Proposal in relation to traffic and accident data, regional development and environmental considerations. The development of options considered for the Proposal is described along with evaluation of these options, and selection of the preferred option.
- **Part C** contains a detailed description of the design of the preferred option for the Proposal, construction issues associated with Proposal development, environmental management measures during construction, and maintenance issues once the Proposal is open to traffic.



Figure 1-2 Study area

- **Part D** provides a description of the existing physical environment, the likely impacts of the Proposal on this environment and mitigation measures.
- **Part E** provides a description of the existing socio-economic environment, the likely impacts of the Proposal on this environment and mitigation measures.
- **Part F** provides the likely cumulative impacts of the Proposal, and provides an outline of environmental management measures and monitoring to be implemented.
- **Part G** provides the justification for the Proposal, its net adverse impacts and the overall benefits, and sets out the conclusions of the EIS.

Specialist studies, presented as Working Papers, are:

- **Volume 2**
  - Working Paper No. 1 - Traffic Assessment
  - Working Paper No. 2 - Concept Design
  - Working Paper No. 3 - Noise and Vibration Assessment
  - Working Paper No. 4 - Hydrology and Flooding
  - Working Paper No. 5 - Cultural Heritage
- **Volume 3**
  - Working Paper No. 6 - Aquatic Ecology
  - Working Paper No. 7 - Flora and Fauna Assessment
  - Working Paper No. 8 - Geotechnical Assessment
  - Working Paper No. 9 - Visual Assessment, Landscape and Urban Design Strategy
  - Working Paper No. 10 - Overview of Social Effects.

## 1.8 Exhibition of this EIS

The RTA will place this EIS on public exhibition for at least the statutory period of 30 days. The EIS and Working Papers will be available for review at the following locations, and for purchase in hard copy or CD format at those locations marked with an asterisk:

- \*Roads and Traffic Authority (Sydney), Ground floor, Centennial Plaza, 260 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills
- \*RTA Pacific Highway Office, 21 Prince Street, Grafton
- \*RTA Port Macquarie Motor Registry, corner Central Road and Barton Crescent, Port Macquarie
- \*RTA Taree Motor Registry, 7 Macquarie Street, Taree
- \*RTA Wauchope Motor Registry, corner Young and Hastings Streets, Wauchope
- NSW Government Information Centre, Goodsell Building, corner Phillip and Hunter Streets, Sydney
- Nature Conservation Council (NSW Environment Centre) (Sydney), Level 5, 362 Kent Street, Sydney
- Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (Sydney), Henry Deane Building, 20 Lee Street, Haymarket (until 24 June 2005)
- Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (Sydney), Ground floor, 23-33 Bridge Street, Sydney (from 27 June 2005 onward)
- Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (Grafton), Government Office Block, 49 Victoria Street, Grafton
- Greater Taree City Council, 2 Pultenay Street, Taree

- Hastings Council, corner Lord and Burrawan Streets, Port Macquarie
- Kew Visitor Information Centre, Pacific Highway, Kew
- Laurieton Library, Laurie Street, Laurieton.

## 1.9 Guidelines for making a representation

Public authorities, interested groups and organisations, and the general community are invited to make written representations in response to the EIS. If you wish to make a written representation, it would be helpful if you include:

- the nature of your interest in the Proposal
- your opinions on the Proposal
- any suggestions you wish to make about alternatives or improvements to the Proposal
- any additional measures you consider necessary to adequately protect the environment
- any errors or omissions in the information presented in the EIS
- any additional factual information you have (and its source)
- any other aspects that you consider relevant to this Proposal and its determination.

In order to make it easier for matters raised in the representations to be analysed and properly considered, please:

- list points wherever possible - this makes the issues clearer
- refer each point to the relevant section or subsection of the EIS and/or the Working Paper
- include your name and address details and date if you would like your representation acknowledged
- ensure that your representation is as legible as possible.

All information in representations received may be published in subsequent assessment documents. Where the supplier indicates at the time of supply of information that it should be kept confidential, the RTA will attempt to keep it confidential but there may be legislative or legal justification for the release of the information, for example, under the *Freedom of Information Act 1989* or under subpoena or other statutory instrument.

Representations should be forwarded to:

**RTA Project Manager**  
Roger Fenner  
PO Box 546  
GRAFTON NSW 2460