

Chapter 18 Social impacts

This chapter describes the relevant demographic characteristics of the study area and assesses the impacts of the Proposal on the demographic structure of the area. Potential social impacts related to rural and residential amenity, local access and health effects are also discussed.

18.1 Demographic characteristics

18.1.1 Population size and characteristics

The population of the study area forms only a small proportion of the population of both the Greater Taree LGA (in the southern part of the study area) and Hastings LGA (in the northern part of the study area).

The population as recorded by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2001) in census Collection Districts (CDs) (Figure 18-1) within and adjacent to the study area is shown on Table 18-1. The total population for relevant CDs was 3,222 people. The small size of the townships within and near the the study area is reflected by the fact that in 2001 Kew had a total population of 144 people, Kendall 732 people and Johns River 118 people.

Table 18-1 Study area population (2001)

Collection District	Total population	
	Number	%
Greater Taree LGA		
West of Pacific Highway (CD 1091007)	330	10.3
East of Pacific Highway (CD 1091001)	508	15.9
Johns River (CD 1091013)	118	3.4
Subtotal	953	29.6
Hastings LGA		
West of Pacific Highway (CD 1090806)	675	21.0
Kendall (CD 1090807)	732	22.8
Kew (CD 1090713)	144	4.6
North and east of Kew and Kendall (CD 1090715)	267	8.3
South-east of Kew, east of Pacific Highway (CD 1090701)	438	13.7
Subtotal	2,256	70.4
Total	3,222	100

Source: ABS 2001

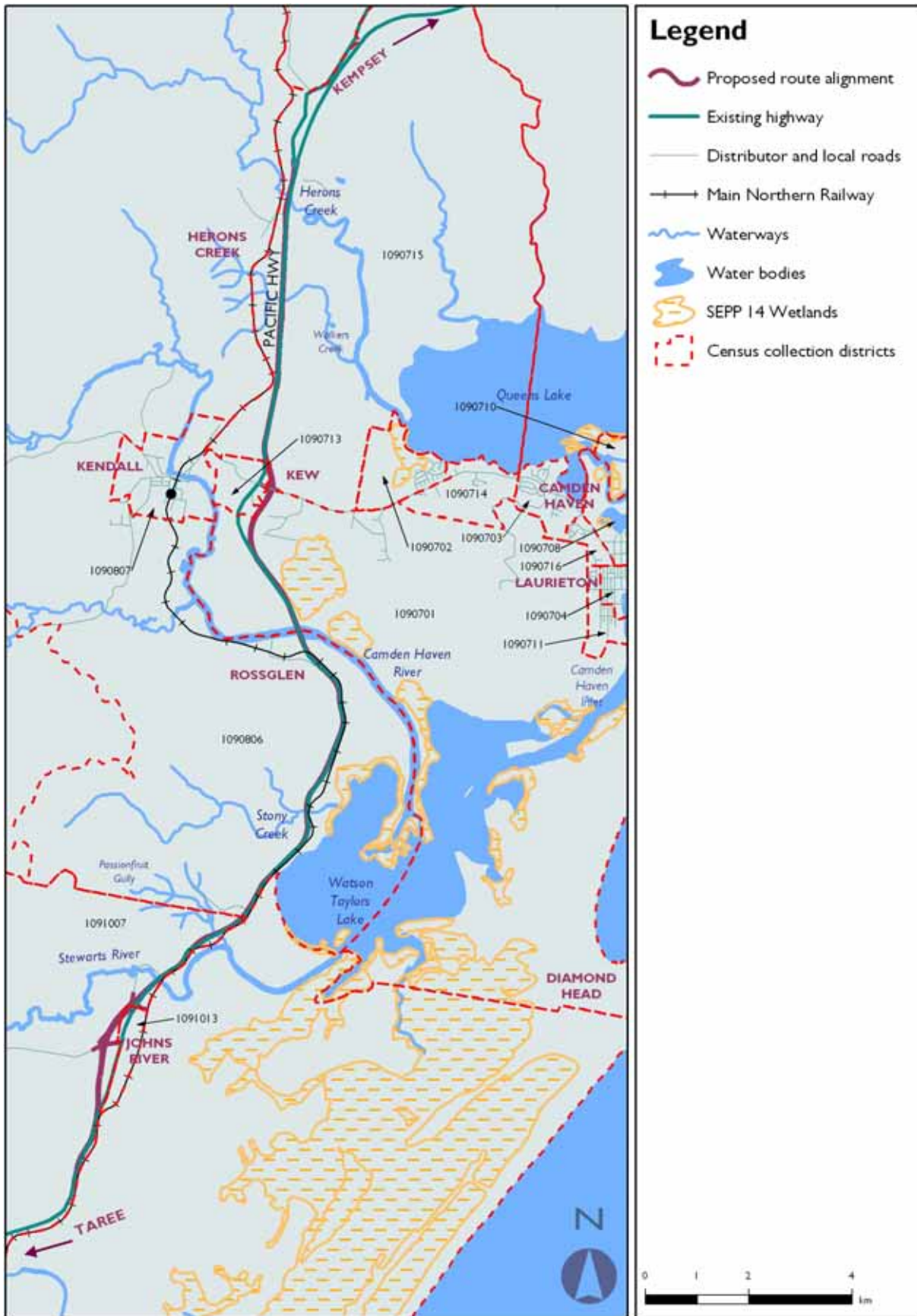


Figure 18-1 Census Collection Districts

Analysis of data from the 2001 Census indicates that the population of the study area had the following characteristics:

- the median age of the study area population, which ranged from 34 to 48 years, was generally higher than the NSW median age of 35 years.
- weekly individual incomes in the study area were generally lower than the NSW average.
- the unemployment rate in the study area was significantly higher than the NSW rate.
- there was a high dependency on private motor vehicles in the study area compared to other methods of travel.

18.1.2 Future population growth

The population of the Mid North Coast Region (within which the study area is located) is predicted to increase by 30% over the thirty years from 2001 to 2031 based on data contained in *NSW State and Regional Population Projections 2001-2051* (DIPNR 2004). However, the region's population growth rate is expected to slow over the following 30-year period. The annual rate of change between 2001 and 2006 is projected to be 1.1% - this compares with the annual rate of change of 1.3% between 1996 and 2001. By 2031, the annual rate of population change is projected to be 0.72%.

Internal migration (i.e. people shifting from other parts of NSW including Sydney) is anticipated to be the major factor underlying the projected population growth in the Mid North Coast region. This region is anticipated to attract older adults while tending to lose young adults to the major metropolitan centres of NSW and Queensland. This will result in significant ageing of the regional population.

Population within the Greater Taree LGA is projected to increase over the period between 2001 to 2021 by approximately 1.2% per annum. Based on the data presented in the Greater Taree Demographic Profile 2003 (Greater Taree City Council 2003), population projections for the Greater Taree LGA indicate an increase from 45,904 people in 2006 to 49,324 people in 2016. No estimates were available for 2021.

Population within the Hastings LGA is projected to increase over the period 2001 to 2021 by between 17,615 (low projection) and 32,800 people (high projection). Most of this population increase is anticipated to occur in the Port Macquarie urban area with only small increases anticipated within or adjacent to the study area.

Forecast continued regional and local population growth over the next 20 to 30 years reinforces the need for upgrading of this section of the Pacific Highway (see Chapter 4).

18.1.3 Impacts on the demographic structure

The lower than average income levels and relatively high unemployment indicate that communities within the study area may be less able to withstand any loss of employment opportunities that may occur as a result of the proposed bypass of Kew (see Chapter 17). Improved highway access to regional centres would have a positive impact for all residents, providing better access to community facilities and services. This is particularly relevant given the high car dependency of the study area population.

18.2 Social impacts

Social impacts associated with the Proposal relate to the following key aspects:

- acquisition of dwellings and relocation of residents
- improvements to residential amenity in Johns River and Kew (particularly for properties that front the existing highway) through reduced levels of traffic noise and vehicle emissions
- changes to the amenity of community activities and facilities such as the Johns River Community Market and Herons Creek Public School
- improved and safer local accessibility
- health effects.

18.2.1 Acquisition of dwellings and relocation of residents

A total of four dwellings would be acquired as a result of the Proposal:

- one to the south of Kew
- one in the Glen Haven residential subdivision to the east of Kew
- two adjacent to the existing highway in the Herons Creek section of the Proposal.

This loss of dwellings must be expected to have some adverse impacts for the residents involved. However, because of the small number of dwellings involved, the collective impact would not be such as to adversely affect the nature and supply of the housing stock in the study area or its overall demographic structure.

For acquired dwellings, affected residents may choose to relocate within or close to the study area – if so, their social networks may remain largely intact. If these residents choose to relocate elsewhere, it is unlikely that any resultant population loss would adversely affect the operation of local businesses or community organisations because of the very small number of people involved.

18.2.2 Residential amenity

For rural residents living adjacent to those sections of the highway where upgrading is proposed through duplication within the existing highway reserve, there would be varying impacts on existing amenity (which, in some cases, is already affected by traffic noise, especially at night). Residential amenity is affected by changes to the level of noise, air quality and landscape character, and is a key concern to local residents.

Johns River

The existing highway provides direct frontage to 28 identified residential properties in Johns River, as well as the general store, service station, motor vehicle repairer and Community Hall. The majority of dwellings have a setback from the highway of around only 10 to 18 m. This proximity to the highway results in amenity being affected by the noise of highway traffic (see Chapter 19) and the ability to gain vehicle access to the highway, particularly during peak holiday periods. It follows that the greater the traffic levels, the greater these impacts.

Likely positive impacts on residential amenity within Johns River as a result of the Proposal include:

- improved general well-being for residents, particularly in terms of reduced noise (especially at night) and vehicle emissions
- accessibility improvement for cyclists and pedestrians to the Community Hall and related Recreation Reserve
- safer movements to and from the primary school for students

- safer and more convenient access to the township 'main street' and to the new highway
- opportunity for visual enhancement within township 'main street' through the implementation of appropriate landscape treatments and improvements.

Adverse impacts may occur at some dwellings which are not currently located directly adjacent to the existing highway. There are eight dwellings located to the north and south of the Stewarts River Road intersection with the proposed upgraded highway that would be located relatively close to the Proposal (between 20 m and 100 m from the roadway edge subject to property acquisition). Amenity for these residents may be adversely affected both during construction (temporary episodes of dust, construction noise, and vibration) and post construction (increase in exposure to vehicle emissions, visual impacts, and traffic noise – see Chapters 12, 13 and 19 respectively). These impacts would be particularly noticeable to those residents who have chosen their current semi-rural location for lifestyle values, away from noise and traffic intrusion arising from the existing alignment of the highway through Johns River.

Kew

The Pacific Highway provides direct frontage to approximately thirty identified residential properties in Kew as well as most of the township's businesses. The majority of these dwellings have a setback from the highway in the range of 10 to 16 m. This results in amenity for residents being affected by the noise of highway traffic (especially at night) and the ability to gain vehicle access to the highway, particularly during peak holiday periods.

The positive impacts on residential amenity within Kew resulting from the Proposal are similar to those for Johns River.

The bypass of Kew township would route the Proposal along the western edge of the Glen Haven residential estate. Land acquisition would be required from six properties within the estate with the new property boundaries being located at least 25 m from the road shoulder. One existing dwelling in the Glen Haven estate would be demolished near station 15400 and the other five directly affected residential properties would be located relatively close to the Proposal (between 20 m and 100 m from the roadway edge subject to property acquisition). Adverse impacts on amenity at these properties may occur due to exposure to traffic noise (see Chapter 19), vehicular air emissions (see Chapter 12) and alteration of the existing landscape character and visual amenity (see Chapter 13) as a result of the Proposal.

Lakes and Herons Creek sections

Decreased amenity (especially in relation to traffic noise exposure) may result for residents of five dwellings where land acquisitions to accommodate duplication of the highway would reduce the distance between the upgraded highway and dwellings.

Mitigation measures

Mitigation measures are presented in relation to visual impact and noise in Chapters 13 and 19 respectively.

18.2.3 Community facilities and activities

The only existing community facilities and activities which would be adversely affected by the Proposal would be the Johns River Community Market and the Herons Creek Public School (see discussion of impacts on the Kew Visitor Information Centre in Chapter 17).

Johns River Community Market

The monthly Johns River Community Market benefits from passing trade given its good exposure to existing highway traffic. The profits from this market assist in maintaining the Community Hall and adjacent Recreation Reserve, which are the main community facilities in Johns River. Consequently, if profits from the market fall as a result of decreased highway-related trade, the current level of maintenance of the Hall and Reserve may not be sustainable unless replacement funds are provided from another source.

Mitigation measures

Subject to compliance with RTA signage policy, there may be an opportunity to incorporate reference to the Community Market in the Proposal signage. Further, it may be possible to integrate other opportunities for ongoing promotion of the market into planning activities for landscape improvements along the former highway alignment in Johns River.

Hérons Creek Public School

Vehicular access to the Herons Creek Public School would be amended as a result of the Proposal to provide improved safety for cars and buses (see Chapter 6). Pedestrian and bicycle access from the residential area of Herons Creek would continue to be provided separate from, but parallel to, the highway via a pedestrian walkway integrated with the new northbound highway bridge over Herons Creek.

As the northbound carriageway would be located 14 m closer to the school property than the current highway, the interior of the school rooms as well as the playground are projected to be subject to noise levels in excess of relevant guidelines (see Chapter 19).

Mitigation measures

Proposed mitigation measures in relation to noise impacts in the vicinity of Herons Creek Public School are discussed in Chapter 19.

18.2.4 Local accessibility

Approximately 180 properties currently have direct access, generally unrestricted, to the Pacific Highway within the study area. The Proposal would change this situation for most properties with highway frontage resulting in left-in, left-out access only being available and other movements available at nearby U-turn facilities (see Chapter 6). This change would result in marginally increased travel distances for most residents and visitors to their properties. Overall, however, the Proposal would improve road safety and local and regional travel times for the majority of residents.

For both the Johns River and Kew communities, the existing highway also defines the townships' main commercial areas and is a key element of the local road network. During current peak traffic periods, residents can experience difficulty getting to local shops and community facilities (although this situation improved in Kew with the installation of traffic signals at the junction of the highway with Kendall Road and Ocean Drive in late 2001). The proposed bypasses of these two townships would improve amenity and safety for both residents and visitors. The location of grade-separated interchanges to the west of the Johns River township (Stewarts River Road) and east of the Kew township (Ocean Drive) would maintain the major east-west road connections across the Proposal and remove the potential for conflict between local and through traffic.

18.3 Health effects

Vehicles travelling on the existing highway generate emissions which would increase as the volume of traffic increases, whether the Proposal proceeds or not. However, due to the generally rural nature of the study area, air quality is predicted to be well within relevant goals at residences along the Proposal route (see Chapter 12). The Proposal, with bypasses of Johns River and Kew, would significantly reduce traffic volumes through these townships and improve traffic flow patterns on the new highway, with a consequent reduction in vehicle emissions (especially in the vicinity of the traffic signals in Kew).

There are well-established links between annoyance, nuisance and sleep disturbance associated with traffic noise. The Proposal is to bypass the townships of Johns River and Kew, relocating the highway away from the highest population density. A range of appropriate noise attenuation measures such as landscaped bunds, noise walls, low-noise pavement and architectural treatments would be provided in the design to reduce any adverse impacts on the local aural environment (see Chapter 19). Consequently, as a result of the Proposal, no adverse health effects arising from noise or vehicular engine emissions are expected.

18.4 Implications for ESD

18.4.1 Precautionary principle

Extensive community consultation throughout the environmental assessment process has allowed for community concerns to be raised and issues incorporated into assessment and identification of relevant mitigation measures. Consideration during the route selection process was given to the impact of the various route options on local amenity. The Proposal route with bypasses of Johns River and Kew has had regard to the potential for improved amenity within these two townships. It is recognised that the potential for loss of amenity for properties could be minimised through the application of appropriate mitigation measures.

18.4.2 Intergenerational equity

The Proposal would result in substantially improved amenity along the existing highway through Johns River and Kew in terms of noise, air quality and safety for current and future generations. The proposed bypasses would decrease the current adverse amenity and safety impacts on these townships that are caused by the existing highway.

18.4.3 Conservation of biological diversity

This principle is not relevant to the social impact of the Proposal.

18.4.4 Improved valuation and pricing of environmental resources

This principle is not relevant to the social impact of the Proposal.