

1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the proposal and provides the context of the environmental assessment. In introducing the proposal, the objectives and proposal development history are detailed and the purpose of the report provided.

1.1 Proposal identification

Roads and Maritime Services (Roads and Maritime) propose to build a New England Highway bypass of Singleton (the proposal). The proposal is a two lane highway bypass located to the west of Singleton.

The proposal is located in the Singleton local government area (LGA) in the Hunter Valley, 75 kilometres inland from Newcastle, 47 kilometres south-east of Muswellbrook and 200 kilometres north from Sydney (refer to Figure: 1-1).

The New England Highway currently passes through Singleton and forms the main road access through the town and to the town centre. More than 28,000 vehicles, including over 3700 heavy vehicles, use the highway through Singleton each day. In recent years, traffic growth has been high with the coal mining industry, commuters and heavy vehicles identified as major contributors. Traffic volumes are predicted to further increase as a result of population growth, future land developments in and around Singleton and general increase of freight movement across the region.

The New England Highway through Singleton is a two lane road with the corridor restricted by numerous intersections and adjacent buildings with minimal setback from the road. The road performance of the highway through Singleton is expected to gradually worsen over time with increasing traffic volumes. Road users are already experiencing traffic congestion and increased travel times through this corridor, as well as safety issues on the highway through the town.

A bypass at Singleton would improve traffic flow, travel times and safety through Singleton by reduced traffic volumes and improve the movement of heavy freight vehicles.

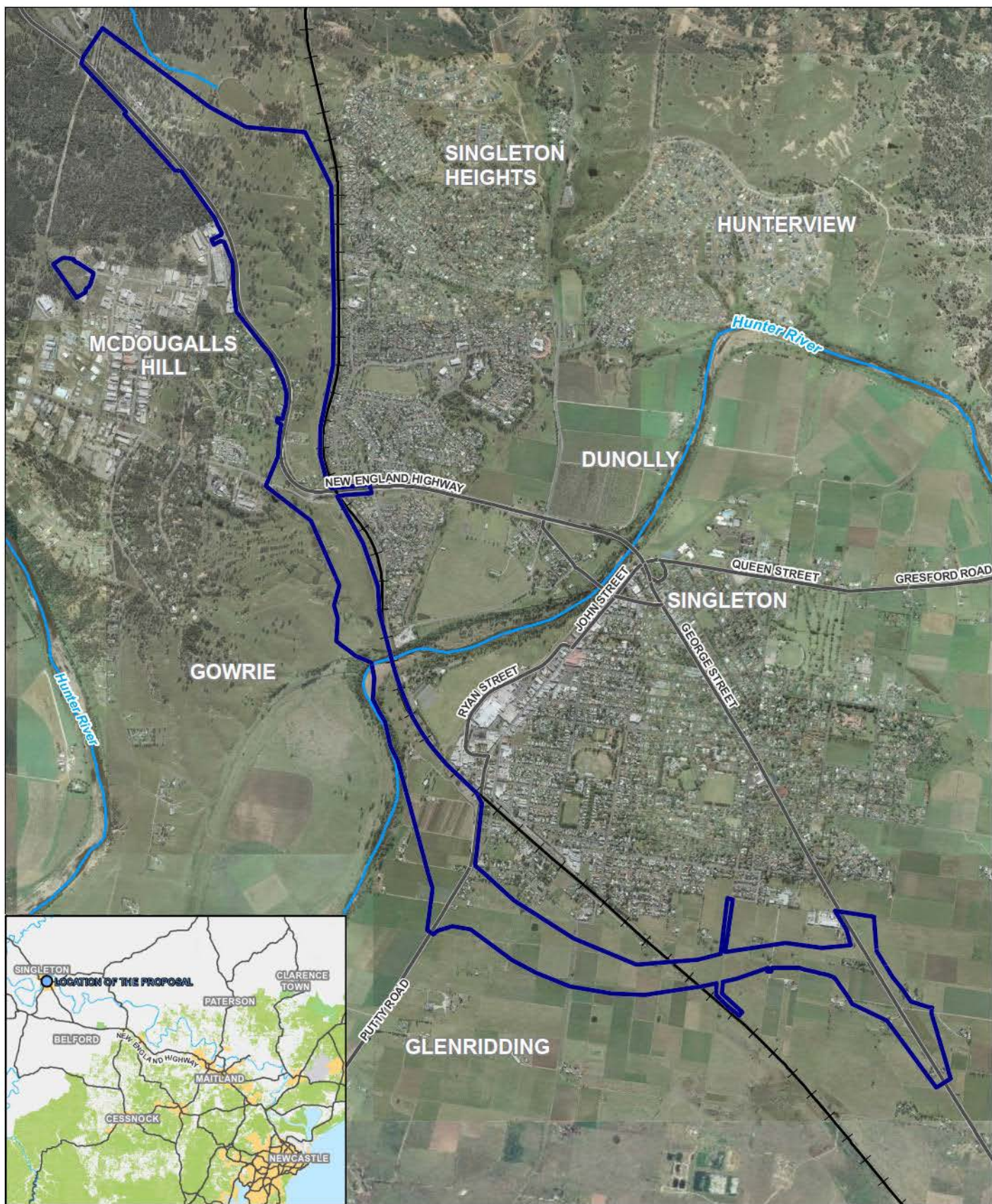
The proposed bypass route would depart the New England Highway near Newington Lane in Whittingham then head west over the Main North railway line across the floodplain over Putty Road. It would continue over the Hunter River, west of Singleton, before crossing the New England Highway west of Gowrie Gates and continue north before re-joining the highway north of McDougalls Hill.

The proposal, as assessed in this Review of Environmental Factors (REF), would include the following key features:

- About eight kilometres of the bypass of Singleton with a single lane in each direction
- Connection with the New England Highway at the southern end of the proposal, including a southbound entry ramp and northbound exit ramp only (the southern connection)
- A 55 metre long bridge over the bypass at the southern connection
- A 1.7 kilometre long bridge over the Main North railway line, Doughboy Hollow and Hunter River floodplain, Army Camp Road and Putty Road (bridge over the floodplain)
- Connection to Putty Road including a northbound entry ramp and southbound exit ramp (the Putty Road connection)
- A 40 metre bridge over the entry ramp at the Putty Road connection
- A 100 metre bridge over Rose Point floodway
- A 205 metre bridge over the Hunter River
- A 40 metre bridge over the New England Highway west of the existing Main North railway line overbridge (known as Gowrie Gates)

- Connection with the New England Highway at Gowrie Gates consisting of a southbound entry ramp and northbound exit ramp. The northbound exit ramp would connect to the New England Highway via a new roundabout intersection at Maison Dieu Road
- A 1.7 kilometre northbound climbing lane between Gowrie Gates and the northern connection
- Connection at Magpie Street providing access to the nearby industrial area (the northern connection), consisting of a southbound entry ramp, southbound exit ramp and northbound entry ramp
- A 60 metre long bridge over the bypass at the northern connection.

The location of the proposal is shown in Figure: 1-1.



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1.2 Purpose of the report

This REF has been prepared by AECOM Pty Ltd on behalf of Roads and Maritime. For the purposes of these works, Roads and Maritime is the proponent and the determining authority under Division 5.1 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act).

The purpose of the REF is to describe the proposal, to document the likely impacts of the proposal on the environment, and to detail protective measures to be implemented.

The description of the proposed work and associated environmental impacts have been carried out in the context of clause 228 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000*, the factors in *Is an EIS Required? Best Practice Guidelines for Part 5 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (Is an EIS required? guidelines) (DUAP, 1995/1996), the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (BC Act), the *Fisheries Management Act 1994* (FM Act), and the Australian Government's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

In doing so, the REF helps to fulfil the requirements of:

- Section 5.5 of the EP&A Act that Roads and Maritime examine and take into account to the fullest extent possible, all matters affecting or likely to affect the environment by reason of the activity
- The strategic assessment approval granted by the Federal Government under the EPBC Act in September 2015, with respect to the impacts of Roads and Maritime's road activities on nationally listed threatened species, populations, ecological communities and migratory species.

The findings of the REF would be considered when assessing:

- Whether the proposal is likely to have a significant impact on the environment and therefore the necessity for an environmental impact statement to be prepared and approval to be sought from the Minister for Planning under Division 5.2 of the EP&A Act
- The significance of any impact on threatened species as defined by the BC Act and/or FM Act, in section 1.7 of the EP&A Act and therefore the requirement for a Species Impact Statement or a Biodiversity Development Assessment Report
- The significance of any impact on nationally listed biodiversity matters under the EPBC Act, including whether there is a real possibility that the activity may threaten long-term survival of these matters, and whether offsets are required and able to be secured. The potential for the proposal to significantly impact any other matters of national environmental significance or Commonwealth land and the need, subject to the EPBC Act strategic assessment approval, to make a referral to the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy for a decision by the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment on whether assessment and approval is required under the EPBC Act.