

# Executive summary

## Strategic context

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Australia is facing its most challenging economic outlook since at least the crash of 1987 and perhaps even The Great Depression as a lingering hangover from the US financial crisis.

In its response to this unprecedented time, the Federal Government has announced a strategy of fast-tracking investment in major infrastructure to help insure the economy against recession.

*The Australian* reported Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on the eve of the November G20 summit held in Washington, as declaring that: “Our challenge is to do everything that is humanly possible to support growth and to support jobs. The reason is we are facing the gravest global financial and economic crisis in three-quarters of a century.”

In this context, the Queensland Hunter Gas Pipeline (QHGP) meets this challenge.

The pipeline is a nation building infrastructure project designed to support much needed industries in New South Wales (NSW) and in turn pump money and jobs into the national economy.

It also has the potential to enable the development of a NSW coal seam methane gas industry and provide gas for potential reticulation in regional and rural NSW.

The QHGP has received approval from the Queensland Government and was gazetted critical infrastructure by the NSW Government in June 2008 and is being considered for approval under Part 3A of the *Environment, Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

In addition, the proposed 833km gas transmission pipeline from Wallumbilla in Queensland to Newcastle in NSW will assist the State and National Governments meet their objectives in a carbon constrained economy by providing a cleaner form of energy than coal fired power to industries and homes.

## Submissions report

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The proponent of the QHGP is seeking project approval under Section 75P(1)(c) of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (EP&A Act) - approval of the project with no further environmental assessment being required for the project or any particular stage of the project.

As part of the approval process, the QHGP released a comprehensive Environmental Assessment for public exhibition in September.

The objective of the QHGP philosophy, supported by adaptive management, is to avoid environmental constraints – primarily, avoiding environmentally significant sites such as Travelling Stock Routes and World Heritage listed areas such as Ramsar Wetlands.

This approach is backed by sophisticated desktop and field studies contained in this report, which demonstrate the avoidance philosophy and the commitment to maintain environmental quality by utilising best practice as stipulated in the relevant Australian Standards.

During the formal public exhibition period, a total of 60 submissions were received. This is testament to the rigour of the QHGP public awareness and consultation process that included exhibition stalls in 11 major town centres along the route and contact made with at least 600 individual landholders.

QHGP also held numerous briefings with senior representatives of the key state government agencies where the strategic management approach taken by QHGP was presented and specific issues were worked through in a spirit of cooperation.

As a result of the ongoing engagement with all key stakeholders, the pipeline has been further refined to meet the project philosophy of avoidance where possible and in turn ensure a better outcome for individual landholders and government agencies as well as minimise the project's overall environmental footprint.

QHGP's commitment to engage with all affected stakeholders will not conclude after the assessment period, but will continue through construction and commissioning and be maintained for the life of pipeline operation.

In addition to QHGP's response to the formal submissions, this report also contains the required information on the refined pipeline route as well as additional field and heritage studies.

The careful process of route development has already avoided the majority of constraints identified in the EA. This is supported by the fact that of the 611km of the proposed pipeline, specific management measures have only needed to be developed for 54km; a total of 8.8% of the NSW portion of the QHGP.

A further 14.3km of the pipeline will be subject to additional fieldwork to be completed prior to construction due to limitations in access during surveying. Issue specific mitigation and management measures have been developed where constraints cannot be explicitly avoided.

Due to the iterative nature of pipeline construction, the process of refining the Right of Way (ROW) will continue post-approval, however any future refinements will not significantly alter the nature of the QHGP and would be made only to further reduce project impacts.

The impacts resulting from the construction of the QHGP are temporary and will result in minimal habitat loss. Where constraints cannot be explicitly be avoided, impacts will be mitigated so biodiversity value of specific localities can be maintained.

As a result, the QHGP can be correctly classified as a low environmental impact project and the proponent submits that a biodiversity offset is not required.

Similarly, sufficient assessment of the QHGP's potential impacts has been completed. Impacts will be eliminated or managed through the implementation of an avoidance philosophy and adaptive management strategy. A comprehensive revised Statement of Commitments (SoCs), based on information gathered during stakeholder engagement and additional fieldwork, has been developed to guide the management of project impacts.

Between the application of the SoCs and, ongoing stakeholder engagement, the proponent submits that no further environmental assessment or preferred project report is required.