1. Introduction

1.1 The project

The NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) proposes to construct a bypass of the town of Holbrook located on the Hume Highway approximately 114 kilometres south of Gundagai and 60 kilometres north of Albury. The project would include the construction of a new dual carriageway section of the Hume Highway to the west of Holbrook, from approximately five kilometres to the north of Holbrook to three kilometres south of the town. The project would encompass a total length of 9.5 kilometres, replacing the six kilometres of single carriageway highway that currently passes through the town of Holbrook.

1.2 Overview

The Hume Highway is the main road freight route between Sydney and Melbourne, carrying over 20 million tonnes of road freight every year. In addition, it is a vital transport link for communities and industries in southern NSW. The total length of the Hume Highway is 807 kilometres from Sydney to Melbourne. Of this, 517 kilometres is in NSW and 290 kilometres is in Victoria. Within Victoria, 100 per cent of the highway is now dual carriageway. Within NSW, dual carriageway conditions exist on approximately 80 per cent of the total length of the highway.

Of the 89 kilometres of the Hume Highway in NSW yet to be duplicated, 69 kilometres is contained within projects currently under construction. These projects include the Sheahan Bridge duplication (at Gundagai) and the Hume Highway duplication between the Sturt Highway junction and Table Top (north of Albury). All of these works are due to be completed by late 2009. Upgrade of the remaining 20 kilometres of single carriageway on the Hume Highway at Tarcutta, Holbrook and Woomargama would result in dual carriageway conditions between Sydney and Melbourne (see Figure 1-1).

The previous Federal Government committed to completion of full duplication of the Hume Highway by 2012. The Hume Highway duplication and its component sub-projects, including the Holbrook bypass, are included as major projects to be undertaken, requiring Federal funding for completion, in the *State Infrastructure Strategy — New South Wales 2008-09 to 2017-18*.

In accordance with the above, the RTA proposes to construct a dual carriageway highway bypass of Holbrook. The scope of this project, which is the subject of this environmental assessment, comprises the bypass of six kilometres of existing single carriageway highway through the town of Holbrook. For the purposes of the report, the scope of works is referred to as 'the project' or 'the proposed bypass'. The assessment area incorporates the project plus approximately a 200 metre buffer around its centreline, as well as additional areas required for project delivery.

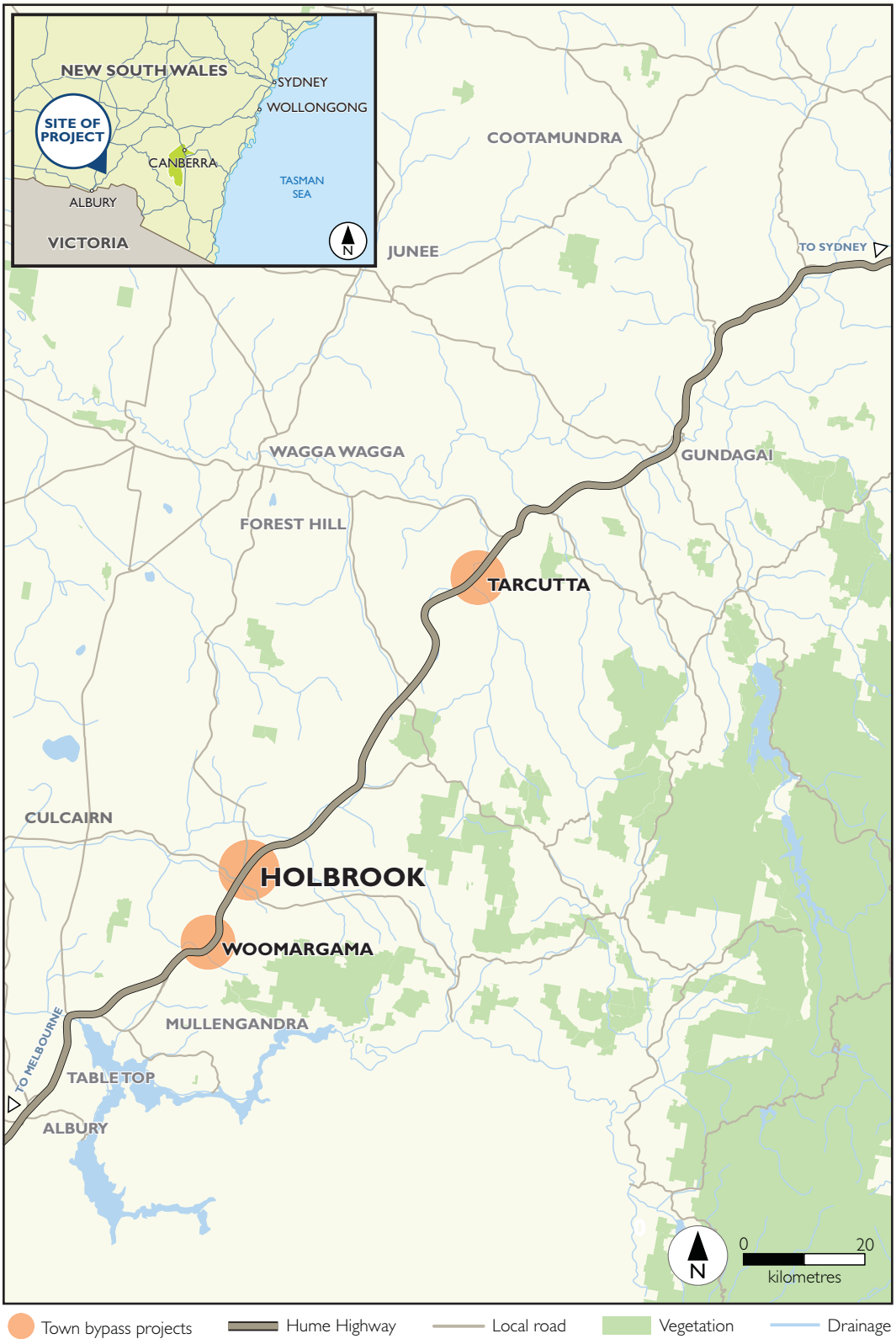

Figure 1-1 **Regional context**

1.3 Project delivery

The project would be delivered under a 'design and construct' or a 'construct only' contract.

The RTA has developed a concept design for the project, which is presented in this environmental assessment. A construction contractor would be appointed through a tender process to undertake detailed design (if 'design and construct', otherwise RTA would undertake detailed design) and construction of the project. The tender process will commence in late 2009 and construction is scheduled to commence in mid 2010. Project completion is scheduled for late 2012.

1.4 The locality

Holbrook is a small, rural township with a population of 1336 (ABS 2006). It is located on the Hume Highway approximately 60 kilometres north of Albury and 114 kilometres south of Gundagai. Wagga Wagga is some 90 kilometres to the north.

The Hume Highway is the main street of Holbrook and has a speed limit of 50 kilometres per hour and includes a 40 kilometre per hour school zone speed limit for one kilometre in the centre of town. Adjacent to the highway, land use through the town is a mixture of residential and commercial. The main residential area extends both east and west of the existing highway. Rural residential properties and rural holdings are located around the town. The racecourse, golf course and public swimming pool are located to the east of the town.

Holbrook is positioned approximately halfway between Sydney and Melbourne. Holbrook has a dual role as a service town for the surrounding agricultural district and a convenient rest stop for traffic travelling between Sydney and Melbourne. The function of the town as a highway rest stop is enhanced by historic buildings, a variety of eateries and shops, and tourist attractions such as the iconic submarine — HMAS Otway — located along the Hume Highway.

The landscape of the area immediately around Holbrook is relatively flat and includes the Ten Mile Creek floodplain. The landscape becomes more undulating to hilly to the east and the west of the town.

Generally, the native vegetation surrounding Holbrook has been extensively cleared. The condition of this vegetation has been modified by agricultural land uses, including vegetation clearing, grazing and cropping. Remnant patches of native woodland generally occur in roadside reserves, the former Town Common and Travelling Stock Reserves (one at the north of the project — the Wagga Wagga Road Travelling Stock Reserve, and one at the south of the project — the Culcairn Road Travelling Stock Reserve, refer Figure 1-2). These are important remnant vegetation communities, providing fauna corridors and transitions between communities.

Figure 1-2 shows the locality of the project.

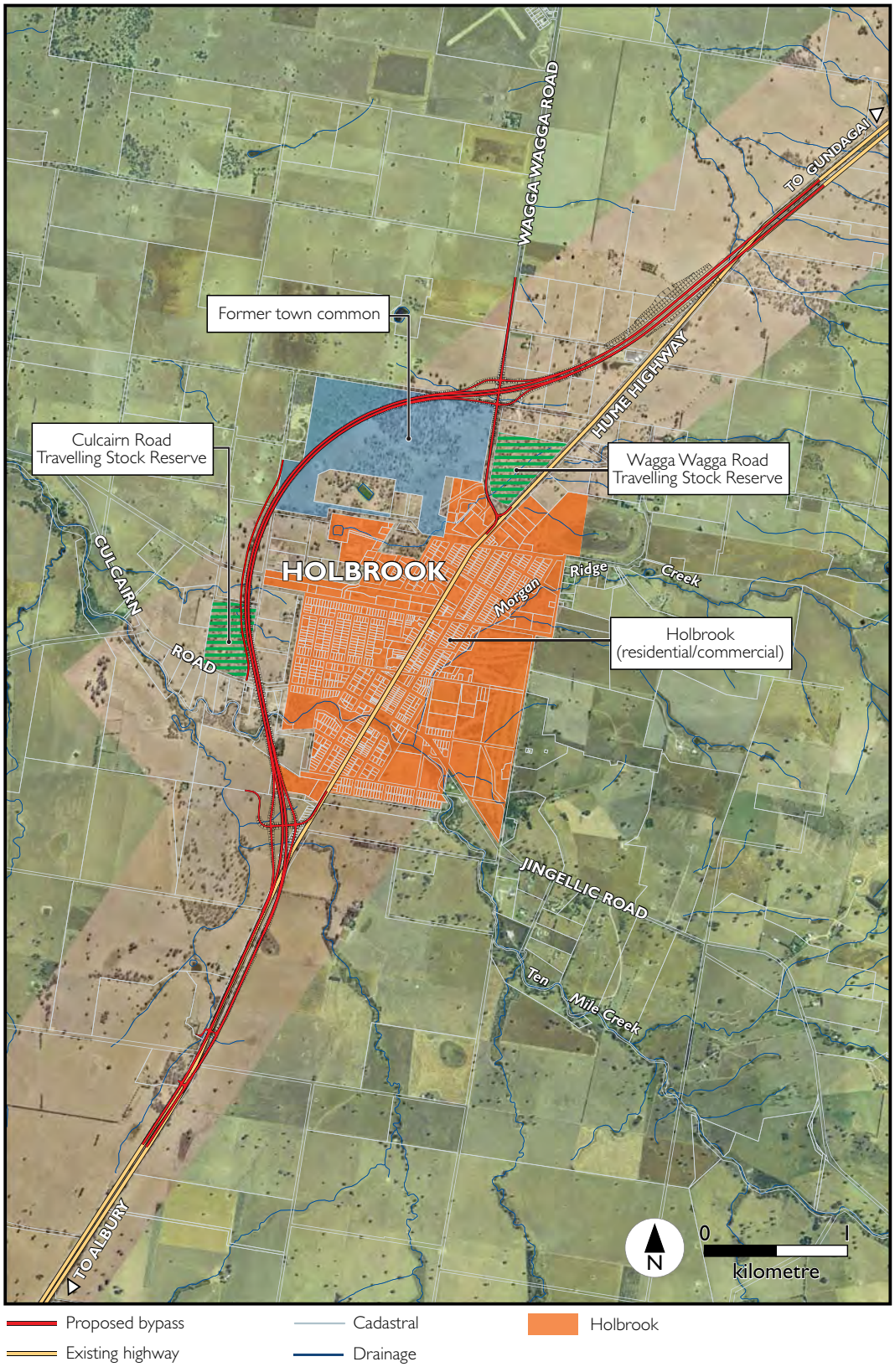

Figure 1-2 **Locality of the project**

1.5 Structure of the environmental assessment

Table 1-1 summarises the structure and content of this environmental assessment.

Table 1-1 Structure and content of this environmental assessment

Chapter	Description
Volume 1 — Environmental assessment	
Statement of validity	
Executive summary	
Chapter 1 *Introduction*	Outlines the background to, and purpose of, the project. Provides an overview of the project and the structure of this environmental assessment.
Chapter 2 *Planning and statutory requirements*	Outlines the legislation, planning strategies and policies that apply to the project as well as the planning approvals process.
Chapter 3 *Strategic justification*	Outlines the strategic need and project need, and the project objectives.
Chapter 4 *Project development and alternatives*	Describes the process undertaken to assess preliminary route options to determine a preferred route, and describes the development of the concept design (the project).
Chapter 5 *Project description*	Provides a detailed description of the physical works that make up the project. Provides an overview of the design criteria that apply to the project and considers the environmental and engineering constraints to the project.
Chapter 6 *Construction*	Details the construction approach, equipment, resources, labour and ancillary facilities for the project.
Chapter 7 *Consultation and stakeholder engagement*	Outlines how the community and stakeholders have been, and will continue to be, involved in the development of the project. Summarises the issues raised by the community and stakeholders to date.
Chapter 8 *Environmental risk analysis*	Details the risk analysis process by which the potential environmental issues for assessment were identified.
Chapter 9 *Assessment of key issues*	Describes the potential impact of the project on key issues. Outlines measures proposed to avoid, mitigate or manage those impacts.
Chapter 10 *Other environmental issues*	Describes the potential impacts of the project on other environmental issues. Outlines measures proposed to avoid, mitigate or manage those impacts.
Chapter 11 *Draft statement of commitments*	Provides a draft overview of all commitments to avoid, minimise, mitigate, manage, offset or monitor impacts associated with the project.
Chapter 12 *Justification and conclusion*	Outlines the justification for proceeding with the project. Considers the project objectives, the significance of expected environmental impacts, the objects of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, the suitability of the site and the public interest.
Chapter 13 *References*	
Chapter 14 *Glossary and abbreviations*	

Chapter	Description
Appendices	
Appendix A *Minister's Orders*	A copy of the Order gazetted to declare the project a major project and then a critical infrastructure project.
Appendix B *Director General's Requirements*	A copy of the Director General's Requirements (DGRs) issued by the Department of Planning.
Appendix C *Director-General's Requirements checklist*	Cross-reference to where in the environmental assessment each issue in the DGRs is addressed.
Volume 2 — Technical Papers	
Technical Paper 1	*Flora and fauna* (Parsons Brinckerhoff Australia Pty Ltd).
Technical Paper 2	*Aboriginal heritage* (Kelleher Nightingale Consulting Pty Ltd).
Technical Paper 3	*Noise and vibration* (Wilkinson Murray Pty Ltd).
Technical Paper 4	*Traffic and transport* (Parsons Brinckerhoff Australia Pty Ltd).