1. Introduction

1.1 The project

The NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) proposes to construct a bypass of the village of Tarcutta located on the Hume Highway approximately 45 kilometres south of Gundagai and 30 kilometres south-east of Wagga Wagga. The project would include the construction of a new dual carriageway section of the Hume Highway from approximately two kilometres north of the village to two kilometres south of the village, encompassing a total length of approximately seven kilometres.

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 101 kilometres of the Hume Highway in NSW yet to be duplicated, 81 kilometres is contained within projects currently under construction. These projects include the Coolac bypass, the Sheahan Bridge duplication, 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. In December 2008, as part of the Nation Building Program, the current Federal Government announced an advance payment of $225 million to be provided to NSW in 2008-09 to accelerate construction of the Hume Highway duplication, including the Tarcutta bypass. The Hume Highway duplication and its component sub-projects, including the Tarcutta bypass, are included as major projects to be undertaken, requiring Federal funding for completion, in the *State Infrastructure Strategy — New South Wales 2006-07 to 2015-16*.

In accordance with the above, the RTA proposes to construct a dual carriageway highway bypass of Tarcutta. The scope of this project, which is the subject of this environmental assessment, comprises the bypass of approximately seven kilometres of existing single carriageway highway through the village of Tarcutta. 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 a 200 metre buffer around its centreline, as well as additional areas required for project delivery.

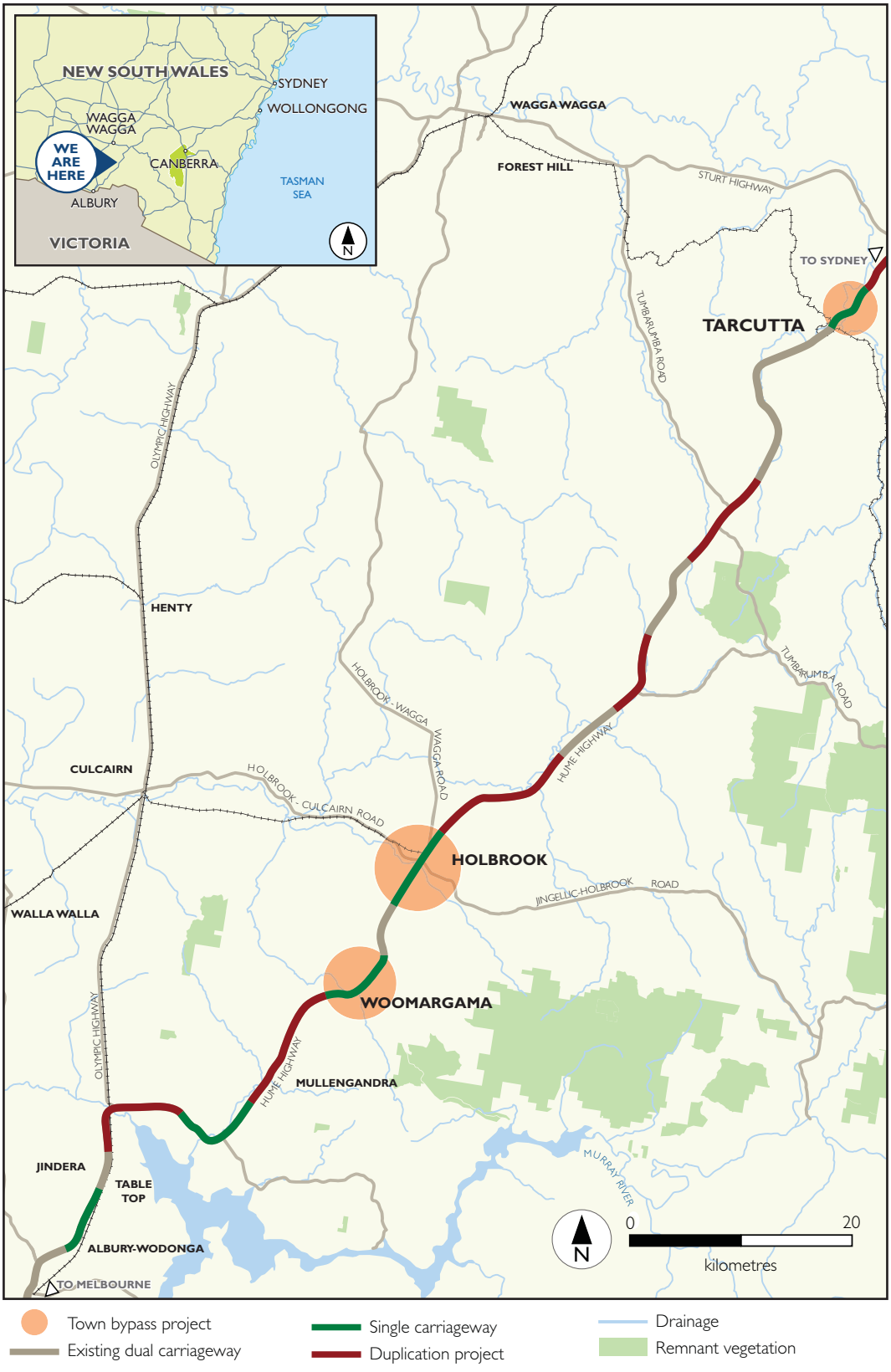

Figure 1-1 **Regional context**

1.3 Project delivery

Design development and construction of the project would be delivered through an alliance (the Tarcutta Hume Alliance). An alliance is a project delivery model that involves the collaboration of 'owner' and 'non-owner' participants to deliver the capital phase of a project. All participants share the responsibility for project risks and for achieving project outcomes. A key benefit of an alliance is the early involvement of the construction team in the pre-construction planning phase, which leads to more informed decision making.

The alliance contract for this project was awarded in April 2009. This has enabled progressive design development resulting in a robust concept design for the environmental assessment. The RTA would be responsible for overseeing construction, including inspections, monitoring and auditing works performed by the contractor(s). The benefits of an alliance for the project include:

- Greater flexibility in modifying the design of the project and greater capacity for ongoing changes to be incorporated during construction.
- Additional opportunities for innovation during design and construction to improve results.
- A performance-based contract that rewards alliance partners for outstanding performance where it is ascertained that the project's targets have been exceeded. However, if a project fails to meet its targets, the alliance partners are financially penalised.
- A shared responsibility for managing the project's risks and ensuring that the project is implemented to meet the RTA's and the community's requirements.

1.4 The locality

Tarcutta is a small, rural village with a population of 245 people (ABS 2006). The Hume Highway is the main street of Tarcutta and has a speed limit of 50 kilometres per hour. Adjacent to the highway, land use through the village 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 village. The Tarcutta General Cemetery is located adjacent to the north-western corner of the village.

Tarcutta is positioned approximately halfway between Sydney and Melbourne. It is a well established 'trucking town' that has catered for the trucking industry as a stopover point for decades. To support this use by the trucking industry, two truck layover areas are located in the middle of the main street. Also, in 2006, a truck interchange facility was constructed in the village on the western side of the highway. Tarcutta's importance for the trucking industry was reinforced in 1994 with the establishment of the Australian Truck Drivers' Memorial in the main street. This memorial includes the names of over 1000 truck drivers killed on Australian roads.

The landform of the area immediately surrounding Tarcutta is largely undulating to hilly and typical of the south-western slopes region of NSW. The main watercourses in the area are Tarcutta Creek, which flows generally south to north to the west of the village, and Keajura Creek (fourth crossing), which is a tributary of Tarcutta Creek.

Since non-Aboriginal settlement of the district in the 1830s, the native vegetation surrounding Tarcutta has been extensively cleared. Remnant patches of native woodland generally occur in roadside reserves, travelling stock reserves, riparian corridors and on rocky hilltops. The condition of this vegetation has been modified by agricultural land uses, including vegetation clearing, grazing and cropping. These are, nonetheless, important remnant vegetation communities, particularly in areas providing fauna corridors and transitions between communities.

Figure 1-2 shows the locality of the project.

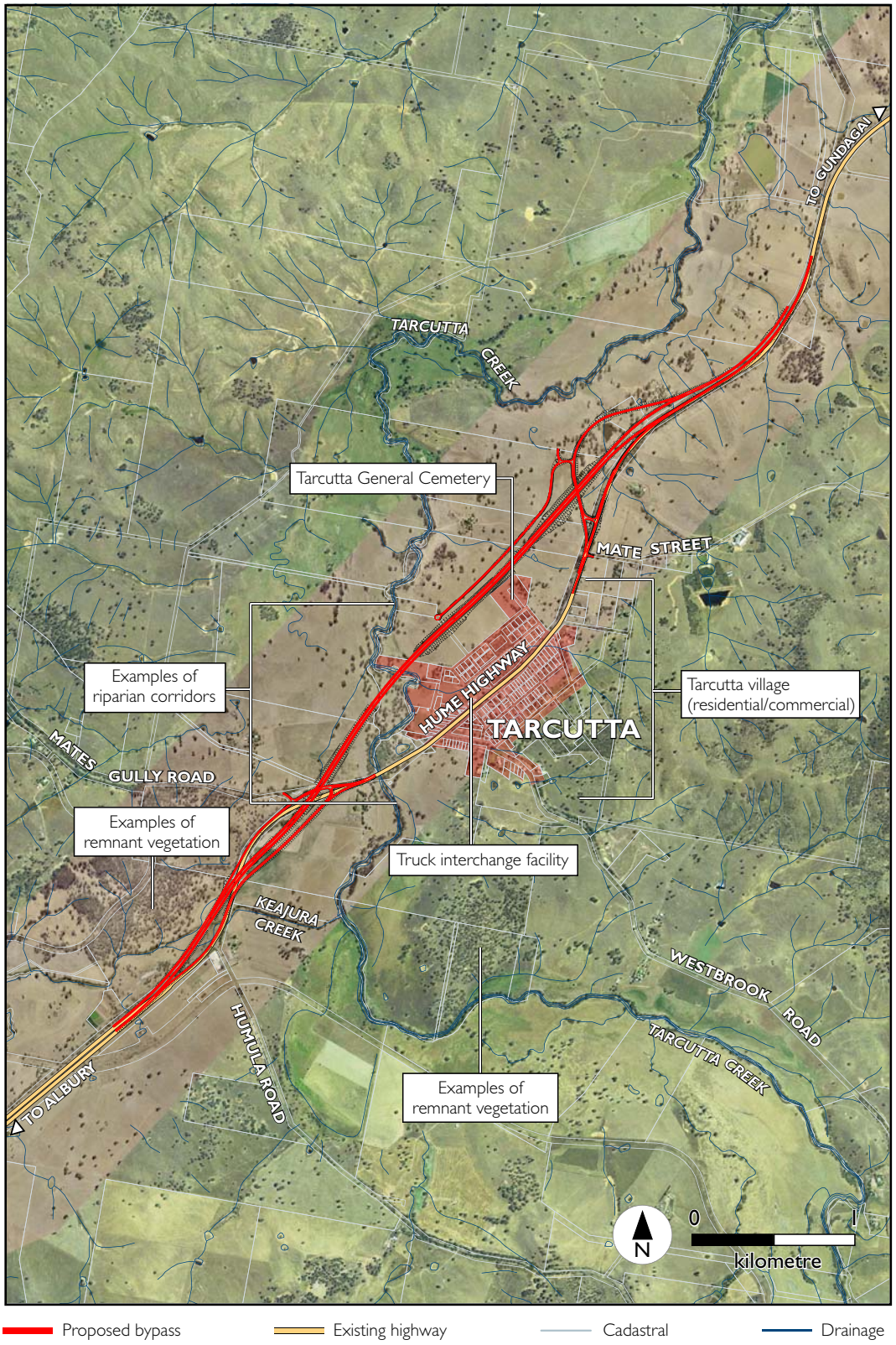

Figure 1-2 **Locality of the project**

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 the 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 those impacts.
Chapter 11Draft 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 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 Orders 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	*Non-Aboriginal Heritage* (HCPL Heritage and Archaeology).
Technical Paper 4	*Surface Water* (Parsons Brinckerhoff Australia Pty Ltd).
Technical Paper 5	*Groundwater* (Parsons Brinckerhoff Australia Pty Ltd).
Technical Paper 6	*Noise and Vibration* (Wilkinson Murray Pty Ltd).
Technical Paper 7	*Traffic and Transport* (Parsons Brinckerhoff Australia Pty Ltd).