INTRODUCTION
Upper Hunter Shire Council is constructing a 40 kilometre underground water pipeline from Scone to Murrurundi.

The pipeline will provide Murrurundi with a secure water source from Lake Glenbawn to Murrurundi reservoirs.

The pipeline corridor will include a number of tanks and pump stations along the pipeline. Some of the technical aspects of the design have been completed including a review of the hydraulic model to confirm the location and size of pump stations, balance tanks and break tanks.

The infrastructure will be installed along a pipeline corridor, an area along the pipeline route where access will be required. There may need to be access to properties even where the pipeline route does not cross into that property.

Council has been meeting with affected property owners along the pipeline corridor to establish Access Agreements and, where longer term access is required, Easement Agreements on both private and Crown land.

The Review of Environmental Factors (REF) found there are potential archaeological deposits (PADs) along the proposed route that may contain Aboriginal objects. This has resulted in a number of consultations and investigations involving Aboriginal stakeholders.

The scope of work and tender documents have been created and the project is expected to go to tender in 2018 and be completed in 2020.

HOW MUCH WILL THE PIPELINE COST AND HOW IS IT BEING FUNDED?
The project is estimated to cost $14.2 million, with over $13 million in funding provided by the NSW Government's Restart NSW Water Security for Regions program. The remainder of project funding has been provided by Upper Hunter Shire Council.

WHO WILL APPROVE THE PIPELINE PROJECT?
Upper Hunter Shire Council has assessed and approved the project under Part 5 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act.

As part of this assessment Council liaised with key stakeholders in the project including NSW Government authorities and affected landowners.
PROTECTING HERITAGE

NSW Public Works undertook the Review of Environmental Factors (REF) which included a review of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage. Site inspections along the proposed route were conducted as part of the REF and included looking for evidence of Aboriginal objects. One of the findings in the REF was that there are potential archaeological deposits (PADs) that follow along the water ways, including Kingdon Ponds. These PADs are areas that may contain Aboriginal objects which are protected under the National Parks and Wildlife Act (1974).

According to the REF:

“...environmental contexts suggest that there is potential for evidence of Aboriginal occupation to have survived previous land use history,” and “Artefact scatters and isolated finds are the most likely site type to occur in the proposed route alignments due to the types and locations of landforms (e.g. flats adjacent to water courses).”

The REF findings meant an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment had to be undertaken which involved a thorough process of consultation with representatives of the Aboriginal community.

An outcome of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment was that an extensive archaeological testing program was required which involved the digging by hand of hundreds of test pits along the pipeline route to determine the extent of the existence of Aboriginal objects. The results of the test program have been documented and the report was submitted to the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) with the application for an Aboriginal Heritage Impact Permit (AHIP). The OEH is currently assessing the AHIP application.

All of these investigations need to be completed before the detailed alignment of the pipeline can be finalised.

Council will undertake all necessary steps to protect Aboriginal sites.

The required processes could extend the timeline for the pipeline’s construction by several months and will have an ongoing impact on the pipeline project timeline. For example, workers’ inductions will include their responsibilities under legislation and in the unlikely event Aboriginal objects are found all works must cease and the area is protected until a qualified archaeologist and representatives of registered Aboriginal parties are contacted and can inspect and assess the area to determine its significance.

The REF also identified relevant heritage items, particularly the Murrurundi Railway Station area and Mountain House at Wingen, however work on construction of the pipeline will be carried out to avoid impacting on all identified heritage items.

Photo: Archaeological test pit digging
WHY IS A WATER PIPELINE NEEDED?

The current water source for Murrurundi consists of three inlets on the Pages River upstream of the town, a gravity transfer pipeline, a settling pond, a 160 ML off-river storage, small membrane filtration unit, and a chlorination unit. The main problem with this supply is that the river flows are very inconsistent and in severe droughts water availability is very low.

As a result of these issues, between January 2002 and September 2014, the town spent 29% of the time with water restrictions including eight months in 2002 and seven months in 2014 on Level 5 water restrictions.

Since December 2017, Level 5 restrictions have been in place for four months with Level 6 restrictions recently imposed.

Council has constructed an emergency supply to collect water from the Pages River and while this has so far prevented the town from running out of water completely, it is not suitable for long term use particularly under drought conditions.

Council undertook a study of the long term water supply options. The study identified the construction of a pipeline to transfer potable water from Scone to Murrurundi as the preferred option.

WHAT IS THE PROPOSED PIPELINE ROUTE?

Council has worked with consultants and specialist contractors to identify a proposed pipeline corridor.

The proposed route has been selected to minimise the impact on the environment whilst maintaining flexibility for cost effective construction.

There may be changes made to this proposed route as a result of further assessments including geo-technical and archaeological investigations.

The proposed pipeline corridor starts at Scone and runs adjacent to the western side of the New England Highway to Wingen. Before the Durham Hotel in Wingen, the pipeline corridor diverts to the west to run along road reserves.

After Wingen the pipeline corridor continues adjacent to the western side of the New England Highway. Before Burning Mountain, the corridor diverts west and follows Wrights Road and Old Highway Road over the Warlands Range all the way to Blandford.

The corridor continues along White Street through Blandford and follows Stockroute Road on to Murrurundi adjacent to the southern boundary of the railway line.

At Murrurundi the corridor diverts south to run along O’Connell Street and joins the existing pipeline at the former Murrurundi showground and cricket paddocks.
WILL LAND OWNERS OUTSIDE MURRURUNDI HAVE ACCESS TO THE WATER?

The primary purpose of the pipeline is to supply potable water to the town of Murrurundi. There is currently an option for rural landowners, whose properties are located within the pipeline corridor between Scone and Wingen, to access water from the pipeline by purchasing an ‘urban style’ connection to the pipeline supplying potable water. Only a limited number of connections will be possible and the connection would need to have appropriate infrastructure located near the pipeline. The estimated cost of a connection to a landowner is around $17,000. Council’s pipeline project team has raised this option with rural landowners when meeting about land access.

HOW WILL THIS PROJECT IMPACT LANDOWNERS ALONG THE PIPELINE ROUTE?

The pipeline will be constructed with connections to allow gravity-fed reticulation networks to be installed to the villages of Parkville, Wingen and Blandford after the pipeline is complete.

The proposed pipeline corridor crosses sections in the road reserve, land owned by the Australian Rail and Track Corporation (ARTC) and private land. Where the pipeline is installed on private land, Council aims to keep the route as close as possible to the existing boundary fences. Council will minimise construction impacts and restore the landscape for each landowner.

GOOD NEIGHBOURS: The Gillett family of Brandon and Cressfield Stud General Manager Wayne Bedggood were amongst the first to sign access agreements to build the much needed water pipeline to Murrurundi.

Council’s Pipeline Project Team directly contacted owners of property along the proposed pipeline corridor route to discuss access and easement arrangements during the pipeline construction and future maintenance. The Pipeline Project Team includes:

- Manager Special Projects, Alan Fletcher
- Project Manager, Chris Agosto
- Specialist contractors as required.

CONTACT US

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For further information see Council’s publication Scone to Murrurundi Water Pipeline Project: FACTS for Landowners and Residents available on our website.