Upper Hunter Shire Council is constructing a 40 kilometre water pipeline from Scone to Murrurundi. The pipeline will provide Murrurundi with a secure water source from Lake Glenbawn, via Scone Reservoirs, to Murrurundi Reservoirs.

Council awarded the tender for detailed design and construction of the pipeline in March 2019 to Leed Engineering and Construction. The project is expected to be completed in 2020.

PIPELINE BUDGET

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.

Council receives funding money from the state government by reimbursement of project expenditure on a monthly basis.

WORK ON THE PIPELINE ALREADY COMPLETED

Any large infrastructure project must meet multiple state and federal requirements (including economic and environmental) to ensure it is carried out safely, legally, efficiently and with appropriate permissions and checks and balances.

For example, Council has had to negotiate land access with everyone who owns land where the pipeline route goes, and in some cases, near it. As the route runs along the New England Highway (RMS), rail corridor (ARTC) and through two dozen privately
owned properties, Individual land access agreements, land purchases and easement agreements have been negotiated.

The pipeline route also crosses portions of Crown Land which require the establishment of easements with the Crown Land Department of Industry. Prior to these easements being agreed to, Council had to negotiate an agreement with multiple Native Title Claimants, negotiate an agreement with the Local Aboriginal Land Council about Land Rights claims which exist on most of the Crown Land portions and get agreement from the Local Land Services Department about the effects on Travelling Stock Reserves.

Council did this work in parallel with the Aboriginal archaeological investigations as required under the National Parks & Wildlife Act, which alone took almost two years to complete.

In August 2018, Council received approval for an Aboriginal Heritage Impact Permit from the Office of Environment & Heritage. This completed a two year process arising out of the Review of Environmental Factors (REF) in 2016 and now allows Council to excavate and trench along the route.

This permit allowed the geo-technical survey of soil type and hardness, and concept design and hydraulic modelling to be competed as required for the tender documents.

NSW Public Works Advisory undertook the Review of Environmental Factors (REF), which identified relevant heritage items, particularly the Murrurundi Railway Station area and Mountain House at Wingen. Construction of the pipeline will avoid impacting on all identified heritage items.

The REF also included site inspections along the proposed route looking for evidence of Aboriginal objects. One of the findings in the REF was that there are potential archaeological deposits (PAPDs) that follow along the water ways, including Kingdon Ponds. These PAPDs are areas that could contain Aboriginal objects which are protected under the National Parks and Wildlife Act (1974).

The REF findings meant an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment was undertaken which involved a thorough process of consultation with representatives of the Aboriginal community and an extensive archaeological testing program, digging by hand hundreds of test pits along the pipeline route. The report was submitted to the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) with the application for an Aboriginal Heritage Impact Permit (AHIP), which was granted.

Council will continue to undertake all necessary steps to protect Aboriginal sites. 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.

PROTECTING HERITAGE

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

The water source for Murrurundi has always been the Pages River. The main problem with this supply is that the river flows are very inconsistent and in severe droughts water availability is very low.

Over the last 20 years Murrurundi has been on water restrictions for nearly a third of the time. Level 6 restrictions have been in place since mid 2018.

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

Recently the town’s water supply has been supplemented by an emergency bore and in February 2019 Council began carting water from Scone to Murrurundi.

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.

The pipeline corridor starts at Scone Reservoirs, runs around the northern edge of Scone before crossing the New England Highway at Common Road. It then runs adjacent to the western side of the 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, crosses the former Murrurundi showground and cricket paddocks, before running along Pages River Road and Murulla Street up to the Murrurundi Reservoirs.

SECURING MURRURUNDI’S WATER SUPPLY BEFORE THE PIPELINE IS COMPLETED...

Murrurundi’s water is currently coming from:

- An emergency water bore that Council installed in 2018
- Water Council is carting from Scone,
- Pages River gravels infiltration gallery

Currently the Murrurundi Dam is not providing any water as it is too low. Water restrictions will need to remain in place until the Murrurundi Dam levels recover. Council has worked closely with the NSW Government on these initiatives.
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.

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 pipeline corridor will include a number of pump stations and balance and break tanks along the route. The proposed pipeline corridor crosses sections in the road reserve, land owned by Roads and Maritime Services (RMS), land owned by the Australian Rail and Track Corporation (ARTC), Crown land 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.

Council has met with affected property owners along the pipeline corridor to establish Access Agreements and Easement Agreements.

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

ARE PROPERTY OWNERS ALONG THE ROUTE GETTING ACCESS TO WATER?

There will be a single supply pipeline constructed that will supply water to Murrurundi.

Where the route goes through a property or next to a boundary, the land owners had the opportunity to apply to access water (which they would need to store and would pay water rates for). Initially there was limited interest due to the costs however because of the drought, several properties are currently taking up this option. This will not delay the pipeline.

The pipeline is being built to allow water reticulation to be added later in the villages of Parkville, Wingen and Blandford.

More information will be made available to properties along the route.

WHY IS IT TAKING LONGER THAN QUIRINDI’S PIPELINE?

The Quirindi to Willow Tree pipeline was 15.5km long, cost $4.85 million and tapped into an existing pipeline route along a roadside, requiring only one pumping station.

The Scone to Murrurundi pipeline is 40km long costing over $14 million and it is on an incline requiring several pumping stations and their associated electrical infrastructure. The Murrurundi pipeline route also crosses land owned or managed by many different parties.

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.