

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Overview

The Western Highway (A8) in Victoria is the principal road link between Melbourne and Adelaide. The highway serves interstate trade between Victoria and South Australia, and is the key transport corridor through Victoria's west. It also supports the farming industry, grain production, regional tourism, and a range of manufacturing and service activities in Victoria's west. Currently, more than 5500 vehicles travel the Western Highway between Ballarat and Stawell each day, including 1500 trucks, and in terms of freight movements the Western Highway is one of the busiest highways in the country.

VicRoads identified the need to upgrade the Western Highway in order to:

- Improve road safety at intersections
- Improve safety of access to adjoining properties
- Enhance road freight efficiency
- Reduce travel time
- Provide better access to local facilities
- Improve roadside facilities
- Complement future bypasses of Beaufort and Ararat.

The Western Highway is part of the National Land Transport Network, the national network of strategically important land transport linkages. As part of the Nation Building Program (which assists national, regional economic and social development by the provision of funding aimed at improving the performance of land transport infrastructure).

VicRoads was allocated funding from both the Commonwealth and State Governments to progressively upgrade the Western Highway into a four-lane divided highway. This Project, known as the Western Highway Project, extends for approximately 100 kilometres (km), commencing at the western edge of Ballarat and finishing at the south-eastern edge of Stawell.

The Western Highway Project has been split into a series of sections for planning and delivery purposes:

- Ballarat to Beaufort (Section 1)
- Beaufort to Ararat (Section 2)
- Ararat to Stawell (Section 3).

Works on an initial 8km segment between Ballarat and Burrumbeet (Section 1a) commenced in April 2010 and will be completed in 2012. Works on a 23.5km segment between Burrumbeet and Trawalla (Section 1b) commenced in May 2012 with completion expected in 2014. Construction of a 3.2km segment from Trawalla to Beaufort commenced in November 2011 and is expected to be completed in 2012. Sections 2 and 3 are still in the planning phase of the Project, and are the subject of separate Environment Effects Statements (EESs). The full length of the duplication is expected to be completed and opened in stages through to 2016, subject to future funding. Town bypasses of Beaufort and Ararat are not included in the current proposals.

The Project sections are shown in Figure 1-1. A summary of each Project section and the current status of each section are provided in Table 1-1.

This EES is for Section 3 (Ararat to Stawell) of the Western Highway Project. The Section 3 Project Area is shown in Figure 1-2.

Table 1-1 Western Highway Project Sections

| Section | Location | Length (approximate) | Status |
|---------|------------------------|----------------------|--|
| 1a | Ballarat to Burrumbeet | 8km | Construction commenced in April 2010, and is expected to be completed in 2012 |
| 1b | Burrumbeet to Trawalla | 23.5km | Construction commenced in May 2012 and is expected to be completed in 2014 |
| 1c | Trawalla to Beaufort | 3.2km | Construction commenced in late 2011 and is expected to be completed in 2012 |
| 2 | Beaufort to Ararat | 38km | Planning phase. Programmed for construction between 2013 and 2016. |
| 3 | Ararat to Stawell | 24km | Planning phase. Programmed for construction between 2014 and 2016. Construction of Section 3 is subject to future funding allocations. |

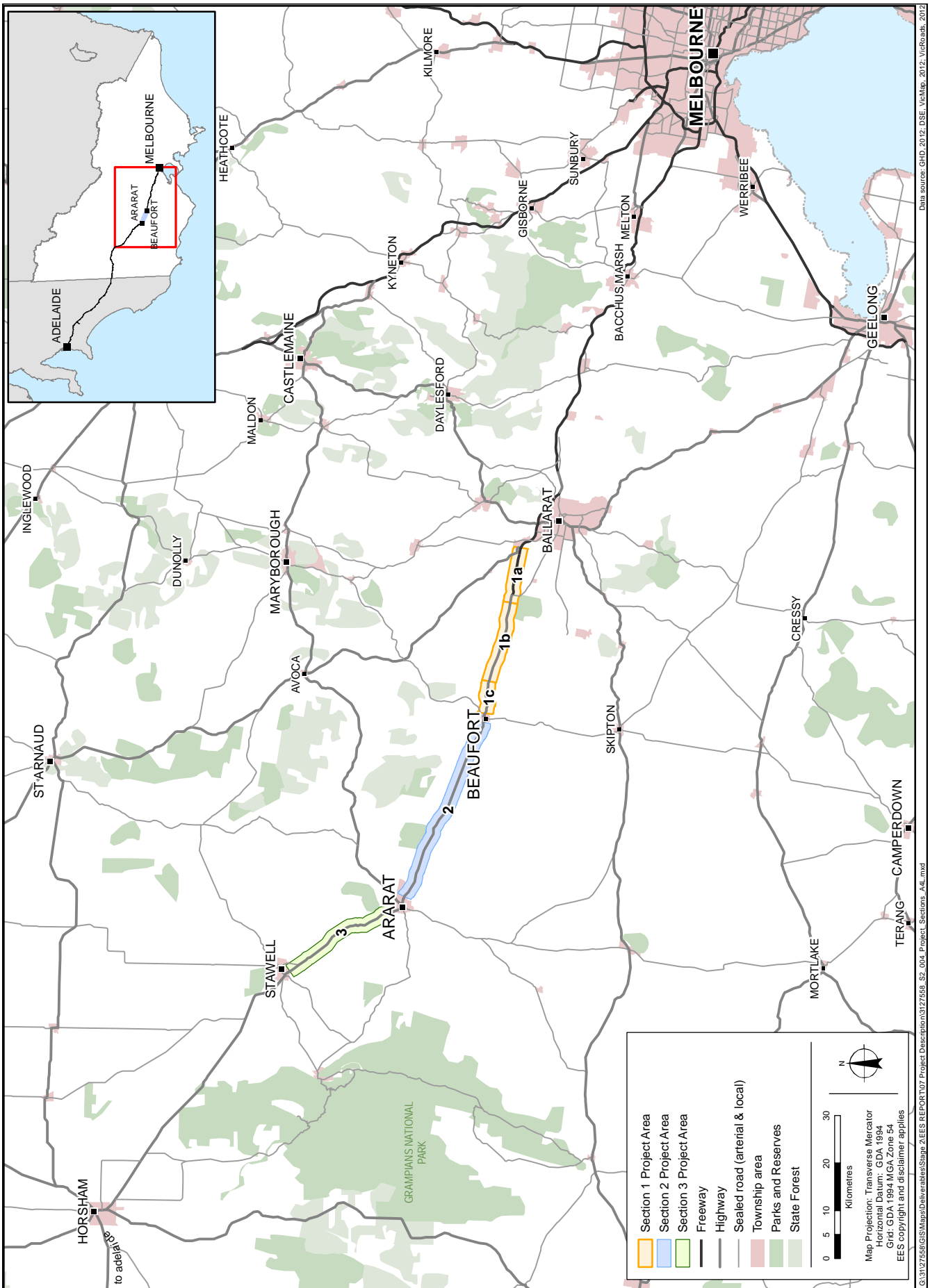


Figure 1-1 Western Highway Project Sections

G:\3127558\GIS\MapData\Deliverables\Stage 2\EES REPORT\07 Project Description\3127558_S2_004_Project_Sections_A4L.mxd Data source: GHD, 2012; DSE, VicMap, 2012; VicRoads, 2012

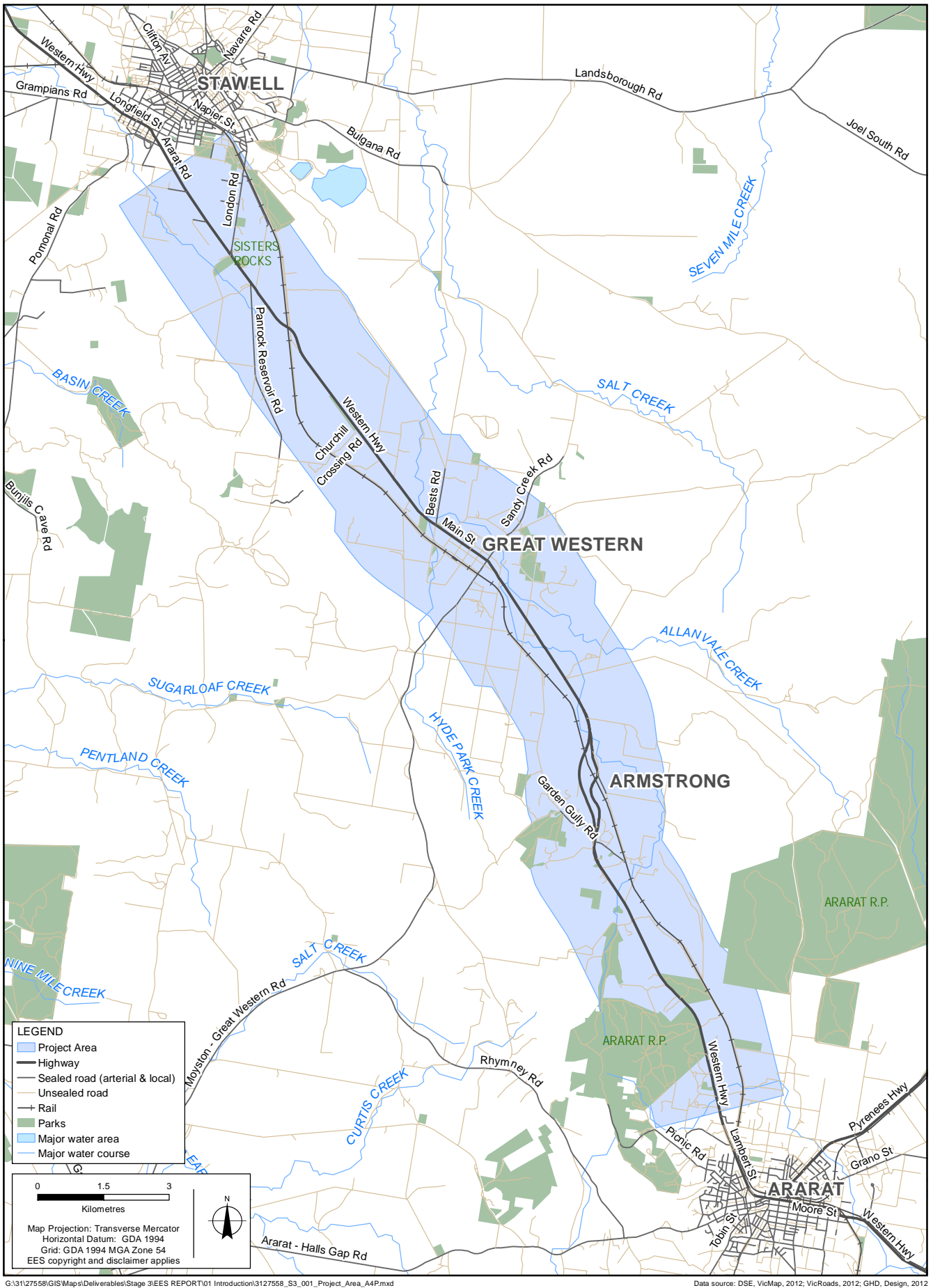


Figure 1-2 Western Highway Project – Section 3 Project Area

1.2 Project Summary - Section 3

Section 3 commences north of Pollard Lane, Ararat and extends for a distance of approximately 24km to the south east of Gilchrist Road, Stawell.

The Project objectives are to:

- Provide safer conditions for all road users by:
 - Reducing the incidence of head-on and run-off crashes
 - Improving safety at intersections; and
 - Improving safety of access to adjoining properties.
- Improve efficiency of freight by designing for High Productivity Freight Vehicles.
- Provide adequate and improved rest areas.
- Locate the alignment to allow for possible future bypass of Ararat.

1.2.1 Scope of Project

The Western Highway is currently supporting a large variety of vehicle types ranging from tourist traffic and commuter traffic to large B-Double trucks and even some farm machinery. The numbers of vehicles on the highway is also increasing, which means that there is an increasing problem of queuing behind slow moving vehicles.

The current configuration of the Western Highway is a two lane, single carriageway highway. This configuration of the highway has remained unchanged for almost a century in some locations.

In order to achieve the Project objectives listed in Section 1.2, VicRoads is proposing to duplicate the Western Highway between Ararat and Stawell.

This EES assesses Section 3 of the Project, which involves construction of dual two-lane carriageways containing two railway crossings, four significant waterway crossings and 28 minor waterway crossings and a north-eastern bypass of the Great Western township.

1.2.2 Requirements for an EES and Controlled Action

On 27 October 2010, the then Victorian Minister for Planning determined that an EES was required to document the likely environmental effects of the Project.

On 17 December 2010, the delegate for the Commonwealth Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities determined the Project to be a controlled action that requires assessment and approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The EES process is to be applied as an accredited process under the

EPBC Act in accordance with the bilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and Victorian governments. This means that the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities will make a decision whether to approve the Project under the EPBC Act, based on the EES and not a separate assessment process.

1.2.3 Section 3 EES Project Area

The Project area defines the area that was considered for alignment options and was studied to assess potential impacts and benefits of the Project for the EES. The Section 3 Project area, for the purpose of this EES, is approximately 1500 metres (m) either side (east and west) of the existing highway, except around Great Western where the Project area extends up to 1800m (encompassing the extent of new alignment possibilities). This allowed for assessment of options where the alignments deviated from the existing highway.

Figure 1-2 shows the Project area boundary and Technical Appendix A contains map books that show the proposed alignment for the Project. Some of the assessments undertaken to inform this EES have adopted larger study areas than the Project area for the purposes of characterising relevant effects. These are described in the specialist impact assessment reports appended to this EES and in the associated chapters.

1.3 Project Proponent

The proponent for the Project is Roads Corporation of Victoria (VicRoads). VicRoads is a statutory authority whose responsibilities are outlined in the *Transport Integration Act 2010*. It is one of several State Government agencies that assist the Government to achieve its integrated transport policy objectives. VicRoads also administers a number of other Acts and Regulations including the *Road Management Act 2004* and the *Road Safety Act 1986*. The VicRoads Chief Executive is accountable to the Minister for Roads, reporting through the Secretary of the Department of Transport.

VicRoads supports Victoria's liveability and economic prosperity by planning, developing and managing the arterial road network and delivering registration and licensing services. VicRoads manages over 22,000km of roads and 22 million transactions a year for 3.7 million licensed drivers and 4.9 million registered vehicles.

As the statutory authority for arterial roads (including highways and freeways), VicRoads is responsible for the duplication of the Western Highway and is the proponent for this Project.

1.4 Structure of Environment Effects Statement

The draft EES Scoping Requirements were placed on public exhibition in May 2011 and then issued by the Minister for Planning in their final form in September 2011.

The EES Scoping Requirements provide guidance on the range of environmental matters to be investigated and documented in the EES including Commonwealth requirements under the EPBC Act. The EES is generally structured in accordance with these EES Scoping Requirements. Table 1-2 summarises the structure of the document and the content of each chapter.

Table 1-2 EES Structure

| Chapter No. | Chapter title | Chapter summary |
|-------------|--|--|
| 1 | Introduction | Describes the Project and the proponent, and the objectives of the Project. |
| 2 | Project Rationale | Describes the rationale and policy context for the Project. |
| 3 | Legislation, Policy and Assessment Framework | Describes the approvals framework and the relevant legislation and policies to the Project. |
| 4 | Approach to the EES | Describes the methodology used to prepare this EES including selection of a preferred option, assessment of environmental risks, assessment of potential impacts and development of measures to ameliorate or manage impacts. |
| 5 | Project Alternatives | Describes alternative proposals which may still allow the objectives of the Project to be met, and details reasons for the selection and rejection of particular options. |
| 6 | Project Description | Outlines the proposed development and its components for both construction and operation. |
| 7 | Stakeholder and Community Engagement | Describes the key stakeholders in the Project, the consultation undertaken by the proponent in relation to the Project, and the major issues identified by stakeholders and the community. |
| 8 | Planning and Land Use | Describes the physical, biological, cultural, social and economic environments that the Project would operate within, the potential risks and impacts of the Project upon the existing environment, the mitigation and management measures that would be undertaken to minimise these risks and impacts, and the estimated residual environmental effects of the Project. |
| 9 | Traffic and Transport | |
| 10 | Soils and Geology | |
| 11 | Groundwater | |
| 12 | Surface Water | |
| 13 | Biodiversity and Habitat | |
| 14 | Cultural Heritage | |
| 15 | Air Quality | |
| 16 | Noise and Vibration | |
| 17 | Visual and Landscape | |
| 18 | Social | |
| 19 | Economic | |
| 20 | Matters of National Environmental Significance | Summarises the assessment of matters of national environmental significance that are required to be addressed under the Commonwealth <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> . |
| 21 | Environmental Management Framework | Outlines the VicRoads safety and environmental management process, and describes the environmental management plan that would be used in the construction, operation and rehabilitation of the Project. It also outlines the monitoring programs, auditing and reporting that would be carried out for the Project, and any environmental offsets that VicRoads is committed to. |
| 22 | Conclusion | Presents the conclusions of the EES. |

To characterise the baseline conditions of the environment and assess the potential impacts from the Project, a number of specialist studies were completed. These are outlined in Table 1-3, along with the corresponding EES chapter. These technical reports have been attached as appendices to the EES.

Note that where the conditional tense is used through the EES (e.g. the use of the word 'would' rather than 'will'), this is in reference to the possibility that the Project may not be approved and may therefore not proceed. If however, the Project does proceed, all proposed management measures outlined in Chapter 21 (Environmental Management Framework) would be implemented.

Table 1-3 Studies completed for the Western Highway Project Section 3 EES

| Study | Organisation | Relevant EES Chapter | Relevant Appendix |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Planning and Land Use | GHD Pty Ltd | Chapter 8 | Appendix C |
| Traffic and Transport | GHD Pty Ltd | Chapter 9 | Appendix D |
| Soils and Geology | GHD Pty Ltd | Chapter 10 | Appendix E |
| Groundwater | GHD Pty Ltd | Chapter 11 | Appendix F |
| Surface Water | GHD Pty Ltd | Chapter 12 | Appendix G |
| Biodiversity and Habitat | Ecology & Heritage Partners Pty Ltd | Chapter 13 | Appendix H |
| Cultural Heritage | Andrew Long & Associates | Chapter 14 | Appendix I, J, K |
| Air Quality | GHD Pty Ltd | Chapter 15 | Appendix L |
| Noise and Vibration | GHD Pty Ltd | Chapter 16 | Appendix M |
| Visual and Landscape | Aspect Studios Pty Ltd | Chapter 17 | Appendix N |
| Social | GHD Pty Ltd | Chapter 18 | Appendix O |
| Economic | GHD Pty Ltd | Chapter 19 | Appendix P |

**Western Highway – looking south towards Armstrong Deviation**