

Case Study

Infrastructure Construction Phase Project

W2BH (John Holland, MPC Kinetic and WaterNSW) | Wentworth to Broken Hill Pipeline Project

The overall aim of the Wentworth to Broken Hill Pipeline (W2BH) project was to construct a 270km pipeline and associated infrastructure (including four pump stations, a 720ML bulk water storage and high voltage power lines) to transfer up to 37.4ML per day of water from the River Murray to the Mica Street Water Treatment Plant in Broken Hill. There was a need for the pipeline to be operational before Broken Hill's supply of water from the Darling River ran out, as a result of severe drought conditions experienced by much of NSW.

The integrated Community Engagement Team was responsible for managing all community and stakeholder engagement activities during the design and construction stages of the project. WaterNSW and JV personnel worked closely together to deliver consistent messaging, identify whether issues were to do with broader water policy or related directly to the project and quickly resolve any issues that were raised by community members.

In order to achieve the project objectives, the community and stakeholders were engaged at different levels of participation throughout construction. The different levels of public participation were guided by the IAP2 Spectrum, with stakeholders engaging mostly at the 'inform', 'consult' and 'involve' levels, with some engagement taking place at the "collaborate" level.

At project commencement the team developed a comprehensive Communications and Engagement Strategy that detailed the approach to effectively minimising and managing community impacts associated with the project. The community engagement team rolled out an extensive communication, engagement and education program to inform the community of construction work and collaborate to deliver positive outcomes when faced with a number of construction related issues.

In order to achieve positive outcomes with the local community during construction, the project Community Engagement Team implemented a program that went above and beyond the expectations of a standard construction project, recognising the substantial community and stakeholder risks that needed to be managed. The team undertook the following activities which contributed significantly to increasing community awareness and understanding of the project and provided opportunities for the community to be involved in developing solutions to minimise community or stakeholder disturbance during construction.

Due to the size and nature of this critical water security project, the public played a limited role in major decisions related to the project need and scope or alternative options for supplying Broken Hill with water. During construction, there were multiple opportunities for residents, businesses and other stakeholder to provide input on decisions that had potential to impact on them. The scale of these decisions varied greatly, and the level of engagement was adjusted accordingly. Examples where the community and stakeholders had input into decisions during construction included:

- Setting requirements for the team to adhere to when passing through or using properties to store vehicles or construction materials.
- Making changes to the pipeline alignment within a designated construction corridor to minimise the removal of vegetation or avoid impacting on roadside memorials
- Choosing whether to participate in the Project Dilapidation Program
- Agreeing on property access arrangements when pipelaying took place near residential properties or businesses to minimise inconvenience for property owners and customers
- Adjustments to scheduled construction activities to minimise disruptions to events such as school examination periods and major community events
- The approach to be taken when returning salvaged Aboriginal cultural artefacts to Country, following the completion of construction.

Case Study



The Wentworth to Broken Hill Pipeline was delivered within a highly complex social, political and environmental setting. In addition to being 'the biggest project in town' there was a high degree of interest from the wider community and political stakeholders. The 2019 NSW State election, extreme drought conditions and concerns over water management of Darling River and Murray Darling Basin provided challenging local context for the project.

Prior to the commencement of construction, WaterNSW recognised that a number of stakeholder groups and segments of the community were dissatisfied with the perceived lack of transparency and level of community involvement in the process undertaken by the NSW Government to select a water security option for Broken Hill. The team commenced construction in a challenging environment where misinformation about the project was widespread and a vocal segment of the community was disengaged and sceptical about any opportunities for genuine involvement with the project during construction.

Misinformation about the project's role in broader water policy

Misinformation about the Project in relation to the NSW Governments broader water policy and the role of the JV meant that many stakeholders were initially unwilling to work with the community team. During early consultation, the community team needed to make it clear to stakeholders that the JV had no input into past or present management of the Murray-Darling system and that the object of consulting with them was to ensure that construction impacts to them were limited. The amount of time spent consulting with directly impacted stakeholders meant that the community team were able to listen to stakeholder views on the broader water policy, explain the role of the Project and the JV within this policy and still achieve the engagement objective. Allowing stakeholders to voice their opinions and concerns without disregarding them helped build trust in the team and understanding of the Project within the community.

It was critical that media outlets in the region were informed and educated about the Project and the activities that were being undertaken. By building positive relationships with media outlets in the area, we were able to provide them with regular updates on the project and quickly respond to any media enquiries. Engaging with media outlets to assist them in reporting accurately, resulted in the wider community being better informed about the Project and gave the media on more context on where the Project sat within the broader water policy. The positive result of this was that during protests held in Wentworth about the pipeline and broader water policy, reporting by the local media was balanced and fair.

Trees and roadside memorials within the construction footprint

During the W2BH Project early consultation phase, the Community Engagement Team was able to identify concerns from key stakeholder groups, particularly in relation to the pipeline route selected. The pipeline route was determined during WaterNSW's extensive planning and approvals process, which eventually formed the Review of Environmental Factors (REF). The pipeline construction team was required to only work within the parameters outlined in the REF, which was a 25m construction corridor. While the 25m corridor was not overly onerous to construction methodologies, it did present a number of challenges in that some sections of the route would result in the removal of mature trees and many roadside memorials, which were flagged by stakeholders as important to the community.

Four sections of trees deemed important to community were identified, namely a double row of 40+ mature trees on the approach to Broken Hill, a string of 10 mature trees on the city's main road, a trio of mature trees located in Slag Street and one single mature tree located outside the region's only highway roadhouse.

With the pipeline route running parallel to the Silver City Highway, the Community Engagement Team sadly identified more than two dozen roadside memorials and also the "Bra Tree", which recognised the passing of a well-known local woman from breast cancer. The Bra Tree had for many years served as community beacon of strength for breast cancer sufferers and survivors, and its branches were regularly adorned with the bras of locals and travellers.

The Community Engagement Team was able to mitigate potentially negative community sentiment and damage to these trees and memorials, through close collaboration with the project's engineering, design and construction teams. This collaboration resulted in construction crews agreeing to slightly altering the pipeline route, or to use different machinery and methodologies, to ensure that these trees and memorials could be kept in place, while still keeping within the 25m REF requirements.

Before construction commenced, the Community Engagement Team utilised the local police database and media clippings to trace and contact all known families of the roadside memorials, to assure those families that their roadside memorial had been identified and cordoned off, to ensure they would not be disturbed during construction. The Project's effort to save the trees and memorials was positively acknowledged by affected families and local residents, and the efforts received positive media coverage to the wider community.