

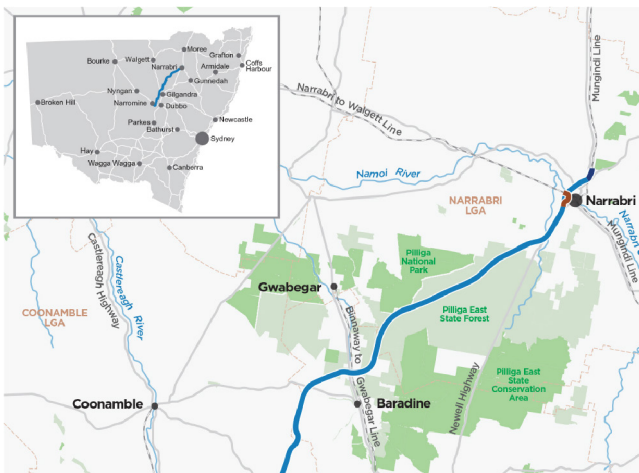
Crossing the Pilliga forests

Artist's impression of the rail corridor, looking north, located alongside the Cumbil Road, Baradine.

The Pilliga forests portion comprises approximately one quarter of the 306km Narromine to Narrabri (N2N) greenfield rail project.

Once built, the N2N 'missing link' will connect the section of Inland Rail under construction between Narrabri and North Star to the Parkes to Narromine section that is already complete and supports freight rail connections to Adelaide and Perth.

The area of the Pilliga forests the Inland Rail route traverses is a semi-arid woodland comprising several State Forests managed by the Forestry Corporation of NSW (FCNSW), traditionally reserved for use by primary industries including timber production.



The route, in blue, through the Pilliga forests

Choosing the route

The Pilliga forests route was determined over a 10-year period of extensive stakeholder consultation and various route option assessments.

This final alignment was validated following a Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) of all options. The rationale for choosing the route through the Pilliga forests includes:

- Reduced property impacts (acquisition, severance and amenity changes), affecting only two vs 70 landowners
- Avoids traversing prime agricultural farmland
- More direct route saves up to 12 minutes and meets the Inland Rail service offering of less than 24-hour transit time
- Once the corridor is operational, general public transport impacts will be minimal with 16 public level crossings maintained along the Pilliga alignment.

Approvals required

Prior to ARTC Inland Rail taking possession of the land parcels required to construct the Inland Rail corridor, two key statutory processes must occur.

The Pilliga State forests are Crown Land that has been dedicated by the Governor as State Forest under the *NSW Forestry Act 2012*. For access to be granted this dedication must be revoked by the NSW Parliament. The land can then be acquired by Transport for NSW and leased to ARTC Inland Rail for construction to begin.

ARTC Inland Rail must also obtain planning approval from the NSW Minister for Planning. Approval is granted on recommendation by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment (DPE). The approval process involves field studies and investigations, modelling and consultation with stakeholders to develop an understanding of the project's potential impacts and mitigation measures. This is documented in the project's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

ARTC Inland Rail is consulting with FCNSW and other key Pilliga forests stakeholders to better understand the area, potential impacts and mitigation measures.

Managing environmental impacts

At ARTC Inland Rail, we are committed to responsibly managing, minimising and mitigating unavoidable environmental impacts of the project and acknowledge this is a fundamental expectation of communities along our alignment.

We recognise the local community has a strong appreciation of the ecological values connected to the flora and fauna of the Pilliga forests.

ARTC Inland Rail is working closely with the NSW Biodiversity Conservation and Science (BCS) division of DPE to understand and minimise impacts on the area's flora and fauna habitats. We are implementing four key initiatives to bolster our knowledge of the region and further reduce the impact of construction and operational activities on the natural environment.

1. Koala population studies

ARTC Inland Rail has conducted ecological studies to determine koala habitats between Narromine and Acacia Ridge in Queensland, including the Pilliga forests.

These involved thermal drone surveys and an independently certified expert report into koala habitats, carried out in 2021, and a Koala genetics study that began in mid-2022.

Study findings will guide targeted management measures to appropriately address potential construction impacts on local habitats.

For more information on the route history visit inlandrail.artc.com.au/where-we-go/route-history/ or scan this QR code



2. Fauna Connectivity Strategy

To minimise impacts on fauna once Inland Rail is built and operational, ARTC Inland Rail has developed a preliminary Fauna Connectivity Strategy in consultation with BCS. The strategy is included in the updated Biodiversity Development Assessment Report and will be made publicly available. The strategy identifies fauna connectivity structures and measures to improve connectivity for fauna species:

- dedicated fauna underpasses with fauna furniture to encourage the movement of fauna (such as the Koala and Pilliga mouse in areas of preferred habitat)
- canopy bridges at regular intervals and wooden barrier poles at selected bridges
- landscaping of the rail corridor to encourage movement of fauna across the gap
- fencing to direct fauna towards crossing structures.

A Final Fauna Connectivity Strategy will identify the type and location of all connectivity structures to be included in the N2N section's detailed design.

3. Biodiversity offsets

Native vegetation and habitats located within the Pilliga forests which are unavoidably impacted by construction will be offset under ARTC Inland Rail's NSW Biodiversity Offset Delivery Strategy.

In the Pilliga forests, approximately 1,791 hectares associated with the Inland Rail corridor and construction zone will be offset under the NSW Government's Biodiversity Offsets Scheme.

4. Approach to environmental management

The management of environmental impacts during construction will be documented in the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), to be prepared by the construction contractor in consultation with relevant agencies. It must comply with the *Environmental Management Plan Guideline for Infrastructure Projects* (DPIE, 2020) and the Inland Rail Construction Environmental Management Framework.

The CEMP outlines the project's commitments to environmental management, including the identification of environmental aspects to be managed, and how environmental values will be protected and enhanced. It also identifies mitigation measures to be included in the project's detailed design.

The CEMP will be regularly updated to address community concerns and reflect changes in environmental management procedures, new techniques and relevant legislative requirements.

Environmental impacts during operation will be managed by ARTC's Environmental Management System.

Key features of the Inland Rail alignment through the Pilliga forest will include:



RAIL CORRIDOR

Constructing approx 75km of new rail corridor



CROSSING LOOPS

1 crossing loop up to 2.2km long



BRIDGES

17 new bridges or viaducts



CROSSINGS

16 new level crossings

Avoiding cultural and historic impacts

Cultural heritage investigations undertaken during the N2N project's EIS development phase found significant Indigenous cultural heritage in the proposed rail corridor.

The Cumbil Forests Creek location contains a 0.5ha grinding groove site that is highly significant to the Gomeri People as a place where Aboriginal men once worked. The grinding grooves represent a key remaining visible aspect of Indigenous culture and are evidence of Indigenous occupation of the broader region.

Based on the recommendations of Indigenous community members and archaeological experts, we realigned the route to avoid and preserve this site of cultural significance.

Emergency planning and management

During construction, our civil contractor will manage fire risk in accordance with their Safety Management Plan, which will be developed in consultation with FCNSW.

During operations, ARTC will manage fire risk in accordance with standard operating procedures. ARTC is working closely with FCNSW to agree on site specific approaches including:

- Agreement that trains will not traverse the Pilliga forests during a fire
- Supply of mobile ramps and any necessary training for FCNSW to allow excavators and other firefighting equipment to traverse the rail line during a bushfire
- Continued dialogue and support via additional resources to manage fire season risk.

Level crossings

16 passive public level crossings are proposed in the N2N project's reference design to maintain connectivity in the Pilliga forests. Passive public level crossings use stop or give way signs for motorists, and 'look for trains' signs for pedestrians.

Once Inland Rail is operational, FCNSW will be responsible for signage maintenance in its capacity as the road manager.

Safety and public access

ARTC Inland Rail will endeavour to minimise impacts to recreational use through the Pilliga forests during construction. With 16 passive public level crossings proposed for installation, we anticipate minimal to no impact on general public access and use of roads within the Pilliga forests after construction.

Once the line is operational, ARTC will ensure safety along the entire N2N alignment by complying with all relevant National Rail Safety Standards, overseen by the Office of the National Rail Safety regulator (ONRSSR).

Want to know more?



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