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MEDIA RELEASE

History created at Wandong-Heathcote Junction as households connect to natural gas for first time

For the first time ever, hundreds of home and business owners at Wandong-Heathcote Junction - a flourishing region about 60km north of Melbourne - will soon be able to connect to natural gas after the construction of a \$6 million pipeline.

And in a major new development, Australian Gas Networks (AGN) - the country's leading gas distribution company - announced today the project has been expanded to include businesses and households on the western part of the town, an area not included in the original planning.

The milestone development is a significant boon to the district with hundreds of local homeowners and businesses expected to connect natural gas directly to their properties over the next 20 years.

AGN is driving the history-making \$5.8 million project to install about 17 kilometres of gas reticulation mains within Wandong-Heathcote Junction following a near-\$5 million funding commitment by the Victorian Government.

"Australian Gas Networks is delighted to be at the forefront of such a vital, history-making infrastructure project that is delivering such a key energy source to the region of Wandong-Heathcote Junction," AGN's Chief Operating Officer, Mr Andrew Staniford, said today.

"And now being able to expand the project to the western part of the town - on the western side of the railway - will create a further economic boost for the region," he said.

"Our expanded supply infrastructure network is great news for even more local businesses and households in the area, including in the rapidly growing western part of Wandong-Heathcote Junction.

"For the first time, local homeowners and businesses can connect to natural gas running straight past their properties, saving them the cumbersome task of having to use bottled LPG.

"Generally households choosing to connect to gas will not have to pay any up-front charges to AGN. We will provide - and fund the cost of - a service pipe and the meter in the customer's property.

"The response we have received from property owners - keen to hook up to natural gas as soon as they can - has been very positive.

"Importantly, the new infrastructure will provide a major economic boost for the area as more and more businesses and homeowners access the many benefits of natural gas for the first time."

It is anticipated over 650 homes and 20 businesses in the area will connect to natural gas over the next two decades.

The Wandong-Heathcote Junction project - which is being undertaken with financial support of the Victorian Government - is one of several major infrastructure projects in which AGN has been recently involved in Victoria.

This includes a \$14 million upgrade the Adelaide-based company completed last year to the natural gas pipeline that supplies Mildura, providing a major economic boost for the region.

Mr Staniford said a major marketing campaign was underway at Wandong-Heathcote Junction to advise potential new customers of the new natural gas network.

He urged new customers to take advantage of a range of AGN rebates of up to \$1500 to install natural gas appliances.

From 1 January, a range of new rebates are now available to support existing home customers' connection costs.

They include a \$500 "new connection" rebate, a \$500 rebate for a natural gas central heater, space heater and/or dedicated natural gas hot water system, and a \$100 rebate for any other natural gas appliance.

Mr Staniford said: "The expanded Wandong-Heathcote Junction project is one of the major projects we are currently undertaking in Victoria, and is part of the continual improvement program we roll out across all the jurisdictions in which we operate.

"It's a well-known fact that natural gas is a clean, safe, instant and cost effective energy source. We believe the availability of natural gas to property owners in the area will be a real economic growth opportunity for the region," he said.

"Our upgraded natural gas network provides a wonderful opportunity to offer these business and home owners the opportunity to connect to the network, and enjoy the many advantages of natural gas being supplied to their properties, while taking advantage of the great rebates available to them.

"Expanding our network into the Wandong-Heathcote Junction region means AGN is now ideally placed to target network growth and facilitate connections for new and existing customers."

For more information, visit www.australiangasnetworks.com.au

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