

2025 Basin Plan Evaluation Roadmap

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Acknowledgement of the Traditional Owners of the Murray–Darling Basin

The Murray–Darling Basin Authority pays respect to the Traditional Owners and their Nations of the Murray–Darling Basin. We acknowledge their deep cultural, social, environmental, spiritual and economic connection to their lands and waters.

The guidance and support received from the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations, the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations and our many Traditional Owner friends and colleagues is very much valued and appreciated.

Aboriginal people should be aware that this publication may contain images, names or quotations of deceased persons.

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1. Purpose of the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation and the Roadmap

1.1 Purpose of the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation

The 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation will play a critical role in tracking and communicating progress and achievement against the outcomes set out in the Basin Plan. The evaluation will also identify potential improvements to the Basin Plan, informing adaptive management and decision-making.

The purpose of 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation is to:

- inform the 10-yearly review of the Basin Plan in 2026
- contribute to ongoing Basin Plan implementation by Basin government water management agencies
- communicate the effectiveness, appropriateness and impacts of the Basin Plan to the intended audience.

The primary audience for the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation is the Australian Government Water Minister, the Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council and the Basin Officials Committee. The Basin Plan evaluation report and the associated products will be publicly available and published on the MDBA website.

Given the wide interest in the effectiveness of the Basin Plan in the context of the national significance of the Murray–Darling Basin, the findings and recommendations of the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation will be broadly communicated.

1.2 Purpose of the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation Roadmap

The purpose of the Roadmap is to describe the Authority's approach to the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation. The Roadmap sets out the design elements, key timeframes, activities and milestones, as well as roles and responsibilities of the Authority, Basin governments and other key stakeholders.

The Roadmap complements the Framework for the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation, which describes the requirements of the evaluation of the Basin Plan.

2. Overview

The Authority is responsible for leading the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation, including the development of the evaluation's final finding and recommendations. The Authority will be supported in their role by two separate evaluation panels, which will provide advice for the Authority's consideration.

The 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation will consist of two phases: a preparation phase and an evaluation phase.

The preparation phase includes all activities and tasks required to scope, assemble and analyse the evidence required for the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation. An Evaluation Design Panel will be established to guide the preparation of the evidence. The evidence will be collated from a range of sources, including reporting required under Chapter 13 of the Basin Plan. The scope and content of evidence will be guided by supporting documents such as evaluation plans. Basin governments and other key stakeholders will be engaged throughout the preparation phase.

An Evaluation Advisory Panel will be established towards the end of the preparation phase and continue into the evaluation phase of the process. This panel will work under the direction of the Authority. The Evaluation Advisory Panel will undertake an evaluative assessment of the available evidence against each of the key evaluation questions in the Basin Plan. The proposed findings and recommendations of this assessment will be provided to the Authority. The Authority will provide the proposed findings and recommendations to Basin governments and other key stakeholders for feedback and comment prior to finalisation.

The Authority will consider advice and feedback and prepare the final findings and recommendations in time to support the 2026 Review of the Basin Plan. The Evaluation will be completed by 30 June 2025.

The 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation is supported by a suite of planning documents which are outlined in Figure 1.

Planning documents menu 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation

This menu describes each of the planning documents intended to support the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation process.

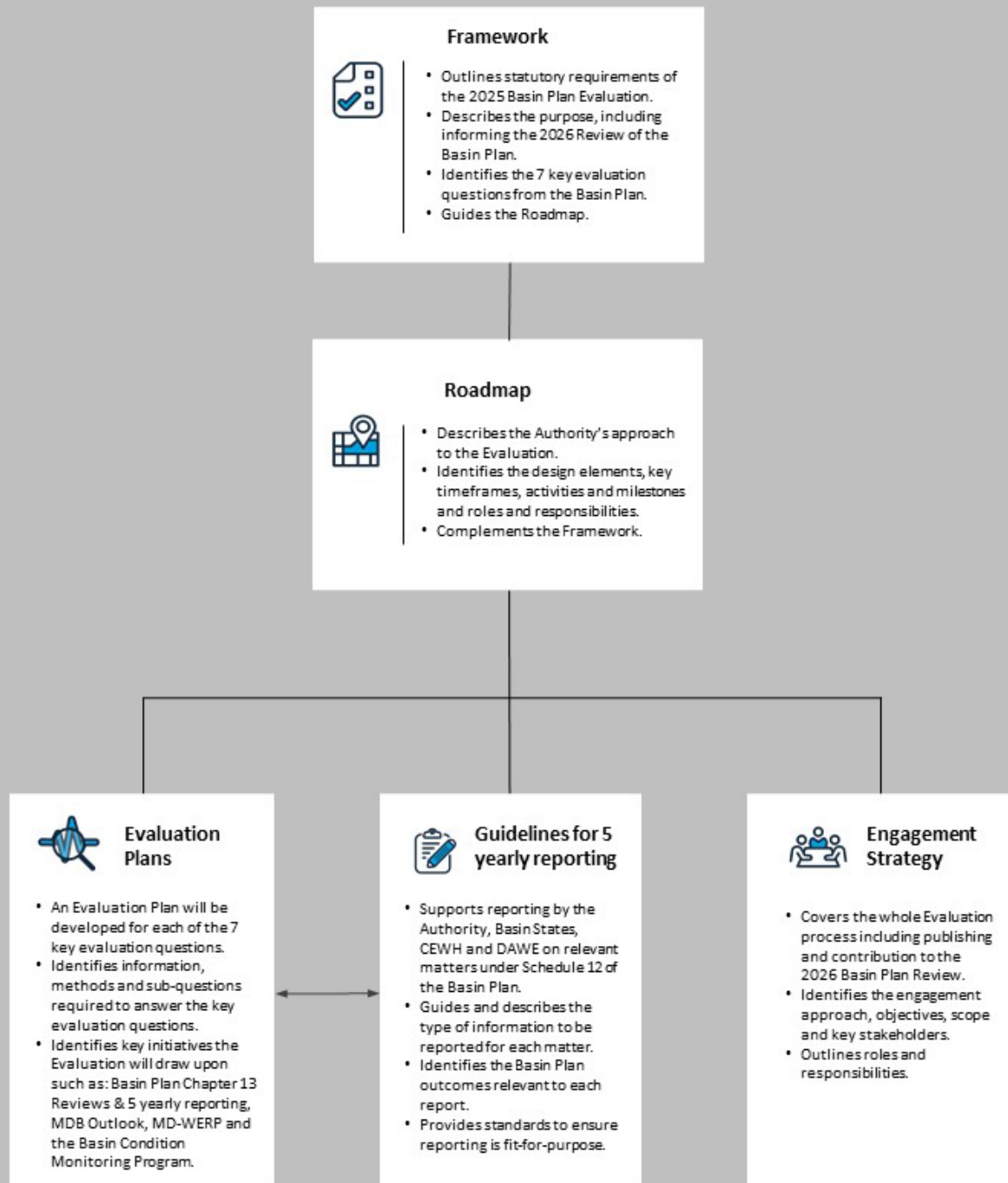


Figure 1: Planning documents menu

3. Phases and timeframes

The 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation consists of 2 phases:

1 Preparation Phase: **May 2022 to October 2024**

The purpose of this phase is to obtain, collate, analyse and quality assure the evidence for the evaluation phase.

2 Evaluation Phase: **November 2024 to June 2025**

The purpose of this phase is to undertake an evaluative assessment of the evidence and prepare findings and recommendations.

Important activities, milestones and dates are shown in Figure 2, these include:

- Two project check points that will be completed by June 2023 and June 2024.
- Delivery of the evidence by the conclusion of preparation phase on 31 October 2024.
- The completion of the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation by 30 June 2025.
- The publication of the findings and recommendations by September 2025.

The project check points will be led by the Authority and are an opportunity to take stock of progress prior to the completion of the preparation phase and respond to any emerging risks. The check points will be a collaborative process (see Section 4.4 Roles and responsibilities in the preparation phase).

2025 Basin Plan Evaluation timeline

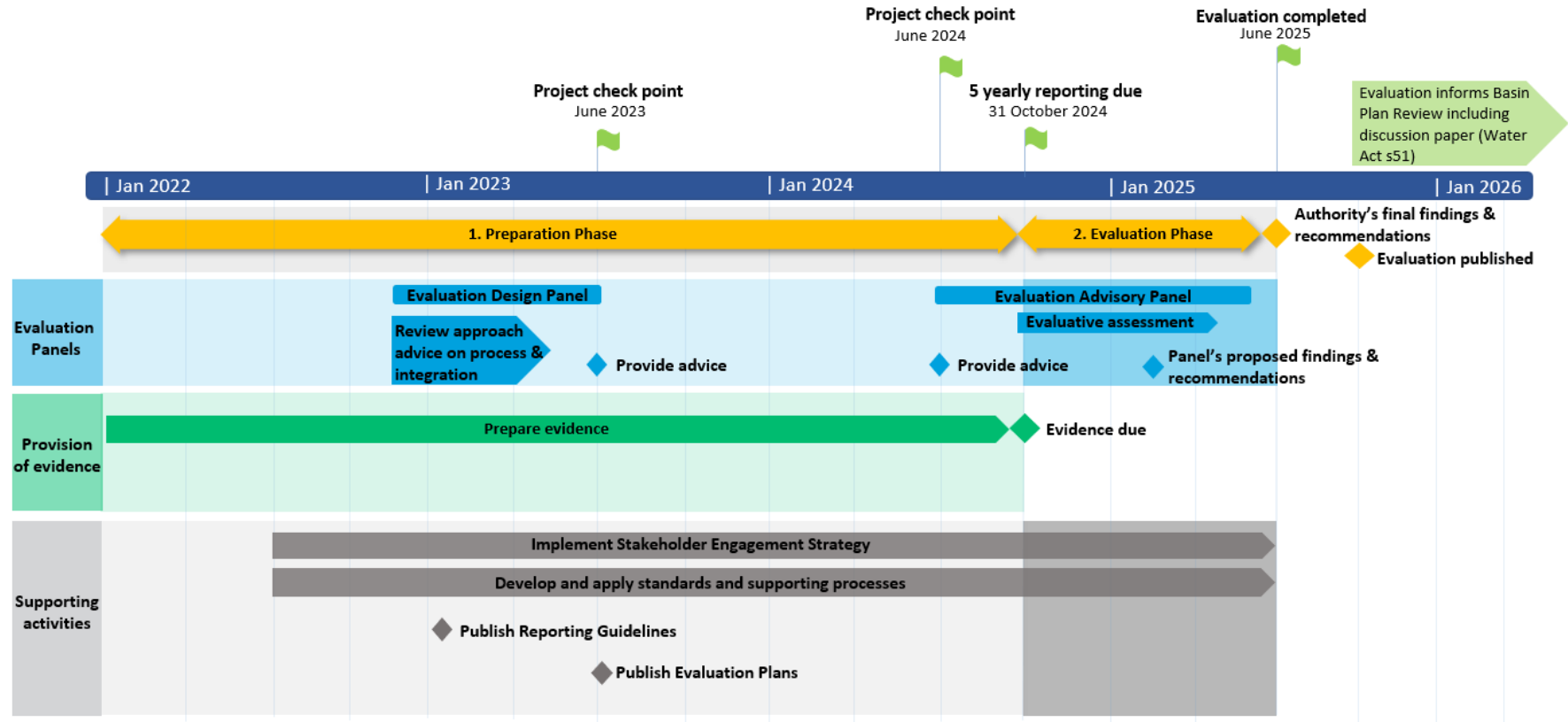


Figure 2: 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation timeline

4. The Preparation Phase

The preparation phase (May 2022 to October 2024) has been divided into 3 components:

1. The Evaluation Design Panel.
2. The provision of evidence.
3. Supporting activities.

4.1 Evaluation Panels

Central to the approach for the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation is the use of two Evaluation Panels. The Evaluation Design Panel will be established during the preparation phase. The Evaluation Advisory Panel will be established and provide support during the final stages of the preparation phase, but its main function of assessing the available evidence will occur during the Evaluation Phase.

Both Panels will be established as advisory committees under s203 of the *Water Act 2007* (Cth) (the Water Act) and guided by a workplan agreed by the Authority or an appropriate MDBA delegate.

The Evaluation Design Panel will be established and delivered entirely within the preparation phase, operating from December 2022 to June 2023. The terms of reference for the Evaluation Design Panel are to:

- (a) The Panel will support the Authority in their role to lead the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation (a legislative requirement under section 13.05(1) of the Basin Plan).
- (b) The Panel will have an agreed work plan guided by the 2022 Basin Plan Evaluation Framework and 2022 Basin Plan Evaluation Roadmap. The work plan, as well as set operating principles, will be updated as required, and agreed by the Chair the relevant MDBA Executive Director.
- (c) The Panel's key roles are to assist in the design and preparation for the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation by providing advice to the Authority on the following:
 - (i) the rigor of the proposed approach, including whether evidence identified through the evaluation plans can reasonably be expected to be fit-for-purpose;
 - (ii) critical or high-risk gaps in the planned evidence base;
 - (iii) priority and emphasis of each of the legislated key evaluation questions (section 13.06 of the Basin Plan);
 - (iv) an approach or methodology to integrate environmental, economic, social and cultural information; and
 - (v) the scope and tasks of the Evaluation Advisory Panel.
- (d) The Panel will also participate in the first project check point in June 2023, noting the specific nature of this function will be determined by the Authority in early 2023.

The Evaluation Advisory Panel will be established by May 2024, during the preparation phase, and assist the Authority in the second project check point in June 2024.

4.2 Provision of evidence

Evidence will be drawn from a range of sources. Evidence being prepared for the evaluation should be presented, analysed and synthesised in a way that draws insight and conclusions that are relevant to the key evaluation questions and to the Basin Plan. More guidance on the types of conclusions being sought from particular sources of evidence will be provided in the evaluation plans and guidelines for 5 yearly reporting.

Sources of evidence include Basin Plan 5 yearly reporting undertaken by the Authority, Basin States, Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, any invited submissions as well as other key programs and initiatives. All evidence will need to be received by 31 October 2024.

Reporters, i.e. those with responsibility to deliver 5 yearly reports, will be invited to participate in both the project check points and provide an update on the progress of their reports and identify any issues or risks.

4.2.1 Five yearly reporting

Five yearly reporting provided via Schedule 12 of the Basin Plan will be a key source of evidence for the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation. The 5 yearly reports will be prepared according to and guided by the products developed under the supporting activities component. Five yearly reports are due by 31 October 2024 (this date is earlier than would otherwise have occurred and was agreed by all parties in 2022 in order to ensure the Schedule 12 reporting was provided in a timely way for the evaluation).

4.2.2 Chapter 13 Reviews

Chapter 13 of the Basin Plan requires, within every 5 years, reviews of water quality and salinity management plan targets (s13.08), reviews of the environmental watering plan (s13.09) and reviews of the social and economic impact of the Basin Plan (s13.09A). These reviews are due to be completed in 2025, however, any relevant information that is available by 31 October 2024 will be included as evidence for the evaluation.

4.2.3 Invited submissions

Key stakeholder groups, including but not limited to, the Basin Community Committee, the Regional Community Forums, Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) and Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) will be invited to contribute to the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation.

Stakeholder groups in addition to those listed above will be identified in the Engagement Strategy. The form of the submission will be designed in partnership with the relevant stakeholders and the MDBA. Submission dates will be agreed with the relevant stakeholder groups but will be due ahead of 31 October 2024 to ensure they can be reviewed and collated by this time so that they can be effectively utilised alongside other sources of evidence in the Evaluation phase.

4.2.4 Other sources of evidence

Other relevant sources of information will be identified in the evaluation plans. Key MDBA led programs include:

- [Murray–Darling Basin Water and Environment Research Program](#) which is strengthening scientific knowledge of the Murray–Darling Basin through research partnerships.
- The MDB Outlook which will report on the condition and trend of environmental, social, economic and cultural values in the Basin, assess risks to these values, and provide insights to the future condition of the water dependent ecosystems, economies and communities in the Basin.
- Basin Condition Monitoring Program which aims to develop a deeper understanding at the local level of the key social, economic, environmental and cultural trends and challenges in the Basin.

Strong connection will be maintained between these programs and the evaluation to ensure their ability to inform the evaluation is optimised. The information anticipated to be drawn from these programs will be set out in the evaluation plans.

Additional sources of information, such as external reviews and reports will be identified throughout the preparation phase and at the project check points in June 2023 and June 2024. The project check points will be critical in identifying potential high-risk gaps and any additional evidence that may need to be sourced.

Information provided through Basin Plan annual reporting as well as the Basin Plan Annual Report will also be available as evidence for the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation. Guidance for annual reporting is provided through the Basin Plan annual reporting templates.

4.3 Supporting activities

Foundational supporting activities, such as evaluation plans, guidance for 5 yearly reporting, stakeholder engagement strategy, evaluative assessment tools, commence early in the preparation phase. These supporting activities are outlined below.

4.3.1 Evaluation Plans

An evaluation plan will be developed for each of the 7 key evaluation questions listed in the Basin Plan (s13.06). The Authority is required to ask these questions when undertaking an evaluation. The evaluation plans will identify the information required to answer each key evaluation question as well as the appropriate sources of this evidence. This includes the information the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation is expected to source from key initiatives, such as the [Murray–Darling Water and Environment Research Program](#), the MDB Outlook and the Basin Condition Monitoring Program. The Evaluation Design Panel will provide advice and review of evaluation plans. The Advisory Committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences may also provide advice to the Authority on evaluation plans.

The evaluation plans will:

- Outline the intended method or approach for answering each key evaluation question.
- Guide the scope of the evidence outlined in section 4.2 above.
- Define any sub-questions required.
- Consider the need to inform the 2026 Review of the Basin Plan, which includes placing emphasis on those key evaluation questions that are of particular interest.

The evaluation plans will be published mid-2023, and reviewed if necessary following the project check points in June 2023 and June 2024.

4.3.2 Guidance for 5 yearly reporting

The Authority, Basin States, Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water are responsible for reporting on particular Matters at either annual or 5 yearly reporting intervals (s13.14). The Matters are listed under Schedule 12 of the Basin Plan and relate to the objectives and outcomes of the Basin Plan.

Guidance on the requirements for 5 yearly reporting will be provided through 5 yearly Schedule 12 Guidelines to be prepared by early 2023. The guidelines will describe the type of information required for a given report and highlight the importance of providing conclusions aligned to the relevant to Basin Plan Chapter 5 outcomes. The guidelines will specify the need for standards to ensure thorough documentation, transparency and integrity of information. The specific data, information and methods used to draw conclusions will be at the discretion of the reporter and, to the degree practicable, shared at the project check points.

The requirements for each 5 yearly report will be consistent with the evaluation plans. The connection between evaluation plans and the guidelines will be reviewed at the project check points in June 2023 and June 2024.

4.3.3 Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

The strategy will be developed by early 2023 and will cover both phases of the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation, as well as publishing and alignment with other MDBA engagement activities. The strategy will identify the engagement objectives, the key stakeholders and the engagement approach.

4.3.4 Other supporting activities

The MDBA will develop a range of evaluation standards that will be applied in both the preparation and evaluation phases. The purpose of these standards is to:

- Efficiently and effectively bring together a wide range information.
- Provide a clear line of sight between information, findings, conclusions, and recommendations.
- To provide structure, transparency and rigor to the evaluation process.
- Ensure confidence in the evaluation.

Standards and processes that will be developed include:

- Confidence ratings for the evidence used in the evaluation.
- Descriptions of what success may look like or levels of performance achieved to guide the evaluative assessment.
- Consistent methods to assess the extent to which the Basin Plan has contributed to outcomes.
- Processes for identifying key risks, evidence gaps and whether additional evidence is required.

Existing information management standards will be applied, and where appropriate, additional standards created. This will promote a level of consistency in the management of data and information as well as clearly document the source and subsequent analysis of data. Applying these standards will ensure accountability and openness of the information that underpins the evaluation.

Where relevant these standards and processes will be provided to and applied by those responsible for preparing and providing evidence.

The preparation phase will be supported by a risk management process where risks are assessed and appropriate mitigation measures put in place.

4.4 Roles and responsibilities in the preparation phase

Name	Roles and responsibilities
Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responsible for leading all evaluations of the effectiveness of the Basin Plan (Principle 2 s13.03(2))• Set direction, scope and priorities• Appoint and direct the Evaluation Design Panel and Evaluation Advisory Panel• Lead project check points June 2023 and June 2024
Evaluation Design Panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide advice on direction, scope and priorities• Provide advice on integration of findings• Participate in project check point June 2023• Provide advice on scope and tasks for the Evaluation Advisory Panel
Evaluation Advisory Panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participate in the project check point June 2024
Basin Officials Committee Alternates	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide advice on direction, scope and priorities• Invited to participate in check points June 2023 and June 2024

Name	Roles and responsibilities
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide advice on 5 yearly reporting guidance, evaluation plans and other supporting activities • Participate in project check points June 2023 and June 2024
Reporters (those with responsibility to deliver 5 yearly reports)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable evaluation by collecting, analysing and reporting information in a fit for purpose manner (Principle 2 s13.03(2)) and applying relevant standards and processes • Prepare 5 yearly reports consistent with reporting guidance and evaluation plans • Participate in project check points June 2023 and June 2024 • Deliver 5 yearly reports by 31 October 2024
Advisory Committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide advice to the Authority related to the preparation of evidence • Invited to participate in project check points June 2023 and June 2024
Stakeholder groups, including (but not limited to) the Basin Community Committee, Regional Community Forums, MLDRIN, NBAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide advice • Provide evidence through the invited submission process ahead of 31 October 2024

5. The Evaluation Phase

The evaluation phase (November 2024 to June 2025) has been divided into 2 components:

1. Evaluative assessment.
2. Supporting activities.

5.1 Evaluative Assessment

Under the direction of the Authority, the Evaluation Advisory Panel will undertake an evaluative assessment of the evidence. The specific role of the Evaluation Advisory Panel in this assessment will be set by the Authority in early 2024 prior to the establishment of the Panel. The assessment will be guided by the standards and processes developed in the preparation phase as described in the supporting activities below (section 5.2).

The Panel will be available to meet with the Basin Officials Committee or its delegates where appropriate during the development of the proposed findings and recommendations to capture key strategic issues and perspectives.

5.1.1 Proposed findings and recommendations

The Evaluation Advisory Panel will draft responses to the key evaluation questions (Basin Plan s13.06) and provide a set of proposed findings and recommendations to the Authority. The Basin States, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, and other relevant bodies will be provided an opportunity to comment on these proposed finding and recommendations.

5.1.2 Findings, recommendations, and publication

The proposed findings and recommendations as well as the comments provided by the Basin States, Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, and other relevant stakeholders will be provided to the Authority. The Authority will consider this advice and prepare the final findings and recommendations by June 2025 in time to support the 2026 Review of the Basin Plan. The final evaluation, along with relevant supporting communication material, will be published on the MDBA website by September 2025.

5.2 Supporting activities

The MDBA will support the Evaluation Advisory Panel and the Authority during the evaluation phase. This support will include collating the evidence and applying the appropriate standards and processes developed during the preparation phase. This will assist the Evaluation Advisory Panel to understand the degree to which the key evaluation questions will be addressed by the available evidence, structure their responses to key evaluation questions, and allow the Panel to assess their overall confidence in the evaluative assessment. The evaluation phase will be supported by a risk management process where risks are assessed and appropriate mitigation measures put in place.

5.3 Roles and responsibilities in the evaluation phase

Name	Roles and responsibilities
Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct the Evaluation Advisory Panel• Consider the proposed findings and recommendations and comments received• Deliver final findings and recommendations
Evaluation Advisory Panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop proposed findings and recommendations• Consider comments on proposed findings and recommendations• Provide advice to the Authority
Basin Officials Committee/ Basin Official Committee Alternates	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide comment on proposed findings and recommendation• Meet with or respond to the Evaluation Advisory Panel as appropriate
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitate Basin governments comment on proposed findings and recommendation• Advice as requested by the Evaluation Advisory Panel
Reporters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide clarifying advice to the Evaluation Advisory Panel, where necessary
Advisory Committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide advice to the Authority on progress and content of the evaluation
Stakeholder groups, including the Basin Community Committee, MLDRIN, NBAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide advice to the Evaluation Advisory Panel

6. Further Information

For any further information please email Basinplanevaluation@mdba.gov.au.

Office locations – First Nations Country

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Goondiwindi – Bigambul Country


Griffith – Wiradjuri Country

Mildura – Latji Latji Country

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