

# Framework for the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation

August 2022

Published by the Murray–Darling Basin Authority  
MDBA publication no: 21/22  
ISBN (online): 978-1-922699-06-0



GPO Box 1801, Canberra ACT 2601

engagement@mdba.gov.au



1800 230 067



mdba.gov.au

© Murray–Darling Basin Authority 2022

### Ownership of intellectual property rights



With the exception of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, the MDBA logo, trademarks and any exempt photographs and graphics (these are identified), this publication is provided under a *Creative Commons Attribution 4.0* licence. (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)

The Australian Government acting through the Murray–Darling Basin Authority has exercised due care and skill in preparing and compiling the information and data in this publication. Notwithstanding, the Murray–Darling Basin Authority, its employees and advisers disclaim all liability, including liability for negligence and for any loss, damage, injury, expense or cost incurred by any person as a result of accessing, using or relying upon any of the information or data in this publication to the maximum extent permitted by law.

The Murray–Darling Basin Authority's preference is that you attribute this publication (and any Murray–Darling Basin Authority material sourced from it) using the following wording within your work:

### Cataloguing data

**Title:** Framework for the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation, Murray–Darling Basin Authority Canberra, 2022. CC BY 4.0

### Accessibility

The Murray–Darling Basin Authority makes its documents and information available in accessible formats. On some occasions the highly technical nature of the document means that we cannot make some sections fully accessible. If you encounter accessibility problems or the document is in a format that you cannot access, please contact us.

### 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.

# Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Purpose of this document .....	1
2	Basin Plan evaluation .....	2
2.1	Basin Plan evaluation requirement .....	2
2.2	Evaluation process.....	3
3	Purpose and audience of the Basin Plan evaluation .....	4
3.1	Purpose of Basin Plan evaluation .....	4
3.2	Audience for Basin Plan evaluation.....	4
4	Basin Plan program logic .....	5
4.1	Basin Plan implementation activities .....	7
4.2	Supporting activities.....	7
5	Evaluation questions, categories and priorities .....	8
5.1	Key evaluation questions .....	8
5.2	Evaluation categories .....	8
5.3	Priorities .....	9
6	Sources of evidence and evaluation planning.....	10
6.1	Sources of evidence.....	10
6.2	Evaluation planning.....	10
7	Evaluation findings and recommendations.....	11
8	Roles and Responsibilities .....	12
	Appendix A .....	13

## Figure list

Figure 1: Overarching program logic for the Basin Plan .....	5
Figure 2: Chapter 5 Objectives and Outcomes.....	6

# 1. Introduction

## What is evaluation?

Evaluation is an assessment that involves a systematic judgement of a policy or program's merit, worth or significance, using pre-determined and agreed criteria or questions. While evaluation is distinct from other activities such as condition assessments and intervention monitoring, it draws on evidence collected through these activities to help inform evaluation findings.

Evaluation is a key component of the policy cycle facilitating continuous and adaptive improvement. This supports one of the overarching objectives of the Murray–Darling Basin Plan, which is to establish a sustainable and long-term adaptive management framework.

The Authority's evaluation of the Basin Plan is an opportunity to assess progress towards achieving the intended outcomes as well as identify opportunities for improvements to implementation. The 10-yearly review of the Basin Plan required by the *Water Act 2007* will occur in 2026. Based on s13.05(1)(c) the Authority must therefore complete an evaluation of the Basin Plan by the end of 2025 to support the 10-yearly review of the Basin Plan in 2026.

## 1.1 Purpose of this document

This framework outlines the statutory requirements for undertaking evaluation functions under the Basin Plan. It is intended to support all Basin Plan evaluations, but with particular emphasis on guiding the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation.

The purpose of the Evaluation Framework is to:

- provide transparency to the evaluation process
- ensure the evaluation will meet the legislative requirements
- inform the continued implementation and improvement of the Basin Plan.

This Evaluation Framework builds on the 2019 Evaluation Framework used to guide the 2020 Basin Plan Evaluation. This Evaluation Framework incorporates lessons learnt from Authority's 2017 and 2020 evaluations of the Basin Plan. It also considers the requirements of the 2026 Review of the Basin Plan.

The implementation of the Evaluation Framework will be guided by an Evaluation Roadmap, which will set out specific details on approach, governance, roles and responsibilities and timeframes for the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation. The Evaluation Roadmap is due to be completed in early 2022.

## 2. Basin Plan evaluation

Chapter 13 of the Basin Plan sets out the program for evaluating the Basin Plan.

### 2.1 Basin Plan evaluation requirement

Chapter 13 of the Basin Plan sets out the requirements for the evaluation of the Basin Plan (Chapter 13, Part 3, Division 1; ss13.05-13.06).<sup>1</sup>

Section 13.05 (1) of the Basin Plan states:

*The Authority must evaluate the effectiveness of the Basin Plan against the objectives and outcomes set out in Chapters 5, 8 and 9, and by reference to the matters listed in Schedule 12, for the purposes of:*

- (a) annual reports on the effectiveness of the Basin Plan, as required by section 52A of the Act; and*
- (b) advising on the impacts of the Basin Plan before the end of 2020, as required by section 49A of the Act; and*
- (c) 10 yearly reviews of the Basin Plan, as required by subsection 50(1) of the Act; and*
- (d) any other reviews of the long-term average sustainable diversion limits (for example, following a request under subsection 50(2) of the Act).*

*Note: The Authority must publish the findings and recommendations arising from an evaluation: see section 13.18.*

Chapter 5 sets out the primary objectives and outcomes that will be used by the Authority to evaluate the Basin Plan. All other objectives, outcomes and targets, such as those in Chapter 8 and 9, are aligned with the primary objectives and therefore considered subsidiary. These subsidiary objectives, outcomes and targets will be used to evaluate Chapter 5 objectives and outcomes where appropriate.

In making an evaluation, the Authority must have regard to reports produced under Schedule 12 of the Basin Plan, the key evaluation questions, and any other relevant information (s13.05(3)). The matters in Schedule 12 relate to the Basin Plan as a whole as well as elements of the Basin Plan. The key evaluation questions are listed in s13.06.

The Basin Plan includes 11 principles that apply to monitoring and evaluating the Basin Plan (s13.03 and s13.04). Of particular relevance to this Framework is Principle 2 (s13.03(2)), which states “The Authority is responsible for leading all evaluations of the effectiveness of the Basin Plan, with Basin States, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and the Department enabling evaluations by collecting, analysing and reporting information (including data) in a fit for purpose manner”. Where appropriate, other principles that relate to this Evaluation Framework are referenced.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ref to Basin Plan

## 2.2 Evaluation process

The requirements outlined above will be met in the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation with the following process:

- Define purpose and audience
- Define program logic
- Define evaluation questions
- Identify sources of evidence
- Evaluate evidence
- Develop findings and recommendations

## 3. Purpose and audience of the Basin Plan evaluation

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

### 3.1 Purpose of Basin Plan evaluation

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.

### 3.2 Audience for Basin Plan evaluation

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 Evaluation will be broadly communicated.

## 4. Basin Plan program logic

Principle 4 (s13.04 (3)) states “Basin Plan monitoring and evaluation should be undertaken within the conceptual framework of program logic”. A program logic describes the rationale behind a program and describes the relationship between activities and outcomes. Principle 4 refers to the Australian Government’s [NRM MERI Framework](#). The NRM MERI Framework’s description of program logic acknowledges that to achieve and adequately report on desired outcomes there must be a focus on both the means and the ends.

An overarching Basin Plan program logic is presented in Figure 1. The program logic shows how the implementation activities relate to the intended outcomes described in the Basin Plan and is consistent with the program logic definition in the [NRM MERI Framework](#).

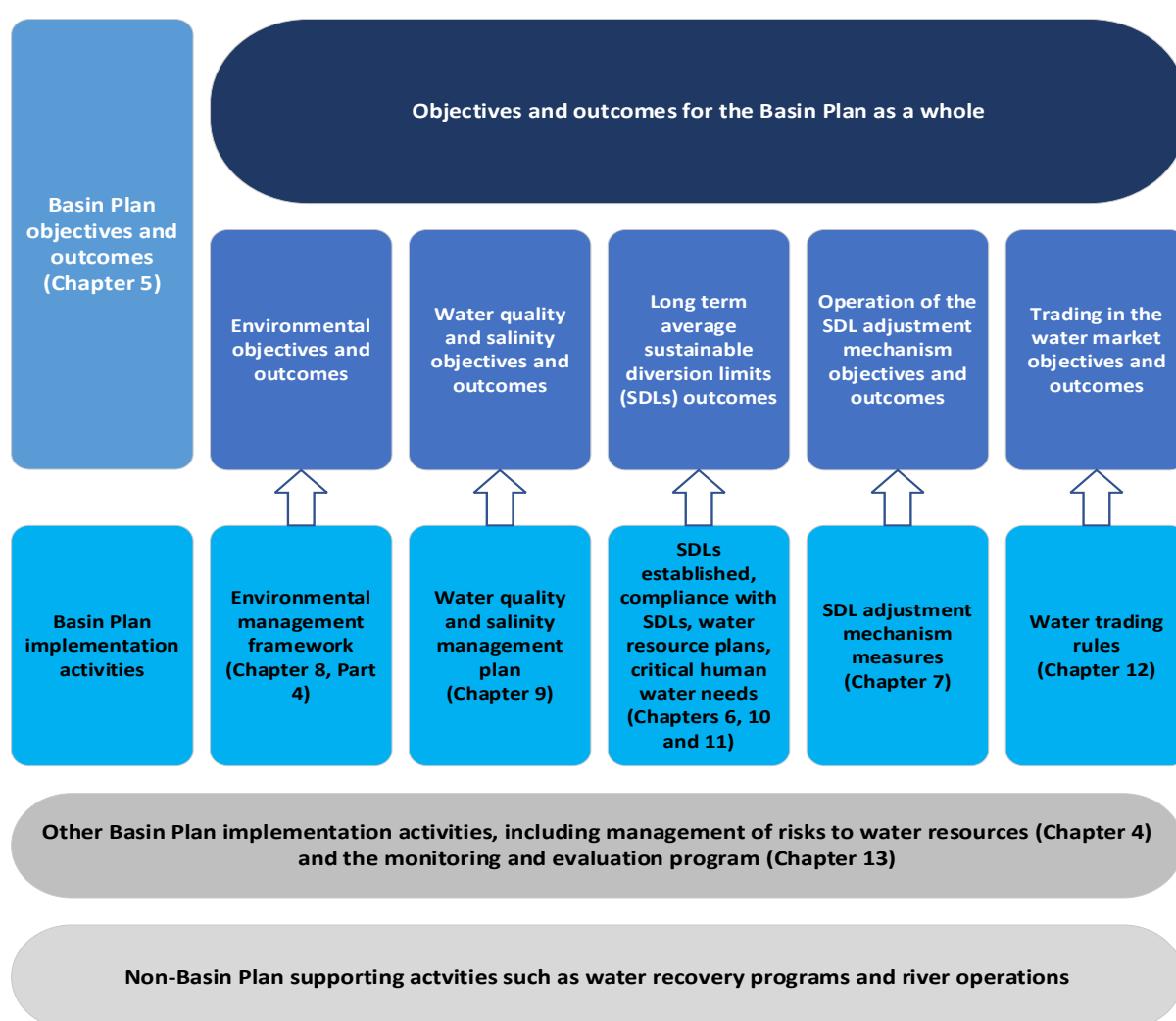


Figure 1: Overarching program logic for the Basin Plan

Objectives are the goals that the Basin Plan aims to achieve, whereas outcomes are the intended results if the objectives are achieved. The primary objectives and outcomes in Chapter 5 of the Basin Plan, cover both the Basin Plan as a whole and elements such as the environment, water quality and salinity, long-term average sustainable diversion limits, the operation of the SDL adjustment mechanism and trading in the water market. See Figure 2.



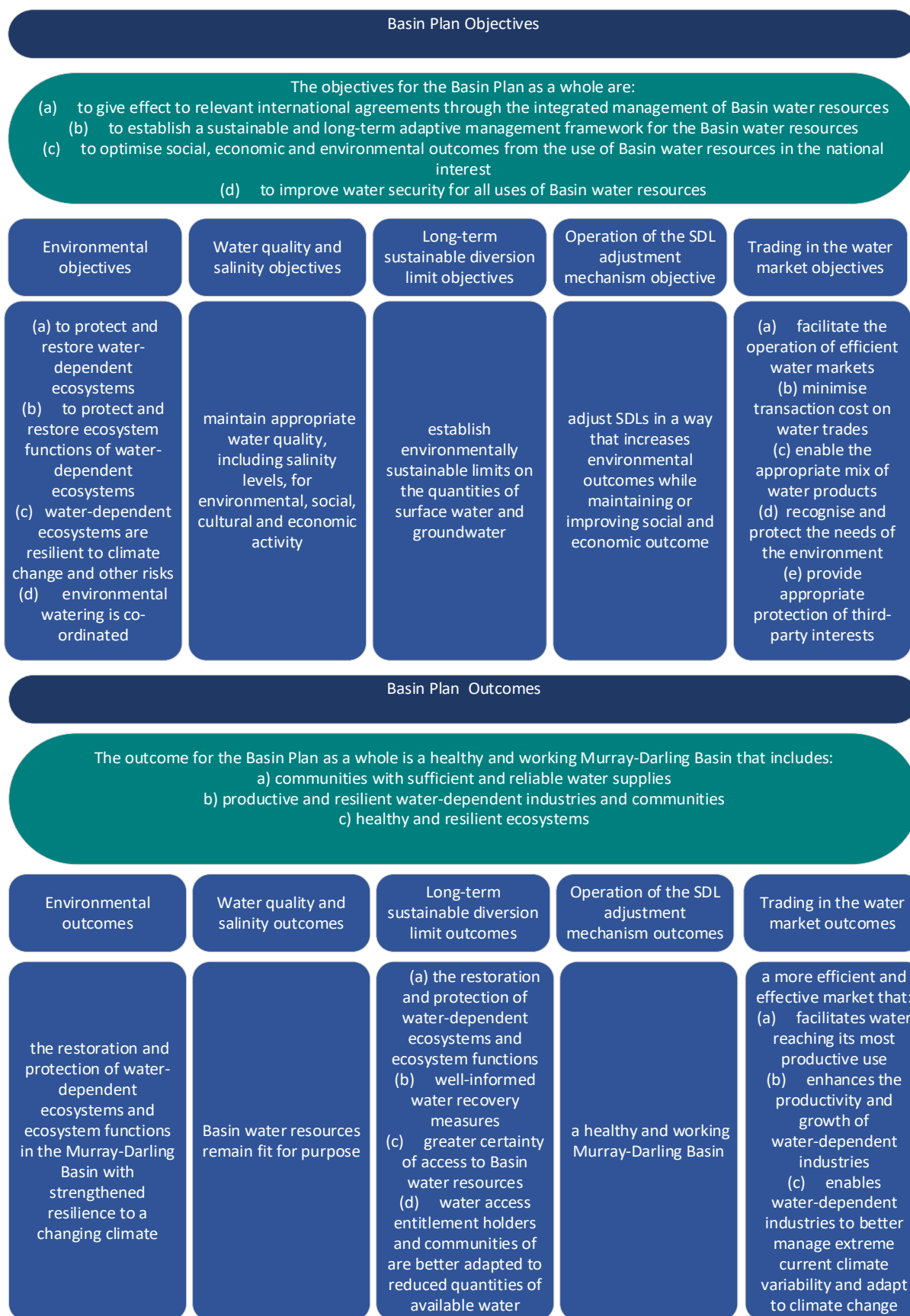


Figure 2: Chapter 5 Objectives and Outcomes

Subsidiary objectives and outcomes for managing environmental water are defined in Chapter 8 of the Basin Plan. Subsidiary objectives and outcomes for water quality and salinity management are defined in Chapter 9 of the Basin Plan. Targets by which to measure progress towards meeting objectives are described in both Schedule 7 (environmental objectives) and Chapter 9 (water quality objectives) of the Basin Plan. These will be used, where appropriate, to support assessments of the primary objectives and outcomes in Chapter 5 of the Basin Plan.

## 4.1 Basin Plan implementation activities

The Basin Plan specifies implementation activities that are intended to contribute to the achievement of outcomes and objectives. They include:

- the environmental management framework (Chapter 8, Part 4)
- the water quality and salinity management plan (Chapter 9)
- SDLs established, compliance with SDLs, water resource plans (Chapters 6 and 10)
- SDL adjustment mechanism (Chapter 7)
- critical human water needs (Chapter 11)
- water trading rules (Chapter 12).

## 4.2 Supporting activities

The implementation of the Basin Plan is supported by a range of other functions and activities that are delivered by all Basin governments. These include water recovery programs and river operations.

## 5. Evaluation questions, categories and priorities

Section 13.06 of the Basin Plan sets out the key evaluation questions that the Authority must ask when undertaking an evaluation. These have been classified into three evaluation categories. Priorities identified in the 2020 Evaluation of the Basin Plan will be considered as an input to the 2025 Evaluation.

### 5.1 Key evaluation questions

Section 13.06 of the Basin Plan specifies the following key evaluation questions:

*The key questions that the Authority must ask when making an evaluation referred to in section 13.05 are the following:*

- (a) to what extent has the intended purpose of the Basin Plan set out in section 20 of the Act been achieved?*
- (b) to what extent have the objectives, targets and outcomes set out in the Basin Plan been achieved?*
- (c) how has the Basin Plan contributed to changes to the environmental, social and economic conditions in the Murray-Darling Basin?*
- (d) what, if any, unanticipated outcomes have resulted from the implementation of the Basin Plan?*
- (e) how could the effectiveness of the Basin Plan be improved?*
- (f) to what extent were the actions required by the Basin Plan suited to meeting the objectives of the Basin Plan?*
- (g) to what extent has the program for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the Basin Plan contributed to adaptive management and improving the available scientific knowledge of the Murray-Darling Basin?*

### 5.2 Evaluation categories

The Australian Government's NRM MERI Framework identifies 5 categories of evaluation questions, however, the key evaluation questions identified in the Basin Plan align with the following three categories

1. Appropriateness – the degree to which a program's design and implementation are adequate to respond to existing needs of a range of stakeholders
2. Effectiveness – a measure of the extent to which a program, activity, or policy attains its desired objectives
3. Impact – changes produced by an intervention including those that are: positive and negative, intended and unintended, direct and indirect.

The remaining two categories identified in the NRM MERI Framework (efficiency and legacy) are not specifically addressed in the Evaluation questions in s13.06 of the Basin Plan. However, some

elements of efficiency and impact/legacy will be gathered via reporting inputs to the evaluation (for example see Appendix A) and will be incorporated into the evaluation as required.

Table 1: Alignment of Key Evaluation Questions with evaluation categories

Evaluation category	Key Evaluation Questions (KEQ) from Chapter 13 of the Basin Plan
<b>Appropriateness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KEQ (f) to what extent were the actions required by the Basin Plan suited to meeting the objectives of the Basin Plan?</li> </ul>
<b>Effectiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KEQ (a) to what extent has the intended purpose of the Basin Plan set out in section 20 of the <i>Water Act 2007</i> been achieved?</li> <li>• KEQ (b) to what extent have the objectives, outcomes and targets set out in the Basin Plan been achieved?</li> <li>• KEQ (e) how could the effectiveness of the Basin Plan be improved?</li> </ul>
<b>Impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KEQ (c) how has the Basin Plan contributed to changes to the environmental, social and economic conditions in the MDB?</li> <li>• KEQ (d) what, if any, unanticipated outcomes have resulted from the implementation of Basin Plan?</li> <li>• KEQ (g) to what extent has the program for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the Basin Plan contributed to adaptive management and improving the available scientific knowledge of the Murray–Darling Basin?</li> </ul>

## 5.3 Priorities

The [2020 Basin Plan Evaluation](#) identified six priority areas for attention by Basin governments in seeking to improve the health and productivity of the Basin. These 6 priority areas will be considered in the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation. The priority areas are:

- implementing the Basin Plan
- adapting to climate challenges and increasing resilience
- strengthening focus and support to enable social and economic outcomes
- establishing a clear and committed pathway for First Nations social and economic outcomes
- integrating water management with other activities to achieve environmental restoration
- advancing science and monitoring.

## 6. Sources of evidence and evaluation planning

### 6.1 Sources of evidence

The Authority, Basin States, Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and 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. The matters are listed under Schedule 12 of the Basin Plan and relate to the objectives and outcomes of the Basin Plan, see [Appendix A](#).

In making an evaluation, the Authority, must have regard to reports produced under Schedule 12, as well as other relevant information (s13.05(3)).

Other key sources of evidence include:

- the reviews of water quality and salinity management plan targets (s13.08)
- the reviews of environmental watering plan (s13.09)
- the reviews of social and economic impacts of the Basin Plan (s13.09A)
- annual analysis of the effectiveness of the Basin Plan (s52A Water Act)
- any assessments of the trends in the condition and availability of the Basin water resources and the social, economic, cultural context in which they are used (s13.11).

Other sources of evidence, in addition to the minimum core set outlined above, will be incorporated where appropriate.

In order to meet the timeframes, all sources of evidence to be used within the 2025 Evaluation of the Basin Plan must be provided by 31 October 2024. Following consultation with Basin governments, 5 yearly Schedule 12 reporting will be brought forward by one year to 31 October 2024 in order to meet this timeframe.

### 6.2 Evaluation planning

The Evaluation Roadmap will describe the steps required to plan and deliver the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation. It will also describe the need for supplementary planning documents such as evaluation plans. The evaluation plans will identify suggested methods and sources of evidence to answer the key evaluation questions (refer Australian Government NRM MERI Framework). Any critical gaps and appropriate additional sources of evidence will be identified.

A standardised approach will be developed to rate the confidence in the quality of evidence and support judgements made. This approach aims to ensure findings and recommendations of the evaluation are robust and defensible.

Evaluation planning will be undertaken in consultation with Basin States, Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, and based on advice from the Authority's Advisory Committee on Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences.

## 7. Evaluation findings and recommendations

Evaluation findings and recommendations will be derived from the assessment of the evidence and with regard to the key evaluation questions. The Authority will lead the development of the findings and recommendations.

Evaluation recommendations will be targeted at informing the implementation and amendments to the Basin Plan. The recommendations of the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation will explicitly inform the 2026 Review of the Basin Plan. Furthermore, the Basin Plan commits the Authority and the Basin States to have regard to evaluation findings when considering amendments to and when implementing the Basin Plan (s13.12(1)(c)). Where the evaluation identifies the need for improvement and adaptive management, the MDBA will work with Basin governments, external experts and key stakeholders to plan appropriate action.

Consistent with s13.18(1) of the Basin Plan, the Authority will publish the findings and recommendations arising from an evaluation. The Authority will provide the Basin States, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and any other relevant person or body with an opportunity to comment on the proposed findings and recommendations before being published (s13.18(2)).

## 8. Roles and Responsibilities

The Authority is responsible for leading all evaluations of the effectiveness of the Basin Plan with Basin States, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water enabling evaluations by collecting, analysing and reporting information (Principle 2) (13.03(2)).

Reporting obligations for each of the responsible parties are outlined in Schedule 12. Principle 3 (s13.04(2)) states that reporters should report against matters in a manner which reflects the degree to which they are responsible for those matters.

Specific governance and engagement arrangements, as well as more detail on responsibilities related to key tasks for the 2025 Basin Plan Evaluation, will be outlined in the Evaluation Roadmap.

Further information on roles and responsibilities are provided in:

- Principle 3: Commonwealth agencies and Basin States should report against matters in a manner which reflects the degree to which they are responsible for those matters.
- Principle 7: The best available knowledge (including scientific, local and cultural knowledge), evidence and analysis should be used where practicable to ensure credibility, transparency and usefulness of monitoring and evaluation findings.
- Principle 8: Basin States and the Commonwealth should collaborate on the technical and operational elements of monitoring and evaluation in order to build engagement and ownership.
- Principle 10: Monitoring and reporting should be timely, efficient, cost-effective and consistent, and should supply the information needed for evaluation.
- Principle 11: To the extent possible, there should be open access to information collected or used in, or generated by, monitoring and evaluation.

# Appendix A

Basin Plan as a whole				
1	The transparency and effectiveness of the management of the Basin water resources.	Authority	A	Chapter 5
2	The protection and restoration of water-dependent ecosystems and ecosystem functions in the Murray–Darling Basin, including for the purposes of strengthening their resilience in a changing climate.	Authority	A	Chapter 5
3	The extent to which the Basin Plan has affected social, economic and environmental outcomes in the Murray–Darling Basin.	Department, Authority	A	Chapter 5
4	The effectiveness of the management of risks to Basin water resources.	Basin States, Authority	B	Chapters 4, 5 and 10
5	The transition to long-term average sustainable diversion limits.	Department	B	Chapters 5 and 6
6	The extent to which local knowledge and solutions inform the implementation of the Basin Plan.	Basin States, Authority, CEWH	B	Chapters 6, 8 and 10
Environmental watering plan				
7	The achievement of environmental outcomes at a Basin scale, by reference to the targets in Schedule 7.	Authority, CEWH	A	Chapter 8
8	The achievement of environmental outcomes at an asset scale.	Basin States	A	Chapter 8
9	The identification of environmental water and the monitoring of its use.	Basin States, CEWH, Authority	B	Chapter 8
10	The implementation of the environmental management framework (Part 4 of Chapter 8).	Basin States, CEWH, Authority	B	Chapter 8
Water quality and salinity				
11	The fitness for purpose of the Basin water resources.	Authority	A	Chapters 5 and 9
12	Progress towards the water quality targets in Chapter 9.	Basin States, Authority	A	Chapter 9
13	The implementation, where necessary, of the emergency response process for critical human water needs.	Basin States, Authority, Department	B	Chapter 11
14	The implementation of the water quality and salinity management plan, including the extent to which regard is had to the targets in Chapter 9 when making flow management decisions.	Basin States, Authority, CEWH	B	Chapter 9
Water trading rules				
15	The facilitation, by efficient and effective water markets, of tradeable water rights reaching their most productive use.	Authority	A	Chapters 5 and 12
16	The implementation of water trading rules.	Basin States, Authority	B	Chapter 12
Water resource planning				
17	The certainty of access to Basin water resources.	Authority	A	Chapters 5 and 10
18	The efficiency and effectiveness of the operation of water resource plans, including in providing a robust framework under a changing climate.	Basin States, Authority	A	Chapter 10
19	Compliance with water resource plans.	Basin States	B	Chapter 10
20	The prioritisation of critical human water needs.	Basin States	B	Chapters 10 and 11
21	The accountability and transparency of arrangements for water sharing.	Basin States	B	Chapter 10

Note 1: The matters listed in this Schedule relate to the objectives and outcomes against which the effectiveness of the Basin Plan will be evaluated (see section 13.05). The matters are also matters on which the Authority, the Basin States, the Department and the CEWH are required to report (see section 13.14). The Authority may publish guidelines under section 13.16, and enter into agreements under section 13.15, in relation to the reporting requirements.

Note: 2 Category A matters are subject to 5 yearly reporting and Category B matters are subject to annual reporting, subject to an agreement being made under section 13.



---

**Office locations – First Nations Country**

**Adelaide** – *Kurna*

**Canberra** – *Ngunnawal*

**Goondiwindi** – *Bigambul*


**Griffith** – *Wiradjuri*

**Mildura** – *Latji Latji*

**Murray Bridge** – *Ngarrindjeri*

**Toowoomba** – *Jarowair and Wakka Wakka*

**Wodonga** – *Dhudhuroa*

 [mdba.gov.au](https://mdba.gov.au)

 1800 630 114

 [engagement@mdba.gov.au](mailto:engagement@mdba.gov.au)