

1. Background

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) has commenced a review of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan (Basin Plan). The review is due to be completed by 30 June 2026, and the MDBA is expected to undertake a public consultation process during Quarter 1 (Q1) 2026.

The Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation (RAMJO) invites Expressions of Interest from appropriately skilled and experienced consultants to research and synthesise relevant evidence (research, policy, datasets and stakeholder positions) to inform RAMJO's written submission to the MDBA.

2. RAMJO Position Statement

RAMJO's submission will be informed by the following policy position:

- Regional communities acknowledge the importance of healthy inland rivers and support sustainable, evidence-based approaches to river management.
- RAMJO opposes Commonwealth intervention in the water market through water buybacks.
- The future of Basin regional communities relies on access to water that supports the production of food and fibre for Australia.
- Water buybacks can undermine the economic base of irrigation-dependent communities and do not necessarily deliver commensurate environmental outcomes.
- Public investment in water conveyance and efficiency infrastructure (to reduce evaporation and seepage and improve system performance) can deliver enduring benefits for communities and the environment.
- Sufficient water has been recovered across the Basin already and there is no need to recover any more. The Basin Plan has achieved its goal. The plan must evolve. Future action must prioritise optimization not recovery.
- Continue existing SDLAM adjusted limits, as Basins SDL and monitor outcomes with no more water recovered through any means to ensure no impact from any SDLAM (or other) gap.
- Securing the additional 450 GL through infrastructure investment (where feasible and demonstrably deliverable) is preferred to retaining water in productive use while achieving environmental objectives.

Respondents should demonstrate an ability to marshal evidence and analysis in support of a rigorous, credible and constructive submission consistent with this position.

3. Objectives

The objectives of this engagement are to:

- Provide RAMJO with an evidence base to respond effectively to the MDBA's consultation materials (including any discussion paper(s) released in early 2026).
- Identify the implications of reform options for Basin communities, with a particular focus on socio-economic impacts of water recovery mechanisms.
- Support RAMJO to articulate a pragmatic alternative pathway to achieve environmental outcomes that minimises adverse community and regional economic impacts.
- Prepare a high-quality written submission suitable for lodgement during the Q1 2026 public consultation period.
- RAMJO intends to formulate a public education campaign in response to the Australian Government's unbalanced public messaging that the Basin is dying

4. Scope of Services

The successful Respondent will be required to undertake, at a minimum, the following tasks:

1. Evidence scan and synthesis: compile and analyse relevant research, policy documents, datasets and reports that are likely to inform the MDBA's review themes and consultation questions.
2. Stakeholder and policy landscape: map key stakeholder positions, pressure points and areas of contention relevant to RAMJO's interests, including water recovery methods (buybacks vs infrastructure measures) and the 450 GL program.
3. Socio-economic analysis: identify and summarise credible methods and findings on community and regional economic impacts of water recovery, including the application of socio-economic tests and complementary measures.
4. Drafting: prepare a structured draft submission for RAMJO review, incorporating clear recommendations and supporting evidence.
5. Formulation of a public education campaign.
6. Finalisation: revise and finalise the submission based on RAMJO feedback, and provide an annexed evidence pack (sources, summaries, data references).
7. Briefing support: provide up to six (6) briefings (virtual or in-person) to RAMJO (and/or a steering group) on key findings and recommended submission positions.
8. This scope is indicative and RAMJO is willing to consider additional or different ideas from applicants.

5. Out of Scope

- Legal advice, statutory interpretation, or representation in legal proceedings.
- Lobbying activity on behalf of RAMJO (beyond providing evidence and briefing material to support RAMJO's own engagement).
- Field sampling or primary scientific research requiring new data collection (unless expressly approved by RAMJO as a variation).

6. Deliverables and Indicative Schedule

Respondents should propose a work program that meets the Q1 2026 consultation window. As an indicative guide, RAMJO expects:

Deliverable	Description	Indicative Due Date*
D1 – Evidence Scan and Sources Register	Annotated list of key research, policy, and data sources (with short summaries and relevance notes).	Within 3 weeks of commencement
D2 – Stakeholder and Issues Paper	Stakeholder map, review themes, points of contention, and implications for RAMJO; identifies evidence gaps.	Within 6 weeks of commencement
D3 – Draft Submission	Structured draft submission responding to MDBA consultation materials; includes recommendations and supporting evidence.	No later than 20 April 2026
D4 – Final Submission and Evidence Pack	Final submission ready for lodgement; annexures including evidence pack and data references.	Prior to consultation close as published by MDBA. (Q2 2026)
D5 Public Education Program	Formulate a public education program	Within 6 weeks of commencement
D6 – Briefings (up to six)	Briefing(s) to RAMJO on findings and recommended positions.	As required during engagement
D7 – Post-consultation Update Note (optional)	Short update on material developments through to 30 June 2026, if requested by RAMJO.	By 30 June 2026

*Dates are indicative; Respondents must propose a schedule aligned to the MDBA's published consultation timetable once available.

7. Respondent Requirements

Respondents must demonstrate:

- Relevant professional experience in water policy, Basin Plan implementation, water markets, regional socio-economic analysis, or comparable public policy processes.
- Strong analytical capability, including the ability to interpret technical reports and translate findings into clear, decision-ready advice.
- Proven ability to draft high-quality submissions for public consultations and/or statutory reviews.
- Understanding of Basin community, agricultural and local government perspectives (Riverina/Murray region knowledge is strongly regarded).
- Capacity to deliver within the required timeframe.

8. Conflicts of Interest and Independence

Respondents must disclose any actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest, including prior or current engagements with the MDBA, Commonwealth agencies, state water agencies, major irrigation corporations, or advocacy groups with direct interests in the Basin Plan review. RAMJO may, at its discretion, seek additional information or impose conflict management conditions.

9. Pricing

Respondents must provide a pricing proposal in one of the following forms (or both): (a) fixed price for the scope and deliverables; and/or (b) capped time-and-materials with a not-to-exceed amount. Pricing should specify whether GST is included or excluded, and clearly state any assumptions regarding travel and disbursements.

Note: Deliverables and Indicative Schedule: Pricing of Item “D5 Public Education Program” **should be separately priced from other deliverables**

10. Submission Requirements

Submissions must include, at a minimum:

- A brief capability statement (including relevant project examples).
- Proposed methodology and work plan (including schedule and resourcing).
- Team profile(s), including CVs for key personnel.
- Pricing and cost assumptions (including GST and travel treatment).
- Conflict of interest declaration.
- Evidence of insurances (or a statement that insurances can be provided upon engagement).

Expression of Interest (EOI)

Research and Submission Support – 2026 Murray-Darling Basin Plan Review

11. Evaluation Criteria

EOIs will be assessed against the following criteria (indicative weighting shown):

- Relevant experience and demonstrated capability (30%).
- Methodology, work plan, and understanding of the brief (25%).
- Quality of personnel and capacity to deliver to timeframe (20%).
- Value for money (pricing and commercial approach) (15%).
- Conflict of interest management and governance (10%).

12. Key Dates

Milestone	Date / Time (AEDT)
EOI closing date	6 February 2026 (5:00 pm AEDT)
Proposed commencement (indicative)	Week commencing 16 February 2026
Anticipated MDBA public consultation window	Q2 2026 (to be confirmed by MDBA)
MDBA review completion target	30 June 2026

RAMJO reserves the right to amend the above dates as required.

13. Lodgement Details

EOI submissions must be lodged by email to:

- Executive Officer – Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation (RAMJO)
- Attention: Mr Brett Stonestreet
- Email: brett.stonestreet@ramjo.nsw.gov.au

Please use the email subject line: "EOI – MDB Plan Review Submission Support – [Respondent Name]".

14. Enquiries

Enquiries regarding this EOI should be directed to:

Mr Brett Stonestreet
Executive Officer
Email: brett.stonestreet@ramjo.nsw.gov.au
Mobile: 0408 498 534