# Consultation Paper: Independent Review of the Export Market Development Grants (EMDG) program

## Foreword from the Independent Reviewer

The Minister for Trade and Tourism, Senator the Hon Don Farrell has asked me to conduct an independent review of the Export Market Development Grants (EMDG) program. This is in accordance with section 106A of the *Export Market Development Grants Act 1997* where an independent review is required to be conducted every five years.

Australian exporters create jobs, offer higher wages, and increase government revenues, which fund essential services. In 2024, our two-way trade accounted for approximately 45 percent of our GDP. Australian goods exporters alone employ over 5 million people, which translate into 3.6 million full-time equivalent workers. Generating export opportunities and supporting businesses to navigate uncertain times in global trade is a key priority. There are opportunities to ensure that EMDG remains a cornerstone to help small and medium sized Australian businesses succeed in export markets.

The Minister has asked me to examine EMDG’s operation, effectiveness and opportunities for improvement. As part of this review, I will make recommendations to the Minister to enhance the continuous improvement of EMDG to deliver the best possible outcomes for Australian exporters.

To help inform my recommendations, stakeholders and other interested parties are encouraged to respond to this consultation paper. To inform my report I will consider stakeholder feedback, available sources of data and analysis and research available from Austrade’s Operational Review (2022), Strategic Refocus (2023) and the *EMDG Amendment Rules 2024*.

It is critical to understand the impact of changes that were made to EMDG since the last review. To assist with this, this consultation paper poses questions aligned to the Terms of Reference.

I look forward to your insights and suggestions on enhancing the benefits of the EMDG, alignment to government trade priorities and meeting the needs of Australian business.

Timothy Yeend

Independent Reviewer

## Background

The EMDG program is a key initiative supporting Australian small and medium businesses (SMEs) and their representative bodies to expand into international markets. Since 1974 it has supported over 51,000 small and medium size Australian businesses to promote and market their products and services to over 180 countries world-wide.

The last five years has been a period of significant change for EMDG. Following the 2020 independent review[[1]](#footnote-2), EMDG underwent a major reform from a reimbursement scheme to a grants program.

Since the 2020 independent review there have been four rounds of the program. More information about the EMDG program is on the [Austrade website](https://www.austrade.gov.au/en/how-we-can-help-you/grants/export-market-development-grants/about/whats-changing).

From Round 1 in 2021, EMDG was refined for each subsequent round to ensure the program delivered on its objective of supporting businesses to market, promote, and diversify their exports. This continuous improvement was informed by frequent stakeholder consultations. From mid-2022 onwards, EMDG program design and improvement was supplemented by the 2022 Operational Review, the 2023 Strategic Refocus and changes through the *EMDG Amendment Rules* 2024.

## Purpose

The purpose of the consultations is to gather insights from businesses and industry representatives on their experiences with the EMDG program over the last five years. It also invites broader views from key stakeholders with an interest in trade, export or the EMDG program.

This Independent Review, in accordance with the Terms of Reference will:

* Review the quality of current program processes and delivery, with a focus on applicants’ experience engaging with Round 4 of the program (including communication; program management; allocation of grant opportunities; and service delivery)
* Identifying how Austrade and representative bodies can work together to optimise representative body members’ ability to leverage EMDG funded support to achieve export outcomes
* Identify approaches to better connect EMDG to relevant programs and other support provided by other Australian Government organisations, including States and Territories with a focus on optimising a whole-of-Australian-government approach
* Identify any other matters the reviewer considers are relevant to the effective operation of the program, achievement of value for money, and delivery of trade outcomes.

You are encouraged to consider the Terms of Reference, as your feedback will help shape recommendations for improving program processes, service delivery, and alignment with broader government support for exporters.

Consultation process – how to participate

There are three ways to provide your input and contribute to the independent review. The consultation process will occur between 15 July to 12 September 2025.

*Submissions*

* Using our [online submission form](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=J326xnqppECC5E0jEx3p9Ait8PWhN2tKlV_fHmptJQdUOTJKSUxMVE5OWFU4ODROTVdHN0tPTkVORiQlQCN0PWcu): Stakeholders are encouraged to respond to the key questions outlined in this paper.
* Sending an email, or an attachment to an email, to [EMDGreview@austrade.gov.au](mailto:EMDGreview@austrade.gov.au).

*Survey*

* Complete the [survey](https://survey.confirmit.com.au/wix/p503423629871.aspx).

*Request a meeting*

* Mr Yeend will host in-person sessions, following the consideration of the submission and survey responses. Meetings are anticipated to be held in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney, with the possibility of online consultations for stakeholders in other locations.
* Depending on interest, group meetings may occur including targeted meetings with key stakeholders.
* The details, including how to register will be made available on the [Austrade website](https://www.austrade.gov.au/en/how-we-can-help-you/working-groups-and-engagement/independent-review-emdg-program-have-your-say).

All responses to this consultation process will be considered as part of the review. Please note that the content of submissions will not be made public.

## Key areas for consultation

#### Quality of current program processes and delivery with a focus on applicants’ experience

In terms of the changes that have been made to the EMDG program since 2021, I want to understand the impacts, benefits and suggestions for improvement.

The changes made for Round 4 of the program, the most recent round that opened in November 2024, were based on feedback that grant sizes were ineffective. The changes to EMDG mean higher grant amounts have been given to successful applicants. The average value of grant agreements executed so far is $53,000 per financial year - more than double the average value of grants provided in earlier rounds. I would like to understand the impacts of the changes and the potential for the overall applicant experience to be further improved.

The following questions are a guide to the type of information I am seeking regarding your experience with EMDG’s processes and delivery. Please use them as a guide, noting you are not required to answer all questions. Please provide input relevant to your own experience.

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| **Guiding questions**   * What has been your recent experience with EMDG? * What went well? * What could be improved around EMDG communications (including online, digital, phone and/or email channels)? * What could be improved for the EMDG application process (including log-in, EMDG online portal, application and milestone processes)? * What could be improved around the allocation of grants for each of the tiers? |

#### Role and value of representative bodies in achieving export outcomes

Representative bodies, such as industry bodies and peak body organisations, play an important role in assisting their SME members to export. They do this by providing export training, advice and supporting members with their export marketing and promotion activities internationally.

The following questions are designed to explore how representative bodies engage with the EMDG program, how they support their SME members and how their role can be optimised. Please use them as a guide, noting you are not required to answer all questions. Please provide input relevant to your own experience.

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| **Guiding questions**   * How important are representative bodies in supporting SMEs to export? * What role do representative bodies play in supporting SMEs to export? * How does EMDG enable representative bodies to support SMEs to export? * How can Austrade and representative bodies collaborate more effectively to help businesses achieve export outcomes? |

#### Whole-of-Australian-Government SME support

EMDG is one of many programs to support Australian businesses to export. For example, trade advice is available from Austrade by using the [Go Global Toolkit](https://export.business.gov.au/). The Australian Government, along with state and territory governments, also offer a range of grants, support programs and resources.

The following questions aim to understand how EMDG integrates with other government support and explore improvements in program alignment. Please use them as a guide, you are not required to answer all questions. Please provide input relevant to your own experience.

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| **Guiding questions**   * How can the different levels of government work together to better support SMEs to export? * What types of government support is the most effective in terms of supporting SMEs to export? * How could the EMDG program better connect with broader government support for SMEs? |

#### Any other matters that may support the effective operation of the EMDG program

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| **Guiding questions**   * How does the EMDG program benefit SMEs in their export journey? * What trade outcomes is the EMDG program achieving for SME exporters? * How should the EMDG align with broader government economic and trade objectives? * Do you have any further insights, case studies, or recommendations that may support this review? |

## Terms of Reference

In accordance with the requirement under section 106A of the *Export Market Development Grants Act* 1997 (‘the EMDG Act’) to conduct an Independent Review of the EMDG program (‘the program’) within five years, the Minister for Trade and Tourism, Senator the Hon Don Farrell has appointed Tim Yeend to conduct a review.

Having regard to changes to the program since the last independent review published in July 2020 and noting there remain opportunities to continuously improve the operation and delivery of EMDG, the reviewer is asked to:

1. Review the quality of current program processes and delivery, with a focus on applicants’ experience engaging with Round 4 of the program, including:
   * communications about the program and applicants’ experience engaging with Austrade’s online, digital, phone and/or email channels
   * examination of options to improve management of grant opportunities within the model of assessing applications until expenditure is fully allocated, including grant round opening and closing processes
   * examination of options for changed allocation of grant opportunities (number and size of grants) across EMDG’s tiers
   * opportunities to improve program service delivery that save time, effort and resources for applicants, including scope to integrate EMDG systems and processes with other relevant government programs that EMDG applicants might engage with.
2. Identify how Austrade and representative bodies can work together to optimise representative body members’ ability to leverage EMDG funded support to achieve export outcomes.
3. With a focus on optimising a whole-of-Australian-government approach to support for SME’s engaging in international business, identify approaches to better connect EMDG to relevant programs and other support provided by other Australian Government organisations, including State and Territories.
4. Identify any other matters the reviewer considers are relevant to the effective operation of the program, achievement of value for money, and delivery of trade outcomes.

The independent reviewer will bring together the findings from a range of available reports, including Austrade’s client services projects, review data, external consultant research and stakeholder consultations completed since the last independent review, which explore program changes and the rationale behind them.

The independent reviewer will receive public submissions as part of this Review, consistent with the requirements of section 106A of the EMDG Act.

Out of scope of this review are proposals to amend the EMDG Act, EMDG appropriation levels or the number of tiers in place.

1. Anna Fisher Review published 1 July 2020 *Review of financial assistance to SME exporters* [Review of financial assistance to SME exporters | Austrade](https://www.austrade.gov.au/en/news-and-analysis/publications-and-reports/review-of-financial-assistance-to-sme-exporters) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)