



MEETING 3

MINERAL SANDS AGRICULTURAL LAND RESTORATION WORKING GROUP

The Mineral Sands Agricultural Land Restoration Working Group (the Group) met online on 19 August 2026 to continue its work supporting the development of best-practice guidance for the restoration of agricultural land following mineral sands mining in north-west Victoria, where a landowner requires their land to be returned to productive farming use.

The meeting was chaired by Professor Mohan Yellishetty and focused on community perspectives regarding agricultural land restoration, with emphasis on evidence-based information such as; rehabilitation planning, crop yield, soil health, regular monitoring, and the importance of transparent, independently assessed restoration outcomes.

Ian Ross, Chair of the Kanagulk Landcare Group presented his reflections and experience as a local farmer, former Director of Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority and member of the former Douglas Iluka Environmental Review Committee. Drawing on lessons from the Douglas project, he emphasised the need to understand geological and soil risks before restoration commences, as well as the importance of long-term monitoring of landform stability, soil condition, natural radiation management and potential groundwater impacts.

Representatives of the Dunmunkle Land Protection Group, including Andrew Weidemann, Dr John Russell and Paul Oxbrow, also presented to the Group. They shared perspectives informed by independent soil research, farming experience, field observations and engagement with affected landholders. Discussion centered on the need for robust evidence to demonstrate whether mined agricultural land can be restored to pre-mining productivity and profitability, including through independently designed field trials, transparent data access and long-term monitoring.

KEY THEMES

Evidence, monitoring and accountability

The Group considered the importance of robust, transparent and independently assessed evidence to inform future agricultural land restoration guidance. Discussion reinforced that restoration outcomes should be supported by properly designed trials, clear performance measures, long-term monitoring and transparent reporting. Members discussed the value of crop yield, soil settlement, soil health, farm business viability and rehabilitation performance data that was assessed over multiple seasons, with data and findings accessible to regulators, landholders, researchers and communities.

Soil, landform and environmental risks

Presentations reinforced that rehabilitation planning should begin before mining starts and should address geological, soil, landform, hydrological and material placement risks. Issues raised included landform change, slumping, anaerobic soil conditions, compaction, soil structure, organic matter, soil biology, application of gypsum, groundwater monitoring and the management of low-level naturally occurring radioactive material. The Group discussed the need for robust baseline assessment, careful recording and management of topsoil and subsoil removal, storage and replacement, transparent monitoring and clear investigation triggers where risks emerge.

Agricultural productivity and long-term viability

Agricultural productivity and farming system viability were central to the Group's discussions. Members heard that restored land should be assessed against pre-mining benchmarks and future land-use objectives, including crop yield, gross margins, soil structure, organic matter, fertility, water infiltration, soil biology, landform stability and compatibility with contemporary precision farming practices. The Group also noted the importance of considering productivity and profitability over multiple seasons and crop rotations.

Landholder confidence and future guidance

Landholder engagement was identified as an important component of effective restoration planning and future guidance. The Group heard that affected farmers and community representatives are seeking clear pathways for participation in trial design, monitoring, access to information and review of rehabilitation performance. Discussion reinforced the importance of transparency, locally relevant guidance, practical expectations, independent assessment and accessible information in supporting landholder and community confidence in restoration outcomes.

Next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for **16 September 2026**.