



MEETING 4

MINERAL SANDS AGRICULTURAL LAND RESTORATION WORKING GROUP

The Mineral Sands Agricultural Land Restoration Working Group (the Group) met online on 16 September 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 continued the focus on landholder perspectives, while also considering Agriculture Victoria's scientific capability, land-use evidence and potential research inputs to future guidance.

Scott Anderson, a fifth-generation Mallee farmer, presented his family's experience farming land following mineral sands mining and soil reinstatement. His presentation emphasised the need for detailed pre-mining assessments, improved soil stripping and stockpile management, independent oversight, long-term monitoring and evidence of agricultural productivity.

Russell Heard, President of Mine Free Wimmera Farms Incorporated, presented community and landholder concerns about agricultural land restoration and described his experience as a farmer and agricultural contractor working on land associated with mineral sands mining.

Angela Avery and David Burns from Agriculture Victoria outlined scientific, spatial and policy capabilities that could support restoration guidance, including land-use mapping, catchment-scale modelling, soil science, agronomy, long-term field trials, remote sensing and climate analysis.

KEY THEMES

Restoration performance and agricultural viability

Landholder presentations raised concerns about whether reinstated land can return to sustained agricultural productivity and profitability. Discussion topics included crop and pasture performance, plant development, the time needed for recovery and fodder quality. The Group discussed the possibility of assessing restoration across multiple seasons and crop rotations, using suitable unmined reference areas and measures that reflect both productivity and farm business viability.

Soil handling, reconstruction and landform stability

Discussion reinforced that restoration outcomes depend on detailed, soil-specific planning before mining and disciplined implementation during stripping, storage and replacement. Priorities raised included mapping soil variability, maintaining horizon order, preventing contamination by hostile subsoil or overburden, managing weeds and erosion in stockpiles, controlling compaction and restoring surface levels, drainage and trafficability.

Independent evidence, research and landscape context

The Group considered the value of independent, transparent evidence-based research to establish baselines, recovery trajectories and credible performance measures. Agriculture Victoria outlined capabilities that could contribute to this work, including the Victorian Land Use Information System, the Strategic Agricultural Land and Development work, catchment analysis, soil archives and laboratories, long-term trials, crop field trials, remote sensing and climate scenario tools. Discussion also highlighted potential cumulative land-use pressures and the potential contribution of research partnerships to independently design trials and monitoring.



***Accountability, landholder confidence and future guidance***

Members discussed how future guidance can support clear and transparent expectations for agricultural land restoration, including restoration planning, agreed objectives, measurable indicators and evidence requirements. Suggestions included preparing detailed plans that are understood and agreed to by landholders, proponents and the regulator; using independent monitoring and reporting to track restoration performance over time; and drawing on credible evidence to guide adaptive management where outcomes are not progressing as expected. The Group also discussed potential research priorities and the importance of setting realistic, transparent expectations about achievable restoration outcomes.

Next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 20 October 2026.