MEETING 5

MINERAL SANDS AGRICULTURAL LAND RESTORATION WORKING GROUP

The Mineral Sands Agricultural Land Restoration Working Group (the Group) met online on 20 October 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 rehabilitation plans, and potential research inputs to future guidance.

VHM Limited presented its planned approach to agricultural land rehabilitation at its Goschen mineral sands and rare earths project. The presentation emphasised pre-mining soil and productivity baselines, separate stripping and management of soil horizons, progressive rehabilitation, independent expert input and ongoing monitoring against baseline and reference-site conditions. The presentation also acknowledged the criteria for demonstrating successful rehabilitation and licence relinquishment.

Donald Mineral Sands outlined its planned approach to rehabilitating agricultural land at the Donald Project, drawing on experience across the mineral sands industry. The presentation highlighted detailed pre-mining soil assessments, separate stripping and stockpiling of soil horizons, progressive rehabilitation, and protection of soil structure and biology. It also covered long-term monitoring and measurable completion criteria, which will be used to show that agricultural productivity has been restored before the land is relinquished.

Iluka Resources presented its experience rehabilitating agricultural land across four former mineral sands operations in northwest Victoria, including lessons from variable cropping outcomes and landform settlement. The presentation emphasised careful soil handling, allowing backfill and landforms to stabilise before final soil placement, strong landholder relationships, clear rehabilitation success criteria and multi-season monitoring to demonstrate agricultural productivity.

KEY THEMES

Restoration performance and agricultural productivity
Presentations highlighted the shared objective of returning mined land to productive agricultural use. Discussions included monitoring across multiple seasons, comparison with pre-mining baselines and suitable unmined reference areas, and consideration of soil condition, crop performance, seasonal variability and farm management inputs.

Soil assessment, handling and stockpile management
Presentations emphasised the importance of understanding soil variability before mining and protecting soil horizons during stripping, storage and replacement. Key considerations included detailed soil surveys, site-specific stripping depths, separate management of topsoil and different subsoil layers, and controls to prevent mixing with saline, sodic or boron-rich material. Discussions included the need to manage stockpile duration, erosion, weeds, compaction and soil biological function to support successful reinstatement.

Progressive rehabilitation and landform stability
The presentations highlighted that progressive rehabilitation limits the amount of land disturbed at any one-time during mining and can enable its return to agricultural use before mine closure. The presentations also stressed the importance of appropriate sequencing, sufficient stabilisation time, restored drainage and opportunities to adjust rehabilitation methods as monitoring and practical experience identify issues.

Evidence, monitoring and continuous improvement
Presentations highlighted the role of baseline information, technical expertise and ongoing monitoring in assessing rehabilitation performance and improving practice. Proposed or existing methods included soil testing, yield mapping, crop and pasture assessments, remote sensing and comparisons with reference areas. Research and trials were identified as opportunities to better understand soil constraints, biological recovery and methods for restoring agricultural productivity.

Landholder confidence, completion criteria and future guidance
The presentations emphasised early and ongoing landholder engagement, clear expectations and credible evidence of rehabilitation outcomes. Collectively, the presentations pointed to the need for guidance that establishes transparent outcomes and evidence requirements while allowing rehabilitation methods to respond to site conditions and monitoring results.

Next meeting
The next meeting is scheduled for 18 November 2026.