



26 March 2026

Executive Summary

The Association of Mining and Exploration Companies Inc (AMEC) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Victorian Government's 2026-27 State Budget and Forward Estimates.

The attractiveness of Victoria as a mining jurisdiction is reliant on a strong, stable Government with the ability to deliver effective and efficient regulatory outcomes, and progress project development in appropriate cost settings.

Victoria's minerals sector is well positioned to play a critical role in the state's – and the nation's - energy transition, regional growth, and sovereign supply chain resilience. While the state possesses significant geological potential - particularly in gold and the critical minerals essential to facilitate the energy transition - productivity and investment attraction is being constrained by systemic barriers in regulatory complexity and efficiency, land access and co-existence, limited precompetitive data, workforce capability, and outdated systems.

The diversity of project proponents and commodities across Victoria requires the critical support of a robust legislative and regulatory framework that recognises the importance of the exploration to development life cycle and financial markets.

AMEC has proposed six (6) recommendations under a productivity and regulatory reform package to improve exploration and mining productivity in Victoria through smarter regulatory processes, expand geoscience data capture and utility, and strengthen capability and promote stronger collaboration between industry and government. These recommendations align with the Victorian Government's objectives of economic growth, regional development, and responsible resources management and are designed to reduce project delays, attract new investment, and improve environmental and social outcomes.

They represent practical, outcomes-focused, and high-value reforms that would have a demonstrably positive productivity impact on resources exploration and development in Victoria and deliver material and enduring benefits for Victoria's economy and communities.

Objectives

- Streamlined processing, faster approvals
- Reduced duplication, greater transparency, better outcomes
- Fewer disputes, stronger community trust, enhanced social licence
- Stronger capability, improved performance
- Increased exploration investment
- Leverage a global leadership role in rehabilitation and mine closure innovation
- Significant productivity uplift for both industry and government

Recommendations

1. Extend & Enhance the Resources Victoria Approvals Coordinator Program

The Resources Victoria Approvals Coordinator (RVAC) was established in 2023 and is currently funded through to 2027. AMEC has commended the work done by RVAC since its inception in improving approval timelines and reducing duplication.

Purpose

Project proponents in Victoria face complex, time-consuming, and often opaque approval pathways involving multiple agencies, statutory and regulatory authorities, including local councils, planning, water, heritage, and environmental bodies. This creates uncertainty, adds significant holding costs, and can make Victoria uncompetitive for capital investment.

Proposal

AMEC recommends that the success of this initiative to date warrants its continuity beyond 2027, inclusive of a broader remit that focuses on creating a **unified digital gateway** using a **single point-of-contact “regulatory concierge”** model to further streamline and manage the approvals process for significant exploration and mining projects, including modern online lodgement and tracking systems with integrated mapping, real-time status updates, and automated data validation.

AMEC further recommends providing additional funding to pilot a coordinated **Sustainable Development Pathways Program** for exploration and mining projects with shared environmental baselines and cumulative impact data providing real-time status tracking and eliminates duplicate data entry across multiple statutory authorities and agencies. Included in this should be a **fast-track approval pathway** for low-impact operations and lower-risk exploration activities that meet strict environmental criteria as part of a **revamped digital portal** for Resources Victoria timed to roll-out alongside the transition to a new duty based legislative and regulatory framework from 1 July 2027.

Outcomes:

- Act as a dedicated case manager for projects deemed of state significance
- Coordinate timelines and information requests and reduced duplication between all relevant regulatory bodies
- Proactively identify and resolve bottlenecks in the approval process
- Provide clear guidance to proponents on their obligations under relevant legislation
- Ensures a "whole-of-government" approach, leading to more consistent and predictable outcomes without compromising regulatory standards
- Greater accountability and transparency across agencies
- Reduced administrative burden on proponents
- Enhanced investor confidence through predictable timelines, which is critical for securing project financing

2. Establish a “Coexistence Victoria Working Group”

Land access negotiations are a major source of friction and delay, particularly in the early exploration phase. Misunderstandings and a lack of trusted, impartial information can lead to disputes that harm projects and community relationships. To foster more positive and productive relationships between explorers, energy transition proponents, farmers, landowners, and Traditional Owners, thereby reducing conflict and project delays. AMEC has previously highlighted these challenges in a seminal report published in August 2025.

Purpose:

Modelled on a similar body already established in Queensland, the **Coexistence Victoria Working Group** would be an independent body established to help facilitate and address how key stakeholders including landholders, local communities, Traditional Owners and the resources, energy generation and transmission industries can work together to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

Proposal:

AMEC recommends consideration be given to the establishment of an inter-agency **Coexistence Victoria Working Group**. With the cooperation and assistance of Regional Development Victoria, the **Coexistence Victoria Working Group** would identify areas of challenge and opportunity across the state to ensure the sustainable development of regional communities as they manage land access issues and responsibilities through providing educational tools to landholders and act as an ‘ear to the ground’ to guide government and industry on what communities need.

AMEC’s recommendation includes the formation of a joint industry–government **Land Access & Community Engagement Facilitation Program** funded through the state’s planned community benefits mechanisms to develop regional land access protocols, provide mediation support, and best practice community engagement templates.

- Supports proactive engagement, mediation, and shared land-use planning between explorers, landholders, Traditional Owners, and other industries (e.g., renewables, agriculture)
- Develop and distribute plain-English educational materials for all parties, outlining their respective rights and obligations.
- Run regional workshops to build capacity for both explorers and community members to engage constructively

Outcomes:

- Reduces time and legal costs associated with negotiating land access
- Minimises the risk of project delays due to land access conflicts and disputes, allowing exploration activities to proceed more efficiently
- Improves engagement outcomes and drives stronger community confidence in exploration

- Improved social licence and regulatory compliance outcomes
- Drives stronger partnerships between landholders, communities, and industry
- Lead change by bringing everyone in the same room to work through issues to find common ground and foster sustainable coexistence outcomes
- Avoid sterilisation of ground from future resource development

3. Establish a Victorian Digital Geoscience Hub with Expanded Precompetitive Gold & Critical Minerals Data Programs

Much of Victoria's prospective geology is under sedimentary cover, making it high-cost and high-risk for individual companies to explore. Existing public datasets are often too old or lack sufficient detail for modern exploration targeting of minerals like rare earth elements, copper, and antimony. By providing quality baseline information and streamlined pathways for new technologies, Victoria can compete effectively with other jurisdictions while accelerating discovery and development timelines critical for the energy transition.

AMEC recommends the establishment of a **Digital Geoscience Hub** through the Geological Survey of Victoria (GSV) with direct investment in **Expanded Pre-Competitive Data Collection**, including statewide LiDAR, airborne gravity surveys, geochemical sampling, and 3D deposit modelling focused on strategic under-explored critical minerals zones.

Purpose:

De-risks early-stage exploration and attracts new investment; enables targeted drilling, potentially increasing exploration success rates by converting more greenfield sites into viable projects.

Proposal:

Boost funding for the GSV to acquire, interpret, and release new regional pre-competitive geoscience datasets in Victoria's underexplored terranes through a new and detailed **Gold & Critical Minerals Greenfield Assessment Program**. This could be done coincident with the reinstatement or expansion of a **Co-Funded Exploration Drilling Incentive** (similar to past TARGET initiatives) that matches private exploration investment dollar-for-dollar up to \$200,000 per project.

- Match grants for greenfield drilling in priority zones, prioritising innovative low-impact techniques
- Tie grants to compliance with streamlined work plans, reducing relinquishment burdens and promoting data-sharing for public geoscience repositories

Outcomes:

- Capitalise on Victoria's legacy strength in gold exploration and production success
- Support state and national critical minerals strategies

- Accelerate discovery rate of new critical mineral provinces
- Reduced time and data acquisition costs for individual explorers to identify drill targets; increased exploration activity; lower exploration risk
- Directly stimulates early-stage exploration in underexplored regions
- Strengthened knowledge base to guide investment decisions
- Boosts Victoria's attractiveness for private exploration capital and domestic and international investment
- Generates new geoscientific data for the state, and maintains Victoria's competitiveness with other jurisdictions like WA, SA and TAS that offer similar schemes
- Delivers open-access datasets supporting scientific and policy decisions
- Provides a better scientific baseline for land-use planning and project assessments, leading to more informed and efficient decision-making

4. Facilitate a Strategic Regional Environmental Assessments Program

The project-specific Environmental Effects Statement (EES) process is extremely costly and can take years. Much of this work involves collecting baseline data on biodiversity, water, and heritage that is often duplicated by subsequent projects in the same region.

Purpose:

To reduce the time and cost of individual project-level environmental approvals by undertaking strategic, landscape-scale assessments in areas of high mineral potential and holistically map environmental, social, and heritage values at a regional scale.

Proposal:

Provide funding for a **Strategic Regional Environmental Assessments (SREA) Program** that collates information that can be accessed through a coordinated assessment pathway for exploration and mining projects with shared environmental baselines and cumulative impact data.

Outcomes:

- Allows individual project assessments to be more targeted and efficient, focusing on site-specific impacts rather than re-establishing regional baselines
- Would greatly reduce EES preparation/review times and costs considerably
- Reduced duplication between environmental and mining approvals
- Better environmental outcomes through shared datasets
- Provides a robust, scientifically defensible framework for alternate land-use decisions
- Delivers predictable, transparent regulatory decisions
- Allows government to proactively identify areas suitable for development and areas that require protection, leading to greater certainty for both industry and the community

5. Pursue Real Rehabilitation Reform and Establish a Mine Closure Technology Innovation Fund

Exploration is generally a low impact, low risk and short-term activity in Victoria and the current rehabilitation bond framework is unnecessarily complex and administratively onerous. Every dollar paid in levies or fees is a dollar lost on investment in work on the ground to explore for mineral reserves. Investors that do contribute to the exploration sector are often deterred when they see their funds simply flowing to Government bureaucracy with no demonstrable benefit to industry, the community, or the State. Explorers face a multiplicity of fees, charges and levies based on cost recovery, such as administration and rental charges, licence transfer and work plan fees, with little or no clarity around the actual costs involved or any recognition of the benefits the resource discovery subsequently brings to the State. The cumulative effect of meeting these costs is a reduction in investment.

Purpose

Traditional rehabilitation methods can be slow and costly. Furthermore, community confidence is often low regarding the long-term success of rehabilitation and mine closure efforts. There is a need to incentivise the development and use of leading-practice techniques and the consideration of alternative means of bond funding and recognition of financial constraints on small explorers with limited access to capital. There is also a desire to accelerate the adoption of innovative technologies and practices that deliver better rehabilitation outcomes and reduce the state's long-term liability.

Proposal:

AMEC has previously delivered a detailed submission to government for consideration of alternatives to the current bond framework including a **pooled funding model** for rehabilitation bonds in the state and the use of insurance agency bond instruments, in line with successful models in other jurisdictions. These alternatives release much needed working capital from administratively and financially expensive rehabilitation commitments without compromising environmental standards or obligations to stakeholders.

AMEC further recommends modernising the rehabilitation securities system which facilitates **bond reductions for progressive rehabilitation** milestones completed, incentivised by commitments to reward rehabilitation completed ahead of schedule and that reflects actual project stages and environmental risk.

AMEC recommends real rehabilitation reform include a **Mine Closure Technology Innovation Fund** that finances research into rehabilitation technologies, mine closure best practices, and circular economy opportunities - turning rehabilitation from a cost burden into a productivity and sustainability advantage.

Leveraging on the state's pre-eminent position as a METS hub, Victoria could play a global leadership and world's best practice role in rehabilitation and mine closure innovation.

Outcomes:

- Can reduce overall closure costs and shorten rehabilitation timelines.
- Creates a new sub-sector of environmental and technology (METS) expertise within Victoria.
- Use of drones and AI for progressive rehabilitation monitoring would demonstrate a proactive approach to managing environmental legacies, which helps build community trust and social license.
- Improves the likelihood of relinquishing mine sites back to a stable and sustainable post-mining land use.
- Development of novel soil covers or bioremediation techniques.
- Trials of circular economy principles, such as reprocessing tailings for secondary prospectivity or use in construction materials.

6. Establish a Next Generation Resources Workforce & Regional Development Taskforce

Victoria faces a critical shortage of mining-specific skills, including geologists, environmental scientists, data analysts, automation specialists, and skilled trades. Alongside existing agribusiness, energy generation and transmission and metropolitan housing and infrastructure construction works, mineral exploration and development companies are forced to compete for a small pool of talent or source expensive fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) workers from other jurisdictions (who face similar capacity challenges), which reduces local economic benefits.

Purpose:

To build a skilled, locally based workforce to support a modern, technologically advanced exploration and mining sector in regional Victoria. Supporting local communities, reduce company infrastructure costs, and address skill shortages through TAFE partnerships and apprenticeship subsidies - making Victorian projects more viable and socially sustainable.

Proposal:

AMEC recommends establishing a **Next Generation Resources Workforce & Regional Development Taskforce** through a co-investment with industry and partnership with leading tertiary institutions (TAFEs, universities) to develop micro-credentials in modern exploration techniques, ESG compliance, data analytics, automation operations, stakeholder engagement, and environmental management. Consideration should also be given to subsidise apprenticeships and traineeships specifically for the resources sector and the provision of funding for state-of-the-art training equipment at regional TAFE campuses. Engagement through existing Industry Reference Group channels identifying high-demand skill areas and emerging training needs.

Outcomes:

- Builds a future-ready workforce and supports regional employment by creating local career pathways, reducing reliance on costly fly-in-fly-out workforces
- Ensures pipeline of skilled labour enabling efficient operation of new mines and exploration programs
- Addresses skills shortages, enabling faster project ramp-ups
- Supports a predicted 7,000 new jobs needed to facilitate critical minerals development in Victoria
- Reduces recruitment costs and timeframes for companies expanding Victorian operations
- Enhances operational efficiency through workforce proficiency in modern technologies
- Supports METS (mining equipment, technology, and services) sector growth
- Strengthens community engagement quality through trained stakeholder liaison professionals
- Builds regulatory literacy and improves quality and consistency of decision-making through enhanced technical capability
- Enables better on-the-ground environmental compliance through locally-trained environmental specialists
- Integrates training with benefit-sharing models for Traditional Owners and communities, strengthening social license and compliance
- Embeds a "whole-of-government" approach to regional community planning

About AMEC

The Association of Mining and Exploration Companies (AMEC) is a leading national minerals industry association representing over 575 member companies across Australia. Our members are explorers, emerging miners, producers, and a wide range of businesses and services working in and for the minerals industry.

AMEC provides solutions focussed industry advocacy at national and state levels, value, and benefit to our members, while building community support. AMEC represents a growing number of companies exploring, mining, and investing in Victoria and works to support the development of a strong and prosperous minerals industry in this State.

For further information contact:

Stuart Glazebrook, Director – Victoria & Tasmania | 0402 216 835
Stuart.glazebrook@amec.org.au