

TopSoils Project, East Gippsland Victoria

Frequently Asked Questions

What will it cost me to be involved?

Initial soil sampling will be at no cost to selected landholders. The Victorian Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (which includes Agricultural staff) will process the sampled soil material and will cover the laboratory costs, which alone are in the order of \$150-\$170 per assessment. So there is good value for money to the participants.

How will the soil test results be used?

Each participating landholder will receive a soils sample report that includes a summary of soil composition and texture for the top 10cm. This allows an understanding of whether your soil has any factors that limit production or increase risk of erosion or poor ground cover. This project has already indicated in other parts of the region that some properties may be receiving fertiliser that is not adding value, while other farmers could assist their production with targeted applications.

The soil results will also be combined with existing soil data to improve the understanding at a broad landscape level. This will show where there might be particular soil health problems causing agricultural soils to be stressed. It is not expected that all parts of the East Gippsland will have the same issues given the wide variety of farms and soil types. Knowing where and what the local problems are will allow further work with the community to specifically target support resources. For example, we intend to set up a network of trial sites to show farmers how they can manage their soils with each trial being specifically aimed at the local land health problem identified by our survey.

In addition, the soils data will allow the department of Agriculture staff to determine the overall health of our agricultural soils in the future years.

Will my test results be made publicly available?

No. The general public will not know your individual test results. Your soils results will be stored with all other results from across the region and then compared with other known soils data. Your individual results however may be shared with project partners in order to fulfil the support functions of the project.

What are the steps in the project?

Following your consent to proceed, soil samples will be taken from December 2015 allowing sample results to be reported to you in March 2016.

When the results are returned, they will be sent to you with materials to help explain what your soil test result might mean for your paddock.

At that time, you will have the opportunity to discuss results directly with soils specialists. This will assist your awareness of things that can help improve your bottom line, general land health and other areas of interest.

The agriculture staff will also begin analysing the results from your soil and all the other results from the 2014 and 2015 surveys. This analysis will allow the program team to develop products and services unique to farmers in the East Gippsland region.

It is expected that there may be further opportunity for landholders to undertake soils sampling and to also access broader information on ways to manage soils for long-term production and profitability. These future arrangements are being resolved over the next few months.

What happens next?

You will be contacted by one of the project partners to arrange an initial discussion and sort out arrangements for soil sampling. Snowy River Interstate Landcare in partnership with Agricultural staff will be involved in the field work for the Bendoc, Bonang and Tubbut areas.

What does this new testing have to do with the 2009 soil-testing program?

You may have had your soils tested as part of the 2009 Soil Carbon Project. The earlier program was part of a National Soil Carbon program. It used soil type to randomly select where samples should be collected in order to get a representative picture of soil carbon across East Gippsland. We have continued with this method because it will allow data to be collected on a scientific basis. However, the Soil Carbon project used a method of taking soil samples and tested soil properties that do not meet the needs of the TopSoils project. Therefore we are re-sampling some of the paddocks from the 2009 soil-testing program, in addition to new paddocks.

Importantly, the 2009 sampling method is not what would be used by farmers to manage a paddock. We are using the same method as would be adopted by farmers to enable better use of the existing data.

I did not receive my test results from the 2009 testing, what should I do?

All landholders who participated in the 2009 soil carbon project were sent their results with an explanatory sheet by mail. If you have not received your results please contact the Snowy River Interstate Landcare contact or Wayne Burton from DEDJTR as listed below in contacts.

Who are the partners delivering the project?

The *TopSoils Project* is jointly funded by the Commonwealth Government (National Landcare Program) and the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (Land Health Program). Project Partners include:

- Southern Farming Systems
- Snowy River Interstate Landcare Committee
- East Gippsland Landcare Network
- Far East Victoria Landcare
- Greening Australia

Who do I contact for further information?

For general support and soil sampling arrangements:

Snowy River Interstate Landcare Committee Inc.

Phone 02 64584003 or email srilc@bigpond.com

For access to any additional department services:

Wayne Burton

Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (agriculture unit)

574 Main Street

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Phone: 03 51520603 or Email: wayne.x.burton@ecodev.vic.gov.au