



Evaluation of the Community Partnership Program -Summary

Information contained summarises the evaluation report conducted by RMCG Consulting and includes VBT actions.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The evaluation of the CPP focused on three areas – 1. How **effective is the program?** 2. How **efficient is the program?** and 3. How **appropriate** is the program?

A total of 6 groups participated in the evaluation- Mitta to Murray Blackberry Action Group (North east Victoria), Barkers Creek Blackberry and Gorse Action Group, Dabyminga Blackberry Action Group and Triangle Blackberry Action Group (Central Victoria), Corner Inlet Blackberry Action Group, (Gippsland) and Wellington District Blackberry Action Group (Gippsland).

Data Collection

Data was collected from 60 landholder surveys, 23 landholder property visits, 7 Phone interviews with landholders, 6 Interviews with Blackberry Action Group committee members and 6 Interviews with group project officers.

Snap shot of results

Effectiveness of the program

To what extent is blackberry reduced through the program?

Most landholders reported a reduction in blackberry infestations over the duration of their involvement in the program. Over 70% of landholders said they had less than 5% cover of blackberry across their property after they had been involved in the blackberry action group, up from only 38% of landholders prior to the commencement of the action group.

Finding: Four out of five landholders continue to control blackberry following the completion of the program funding.

Finding: There is increased knowledge and ability to control blackberry, as well as less tolerance for blackberry in the landscape, among the majority of surveyed landholders.

Appropriateness of the program

Overall, 55% of landholders in the survey agreed that the project officer was a valuable resource for the group. In exploring this finding directly with landholders, it appears that landholders who did not rate the value of the project officer highly tended to fit one or more of the following:

- They expected / wanted blackberry to be controlled on neighbouring properties which hadn't been achieved through the project,

- They had an existing high level of knowledge and capability to control blackberry, and/or
- They wanted a financial incentive.

Project officers were valued by the majority of landholders. Other landholders had expectations of the project which couldn't be delivered by the project officer.

Finding: Landholders felt more encouraged and motivated when their groups built a sense of community spirit and working towards a common goal.

Efficiency of the program

From data collated from the VBT annual reports, it can be seen that between 27% and 100% of landholders visited by the project officers have committed to signing up to a voluntary blackberry management agreement. Treatment has occurred on 24% to 90% of mapped infestations, depending on the group.

Blackberry Action Group feedback

Level of funding

The VBT's Community Partnership Program is about 'enabling communities', not providing on-going support. The report highlighted a difference in definition of the term 'enabling' between some groups and the VBT. There were some views that the current level of support from the VBT (3 years) is not long enough.

Administration

Concerning the day to day running of a community group, it was suggested that the VBT have a stronger role in liaison and communication. This includes the employment and management of a project officer.

VBT Actions

The VBT deliberated on the evaluation report and made the following actions.

- The VBT will give community groups the option of running their program over a 4 year period instead of 3. (Funding levels will stay the same but the 3rd year could be extended over a 4th.)
- The VBT, via the Executive officer, will provide avenues to improve communication and provide greater guidance to project officers and committee members.
- Blackberry Action Groups will be given the option of the VBT employing the project officer to reduce the administrative burden.