

# VBTnews

VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

## BIOCONTROL DEVELOPMENT OF DIAGNOSTIC TOOL BEGINS

One of the main priorities for the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce is supporting innovative solutions for cost-effective blackberry management. This includes biocontrol research.

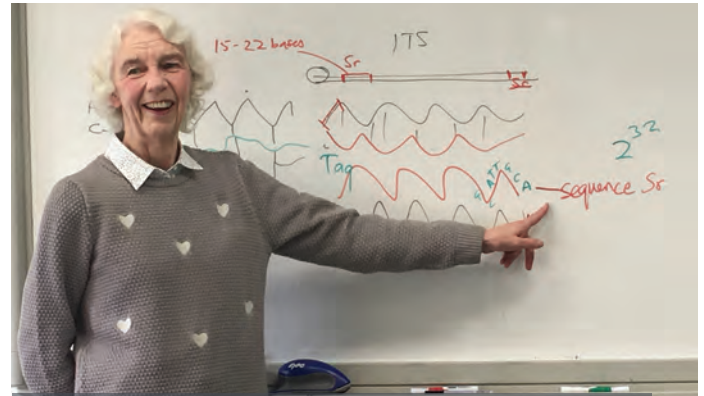
The VBT believes that identification of an effective biocontrol agent is essential to the long-term reduction of blackberry.

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce, via the Federal Government's Ag White paper funding, is currently managing the project - 'Develop a diagnostic tool for purple blotch disease (PBD) of wild blackberry', which will provide better tools for researchers in identifying PBD disease in commercial berry crops.

Anne Lawrie, RMIT Adjunct Associate Professor, and researcher on the project, highlights the difficulty in distinguishing *Septocytia ruborum* (PBD) from other *Septocytia* species. She explained the project will help improve the diagnosis of purple blotch disease, replacing current methods which are not highly accurate. The first stage of the project, to develop one or more diagnostic tools for PBD, will be completed by January 2018.

Following this, the VBT in conjunction with an independent researcher will work closely with the Victorian Rubus industry to discuss options for future use and application.

To view Anne Lawrie's presentation or more information on blackberry biocontrol, visit the VBT website: [www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au/managebb/biological\\_control01.html](http://www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au/managebb/biological_control01.html)



ANNE LAWRIE- RMIT ADJUNCT ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

## Update of VBT Start-Up Kit

Since 2008, the VBT's Start-Up Kit has been an important resource for communities considering or wanting to start a blackberry action group. The original document has just been reviewed and updated to incorporate learnings from our groups who have used the material to start their community programs.

The Start-Up Kit provides practical advice, which includes footage from project officers and community members, relaying experiences in running a blackberry program.

The templates are an important component of the Kit. Included are examples of a Project Officer position description and 3-year Voluntary Blackberry Work Plan. There are also useful web links to websites related to blackberry and wider pest management issues.

The updated Start-Up Kit will be available before the end of the year. If your community is interested in starting a blackberry group, contact the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce:

[vbt@vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au](mailto:vbt@vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au)





DABYMINGA BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP - COMMUNITY SPRAYING DAY

## DABYMINGA BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Dabyminga Blackberry Action Group has completed a successful project with the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce through the Community Partnership Program.

Mark South, the group's president reflected on how it began, 'A few years ago, residents looked down Reedy Creek and basically threw up their arms. I remember looking at it and got a bit depressed.'

The group began in 2015 after contacting the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and receiving assistance to employ their own project officer. Mark commented, 'The Project Officer has been integral to the program, with her experience and very good people skills. A total of 34 landholders have been engaged, encompassing 1500 hectares of private property. Of these, 32 landholders have signed voluntary management agreements.'

The group was mindful in setting realistic goals, taking into account the widespread nature and biology of blackberry. Mark observed, 'We did not kid ourselves, we were never going to get rid of blackberry, we wanted to stop it from getting worse.'

As well as engaging land managers, the Project Officer assisted private landholders in applying for Good Neighbour Funding within the group's target area. This was important as it supported private landowners on Dabyminga's program, who are adjacent to infested public land.

The Action Group has developed partnerships with Mitchell Shire Council, The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and the Southwest Goulburn Landcare Network. The group has realised that not all partnerships develop at the same pace, patience is often needed. Mark is confident that DELWP will

have a greater role in the future supporting program participants with their limited funding, as more participants sign on.

Mark South has been pleased with the support of the council. 'The Murrindindi Shire Council sent an initial mail out to the target area which introduced our program. They also assisted in clarifying landholder responsibilities as they came up, but most importantly controlled blackberry on roadsides adjacent to private landholders on our program.'

The Dabyminga Blackberry Action Group will continue to operate in the short term, and will look to access external funding. The group's plan is to produce blackberry signs and display them in prominent areas, to remind and inform residents in future years.

## WORKING 'OVER THE FENCE'

The North East Blackberry Action Group (NEBAG) is working with four landholders and the Department of Environment, Land Water and Planning to design a variation on the Good Neighbour Program. The landholders, with contiguous Crown Land boundaries, will pilot a program for three years where they control blackberries 'over the fence' in State Forest. A requirement is that each has a ACUP, has a high level of blackberry control, is a participant in the NEBAG program and keeps accurate work records. Watch this space for updates.

## COMMUNITY STORIES: Mitta to Murray's Project Officer - 'Key To Success'

Paula Sheehan is renowned for being enthusiastic about blackberry management. Many people have remarked on how passionate she is in her role for the Mitta to Murray Blackberry Action Group (M2M).

Paula has been engaging landholders since 2012, encouraging landholders to enter into voluntary management agreements. Jim de Hennin, Mitta to Murray Blackberry Action Group President, remarked, 'Paula is just terrific, and an integral part of the program. Without her we would not have reached so many people.'

M2M's strengths is its strong committee, partnerships and most importantly, confidentiality of the program. Jim said, 'People respect and trust her, she encourages and works with landholders to control their blackberry.'

Paula enjoys her role, working with people, providing tools and strategies to landholders with blackberry issues. Paula commented, 'It is very important to find what motivates individual landholders, what is there overall philosophy. Everyone is different.'

M2M use a variety of methods to reach landholders about their program. Local Landcare groups, local champions, cold-calling, referrals from neighbouring



MITTA TO MURRAY PROJECT  
OFFICER - PAULA SHEEHAN, PICTURED RIGHT

properties and attending and presenting at forums have all been used. Paula stated, 'We have had one particular instance where a local champion introduced the program, and as a result I signed 30 landholders to voluntary management agreements.'

Paula has seen landholders get emotionally drained with their blackberry issue and sees the importance of her role in encouraging and tracking success over time, '...continuity of the Project Officer is very important, you build solid relationships over time, this is the key.'

## EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM



NORTH EAST COMMUNITY MEMBERS  
ASSESSING BLACKBERRY CONTROL RESULTS

### The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce's strategy focuses on reducing the local impact of blackberry.

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce's strategy focuses on reducing the local impact of blackberry on agriculture, environmental and social values in Victoria. One of the tools to achieve this is through the VBT's 'Community Partnership Program', a short-term enabling program for communities concerned about local blackberry. A significant amount of the VBT's budget is allocated to this program. A review has been commissioned to gain an insight into its effectiveness.

Six community action groups will be engaged by an independent assessor through a mixture of landholder/committee interviews and site visits.

This review will focus on finding out to what extent blackberry has been reduced through this program, does it provide good value or are there other more effective ways of investing in community action.

The assessment process will occur from mid-October, with findings available in the New Year.



## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Question On Blackberry Rust

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce receives many enquiries concerning biocontrol for European Blackberry and in particular about the blackberry leaf rust fungus, *Phragmidium violaceum*.

An enquiry was received recently about the lifecycle of the rust fungus.

The pictures adjacent are both of blackberry rust, but at different stages of their lifecycle. The orange spores are urediniospores, or the summer spores, that cause the defoliation impact. As winter progresses, or high summer temperatures hit, the rust produces teliospores - overwintering spores. These are survival spores. Same fungus different stage.



### Mapping Blackberry To Measure Change

Funding from the Australian Government Weeds and Rabbits program has enabled the VBT to undertake a review of mapping tools and to investigate new methods which will be more effective at measuring change.

One of the pilot areas will be around Licola, in East Gippsland, on areas of steep agricultural land. The purpose is to identify blackberry from existing maps (rather than mapping on-ground) and use the data as a benchmark for a three-year program.



## Striving For Better Communication Tools

On the 24th October at the Melbourne Museum, representatives from the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce, Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party, Victorian Gorse Taskforce and the Victorian Rabbit Action Network met to discuss better ways to communicate with and assist the Victorian public.

All group chairs and executive officers presented, explaining the background of each group and how they operate. Dr. Nigel Ainsworth (DEDJTR – Policy) gave an update on invasive species legislation and Currie Communications presented ideas on effective communication.

The purpose of the discussion was to learn more about using traditional and social media to better advantage. Often people trying to manage weeds and rabbits have difficulty accessing objective and relevant information about appropriate control methods in a particular situation.

Making it easier to find information and being responsive to enquiries were two of the avenues explored. It was recognised that sometimes people have only one weed which is a problem and need specific information on its treatment. While for others, integrated management advice is required - for example, blackberry and rabbits.

The groups discussed possible ways to collaborative in the future, including linking each other's websites and possible joint media collaboration where appropriate.



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