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 Septocya ruborum (PBD) from other Septocya 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

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
The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce’s strategy focuses on reducing the local impact of blackberry on agriculture, environment 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.
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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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.