

Victorian
Blackberry
Taskforce

progress
report

2005–2007





NORTH EAST
CATCHMENT
MANAGEMENT
AUTHORITY



North Central
Catchment
Management Authority

Glenelg Hopkins



C M A



GOULBURN
BROKEN
CATCHMENT
MANAGEMENT
AUTHORITY



West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority



CORANGAMITE CMA

HEALTHY CATCHMENTS
- HEALTHY WATERWAYS



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LANDCARE
VICTORIA

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Chairperson's Report



Lyn Coulston

As the Chair of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT), I am pleased to present our first Progress Report for the years 2005-2007.

The VBT remained in a period of abeyance until 2001, since its recommencement and appointment; we have begun to achieve progress towards the reduction of blackberry across Victoria.

Blackberry remains a serious woody-weed across many parts of Victoria and because of its highly invasive nature, has negative impacts on agricultural production and biodiversity.

The infestation of blackberry across different land tenures also remains a serious concern for communities across the state.

Our leadership has begun to facilitate the integration necessary to achieve a more strategic, holistic and community supported approach to manage blackberry infestations.

We have received strong support from the Victorian State Government through the Tackling Weeds on Private Land Program, the Mobile Compliance team, Interim Roadsides Weed Control funding, the Good Neighbour Program and research into biological control methods remains crucial for the containment, reduction and prevention of new blackberry infestations.

The VBT also established three partnership projects during the 2005-07 period which focused on problem areas in north east Victoria, the Bass Coast region and South Gippsland. Our community partnership projects have been very successful and we are changing the landscape as blackberry infestations are reduced. This raises new challenges for the VBT as farmers begin to explore options for land management after blackberry.

Despite this community-led approach, blackberry remains endemic in many regions of Victoria. Effective community engagement remains a high priority for the VBT and that is why we will continue to work with interested communities to co-develop the capacity to effectively manage blackberry infestations.

Our leadership will continue to encourage statewide community-led blackberry management.

Lyn Coulston
VBT Chairperson

Background

The problem

European blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus* L. agg.), the plant commonly referred to as 'weedy blackberry' in Victoria, is not just one species but belongs to 15 closely related but distinct species. Within Victoria there are at least nine species, some with subspecies and possibly hybrids.

Blackberry has many adverse impacts on agriculture, the environment, society and the economy. A conservative estimate of the cost of blackberry management and lost agricultural production in southern Australia is at least 40 million \$ per annum.

Blackberry invasion and establishment is reliant on three principals. Firstly that there is a place for it to grow, secondly that it has a way to get to that site and thirdly, once at that site, it has the ability to compete with other plant species to enable establishment.

Blackberry is unlikely to establish in situations where other plants have the opportunity to out compete it, hence we generally find blackberry establishing in situations where competition is removed or reduced to such a level that the weed has an advantage. Invasion of blackberry is most likely after disturbance, the greater the degree of disturbance the greater the invasion. As a general rule, the greater the diversity of the desired plant community, the less likely blackberry will invade.

Therefore the worst blackberry problems are often in areas where there is bare soft soil, high nutrient availability, moist conditions and high light intensity.

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) was originally formed in October 1999 because of increasing concern about the impact of blackberry across Victoria. A community workshop was convened which led to the development of the *Victorian Blackberry Strategy (VBS) 2001*. The vision of this strategy is that "*blackberry is managed effectively to prevent further spread and reduce its current impact on all land in Victoria*".

The VBT then went into a period of abeyance from 2001 until February 2006, when Lyn Coulston was appointed as new Chairperson. The VBT then revised and edited its Charter of Operations and reviewed the goals and actions contained in the VBS.

The role of the VBT is to oversee the implementation of the goals, objectives and actions as described in the VBS. It has strongly focused on promoting the Community Weeds Model approach. The Community Weed Model is an engagement and partnership approach which provides clear structure, function and processes to community groups to enable them to drive long-term change in the management of priority species in their landscape.

This progress report captures the progress of the VBT in the period 2005 to 2007.

The VBT's membership is comprised of community representatives and a range of stakeholders, including the Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Parks Victoria, the Victorian Farmers Federation and Catchment Management Authorities from across the state.

During this time the VBT has shared two Executive Officer positions, previously held by Andy Wernet and now Michael Reid.

Community Programs

Since its reformation the VBT's important strategic action has been investing in developing community partnerships around the state. This approach aligns with the desired outcomes set out in the 'Victorian Pest Management Framework' namely, 'increasing community capacity to successfully respond to new and existing pest problems'.

The program's principle objective is to support community partnerships and actions to implement voluntary compliance programs reducing the growth and spread of blackberry that:

- promote greater community understanding of the responsibility of private land managers to control blackberry;
- raise awareness in the broader community of the impacts of uncontrolled blackberry on biodiversity, recreational activities and agricultural production;
- achieve higher levels of compliance by supporting land managers to implement effective control programs; and
- involve public land managers on public-private interface to more effectively use the Good Neighbour Program to support work on private land.

Synergies have been created through the formation of partnerships with state and local government, Catchment Management Authorities, community groups and industry. These partnerships are essential to develop a holistic approach to blackberry management and will continue to evolve and strengthen as we continue into the future.



North East Blackberry Action Group

Introduction

The North East Blackberry Action Group - Upper Murray (NEBAGUM) was formed in February 2005 as a result of community desire to address the impacts of blackberry infestations on agricultural productivity and biodiversity in north east Victoria.

The foundation of the group is basically the Upper Murray Landcare Network, with partners including the Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Parks Victoria, Hancock's Victorian Plantations, Towong Shire Council, North East Catchment Management Authority and VicRoads.

NEBAGUM is the pilot community action group for the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce in the implementation of the Community Weed Model across Victoria.

In March 2005 the group initiated the development of a Blackberry Control Action Plan and began seeking financial resources to implement the plan. The State Government "Tackling Weeds on Private Land Initiative" was the only likely source at the time, so an approach was made to Towong Shire Council to support and submit the group's application for \$31,000.

The application was successful and NEBAGUM received \$25,000 for the development and implementation of a voluntary compliance project with private landholders in the Burrowye and Walwa localities of the Upper Murray.

Locality

The project area covers the administrative group boundaries of the Burrowye and Walwa Landcare groups. The nearest large population centre is Corryong to the east and Tallangatta to the west. The localities of Walwa, Burrowye, Mount Alfred and Guys Forest all fall within the project area.

Engagement

A private project officer was employed by the group to provide mapping and extension services in the Burrowye-Walwa project area in 2006. Mapping services included assessment of blackberry infestation on private land and on public-private land boundaries. Services also included roadside mapping of blackberry in the Towong Shire, beyond the project area into Cudgewa-Tintaldra and Nariel-Thowgla valleys. Maps were presented to Towong Shire by the NEBAGUM.

A list of landholders was provided to the program facilitator and 92 landholders were reduced to a priority list of 38. Inspection meetings were arranged for each of the 38 priority landholders.

NEBAGUM conducted 38 landholder visits and inspections in the works period from February to May 2006. Twenty nine of these landholders agreed to the terms of the three-year management contract between themselves and NEBAGUM.

The management contract outlined the landholder's blackberry management responsibilities and timing, to affect positive on-ground change on the land under their care. Landholders were supplied with a coreflute sign, recognising their involvement in the program, for display on their farm gate.

NEBAGUM was able to offer various forms of assistance to initiate control and/or reinvigorate landholder enthusiasm towards continuing control of the problem. Twenty-four landholders were offered differing forms of assistance, of which 17 agreed to the terms of the assistance and signed and returned the funding schedule. A total commitment of \$42,310 was made from NEBAGUM in 2006-07. Assistance included:

- 12.5 km of access track
- 73 acres of revegetation
- 2 packets of chemical
- 9 days of contractor assisted spraying
- 8.76 km of fencing materials

Landholders have made a total commitment of \$38,165 via their respective management contracts and assistance in 2006-07, including:

- 9.48 km of access track
- 8 hours of mechanical removal of dead canes
- 20 acres of Heli-Spraying
- 9 Contractor spray days
- 1 km of fencing material
- 50 hours of fencing labour
- 24 landholder spray days (in addition to current spray program)

Observations

During the site visits and landholder interviews common themes emerged, providing an insight into the past and current management of Blackberry in the area. Below is a short summary of the findings.

▪ **Landholders are receptive to change**

Most landholders are well aware that they have a problem and are very open to any suggestions made in terms of future management and containment of infestations. The landholders who seemed most despondent did not have the correct information or had not received credible advice in the past about blackberry control. This resulted in a spiral of futile control efforts and lack of kill which only compounded landholder feelings of 'why bother', enabling the weed to manifest on these properties. This highlights the importance of education and training for those providing control method advice to landholders, including Landcare officers, agricultural retailers, council weed officers, and weed contractors.

▪ **Frustration is shared**

Landholders with a blackberry problem are often just as frustrated as neighbours who cast judgement. Surveyed landholders said they could see no way forward and felt they received very little encouragement from external parties, including neighbours, to take affirmative action. Therefore, with landholders who are judged to be bad land managers by those around them, the cast aspersion tends to stick and the landholder often becomes despondent. Landholders are often too embarrassed to ask for assistance from neighbours or for advice on control. Farmers want to be seen as self-sufficient and asking for help is a sign they are unable to manage. The extension services offered through the program provided these landholders with an avenue for discussion and support. The program coordinator is a neutral player, well educated in the matter and sensitive to their economic and social pressures.

- **Understanding landholder motivation is the key to success**

Unless an understanding of what the farm means to the individual is grasped quickly, it is unlikely that 'best fit' management recommendations will be developed in the contract. For example, a farmer who bought his or her property over the Internet without setting foot on the property has significantly less emotional attachment than a 70-year old farmer who was born and raised on the property. In each case, management recommendations must reflect the financial, physical and mental status of the land manager.

The Internet buyer is likely to be cash rich but time poor, therefore management options that revolve around contractors facilitated by the program coordinator are likely to be more successful than landholder assisted spraying.

The 70-year old farmer is likely to be time rich, cash poor but physically challenged. Case management recommendations must be curtailed to what he or she is able to contribute physically and financially. In such instances NEBAGUM directs assistance to making access safe (construction of tracks) and also providing financial assistance for contractor assisted spraying.

- **Spring spraying needs to be increased**

Summer blackberry weed spraying is not enough to enable rapid success. An appropriate mix of chemical selection and timing is needed to give land managers the upper-hand when it comes to reducing the spread and incidence of the target.



Land managers discussing blackberry reduction efforts in Walwa, north east Victoria.

Figure 1. Process flow chart of engagement with landholders by project officer.

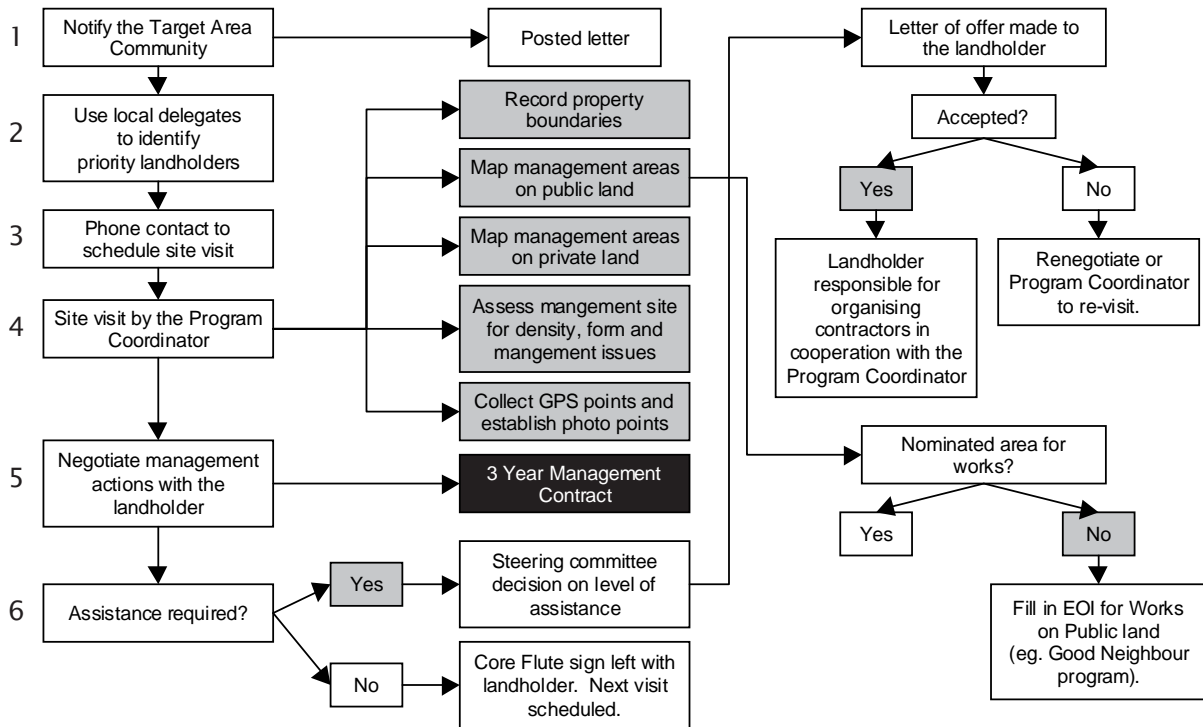


Table 1. Summary of work undertaken on blackberry by the North East Blackberry Action Group.

	Number of Landholders on Work Plans	Financial commitment from Landholders	NEBAGUM financial commitment	Roadside mapping	Roadside spraying	Access tracks built	Heli-sprayed
2005 – 2006	29	\$38,165	\$ 42,310	383 km	226 km	12 km	49 ha
2006 – 2007	42	\$43,890	\$ 22,000	407 km	407 km	22 km	0 ha

Bass Coast Community Partnership Program

The Three Creeks Landcare Group initiated its first major project since its formation in 2007, tackling significant blackberry infestations in the area.

Locality

The Three Creeks Landcare Group area is located between Kilcunda and Dalyston. Its southern boundary is the Bass Highway and northern boundary is Woolamai. The three creeks that give rise to the name of the group are Woolshed, Bourne and Bridge.

The Bass Coast Landcare Network has supported landholders in the past by providing extension and chemicals to help them control blackberries. Some have controlled blackberries and maintained control well, but others consider consistent blackberry control a low priority.

By raising awareness, educating and informing landholders of their control options, the two organisations have increased the capacity of landholders to more effectively control blackberries.

By forming 'cooperatives', the group has enabled some landholders to engage helicopter and standard contractors to spray blackberries at a reduced cost. The Landcare Group and Network were able to link this project with other successful collaborative weed control projects in the area, such as Ragwort and Gorse control projects.



Bass Landcare Group with VBT Chair and Executive officer at project launch.

South Gippsland Landcare Network Partnership Program

The South Gippsland Landcare Network (SGLN) submitted a community partnership program, which commenced in February 2007.

This project is focusing on building community capacity to extend the current blackberry control programs undertaken by SGLN over the past eight years, and specifically target two areas where the community identified an increasing need to address blackberry control. These areas have previously been problematic because of their steep and hilly geographic conditions, lack of resources, absentee landholders and the movement of new landholders into the area.

Outcomes will be reported in the next progress report.

State Government Programs

Tackling Weeds on Private Land

As part of the 2003-04 policy initiatives, the Victorian Government announced a four-year \$10 million Tackling Weeds on Private Land Initiative (TWoPL). The initiative was developed under the government's Victorian Pest Management - A Framework for Action (VPMF) to assist land managers in managing weed problems that impact on private land.

In 2003-04, the first year of the initiative, \$1 million was redirected under the Bushfire Recovery Program to bushfire affected areas in the north east and Gippsland regions. Nine million dollars was allocated to the remaining three years of the initiative. The focus over these three years was to develop and maintain effective partnerships with key stakeholders whose actions and activities impact on, or influence, the management of weeds on private land.

The initiative recognised that to successfully tackle weeds, a coordinated approach is required which engages the many land custodians including: state government, local government, private landowners, industry and the community.

As part of the initiative, a Mobile Compliance Taskforce was established to assist weed projects across the state. This component was designed to support the enforcement activities of regional staff through targeted mobile compliance projects. These projects targeted land managers whose ongoing refusal to tackle weeds threatened the efforts and investment of the surrounding community.

Mobile Compliance

To support the previous extension efforts of the Department of Primary Industries (DPI), the newly formed Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and Landcare, TWoPL's Mobile Compliance Task Force (MCTF) developed and implemented a mobile compliance project targeting blackberry in the Whitfield area in north east Victoria.

As with other MCTF projects, landowners in the project area were contacted in November 2005 to request that they complete control works prior to property inspections. Property inspections commenced on 10 January 2006, with both local and mobile compliance staff from around the state involved in inspecting approximately 3,414 hectares on 53 properties. Local DPI staff also inspected a further 12 adjoining properties to support the project.

From the inspections, 62 Land Management Notices (LMN) were issued requiring blackberry control works to be undertaken in a number of areas including Rose River, King River-Cheshunt and Edi Upper. The majority of landowners complied with the LMN and further action was only taken against one landowner who was issued an official warning letter.

Officers involved in the project received positive feedback from a number of landowners regarding the amount of blackberry control activity the project generated in the Whitfield area. A media release highlighting the program was also developed and published in local newspapers.

Consultation with Stakeholders

In developing and implementing the mobile compliance project, consultation occurred with the following stakeholders who assisted in building partnerships and delivering an effective project which supported the community:

- Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) Land Management unit in negotiating project areas.
- Catchment Management Authority (CMA) boards and DSE Regional Directors through the relevant DPI Community Relationship Manager.

- Peak Bodies for community weed management the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and Landcare groups operating in the area.
- DSE Crown Land Management to ensure public land was also treated as part of the project.

Consultation with these stakeholders included gaining input for project development and providing feedback on project progress and outcomes to assist in implementing projects in these areas in the future.

Interim Roadsides Weed Control Project

An Interim Roadside Weed Control Project (IRWCP) was initiated in October 2004 because a number of significant issues were raised regarding responsibility for the control of Regionally Controlled Weeds and Established Pest Animals (as defined by the CaLP Act 1994), on undeclared roadsides within Victoria. The DSE allocated \$273,000 for the treatment of Regionally Controlled Weeds on priority roadsides in 2004-05. In 2005-06 \$314,890 was allocated for the treatment of Regionally Controlled Weeds and Declared Pest Animals, to support the community led approach and previous investment made by both government and the community. The project was to allow the continuation of roadside pest treatment works, while the clarification of the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, Section 20 Part 3 paragraph (e) was being sought. The project was designed to run from July 2005 to June 2006.

The prioritisation of projects led to the following cost breakdown:

- Gorse \$157,065
- Serrated Tussock \$ 56,700
- Ragwort \$49,050
- Blackberry \$41,375
- Rabbit Multiple Outcome Project - Corangamite \$7,500
- Rabbit Multiple Outcome Project - Glenelg Hopkins \$7,000
- Boxthorn \$5,700
- Total \$314,890

In April, the roadside treatments began in earnest. Some of the major setbacks were in some municipalities' reluctance to proceed with contract provisions. This was the case for the Alpine Shire, in the north east. The Alpine Shire did continue with the process after successful negotiation by a DPI staff member with work completed much later than for other blackberry treated within the same catchment. Without the involvement of the DPI staff, in similar scenarios as this, municipalities may miss the window of opportunity to treat weeds and therefore efficiently use the available funding.

During the 2005-06 financial year a total of 1,744 kilometres of roadsides were treated across eight CMA areas and within 30 municipalities. The 2005-06 project involved the inclusion of 15 municipalities which had not previously been involved. Although it was expected that this might cause some concern at the beginning of the project, all municipalities took the opportunity to support the program. With DPI staff displaying the capacity to successfully engage municipalities that are new to the project, and 30 shires now having been involved in the project so far, a further extension of the process could proceed with less risk than in previous years.

Tables 2 and 3 provide details of roadside blackberry projects undertaken by various local government authorities in Victoria which received funding assistance via the IRWCP from 2005-2007.

Table 2. Blackberry focused projects funded through the interim roadside weed-side project during 2005-06.

Catchment	Species	Municipality	Total infestation (Km) treated 2005-06	Catchment actual cost 2005-06
North East	Blackberry	Towong Shire	21.8	\$10,000.00
North East	Blackberry	Wangaratta City	64.0	\$4,500.00
North East	Blackberry	Alpine Shire	70.0	\$7,000.00
Goulburn Broken	Blackberry	Greater Shepparton and Campaspe	200.0	\$10,000.00
Goulburn Broken	Blackberry	Murrindindi	50.0	\$9,375.00

Table 3. Blackberry focused projects funded through the interim roadside weed-side project during 2006-07.

Catchment	Species	Municipality	Total infestation (Km) treated 2006-07	Catchment actual cost 2006-07
North East	Blackberry	Towong Shire Council	323	\$8,000
North East	Blackberry	Rural City of Wangaratta	0	\$3,000
North East	Blackberry	Alpine Shire	38	\$7,000
North East	Blackberry/ Gorse	Indigo Shire	116.32	\$6,000
West Gippsland	Blackberry	Wellington Shire	24	\$6,000
West Gippsland	Blackberry	Bass Coast Shire	21	\$3,000
West Gippsland	Blackberry	South Gippsland Shire	39	\$3,000
West Gippsland	Blackberry	Baw Baw Shire	131	\$3,000
West Gippsland	Blackberry	Latrobe City	14	\$5,000

Statewide Compliance

The Department of Primary Industries in Victoria implements extension and compliance programs across the state for Regional Priority weed species. These programs engage land managers, ensuring that the weed management requirements of the Catchment and Land Protection Act, 1994 are being met in terms of weed management.

Table 4. A summary of statewide compliance data for blackberry for 2005-06 and 2006-07.

Activity	2005-06	2006-07
Number of priority properties inspected	401	1044
Total hectares inspected	41,479.4	10,5505
Total hectares infested	1,338.71	5598
Number of initial contacts made to land owners	402	432
Number of land owners requested to undertake control works through a Work Plan Agreement	281	320
Total hectares of infestation treated	2,713.47	49
Number of additional contacts made to land owners	362	-
Number of landowners complying with requests	229	157
Number of 24 hour Notices of Intent to Enter (NITE) served	248	661
Number of Notices of Inspection (NOI) served	16	317
Number of Land Management Notices (LMN) served	39	123
Number of prosecutions recommended by Sub-Project Manager	2	3
Number of letters received requesting action	16	16
Number of letters sent to reported land owners	46	8
Number of phone calls received	221	37
Number of phone calls made	139	35
Number of front counter calls	65	12
Number of other information items sent (ie Landcare Notes, etc)	164	99

Good Neighbour Program

The Good Neighbour Program (GNP) promotes the government as a “good neighbour” and catalyst for pest management on public land. The GNP is an essential element in the government’s approach to pest plant and animal management. It supports community based programs occurring on adjoining private land such as the North East Blackberry Action Group’s voluntary compliance program in the Upper Murray district of north east Victoria.

The GNP has a statewide focus targeting areas adjoining existing pest management programs. The GNP provides the mechanism for a strategic approach toward treating blackberry on the public-private land interface according to Regional Catchment Strategies and Local Action Plans.

The North East Blackberry Action Group – Upper Murray (NEBAGUM) are assisting with the implementation of Good Neighbour projects within their project area by mapping blackberry infestations on public land boundaries. This information is then provided to public land managers who endeavour to address these infestations via the Good Neighbour program.

This cooperative effort is proving to be effective and is a good example of the Community Weed Model in action.

Table 5 shows a summary of funding provided for blackberry projects across the state for 2005-06 and 2006-07 according to respective regions.

Table 5. Summary – Good Neighbour Blackberry projects by region.

Region	West Gippsland	North East	Goulburn Broken	North Central	East Gippsland	Wimmera
Amount funded 2005-06	\$65,175	\$226,906	\$144,350	\$545	\$22,500	-
Amount funded 2006-07	\$67,283	\$207,536	\$114,322	\$3,784	\$21,582	\$6,907

Table 6 shows a summary of Good Neighbour funding provided for projects targeting more than one weed species in which blackberry control formed a component of the respective project.

Table 6. Summary – Good Neighbour Blackberry and combined projects by region.

Region	North Central
Amount funded	\$38,900

Research on biological control of European Blackberry

Rust impact evaluation

A five-year study is in progress to quantify the impact of blackberry rust fungus on infestations of blackberry.

Three study sites in Victoria were selected across climatic gradients based on a ranked probability of rust impact. At each site, fungicide exclusion of blackberry rust allows a comparison with plants that are freely infected by rust with those that have very little infection. In this study, summer rainfall has been variable and rust impacts have shown similar levels of variability.

The research sites are located on private property and landowners participate in the maintenance of sites and application of fungicides. The study quantifies rust impacts on blackberry growth and performance to allow an assessment of the success of biocontrol and determine whether additional biological control agents are required. This research is funded by the Department of Sustainability and Environment with matching funds from the National Heritage Trust.



Rust infected blackberry foliage.

Exploration in Europe – searching for new biological control agents

Although blackberry rusts are established in Australia, including Victoria, high impacts are largely confined to open situations in regions that receive cool summer temperatures and regular summer rainfall. Shaded habitats, and those that experience moisture or temperature stresses, generally, are not subject to sufficient levels of defoliation to induce acceptable control. Consequently, a new program is underway to search for and develop new biological control agents for blackberry that are compatible with the Blackberry Rust fungus.

In 2006, a three-month expedition was undertaken across southern Europe to search for accessions of an anthracnose disease, Purple Blotch Disease, known to cause decline in wild blackberry populations. Searches specifically targeted southern Britain, the origin of *Rubus anglocandicans*, southern Australia's most widespread and problematic blackberry species. Over 100 accessions were made and now await evaluation and development as a possible biocontrol agent for blackberry. Native *Rubus* species and commercial brambleberry cultivars will be tested for susceptibility to selected accessions of the disease.

In 2007, the project concentrated on developing an understanding of the biology of Purple Blotch Disease and perfecting host testing methodologies. In 2008 to 2010, a PhD student from RMIT (Melbourne) will undertake extensive evaluation of this exciting new pathogen. The CSIRO staff at Montpellier, France will work collaboratively with Victorian DPI researchers in the development of new biocontrol agents.

In addition, a cane-dwelling sawfly will be examined for suitability as a biocontrol agent. Preliminary studies indicate suitability but additional testing in France is required to confirm its safety as a biocontrol agent in Australia.

Root and crown-dwelling agents are known from Blackberry in Europe. Some species have indications of suitability for development as biological control agents. Preliminary surveys in Europe undertaken in 2005, indicate that insect scarcity and potential difficulties with mass-rearing these species could hamper their development as biological control agents. Further effort is required to progress the potential of these organisms. Crown and root-feeding organisms have the potential to exert high levels of damage on blackberry infestations, as these are the only perennial organs of the plant.

The National Heritage Trust through the Defeating the Weed Menace round funds this research.

Mass-distribution of new strains of the Blackberry Rust Fungus

Eight new Blackberry Rust accessions have been selected and imported into Australia by the CRC for Australian Weeds and the CSIRO. The new accessions have been mass-reared by DPI at its Frankston laboratories and made available to land managers through a community engagement program.

Seventy-five sites were selected across the state based on a range of selection criteria. Releases were completed in 2007.

Despite drought conditions over the 2006-07 spring and summer period, the rusts appear to have established at several sites near Melbourne. DNA fingerprinting and sequencing procedures will be undertaken to confirm establishment.

This project is underpinned by strong community participation in all stages and is funded by the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment. New opportunities may occur in spring 2008-09 for the distribution of blackberry rust on regrowth occurring following the extensive Gippsland fires.

The Victorian program compliments a similar program coordinated by CSIRO in South Australia, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.



Release of Blackberry Rust in Hancock's Victorian Plantations.

National Blackberry Taskforce

The National Blackberry Taskforce (NBT) which drives the implementation of the National Blackberry Strategy (NBS) and is comprised of representatives from all relevant stakeholders in regions where blackberry occurs as well as researchers, agribusiness, and universities.

The Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) hosts the National Blackberry Coordinator who acts as an Executive Officer for the NBT and is responsible for effectively managing the strategy.

All of the 23 actions in the NBS are well underway with at least four completed. A review of the NBS to assess the overall degree of successful implementation of actions is to be undertaken for the remainder of 2006.

The three main goals of the NBS are to prevent further spread of different blackberry species, contain existing infestations and to rehabilitate treated areas to prevent reinfestation.

Introducing the new National Blackberry Coordinator, Penny Richards

Penny Richards started in the role of National Blackberry Coordinator in mid April 2006. She is hosted by the Victorian DPI and is based at the Frankston Centre. Her role is to coordinate implementation of the NBS (2001) and to oversee a cooperative approach to blackberry management across Australia.

As Executive Officer, Penny provides support to the NBT. Her early interest in ecology led Penny to complete a degree in Environmental Science at Deakin University and later a Graduate Diploma in Natural Resource Management at the University of Canberra. She has worked for the past 20 years in natural resource management including conservation planning, land protection, wildlife planning and management, Landcare support and biodiversity planning.

GRILCO secures federal funds

The Genoa River Interstate Liaison Committee (GRILCO) has been successful in securing a \$215,000 grant from the Federal Government through its Defeating the Weed Menace Program.

GRILCO is an interstate committee involving partnerships with industry, Victorian and New South Wales government agencies and private landholders, working on a whole of catchment approach to weed management.

The East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority is the proponent of the grant. Graeme Dear, Chief Executive Officer, said: "GRILCO is a great example of a cooperative group and we are pleased to be a part of it".

The project is running over a three-year period and aims to control weeds, including blackberries within the Genoa River, Wallagaraugh River and Mallacoota Lakes catchments, including sites of national significance. It will target heavily infested sites in the upper catchments to protect high conservation values downstream of the south east Forests National Park (New South Wales) and Coopracambra National Park (Victoria).

Major achievements achieved during 2005-07 towards the NBS Goals:

Goal 1: Prevent, contain and rehabilitate blackberry infestations

- North East Blackberry Action Group Upper Murray (NEBAGUM) established in Victoria in the Upper Murray to effectively achieve blackberry control work on private land and adjacent roadsides. This group has established a herbicide application demonstration site and a trial for pasture re-establishment following successful blackberry removal.

Goal 2: Adoption of “best practice” management.

- Lucid key (CD-Rom) for Rubus spp. identification completed and operational. Training workshops to use the Lucid key CD-Rom for the identification of the different Rubus spp. held in New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and South Australia.

Goal 3: National commitment to the effective management of blackberries is maintained.

- National Blackberry Taskforce (established in 2003) is operational; meeting three times during 2005-06.
- Blackberry is a declared noxious weed in all states and territories of Australia.
- “Defeating the Weed Menace” blackberry project applications coordinated with 23 blackberry project applications received nationally and assessed by the NBT. Two projects were successful in receiving funds in 05-06.

Coordinated Blackberry Research

- Overseas exploration for potential additional biological control agents.
- Blackberry Rust mass-rearing program.
- Release and monitoring of eight additional biological control rust strains in New South Wales, Western Australia and Victoria.
- Population genetics of blackberry rusts and the genetic implications of the new rust genes.
- Impact and evaluation of Blackberry Rust program in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia.

Major achievements of the NBS to date (2007) have included:

- A National Blackberry Research Summit (2004);
- The release and monitoring of eight additional biological control rust strains;
- Studies of the population genetics of Blackberry Rust;
- Exploration of potential additional biological control agents;
- Post-fire regeneration research and monitoring;
- Best practice herbicide use;
- Development of an electronic identification tool for blackberry species and training workshops for the identification key for Rubus;
- National map of blackberry extent, and density compiled;
- State blackberry taskforces in Victoria, Western Australia;
- Blackberry strategies produced for Victoria, Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania and Western Australia;
- Mapping of blackberry species in Western Australia;
- Implementation of a strategic eradication and control plan for all blackberry species in Western Australia;
- Major blackberry control undertaken in fire affected areas (post-January 2003 fires);
- Blackberry identification and management guides produced;
- Identification of blackberry in timber plantations as a major national issue (draft issues paper prepared);
- Major Blackberry control undertaken in fire affected areas (post-January 2003 fires);
- Blackberry identification and Management guides produced; and
- Identification of Blackberry in timber plantations as a major national issue – Draft Issues paper has been prepared.

International Landcare Conference

The VBT worked with other community weed groups to present the Community Weed Model to the delegates of the 2006 International Landcare Conference. The conference convened at the Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre on 8 – 11 October 2006.

Landcare is a uniquely Australian partnership between the community, government and business to 'do something practical' about protecting and repairing our environment. It is an important stakeholder for communication about pest management, and supplies important networks in rural and regional communities.

In the weeks leading up to the conference, members from each of the community weed groups (blackberry, serrated tussock, ragwort and gorse) worked together to produce a Community Weed Model brochure, briefly explaining the community engagement approach and also designed a set of five pull-up banners.

The conference went for four days with over 1,000 delegates attending, of which 10 per cent were from outside Australia. The Community Weed Model booth was well received by the delegates and organisers, with a large amount of extension material distributed.



Staff at the Community Weed Model booth at the International Landcare Conference, Melbourne.

Media

Table 7. VBT Media Activity Summary.

Date	Media type/Name	Activity Description	Comments
7 Dec 05	All media	DPI Media Release - "New Chair For Victorian Blackberry Taskforce"	General release to all media – announcing appointment of Lyn Coulston as the new Chairperson of the VBT.
21 Dec 05	DPI News	"Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party Hosts North East Blackberry Action Group"	Internal DPI news item.
22 Dec 05	ABC Local Radio	Live interview with Melanie Sim, Rural Reporter ABC Local Radio Goulburn-Murray	VBT Executive Officer interviewed regarding the re-establishment of VBT.
5 Jan 05	DPI News	"New Chair For Victorian Blackberry Taskforce"	Internal DPI news item - previous general release to external media.
22 Feb 06	The Weekly Times	Special feature article – "Berries at the sharp end"	VBT Chair & Executive Officer interview regarding the Community Weed Model application in NE Vic.
12 Apr 05	DPI News	"Victorian Blackberry Taskforce Update"	Internal DPI news item.
15 May 06	DPI Primary Voice – Spring edition	Feature article – "Local Hero"	VBT Executive Officer featured; included description of VBT and Community Weed Model.
26 May 06	ABC Local Radio	Field visit by ABC Local Radio Rural Reporter, Melanie Sim to Upper Murray; series of interviews recorded	VBT Chair interviewed by ABC Local Radio regarding NEBAGUM Community Weed Model project, during tour of inspection of project sites in Upper Murray.
27 Dec 06	The Weekly Times	Special feature article - "Sky's the limit for weed pilot"	VBT chair and Hancock Plantation managers feature regarding results achieved by NEBAG.



VBT Chair Lyn Coulston is interviewed by Melanie Sim of ABC Local Radio Goulburn Murray.

Natural Heritage Trust – Funding Report

Project Title - Victorian Blackberry Taskforce Project Officer and Operational Funding.
Project Proponent - Victorian Blackberry Taskforce via DPI Catchment and Agricultural Services.

Table 8. NHT Funding summary report 2005-07.

Milestone	Progress against milestone	Expenditure
Maintain Victorian Blackberry Officer (VBO)	VBO commenced Dec 1. VBT re-established to full complement of members.	\$134,665
Quarterly VBT meetings (inc. administrative assistance, annual reports, etc.) & 3-yr Workplan	VBT reconvened and first meeting held in February 2006 and quarterly since.	\$3,947
Communications	VBT Website developed and regularly updated. Community weed and blackberry poster developed and presented at National Weeds Conference & International Landcare Conference.	\$3,886
Community Weed Mapping	NorthEast Blackberry Action Group, Mitta Valley Landcae, and initial mapping within project partnership area (Bass Coast and Three Creeks) completed project area mapping on roadsides and public land boundaries. Statewide mapping graphics obtained - to be incorporated into poster displays.	\$7,000
Community capacity building	Community blackberry awareness day convened in NEBAG area and Bass Coast. Blackberry ID workshops funded across Victoria. VBT Chair, VBO and two VBT members attended community meeting at Yea (Goulburn-Broken CMA) to present Community Weed Model concept.	\$5,879
Summary	With the appointment of a new Chairperson, a new Executive Officer and the re-establishment of the VBT to a maximum complement of members, the project is now fully functional and beginning to make up for lost time. Budget targets will be more accurately met in the coming quarters as expenditure increases. Project update presented personally to Minister Bob Cameron by VBT Chair and VBO on 5th April 2006. VBT Charter of Operations has been reviewed and is ready for final endorsement at next VBT meeting. VBT 3-year work plan has been drafted. Partnerships established with DSE "Weeds and Pests on Public Land" initiative, DPI Mobile Compliance Team, Australian Rubus Growers Association and several community weed action groups.	\$155,357

Achievements

- VBT re-convened with full complement of members.
- NE visit to Bacchus Marsh.
- NEBAGUM becomes pilot project for PCDSF.
- VBT Charter of Operations reviewed and edited.
- VBT three-year workplan drafted.
- Partnership established with blackberry rust biological control project.
- Weedbuster Award for VBT pilot group, NEBAGUM.
- Partnership established with DPI Practice Change Decision Support Framework project.
- Communication link established with community groups in the Goulburn Broken and Ovens Valley areas.
- Communications established with VicRoads, north east region.
- VBT Website established.
- Minister Cameron approves \$40,000 additional funding for the establishment of two new community blackberry action groups.
- Two community partnership groups funded and established.



VBT Chair Lyn Coulston receives the Weedbuster Private Land category award for 2006 on behalf of the NEBAGUM from "Woody Weed".

Case Study

The North East Blackberry Action Group – Upper Murray (NEBAGUM) was formed in February 2005.

The drivers behind the formation of NEBAGUM were the great concern of Landcare members for the extent of Blackberry infestations in the area, coupled with a reduction in weed related services in the Upper Murray district. This highlighted the need for community action and the local Landcare network adopted the attitude of “if we don’t do it, no-one will!”

NEBAGUM developed a blackberry control action plan in March 2005 and secured funding via the State Government’s “Tackling Weeds on Private Land” initiative with the support of the Towong Shire Council.

A “voluntary compliance” program is currently being implemented in a defined area within the Upper Murray district whereby a consultant has been engaged to visit all landholders within the project area. An assessment of the blackberry situation on each individual property is made and subsequently mapped. A three-year work plan is then developed in consultation with the landowner. Advice on best management practice for blackberry management is also provided at the time of the visit.

Other land management agencies and industries are also encouraged to participate in the project. Because of this collaborative approach blackberry management within the NEBAGUM project area is coordinated across all land tenures, compounding the positive outcomes achieved. Other land management projects have also been integrated into the blackberry management program to deliver a complementary outcome, so that areas where blackberry removal is successful are effectively rehabilitated to a productive level.

For more information call (02) 6043 7975 or visit www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au



NORTH EAST

Blackberry Control Demonstration Site

A community based initiative supported by the Victorian Government.



Victorian Blackberry Taskforce

LANDCARE

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Appendix One

VBT Members

Lyn Coulston	Chairperson; North East Region
Robin Adair	Department of Primary Industries
Alex Arbuthnot	Victorian Catchment Management Council
David Boyle	Department of Primary Industries
Leigh Dennis	Corangamite and Glenelg Hopkins Regions
Garry Hammer	West Gippsland Region
Virginia Harman	Department of Sustainability & Environment
Ian Lobban	Vice Chair; Victorian Farmers Federation
Glenn Mawson	Parks Victoria
Lilian Parker	Goulburn Broken Region
Phil Rowe	Australian Rubus Growers Association
Peter Shea	North Central Region
Matt Stephenson	Bass Coast Landcare Network



Victorian
Blackberry
Taskforce

progress
report
2005–2007