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# Chairperson's Report



Lyn Coulston

As the Chairperson of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) I am pleased to present you with the 2007-2008 Annual Report. The year has presented exciting new opportunities for the taskforce as we continue to reduce the impact of blackberry in Victoria.

This year we have welcomed two new community members to the Taskforce, Shane O'Laughlin, representing North Central Catchment Management area, and Dawn Parker, representing East Gippsland Catchment Management area. The VBT have also released a new look website <http://www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au>, which contains up-to-date information and allows easier access to revise the site with current news, events and technical information as it becomes available.

Higher than average summer rainfalls in parts of Victoria has provided challenges and opportunities for the management of blackberry. On one hand, it has provided suitable growing conditions allowing plants to flourish. Whilst on the other hand, the conditions were also well-suited for the growth of the new strains of blackberry leaf rust, *Phragmidium violaceum*, which were released across 52 trial sites in fire affected regions of Victoria. The VBT hope this biological control agent will take effect in 2009.

The VBT believes that by working together in a community-led attack over the long-term, Victoria will make headway against blackberry. The VBT have invested considerable time developing partnerships with the community. This was highlighted during 2007 by successful completion of one of our community partnership programs in South West Gippsland and the establishment of a partnership project in the Far-East Gippsland region. In order to improve our engagement processes we hosted an international visitor, Dr. Tejpal Singh, from the World Conservation Union, Thailand Office, to share his experiences on community engagement processes.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Victorian State Government for its support through the Good Neighbour Program, the Interim Roadsides Weed Control funding and the continued research into biological control methods, which remain a vital component of the successful control and containment of blackberry infestations. State Government support in the form of compliance and funding for various initiatives have also been crucial for our success over the 2007/08 financial year.

The VBT continues to facilitate a more strategic, holistic and widely supported approach to blackberry control in Victoria. Our leadership in blackberry management will continue to drive statewide, community-led management of this invasive plant into the future.

Lyn Coulston  
**VBT Chairperson**



# Background

## The Problem

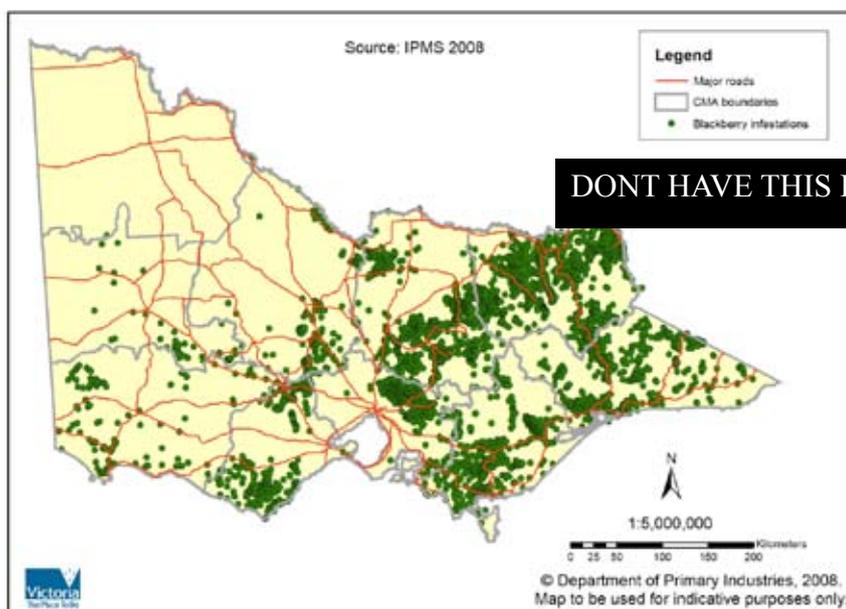
Blackberry is one of Australia's 20 Weeds of National Significance and one of three Victorian Community Weeds, due to its highly invasive nature, potential to spread and the environmental and economic damage it causes. It is a Regionally Controlled species in nine of the ten Victorian Catchment Management Regions which means landowners must take reasonable steps to control its growth and spread in accordance with the Catchment & Land Protection Act, 1994. Blackberry is a Restricted Weed in the Mallee and can not be sold or traded. Refer figure 1 for distribution of blackberry across Victoria.

Blackberry was introduced to Australia by European settlers. While there is evidence it was growing in a Sydney garden in the late 1830s, it wasn't until 1842 that blackberry was first recorded as being deliberately introduced from Europe to Adelaide for its fruit. Nine species were growing in Melbourne's new Royal Botanic Gardens in 1851, and the first director of the gardens, Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, initially championed blackberry as a source of food for the bush.

While the invasiveness and destructiveness of blackberry was recognised by the 1880s, despite considerable action to tackle it, the weed now covers nine per cent of Australia (Page & Lacey 2006).

Blackberry threatens our biodiversity and affects almost 9 million hectares of grazing land. It costs approximately \$100 million annually in control and lost production (Page and Lacey, 2006). This is a rise of \$60 million compared to survey results in the 1980s (Bruzzese and Lane, 1996). The environmental costs of blackberry remain to be quantified but are undoubtedly high.

Cultivars from the *Rubus* genus are grown commercially across all Australian states except the Northern Territory. The total annual production of *Rubus* fruit in Australia is expected to grow beyond the gross value of the current \$10 million annually (Australian *Rubus* Growers Association, 2005).



**Figure 1. Blackberry distribution recorded across Victoria.**

# The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) was formed in 2001 to help tackle blackberry's spread and adverse impacts. The VBT works on a diverse range of weed control programs in partnership with state, regional and local natural resource managers, as well as community organisations and private landholders.

One of three Community Pest Management Groups (CPMG), the main role of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce is to provide strategic direction to government and the community for blackberry control projects. It has a strong emphasis on encouraging and supporting community participation in blackberry control by adopting new approaches, community capacity building and providing incentives for action.

The VBT includes representatives from Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs), Landcare and community groups, the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF), the Victorian Catchment Management Council (VCMC), Department of Primary Industries (DPI), Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and Parks Victoria.

Since its formation the VBT's important strategic action has been investing in developing community partnerships around the state. This is reflected in the VBT's new strategy, emphasising community and partnerships, which was reviewed during the 2007-08 period, and was released in December 2008.

The VBT welcomes two new community representatives, Dawn Parker, Far-East Gippsland and Shane O'Loughlin, North Central CMA. Also Glen Jameson is the newly appointed representative for Parks Victoria.



**Figure 2.** Dawn Parker, new community representative from Far-East Gippsland.



**Figure 3.** Shane O'Loughlin, new community representative from North Central Catchment Management Authority.

# Community Partnership Programs

The VBT recognise that headway against blackberry can only happen when all those affected by blackberry work together in a community-led attack over the long-term. This has been actively pursued through the development of key relationships at the state-wide level, and through the promotion of our community partnership support projects.

The principal aim of these projects is to support community partnerships and action to implement a voluntary compliance program to reduce the growth and spread of blackberry and specifically has the objectives to:

- Promote greater community understanding of the responsibilities 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
- Involve public land managers on public/private interface to more effectively use the Good Neighbour Program to support work on private land.

The VBT have been successful in attracting funding from both the Department of Primary Industries and the Department of Sustainability and Environment to increase community capacity to successfully respond to blackberry management across the State of Victoria.

**Table 1.** Summary – VBT Funding for Capacity Building and Partnerships

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Project aims</b>	<b>Amount</b>
<b>DPI</b>	To develop the VBT and capacity of communities, namely their awareness, skills, knowledge and motivation	\$50,000
<b>DSE</b>	Developing new partnership programs across the State	\$35,000
<b>DPI</b>	Improving delivery mechanisms between government agencies, community partnership projects and the VBT to assist communities in blackberry management.	\$18,000
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$103,000</b>

## Bass Coast Community Partnership Program

The Three Creeks Landcare Group initiated this project to tackle some significant blackberry infestations in their area. The Group formed in 2007 and this became their first major project.

The 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 Creeks.

Previously, the Bass Coast Landcare Network provided extension and supplied chemicals to landholders to manage blackberries in the region. This resulted in mixed outcomes in blackberry control, with some landholders making a concerted effort, whilst others considered blackberry control to be a low priority.

### Engagement Process

The Landcare Network has held four focus meetings since the inception of the project. In the later months of 2007 the Landcare Network sent out letters to all landholders in the Three Creeks area. They were informed about the project and offered assistance with management plans and extension advice. DPI supported this process with management advice and an information package sent out to all landholders.

The Landcare Network Project Officer coordinated a field day on a property in the area. This meeting was attended by 35 landholders and a local contractor who advised the group and other landholders on spraying techniques and offered his services to landholders who are unable to spray blackberry themselves. Discussion was held and plans made for the group to purchase a spray unit for community use.

At the commencement of the project, the Project Officer placed an article in the Bass Coast Landcare Network newsletter to raise awareness of the project. One hundred mail-outs were then sent to landholders on the process and included technical information on the project. This resulted in seven property visits being undertaken by the Landcare Pest Plants and Animals (PPA) Officers.

## Observations

The project was warmly embraced by the community although with the initial mail-out, only one landholder replied seeking assistance in the form of advice. Traditional forms of extension have not proven to be successful with some landholders.

As the control of Blackberry infestation on roadsides was viewed as a high priority to the success of the project, Bass Coast Shire Council, Bass Coast Land Care Network and DPI provide funds to have all roads in the region sprayed. The Bass Coast Landcare Network 'works crew' carried out the work and the feed back from the wider community was positive.

By raising awareness, educating and informing landholders of their control options the Three Creeks Landcare Group have increased the capacity of the landholders to more effectively control their blackberries. The forming of networks has enabled some landholders to engage a helicopter and ground spraying contractors to control blackberries at a reduced cost.

The Landcare Group and Bass Coast Landcare Network were able to link this project with other successful collaborative projects in the area such as Ragwort and Gorse to use available resources effectively.

**Table 2.** Summary of work undertaken on blackberry in Bass Coast region.

	<b>Number of landholders on work plans</b>	<b>Roadside mapping (kms)</b>	<b>Roadside spraying (kms)</b>	<b>Private property infestations mapped (ha)</b>
<b>2007-2008</b>	0	30	32	0

## Mitta Mitta Blackberry Action Group

The Mitta Valley is located in the upper reaches of north-east Victoria. The nearest large population centre is Tallangatta to the northwest. The localities of Eskdale and Mitta Mitta all fall within the project area.

In March 2007 the Mitta Valley Landcare Group initiated discussions with the North East Blackberry Action Group about a Blackberry Control Action Plan for the Mitta Valley. In September 2007, the Mitta Valley Blackberry Action Group formed as a subsidiary group of the North East Blackberry Action Group.

### Engagement Process

A Project Officer was employed by the Mitta group to provide mapping and extension services to community-identified landholders in the area. Mapping services included assessment of blackberry infestations on private land and on public-private land boundaries. Services also included roadside mapping of blackberry.

A list of landholders was provided to the Project Officer by the VBT and six inspections were arranged resulting in all land managers signing a blackberry management plan. The management contract outlined the landholder's blackberry management responsibilities and timing to manage blackberry on their land. The project is still in its early stages; however, progress to date has been promising.

### Observations

Blackberry management in the Mitta region has had a long and chequered history. Efforts to engage the community have met obstacles such as absentee landholders, ill-informed and in some cases - recalcitrant land managers. Past projects have lacked a coordinated approach and follow-up emphasis. In addition, there has been a distinct lack of education and best practice information actually reaching landholders. As a result of the targeted actions of this project many of these past problems are being overcome.

**Table 3.** Summary of work undertaken on blackberry in the Mitta Valley area.

	<b>Number of landholders on work plans</b>	<b>Roadside mapping (kms)</b>	<b>Roadside spraying (kms)</b>	<b>Private property infestations mapped (ha)</b>
<b>2007-2008</b>	6	113	113	364

## North East Blackberry Action Group

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.

The project area is the administrative group boundaries of Burrowye and Walwa Landcare Groups in north eastern Victoria. The nearest large population centre is Corryong to the east and Tallangatta to the west. The localities of Walwa, Burrowye, Mt. Alfred and Guys Forest all fall within the project area.

The foundation of the group is basically the Upper Murray Landcare Network, and partners within the group include the Department of Primary Industries, Department of Sustainability & 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.

A private officer was employed by the group to provide mapping and extension services to community-identified landholders in the area. Mapping services included assessment of blackberry infestations on private land and on public-private land boundaries. Services also included roadside mapping of blackberry.

This year, two NEBAGUM community members attended the Third Victorian Weed Conference – Earth, Water & Weeds, in Bendigo. The conference explored weed prevention and managing widely established weeds, tackling weeds on private land, improved weed management procedures and provided an opportunity to understand new and emerging threats in pest management. NEBAGUM have also submitted a funding proposal to DPI's recreational fishing grants program focusing on the removal of blackberry on crown land reserves in recreational fishing areas.

In March 2008 NEBAGUM hosted a forum to celebrate their success through showcasing their approach to private landholders from across the state, local government and representatives from various State Departments. Over forty-five people attended and were bussed around Burrowye, Walwa, Tintaldra and Cudgewa to see presentations on the different management approaches used to control blackberry infestations.

Subject discussions during the forum focused on:

- Discussion on progressive management and planning for the future.
- Discussion on progressive rehabilitation – Parks Victoria.
- The use of goats as a management tool – Heather Osborne (VFF).
- Establishing pasture on steep slopes.
- Mechanical removal of blackberry from steep slopes.
- Progressive management of river reserves.
- Impacts of heli-spraying.
- Impacts of fire as a management tool.
- Managing blackberry in a 'FarmSafe' way.

**Table 4.** Summary of work undertaken on blackberry in North East District.

	<b>Number of landholders on work plans</b>	<b>Roadside mapping (kms)</b>	<b>Roadside spraying (kms)</b>	<b>Private property infestations mapped (ha)</b>
<b>2007-2008</b>	5	294	294	364

## South Gippsland Partnership Project

The South Gippsland Landcare Network (SGLN) commenced a VBT funded community partnership project in February 2007. Since the network was formed in 1995, SGLN has had a weed extension officer in place to offer advice and information to landholders on the most effective methods of controlling weeds, with priority given to ragwort and blackberry.

The project was divided into two target areas, Foster North-Mount Best and Slow the Flow Cluster - Poowong district, all falling in the South Gippsland Shire. These areas were chosen due to their history of blackberry infestation.

This VBT project was used to further enhance the extension methods in place and target specific heavily infested blackberry areas including roadsides and public land. Assistance was gained through the local shires roadside weed program and good neighbour to control the blackberry on the roadsides in the Foster North target area.



**Figure 4.** Martin Chatfield, Tony Gardern, Lyn Coulston and Mike Carnell at the SGLN offices.

## Foster North & Mount Best District

Landholder engagement was achieved in Foster North & Mount Best district through using an advertising campaign and editorials, coupled with extensive discussions with local groups at meetings and through network newsletters and email.

A workshop was conducted by the SGLN with the Foster North Landcare Group, which takes in the bulk of the target area. The workshop resulted in valuable contacts being made in the proposed area. The majority of landholders in this area are absentee making the engagement process more difficult. To overcome this problem assistance was sought through the local shire, but mostly engagement with land managers was made through direct contact or by post.

Forty extension packages were delivered by the SGLN to absentee landholders in the area which included a letter offering a chemical incentive plus assistance with spray equipment if required. Land managers taking up assistance were required to sign a three year blackberry work plan to undertake control measures on their property.

Main extension activities of the project included:

- Foster North Landcare Group workshop event.
- 40 extension packages delivered to landholders not directly engaged.
- Article in local newspapers: The Mirror (two articles) and The Star, plus an article in a Landcare newsletter.
- Engagement of 16 landholders with 9 signing agreements and 7 wishing to undertake voluntary controls. All sites were treated in the first season.
- 25km of roadsides mapped and used by contractors in the target area through good neighbour and shire funding.
- 5km of roadsides sprayed by engaged landholders.
- 2ha of blackberry sprayed by Vic Roads to support adjacent landholders.

During site visits and landholder discussions, the social barriers and community perceptions towards blackberry management include:

- Absentee landholders are unaware of their responsibility to manage weeds under the Catchment and Land Protection Act or are not aware of the impact on the environment and their neighbours.
- Management of blackberry in remnant vegetation areas is very difficult due to steep terrain, lack of access and native vegetation sensitivity to herbicides.
- There is confusion amongst landholders over the responsibility of weed management on roadsides.
- There is a lack of appropriate equipment to handle large infestations.
- Ageing and ill health are often barriers towards managing blackberries.

It is envisaged that landholders who have not responded to date will be followed up in the 2008-2009 season. Current landholders engaged in the program will also need follow up extension into the future, as the VBT have found continuing guidance in control is often required over a period of years. The South Gippsland Landcare Network will continue to provide this extension into the future where possible.

**Table 5. Summary of work undertaken on blackberry in Foster North and Mount Best District.**

	<b>Number of landholders on work plans</b>	<b>Roadside mapping (kms)</b>	<b>Roadside spraying (kms)</b>	<b>Private property infestations mapped (ha)</b>
<b>2007-2008</b>	9	25km	30km	47.5ha

### Slow the Flow Cluster - Poowong District

The western end of the SGLN sits in the Port Phillip and Western Port CMA region and is made up of four Landcare groups, covering an area of 5,000 square kilometres. These groups are known collectively as the Slow the Flow (STF) Cluster. They are represented by a committee, and served by a facilitator/STF project officer. The STF project historically deals with on ground works and facilitating natural resource gains but has not included invasive plant management in its core role.

The STF cluster is situated at the top half of two river systems - The Bass and Lang Lang Rivers, both of which flow into Western Port Bay (an internationally listed wetlands site). Approximately 80% of the STF region is in the steep to undulating slopes of the Strzelecki Bioregion. The remaining 20% is in undulating to flat Gippsland Plain Bioregion. High rainfall, fertile soils and steep inaccessible gullies are contributing factors to Blackberry infestation.

Landholder engagement was achieved by the SGLN undertaking a media campaign, followed by personalised property visits by the Project Officer which provided technical advice, incentives linked to three year management contracts and property mapping of blackberry. Where necessary, follow up visits occurred to ensure project works were on track and to facilitate the coordination of contractor works.

During site visits and landholder discussions, the social barriers and community perceptions towards blackberry management include:

- Blackberries are the only thing holding the banks together.
- Blackberries are providing a natural barrier to stock entry to steep water courses and gullies.
- The infestations of blackberry along roadsides were an issue.
- Many landholders would like to do undertake blackberry management but are swamped by other commitments and the immensity of the task to reduce infestations

**Table 6.** Summary of work undertaken on blackberry in the Slow the Flow Cluster - Poowong district.

	<b>Number of landholders on work plans</b>	<b>Financial commitment from group</b>	<b>Melbourne Water Commitment</b>	<b>Private property spraying (ha)</b>	<b>Private property infestations mapped (ha)</b>
<b>2007-2008</b>	16	\$22,000	\$15,000	20	20

# State Government Programs

## Interim Roadsides Weed Control Project

An Interim Roadside Weed Control Project (IRWC) was initiated in October 2004, due to a number of significant issues being 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 Department of Sustainability and Environment allocated \$273,000 in 2004/5 for the treatment of Regionally Controlled Weeds on priority roadsides and administration of the project. In 2005/06 \$314,890 was allocated and \$300,000 in 2006/07.

Under the Weeds and Pests Initiative \$300,000 has been allocated for this project. The project will allow the continuation of roadside pest treatment works, whilst the clarification of the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, Section 20 Part 3 paragraph (e) is being sought. Priority roadsides were determined as those that:

1. Support the State-wide Community-led weed groups.
2. Require weed and rabbit management within relevant Multiple Outcome Project or Compliance Areas.
3. Complement works completed under last years programs.
4. Support Municipal Council/Community-led weed management programs where the Councils are prepared to implement the project and contribute matching funds.

DPI, DSE and the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) are continuing to work through the complex issues associated with the management of roadside pests. The responsibility applies to the vast majority of the rural road network, approximately 137,000 km of roadsides state-wide.

**Table 7.** Summary - Roadside weed infestations treated under the interim roadsides project.

Catchment	Species	Municipality	Total Infestation treated 2007/8 (kms)
Port/Phillip	Blackberry/ Ragwort	Baw Baw	69.84
North East	Blackberry/Gorse	Indigo Shire	8.8
North East	Blackberry	Towong Shire	390
West Gippsland	Blackberry/ Ragwort	Baw Baw	215.83
West Gippsland	Blackberry/ Ragwort	Bass Coast	71
West Gippsland	Blackberry/ Ragwort	La Trobe	16
West Gippsland	Blackberry/ Ragwort	South Gippsland	86
West Gippsland	Blackberry/ Ragwort	Wellington	339

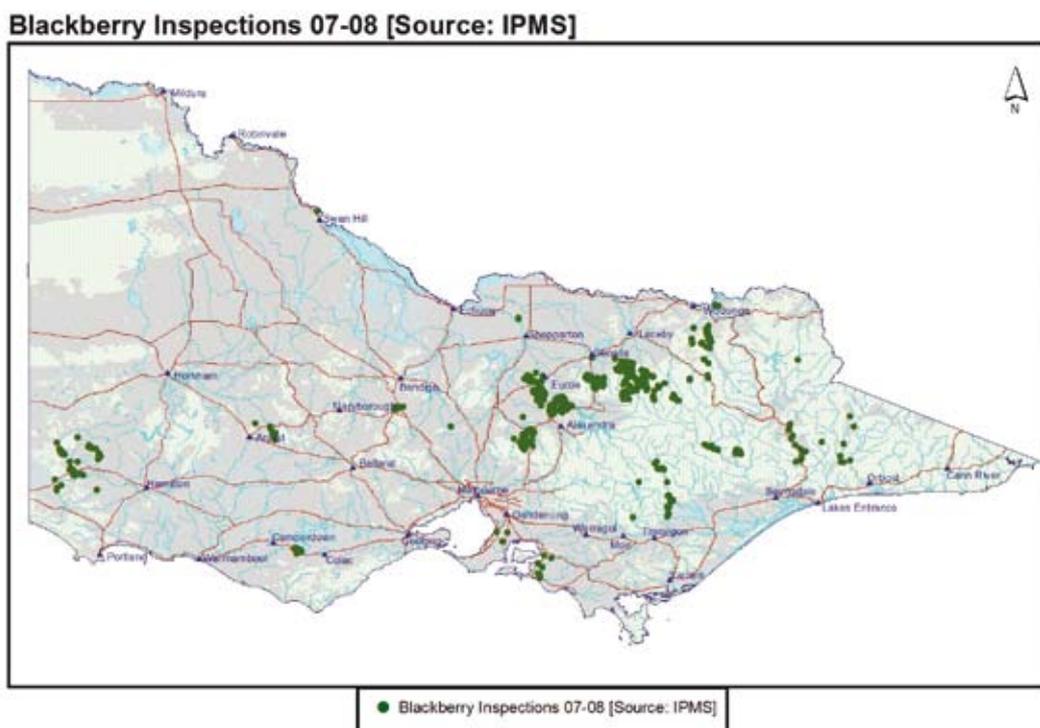
## State-wide Compliance and Extension Programs

The Department of Primary Industries Victoria implements extension and compliance programs across the state for blackberry (Figure 5 & Table 8). These programs engage land managers, ensuring that the land management requirements of the Catchment and Land Protection Act, 1994 are being met in terms of weed management.

DPI Rural Extension Officers provide landowners with advice and information. This increases the community's understanding of the weed's impact, encouraging voluntary management which extends beyond legislative requirements. The extension projects involve:

- A large component of community engagement which is aimed at getting the community to talk about weed management in their area;
- Meeting with individual landowners face to face, for initial and follow up inspections, and;
- Reporting on the work back to the community.

DPI Compliance Officers provide an essential service from which the whole community benefits. They undertake property inspections to ensure landowners meet their legislative requirements and aim at targeting and reducing the most serious areas of infestation to reduce the spread to other properties.



**Figure 5.** DPI extension and compliance programs recorded across Victoria.

**Table 8.** A summary of the state-wide extension and compliance data for blackberry for 2007-08.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>2007-08</b>
Number of priority properties inspected	587
Area of priority land inspected (ha)	95819
Area treated (ha)	2549
Number of directions served	180
Number of direction notices served	180
Number of Land Management Notices (LMNs) served	14
Number of Property Inspection Notices issued	5
Number of compliance entries	0
Number of prosecutions	0
Number of awareness raising events held	9
Number of letters received requesting action	21
Number of letters sent to reported land owners	44
Number of phone calls received	465
Number of phone calls made	439
Number of front counter calls	142
Number of information items sent	196

## Good Neighbour Program

The Good Neighbour Program (GNP) aims to build positive relationships with neighbours by reducing the extent of pests on public land that impact on adjoining private land and promotes the Government as a "Good Neighbour". The Good Neighbour Program is an essential element in the Government's approach to invasive plant and animal management. The GNP 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 provides the mechanism for a strategic approach toward treating a range of weeds including species such as blackberry on the public/private land interface. Regional Catchment Strategies and Local Action Plans provide priorities and the program aims to be responsive to groups and individuals at the local level.

Throughout the state, public land managers actively discuss proposed work in local areas with communities to ensure synergies with local priorities are achieved. In addition the applications of biological control programs are also used to target locations not possible to treat due to factors such as terrain or access. The use of blackberry rust is one such example where both programs compliment one another.

This cooperative effort is proving to be effective and is a good example of the Community Weed Model in action. The key is local people who are part of the community, with good local knowledge.

Table 9 shows a summary of funding provided for blackberry projects across the state in 2007-2008 according to respective CMA areas. Of the \$2.7 million allocated to the GNP program around 16 % is targeted at blackberry across seven CMA areas. Over one hundred projects focus on this species.

**Table 9.** Summary – Good Neighbour Blackberry Projects by CMA.

Region	Total	West Gippsland	North East	Goulburn Broken	North Central	East Gippsland	Wimmera	Glenelg Hopkins
<b>Amount funded 2007-08</b>	\$423,311	\$107,494	\$176,500	\$74,000	\$4,564	\$49,753	\$3,000	\$8,000
<b>Hectares treated</b>	14,411	5,821	2,031	555	28	5,856	110	10



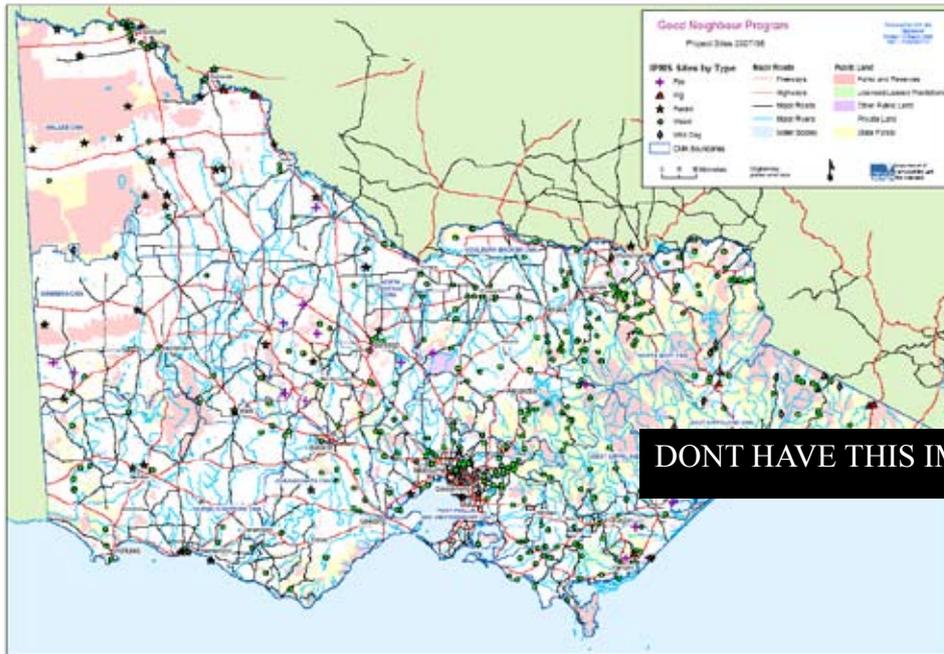


Figure 1. Good Neighbour Program project area, Victoria.

## Parks Victoria Blackberry Pest Plant Management

Parks Victoria's environmental management framework focuses on-ground works on protecting the highest values at greatest risk. Pest plant management is the largest program area for natural values management. Information on the values of the parks system and the risks identified in State of the Parks 2005, together with the 'Levels of Protection' framework, provided a basis for setting strategic priorities. A wide range of pest plant species were treated, some examples of the work on blackberry are listed below.

Parks Victoria Pest Plant and Animal teams continued to conduct targeted control programs across the state on a number of weed species threatening environmental assets. Highlights from the program involving blackberry included:

- Great Otway National Park treating weeds such as Blackberry and Ragwort in high profile areas including Triplet Falls and along the roadside verges of Turtons Track.
- Dense infestations of gorse, broom and blackberry targeted at Doctors Gully at Daylesford in the West region;

The Good Neighbour Program funded a number of pest plant control projects in other parks, and cooperative efforts continued with landowners and other agencies to integrate pest plant control across land tenure boundaries. Of particular note was the willing contribution of many volunteers to several of the projects.



Projects that involved the control of blackberry included:

- Major control programs of blackberry infestations within the Alpine, Snowy River, Mount Buffalo, Errinundra, Coopracambra, Great Otway National Parks, Bunyip State Park, Mitchell River National Park and the environs of the Gippsland Lakes.
- The detection of strong effects of the blackberry rust disease on blackberries in the Great Otway National Park. Sick, rust affected blackberry were observed in all the areas where diseased seedlings have been introduced over the past few years, as well as in quite distant locations.
- Introduction of more rust infected plants into to the Alpine National Park.
- Works were undertaken across the Otways landscape including areas in the National Park and Otway Forest Park by Parks Victoria staff, DSE staff, volunteers and local contractors, with works focussed on wild watsonia, boneseed, blackberry and other woody weeds.

## Research on Biological Control of European Blackberry

### Mass-distribution of New Strains of the Blackberry Rust Fungus

The leaf rust fungus, *Phragmidium violaceum*, is a biological control agent of European Blackberry, *Rubus fruticosus*. Since its introduction to Victoria, the rust has contributed to the effective management of European blackberry. The rust has climatic limitations, and its effectiveness has been limited due to resistance of some blackberry species and biotypes. Releases of additional rust strains have occurred in Australia to increase the range of susceptible blackberry species and to increase the capacity of the rust to co-evolve with its host.

Eight additional strains of the leaf-rust fungus were approved in early 2004 for release in Australia to improve prospects of the biological control of European blackberry. Prior to introduction, the new rust strains were screened to assess their safety for use as biological control agents, and their impact on native and commercial *Rubus* varieties.

The rust fruiting bodies damage the leaves, buds, flowers and fruit of the plant. One type of fruiting body produces bright yellow, wind-dispersed spores and is responsible for epidemics during the growing season, spring through to autumn. Another type is black, produced at the end of the growing season and allows the rust to over winter on infected plants.



**Figure 8.** Infected blackberry leaf with bright yellow spores during late spring.



**Figure 9.** Infected blackberry leaf with black spores during winter.

Following on from releases in 2005/06 and 2006/07, in 2007-08 the rust was released at 48 sites across Victoria. Sites were targeted at fire re-growth areas in West Gippsland, East Gippsland and North East Victoria

To date, evidence suggests that the occurrence of patchy summer rainfalls, resulting in higher humidity, has resulted in higher than expected establishment rates.

#### Exploration in Europe: Update on 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 by Blackberry Rust Fungus to induce acceptable control. Consequently, a new program is under-way to search for and develop new biological control agents for blackberry that are compatible with the Blackberry Rust fungus.

Research is being undertaken in Montpellier, France on the Purple Blotch Disease (PBD). Protocols for screening of disease against desired *rubus* species are almost complete. Currently, DPI Biosciences Research is coordinating the delivery of native Australian *rubus* varieties to be sent to France for screening. PBD is expected to be more effective than leaf rust in infestations under canopy conditions.

# Experience from South East Asia: Visiting Fellow

As a part of the Department of Primary Industries Visiting Fellows Project, the VBT hosted Dr. Tejpal Singh, director of the Ecosystems and Livelihoods group from the World Conservation Union from 21<sup>st</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2008.

Dr. Singh has experience in working with community-based natural resource management both on an international scale and at a local level. During his visit he spoke with landholders, community engagement and compliance staff, and senior managers and policy staff to explore issues around pest management and community engagement.

As a part of Dr. Singh's visit a report will be produced in collaboration with DPI, the World Conservation Union and LaTrobe University exploring learnings and future directions for community engagement in pest management.



**Figure 10.** Dr Tejpal Singh and Lyn Coulston inspecting blackberry control works.

# New Partnerships developed with Victorian Farmers Federation - Goat Committee

In conjunction with the Victorian Farmers Federation and Meat and Livestock Australia, the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce has been supporting a campaign to raise awareness of the benefits of goats in reducing blackberry infestations.

Booklets titled 'Weed Control Using Goats' have been distributed to selected DPI regional offices across the State. A conference entitled, 'Goats the Weed Busters' was also convened on at Wangaratta on May 30<sup>th</sup> 2008.



DONT HAVE THIS IMAGE

**Figure 11. A goat going to work on a stand of blackberry.**

# 'Blackberry Ain't Blackberry'

## Identification Workshops

At first glance, blackberry may all appear the same. However, there are 15 closely related but distinct species of European blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus* L. agg.) all containing subtle characteristics amongst each other. Commonly referred to as 'weedy blackberry', at least nine of these are growing in Victoria, some with subspecies and possibly hybrids.

It is also important to note that there are also native species of *Rubus* (some known as brambles) in Australia. Care should be taken not to confuse blackberry with the indigenous *Rubus* species or commercial varieties of raspberries, blackberries and brambleberries.

The VBT sponsored two State-wide 'Blackberry Identification Workshops' in Frankston and Wodonga. Participants attended from a wide range of organisations, including Local Government, Landcare, DPI and DSE, as well as private land managers.

The workshops provided participants with tools to better identify the different species of 'weedy blackberries' in Victoria and also provided information on various control techniques related to blackberry management. Understanding and collecting this information will contribute to more sophisticated blackberry management schemes in the future.



**Figure 12.** Participants at the Blackberry Identification Workshop, Wodonga.

# Communications and Media

The VBT strive to effectively communicate with our various stakeholders and the wider community in order to:

- provide leadership in blackberry management;
- promote understanding of the Victorian Blackberry Strategy;
- champion responsibility for blackberry management, and;
- develop and maintain blackberry management strategies.

This year the VBT has upgraded their website ([www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au](http://www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au)). The website has been professionally designed and provides easier access for technical information and information to be shared between the community partnership support projects, and it provides the latest blackberry news and events. It is also now supported by a new management system which allows much easier access to upload information. For a summary of all VBT media activity during 2007-08 refer Table 10.

**Table 10.** Summary - VBT Media Activity 2007-08

Date	Media type	Activity description	Comments
15 August 2007	DPI News	Community science fights blackberry	Victorian Blackberry Taskforce's role in blackberry distribution
23 October 2007	All media	Working together to fight blackberry	The role of the VBT in fighting blackberry in partnership with research
25 October 2007	ABC radio	Blackberry rust strains	VBT role in blackberry rust and exploring its effectiveness
3 November 2007	DPI news	Community + Science + Blackberry	The new blackberry rust strains
4 December 2007	DPI news	Community engagement in pest management	Meeting with the DPI secretary to discuss community engagement in pest management.
30 January 2008	DPI news	Blackberry ain't Blackberry	Promoting the VBT sponsored blackberry ID workshops.
19 March 2008	The Weekly Times	Berries perish in rust attack	Effectiveness of new rust strains
2 March 2008	Border Mail	Residents unite to fight blackberry	Mitta Valley blackberry program
10 March 2008	DPI news	Fighting blackberry in the Mitta Valley	New partnership program in the Mitta Valley.
28 March 2008	DPI news	Blackberry: Goats best friend	Promoting the Goat forum for weed control
23 April 2008	DPI news	Thorn in the side?	Promoting 'Blackberry control is more than science' DVD production.
20 June 2008	All media	Department Welcomes International Visitor	Highlighting the visiting fellow visit, Victorian Community Weed Model and community engagement in blackberry.
23 June	Border Mail	North East to Welcome International Expert	Improving community engagement in blackberry through international experience.

# Funding Report

**Project title:** Victorian Blackberry Taskforce Project Officer and Operational Funding.

**Project proponent:** Victorian Blackberry Taskforce via DPI Future Farming Services.

**Table 21. Summary – Expenditure Report.**

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Progress against milestones</b>	<b>Expenditure</b>
Maintain Victorian Blackberry Officer	VBO employed by DPI from 2007-08	\$ 97,641
Quarterly VBT meetings (inc. administrative assistance, annual reports, etc.) and 3-year work plan	Quarterly meeting convened.	\$ 3,937
Communications	New Victorian Blackberry Taskforce website developed. Communication tools purchased for VBT member for promotion. Annual report printing and design costs.	\$ 3,248.00
Community weed mapping	Community roadside mapping undertaken in Mitta Community Partnership support project.	\$ 2,000
Community capacity building	Field day conducted in North-Eastern Victoria. Three community weed meetings convened in East Gippsland with VBT chair and VBO. New community partnership program developed in Mitta Valley. Blackberry ID workshops funded across Victoria. VBT chair, VBO and NEBAG member attend the	\$ 20,129
Summary	The VBT have entered a period of consolidation, with a suite of representatives across community and government agencies appointed. Stronger partnerships have been developed through the community partnership support, with the development of the Mitta Blackberry Action Group and strong interest being demonstrated in East Gippsland. Further funding will be sought to continue to expand the capacity of VBT members and community partnership projects.	<b>\$ 126,956.07</b>

## Summary of Key Achievements

- Victorian Blackberry Strategy 2008-2013 written and finalised.
- One community partnership funded and established in Bass Coast.
- Visiting fellow, Dr. TP. Singh, from the World Conservation Union to explore new community engagement process for voluntary compliance in blackberry management.
- Dialogue and panning is underway for the establishment of a new community weed model for blackberry in Far-East Gippsland.
- New Victorian Blackberry Taskforce website established and functional.
- Approval of funding from DSE and DPI to the total of \$103,000.
- Relationship established with Victorian Farmers Federation – Goat Committee
- Two blackberry identification workshops convened.
- Field day and bus tour held in north east region which focused on showcasing the on-ground achievements of landholders, and discussion of challenges and opportunities for blackberry works into the future.
- Linkages have been established between the VBT and the Genoa River Interstate Liaison Committee.
- Partnership established with DPI Biosciences Research division.
- Victorian Blackberry Taskforce Progress Report 2005-2007 printed and distributed to stakeholders.