CONTROLLING BLACKBERRY POST-FIRE

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) acknowledges the severe impacts the fires have had on communities and the environment, not only in Victoria but nationally.

Landholders are now dealing with the effects of fire on their properties and assessing the present and future impacts on land and water and how best to manage them into the future.

Previously, the VBT has assisted communities in the aftermath of fire events, specifically in 2009, by providing support through community led Blackberry and Woody Weeds groups in Central Gippsland, Mudgegonga and Yarra Ranges. This support focused on the opportunity for landholders to control blackberry as it recovers and regrows after the fire event. Controlling blackberry at one metre high is much easier and more cost effective than controlling blackberry when it reaches three metres.

Landholders planning to use translocating chemicals as part of their blackberry control program, will achieve better results when there is sufficient growth and leafy area to ensure the chemical can be taken up and absorbed by the plant. At least one metre of hardened regrowth will usually provide enough leaf coverage for chemical uptake to the extensive root system.

For those using non-chemical treatments, the opportunity is there to keep on top of blackberry by regular physical control or the use of non-chemical products such as pine oil.

For landholders who would like further information about post-fire blackberry control including a hard copy of the Blackberry Control Manual, please contact the VBT.

VBT email - vbt@vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au

BARRIERS TO CONTROLLING BLACKBERRY IN COMMERCIAL CROPPING AREAS

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) is embarking on a new project to engage landholders in commercial horticultural regions, particularly where commercial Rubus (Raspberry and Blackberry) growers operate.

The project will investigate the barriers to controlling European blackberry and provide extension materials to address these issues.

The project has begun in the Wandin-Seville region, where the VBT’s Engagement Officer has distributed extension material to assist landholders in controlling blackberry effectively and safely.

A key message will be minimising the risk of chemical off-target damage, which is a real possibility in close vicinity to commercial cropping enterprises. The project will also run a series of blackberry control demonstration events.
Over forty Yarra Valley landholders attended the official launch of the Silvan Blackberry Action Group’s new engagement program, held at the Wandin East Recreation Reserve on 22 February.

With funding provided by the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce, the newly formed group will employ a project officer who will target thirty landholders offering a free property assessment and three-year Blackberry Control Plan. Landholders may also be eligible for financial incentives for control works funded by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning’s [DELWP] ‘Caring for Our Local Environments’ Initiative grants program.

The launch provided an opportunity for guest speakers to provide valuable information on a range of topics to the landholders attending.

Adam Upton, the group’s Project Officer, gave an overview of available blackberry control chemicals, which included legal responsibilities, timing and application techniques. Colin Arnold from GrazeAway explained the benefits and requirements for using goats. Nick Sell from Quicksorp demonstrated how Bioweed TM, a pine oil-based product controls blackberry. Nick emphasised the different mode of action and application rate compared with translocating chemicals. Finally, Rob Fallon - Northern Yarra Blackberry Action Group’s facilitator gave an insightful talk on how their blackberry program had a positive impact on the communities of Chum Creek, Steels Creek and Dixons Creek after the 2009 fires.

Adam Upton was very happy with the attendance. He said, ‘I was really pleased with the interest shown in controlling blackberry, but more importantly ten landholders have registered for a property visit’.

The group’s committee has representatives from community, Yarra Ranges Shires Council, Yarra Ranges Landcare Network and Yarra Valley Agri-business. The group’s president Coby Tromp, was grateful for the level of support and will draw on their experience in running the program. She said ‘The Yarra Ranges Landcare Network has been an important partner in getting this project up and running, and the Council has shown a willingness to align their pest program with ours. Melbourne Water has also attended a Group meeting to explain their Stream Frontage Program’.

**New Social Media Facebook Campaign**

In November 2019, the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) launched a six-month Facebook campaign to promote the VBT website and encourage more visitors to the site.

The VBT published 30 Facebook posts focusing on blackberry control options and the impacts blackberry has on landholders and the wider community.

Since the campaign started, the website has received 120 new ‘Need Ideas’ subscribers which represents an unprecedented spike in subscribers and website visits. The VBT uses this information to advertise events and disseminate blackberry control information via bi-monthly E-newsletters and regular emails.

The VBT Chair Lyn Coulston, emphasised the importance of the Facebook campaign. She said, “the increase in ‘Need Ideas’ subscribers, has provided us with a powerful tool to reach more people than would normally be engaged through our conventional community events and engagement programs alone.”

This campaign is funded via the Federal Government’s - Weeds and Rabbits Project VBT on Facebook: facebook.com/VictorianBlackberryTaskforce
Diagnostic tool assisting Rubus growers and future biocontrol options

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) in 2019 funded the development of a diagnostic tool for Purple Blotch Disease (PBD), which although not currently present in Australia, is a promising bio-control option for European blackberry. This tool will assist researchers in identifying the pathogen if research into PBD recommences.

This tool can also benefit the commercial Rubus industry who are affected by similar types of disease pathogens on their commercial cultivars. A leaflet outlining the spot, blotch and rust diseases of Rubus was published in 2019 and is available on the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce Website.

The VBT has also engaged a research scientist who has completed the collection of 150 plant samples across 30 commercial enterprises in Victoria and Tasmania. Spot diseases will be identified by the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and communicated back to individual growers with information to assist them in implementing control measures.

This project is funded via the Federal Government’s Weed and Rabbits Project.