



2014/2015

PROGRESS REPORT

VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT 2014/2015

Progress continues to be made in the management of blackberry in Victoria thanks to collaborative partnerships between the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT), communities, public land managers, Local Government and Industry.

As demonstrated in this report, the efforts of all involved in the quest for innovative and tailored solutions to reduce blackberry infestations is an indication of the commitment of both the VBT and the communities it supports.

The principal objective of the VBT is to oversee the implementation of the Victorian Blackberry Strategy (VBS) 2014-19, with the overall goal of a reduction in the growth and spread of blackberry across the State. This is delivered in a variety of ways, with an emphasis on supporting community efforts through a cooperative approach between all land managers both private and public.

The benefits and challenges of collaboration between community and Government in

blackberry control have been demonstrated again with the publication of the VBT Newsletters. There were two editions, one in December 2014 and the second in April 2015, with the aim of connecting our Partnership Groups and the general community. Featuring innovative approaches, demonstrations, achievements and observations on what has worked and what hasn't, the Newsletters provide a forum for discussion and education.

A highlight of the year was the screening of Community Service Announcements on three television channels across Victoria for three months. The theme of 'working together' and 'blackberry control is everyone's responsibility' generated a large increase in hits to the VBT website and email requests for information. The analysis of the requests and web use provide a valuable insight into the information people want and the best ways to provide it.

Taskforce members work strategically to ensure we are well informed about management options and in turn these are passed on to our groups. The balance between chemical, mechanical and biological control is a subject of increasing interest to our communities. These options were explored in depth this year with well attended forums and field days offering demonstrations of various control methods and specialist speakers

The VBT continues to support the continuation of the research into purple blotch disease (*Septocytia ruborum*). All funding has been withdrawn from what is a promising biocontrol for blackberry in shaded areas. However the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR), has provided the VBT with a \$5000 contribution toward the \$50,000 required to fund the research for another year.

The VBT website continues to provide useful resources for land managers involved in blackberry management including the Start Up Kit for communities interested in driving a local program.

I would like to thank the DEDJTR for funding support for the VBT and our partnership groups and for the contribution of knowledge and experience to assist with the implementation of the VBS.

Thanks also to the communities taking positive action to achieve local results. Your efforts are contributing to the maintenance and improvement of productive and environmental values across Victoria.



Lyn Coulston
Chairperson – Victorian Blackberry Taskforce



’ BLACKBERRY IS ONE OF VICTORIA’S WORST WEEDS

Left unchecked, it can rapidly infest entire local landscapes.

On private land, it costs millions of dollars in lost agricultural productivity.

On public land, it hinders our recreational, commercial and environmental activities.

Blackberry can alter water flows and cause soil erosion, it harbours pest animals, can out-compete native plants and it reduces biodiversity.

Blackberry is a serious issue in Victoria and is recognised as one of Australia’s most noxious weeds.

VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE ACHIEVEMENTS 2014/2015

- Supported hundreds of Victorians to reduce blackberry in their local area.
- Helped 10 community Blackberry Action Groups with their grass-roots activities.
- Funded local project officers vital for motivating landowners in their efforts.
- Presented the successful North East Blackberry Action Group Forum.
- Visited four community Blackberry Action Groups and another potential newcomer.
- Produced three community service announcements which aired on the ABC, Prime and Win TV.
- Successfully advocated on behalf of our communities for a financial contribution from the Victorian Government to continue research into blackberry control potential of Purple Blotch Disease.

THE VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

THE VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE WAS ESTABLISHED IN 2001 TO DRIVE AND SUPPORT EFFORTS TO TACKLE BLACKBERRY ACROSS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LAND.

One of three Victorian Community Pest Management Groups, the Taskforce encourages and supports community grass-roots action, with partnerships and collaboration a key focus.

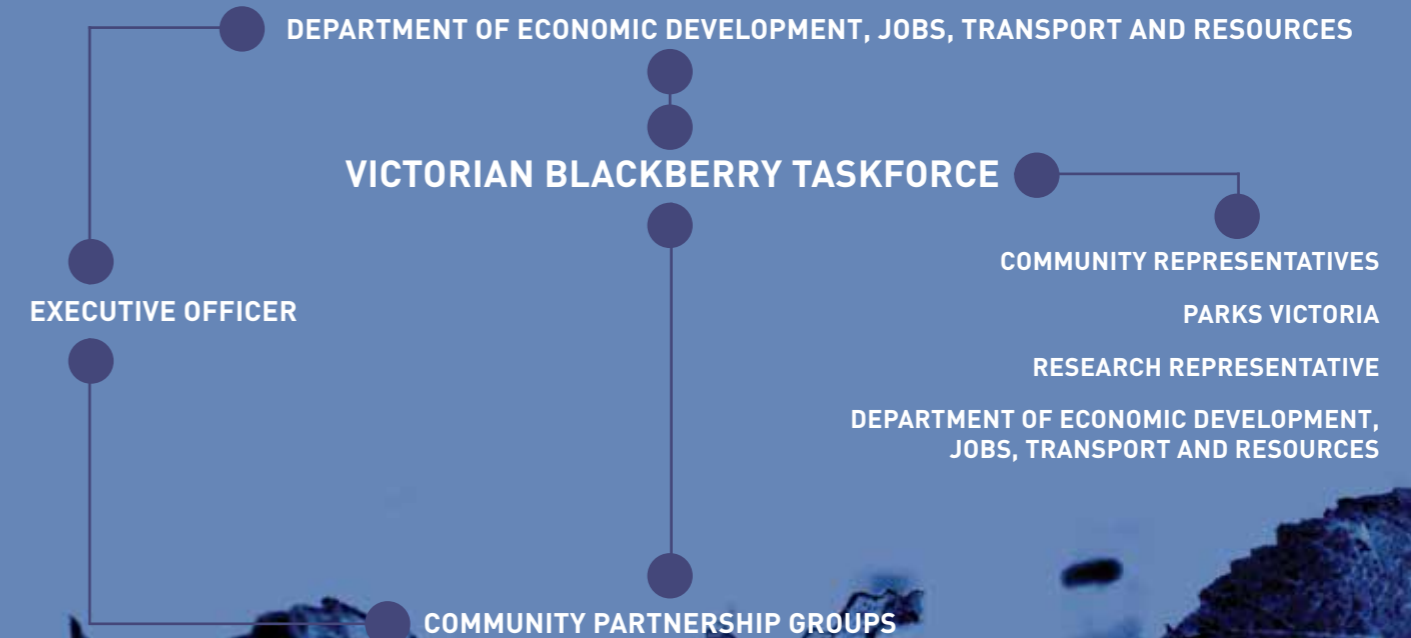
This approach has reinvigorated blackberry control efforts across Victoria and public and private land managers are working together to reduce blackberry and protect economic and environmental values.

The Taskforce comprises 10 members, including six community members, a research scientist and representatives from Parks Victoria and the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources.

It oversees implementation of the Victorian Blackberry Strategy and provides state-wide leadership in blackberry management.

The Taskforce's Community Partnership Program supports communities to motivate local land managers to work together to manage blackberry across landscapes.

It also provides feedback to policy makers on successful community approaches to blackberry control and helps drive research and innovation in blackberry control measures.



VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY EFFORTS TO CONTROL BLACKBERRY IS A PRIORITY FOR THE VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

Our Community Partnerships Program supports community-led action groups across the state to reduce blackberry in their local area.

It funds groups to employ project officers to help drive their activities, which include mapping the location and extent of local blackberry infestations and working closely with landowners to help them reduce the weed.

- Our Community Partnerships Program supported 10 community blackberry action groups this year.
- These groups signed up more than 200 landowners to 3-year voluntary blackberry management agreements.
- Some community action groups have established demonstration sites to showcase effective blackberry control methods.
- They have presented community forums and other events to build community awareness, knowledge and partnerships.
- Over 1,200 Victorian private landowners are now registered on the Blackberry Action Database Information System.



CORNER INLET BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

ANOTHER 12 LANDOWNERS PLEDGE TO MANAGE BLACKBERRY

The Corner Inlet Blackberry Action Group signed 12 more landowners up to blackberry control this year and secured more funding to expand its activities.

The group received almost \$50,000 from the Communities for Nature project to fund the spraying of 2,300 ha of blackberry along local waterways adjacent to landholders who have signed voluntary management agreements.

A further \$20,000 25th Anniversary Landcare grant helped tackle blackberry in the important wetlands area at the Corner Inlet Ramsar site.

The funding also enabled signage on gates and roadsides across the region to raise the profile of blackberry control and to promote the group's activities.

Over 40 private landowners have signed voluntary agreements since the group launched in 2013 and are working to control blackberry across a combined 2,300 ha.

The group's project officer continued supporting them and those who achieved their blackberry control targets were rewarded with a container of free control chemicals to help keep the effort up.



12

NEW LANDHOLDERS
ON AGREEMENTS

23

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

778

PRIVATE PROPERTY
VISITED (HA)

150

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATIONS
MAPPED (HA)

150

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATIONS
TREATED (HA)



KING PARROT CREEK BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

” A COMMUNITY EFFORT TO PROTECT NATURAL ASSETS

The King Parrot Blackberry Action Group signed another 17 local landowners to voluntary blackberry management agreements this year.

Over 60 landowners are now working with the group to reduce and eradicate blackberry on their properties.

The group centres its activities around the picturesque King Parrot Creek which flows through the foothills of the Great Dividing Range around 100 km north of Melbourne. Many private properties extend to the creek’s frontage.

The King Parrot group subsidises control chemicals to landowners and helps with spraying infestations, including by helicopter on steep slopes.

This year it received Good Neighbour Funding to tackle blackberry infestations along King Parrot Creek where spraying is not possible due to the breeding areas of the endangered Macquarie Perch.

It also worked with government officers, who visited approximately 50 local private landowners and issued direction notices to those failing to control their blackberry.



17

NEW LANDHOLDERS
ON AGREEMENTS

17

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

1700

PRIVATE PROPERTY
VISITED (HA)

97

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATIONS
MAPPED (HA)

65

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATIONS
TREATED (HA)

MERTON-CATHKIN BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

” A LEADER IN BLACKBERRY CONTROL EFFORTS

The Merton-Cathkin Blackberry Action Group kept its achievements up this year.

Of the 590 hectares of blackberry infestations on private land it mapped across the Shires of Mansfield and Murrindindi, landholders treated 550 hectares (94%) – exceeding the group’s 75 per cent target.

The group has become a leader in blackberry control efforts with a strong community presence and local blackberry control test and demonstration sites.

This year it received a \$4500 Communities for Nature grant to establish a test site at a riparian blackberry infestation on private land at the Godfrey’s Creek headwaters. Stretching

4.5 km, the infestation affects landholders further south in the Yarck Valley and the action group is working with the landholder, who is making a significant investment to tackle the weed.

The group also hosted a field day for about 30 landholders at its demonstration site at Avalon in Merton where it was the first in Australia to see the new Positrak / Wetblade Forest Mulcher in action.

The group also now provides signs for landholders on 3-year voluntary agreements to recognise their activities and encourage more blackberry action across the region.



9

NEW LANDHOLDERS
ON AGREEMENTS

16

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

1161.6

PRIVATE PROPERTY
VISITED (HA)

37.25

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATIONS
MAPPED (HA)

50

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATIONS
TREATED (HA)

MITTA TO MURRAY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

BLACKBERRY ON THE AGENDA IN NORTH EAST VICTORIA

The Mitta to Murray Blackberry Action Group leads a community-wide effort to tackle blackberry on public and private land across the area.

The group signed another 31 landholders to voluntary management agreements this year, with more on the list waiting to join when more support funding becomes available.

It now has 119 landholders signed up who have treated a combined 5,000 ha of blackberry across 26,500 ha. Some original participants whose 3-year agreements finished signed up to a second phase of 3 years.

The group has a strong local profile and is working with public and private landowners to coordinate blackberry control efforts to maximise results across the landscape.

It hosted two field days in partnership with government, business and industry to demonstrate different blackberry control methods, producing a 5-minute video of the event to help distribute information to others.



31

NEW LANDHOLDERS
ON AGREEMENTS

31

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

7841

PRIVATE PROPERTY
VISITED (HA)

2500

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATIONS
MAPPED (HA)

1500

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATIONS
TREATED (HA)

NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTON GROUP

BLACKBERRY REMAINS A STRONG FOCUS IN NORTH EAST VICTORIA

The North East Blackberry Action Group celebrated its 10th year with even greater success in blackberry control.

It has signed over 100 landholders to 3 year voluntary blackberry management agreements over the last 10 years. As agreements reach the end of the third year many landholders chose to sign for another 3 if they still have substantial infestations.

The group's main focus this year was checking the progress of landholders in blackberry control and its project officer visited 60 properties and phoned another 30 to check progress.

Many landowners have substantially reduced their blackberry infestations and are now focusing on revegetation and fencing projects.

The group expects a sizeable area of farmland to be reclaimed from blackberry in future years as project partners continue to build momentum and success.

Efforts to encourage and support participants included hosting a well-attended and successful field day to highlight the benefits of all land managers working together, the impact of blackberry on property values and to demonstrate various control methods.



3

NEW LANDHOLDERS
ON AGREEMENTS

60

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

35000

PRIVATE PROPERTY
VISITED (HA)

SANDY CREEK WOODY WEEDS ACTION GROUP

” SANDY CREEK WOODY ACTION GROUP JOINS THE EFFORT

The Sandy Creek Woody Weed Action Group is the latest to join the blackberry control effort, launching in late 2014 to tackle weeds across the Maldon region.

The group’s steering committee comprises the Sandy Creek Landcare Group, Maldon Urban Landcare Group, Tarangower Cactus Control Committee, Connecting Country and Parks Victoria.

Its focus is a 4,400 ha area comprising box and ironbark State forest and mostly small landholders, many of them absentee owners.

It aims to sign 30 private landowners to 3-year voluntary management plans in its first year of operation.

The group’s project manager has been visiting properties to remind landowners of their blackberry control responsibilities and to offer advice and support. Mount Alexander Shire has also letter-boxed landowners in the area.

The group will host a field day in spring to build knowledge and awareness in managing blackberry.



2

NEW LANDHOLDERS
ON AGREEMENTS

15

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

TRIANGLE BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

CONTROLLING BLACKBERRY AFTER BUSHFIRES

The Triangle Blackberry Action Group expanded its target area for blackberry control this year.

The group works to control blackberry around Narbethong, Marysville, Taggerty and Buxton on Melbourne's north east fringe.

These areas were severely burned by the 2009 Black Saturday fires and the challenge has been tackling blackberry as it re-establishes itself over native species and threatens waterways and important animal habitats.

The group's steering committee includes representatives from Parks Victoria, Murrindindi Shire Council and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

A total of 82 landowners have now signed 3-year voluntary management agreements and receive generous rebates for control chemicals from the group. Many also attended two field days the group presented over the last year to demonstrate blackberry control methods.

Murrindindi Shire and Parks Victoria continued supporting the group's activities, spraying blackberry along more local roads and shared boundaries with public / private properties in the Cathedral Ranges.



43

NEW LANDHOLDERS
ON AGREEMENTS

66

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

1604.8

PRIVATE PROPERTY
VISITED (HA)

240.6

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATIONS
MAPPED (HA)

182

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATIONS
TREATED (HA)

UPPER CAMPASPE BLACKBERRY AND GORSE ACTION GROUP

7 HELPING NEW LANDOWNERS CONTROL BLACKBERRY

Small landholders are a key focus for the Upper Campaspe Blackberry and Gorse Action Group.

The group encourages and supports diverse landholders to tackle blackberry across the Macedon Ranges Shire around Kyneton, Wooden, Trentham, Metcalf, Malmsbury, Ashbourne and Pipers Creek.

While the region includes larger grazing properties and wineries it predominantly features smaller 'lifestyle' properties as well as peri-urban blocks. Landowners often have limited land management knowledge and skills and are also often time poor.

This year the action group was encouraged by several small 'lifestyle' landholders new to the area joining the blackberry control effort, who appreciated the advice and support received from the group's project officer.

Real progress is being made by property owners who have signed 3-year voluntary agreements. They highlight how a little blackberry control effort makes a big difference to land value and productivity and contributes to protecting natural values.

Maintaining the focus is always a challenge, and the action group's project officer continued working to encourage blackberry control action, including at the Kyneton Show.



7

NEW LANDHOLDERS
ON AGREEMENTS

19

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

820

PRIVATE PROPERTY
VISITED (HA)

535

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATIONS
MAPPED (HA)

350

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATIONS
TREATED (HA)

UP TO US BLACKBERRY ACTON GROUP

PARTNERSHIPS PAY OFF FOR BLACKBERRY CONTROL

The Up to Us Blackberry Action Group exceeded its annual targets and strengthened its partnerships this year.

It signed another 40 local landholders to voluntary management agreements, 10 over its set target. A total of 107 landholders are now signed to agreements to tackle blackberry on their properties.

Up to Us strengthened its support for them this year, launching an incentives program using a \$15,000 grant from the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority.

It also demonstrated wet blade technology and purchased a slip-on spray unit for landholders to use in tackling their blackberry.

Up to Us also won a contract with the Mansfield Shire Council this year to map weed infestations on local roads, enabling it to integrate its data on private land infestations and build a map of weeds across the area. The Council also sent letters to 800 households promoting the group and its activities.

The group also hosted a weed forum for private and government organisations and an integrated blackberry management program is now underway with Victorian Government departments and agencies and local businesses, including alpine resorts and plantations.



40

NEW LANDHOLDERS
ON AGREEMENTS

60

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

3000

PRIVATE PROPERTY
VISITED (HA)

270

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATIONS
MAPPED (HA)

270+

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATIONS
TREATED (HA)

WELLINGTON DISTRICT BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

BLACKBERRY CONTROL ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE

The Wellington District Blackberry Taskforce signed another 22 private landholders to voluntary blackberry management agreements this year.

It's now supporting over 40 landholders in its local area to reduce and eradicate blackberry from their properties.

The Taskforce focuses its activities on the important Macalister Irrigation District and this year it particularly targeted private landowners in the Upper Maffra region.

The Taskforce enjoys strong community awareness and support and its project officer visited 77 properties this year to help landowners work together and eradicate blackberry across the local landscape.

Its successful partnerships also continued, with Southern Rural Water and Wellington Shire Council spraying blackberry along water channels and drains and local roads during the year.



22

NEW LANDHOLDERS
ON AGREEMENTS

77

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

2822

PRIVATE PROPERTY
VISITED (HA)

351.4

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATIONS
MAPPED (HA)

142

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATIONS
TREATED (HA)

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, LAND, WATER AND PLANNING

GOOD NEIGHBOUR PROGRAM

The Victorian Government's Good Neighbour Program aims to build positive relationships with neighbours by reducing the extent of weeds and pest animals on public land adjacent to private land.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and Parks Victoria consult with adjoining private land managers and community groups such as Landcare and Victorian Blackberry Taskforce to plan and deliver complementary blackberry treatment.

In 2014/15, the Good Neighbour Program invested approximately \$651,786 in 85 projects to undertake blackberry control on DELWP and Parks Victoria-managed land.

GOOD NEIGHBOUR INVESTMENT, 2014/15

CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY REGIONS	2014/15 \$ INVESTED	NO. OF PROJECTS
Corangamite	\$2,000	1
East Gippsland	\$158,887	18
Glenelg Hopkins	\$36,800	4
Goulburn Broken	\$79,450	10
North Central	\$55,127	7
North East	\$184,307	17
Mallee	\$0	0
Port Phillip and Westernport	\$60,615	17
West Gippsland	\$74,600	11
Wimmera	\$0	0

*Note in some cases the project may treat other species

\$651,786*
TOTAL \$ INVESTED

85
TOTAL NUMBER
OF PROJECTS

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, LAND, WATER AND PLANNING

PARKS VICTORIA

Invasive weeds in Victoria are a shared problem. The Good Neighbour program provides funding for Parks Victoria to invest in collaborative pest management activities along shared boundaries of public and private land.

Parks Victoria delivered around 100 Good Neighbour projects in 2014/15 to help integrate public and private pest management activities. This included activities to control weeds as well as rabbits and wild pigs.

It invested in blackberry control activities in 66 Victorian parks across around 5,000 ha along public and private boundaries in 2014/15, with approximately half being Good Neighbour projects.

Parks Victoria continued its support of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and its work to encourage collaboration between land management agencies and the community in blackberry control.



PARKS VICTORIA SUPPORT FOR BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS 2014 - 2015

NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

- Good Neighbour funding of \$16,600 supported the treatment of 248 ha in the Burrowa-Pine National Park.
- Good Neighbour also contributed \$6,200 to a project to treat 132 ha in the Mount Mittamatite Regional Park.

NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

- It invested \$880 for the Mountain Creek Education area to strengthen its focus on weed control.
- It invested a further \$880 for weed control activities at the Pheasant Creek Flora Reserve.
- Another \$910 was invested in weed control at Jerimal Wildlife Reserve.
- \$1,920 was invested in weed control at Neils Bend in the Murray River Reserve.

SANDY CREEK WOODY WEED ACTION GROUP

- Contributed to the efforts of Loddon Prison's Landmate team by burning the 400 m of woody weeds it cleared from the Long Gully area in Maldon.
- Support from the Department of Water, Land and Planning saw us remove weeds to reduce bushfire risk in the gully and clear a dredge pond.

MITTA TO MURRAY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

- Good Neighbour funding of \$13,300 treated 111 ha in Jarvis Creek Regional Park.

TRIANGLE BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

- Provided Good Neighbour funding for pest control including blackberry management along 2 km of the Cathedral Ranges State Park boundary.

BIOLOGICAL CONTROL

UPDATE ON PURPLE BLOTCH DISEASE

One of the roles of The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) is to oversee implementation of the Victorian Blackberry Strategy (VBS). The VBS recognises that blackberry is a complex problem which can't be solved but can be managed, and the taskforce continues to advocate for more research into biological control options.

Funding for research into Purple Blotch Disease (pbd) ceased in June 2012 and a proposal to the Australian Weeds committee to seek financial contributions to restart the program created little interest. However, the Victorian Government recently contributed \$5000 to help leverage other funds to continue the research.

The public land estate, private remnant native forest and commercial tree crops may benefit if the research were continued and pbd found suitable for release. These are usually difficult areas to implement successful chemical control programs, for a variety of reasons including damage to non-target species and access issues. Another tool is needed.

COMMONWEALTH FUNDING FOR EXISTING BIO-CONTROL

Phytophthora bilorbang has been occurring naturally in South West Western Australia (Warren and Donnelly River Catchments) causing significant dieback to blackberry since 2006. Recently announced research funding for this potential bio-control is part of a larger project totalling \$1.8 million over 3 years.

The Federal Government Rural Research for Development for Profit Program, targets 6 Weeds Of National Significance (parkinsonia, parthenium, blackberry, silverleaf nightshade, cylindropuntia, gorse) which have impacts on agricultural productivity. Meat and Livestock Australia are also contributing to this funding program.



www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au

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