



VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE
PROGRESS REPORT
2015 / 2016

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT 2015/16

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 2015, and the second in April 2016, 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.

The screening of Community Service Announcements on three television channels across Victoria for three months has generated many enquiries and information requests to the VBT website and email. The analysis of the requests and web use provide a valuable insight into the information people want and the best ways to provide it. The themes of 'working together' and 'blackberry control is everyone's responsibility' were selected in response to the type of landholder issues the VBT receives.

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. Community Service Announcements based on control options will be produced for screening in late 2016.

The VBT continues to seek support for the continuation of the research into purple blotch disease (*Septocytia ruborum*). In 2012 all funding was 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 and this has been matched with a contribution from HVP Plantations. The VBT thanks both organisations for their support.

The VBT website was refreshed this year and 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 a Weed of National Significance and one of Australia's most noxious weeds.**

VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE ACHIEVEMENTS 2015 / 2016

- Supported hundreds of Victorians to reduce blackberry in their local area.
- Helped seven Blackberry Action Groups with community activities.
- Funded local project officers for community engagement.
- Victorian Blackberry Taskforce representatives visited four communities.
- Three community service announcements were broadcast on the ABC, Prime and Win TV over a three month period.
- Two new Community Service announcements were produced for the 2016/17 blackberry season.
- Responded to over 50 email enquiries from landowners and managers with support material including VBT newsletters and blackberry control information.
- Published two newsletters to highlight community success stories in blackberry management and to promote demonstration sites.
- Successfully advocated to industry for continuation of research into Purple Blotch Disease.

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 seven 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 statewide 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.



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM 2015/16

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 Partnership Program supported seven community blackberry action groups this year.

- These groups signed over 100 landowners to 3-year voluntary management agreements.
- Three community groups continue to demonstrate effective control techniques at their demonstration sites.
- Approximately 1,300 Victorian landowners and managers are now registered on the Blackberry Action Database Information System.
- Former Community Partnership Groups signed close to 70 landowners to 3-year voluntary management agreements.





CORNER INLET BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Corner Inlet Blackberry Action Group in South Gippsland continues to expand and strengthen local blackberry control by providing practical advice and support to property owners tackling the weed.

Landholders who had previously shown a pessimistic reluctance to tackle blackberry are now signed up to voluntary blackberry control agreements and are actively involved in the group's activities.

The Action Group also led additional weed control projects in the region during 2015/16 after receiving additional funding through the Communities for Nature and the 25th Anniversary Landcare grants. Among the areas targeted included the important Corner Inlet Ramsar site with its high environmental values.

The South Gippsland Shire has sprayed blackberry along local roadsides and substantial weed treatment on public and private land is now a community commitment.

Large areas of blackberry infested land across the local landscape is now well on the way to being reclaimed, and in December 2015 the Action Group held a community celebration to highlight the efforts and achievements of local landholders and promote the importance of keeping up the focus.

24

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

1650

TOTAL PRIVATE
PROPERTY VISITED
(HA)

24

NUMBER OF NEW
LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS

66

TOTAL NUMBER
OF LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS





CREIGHTON'S CREEK - GOORAM BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Creighton's Creek - Gooram Blackberry Action Group formed in August 2015 to tackle the weed in the Creighton's Creek and Gooram catchments near Euroa in Victoria's north.

The group launched itself with a media event and its initial focus has been raising community awareness of the blackberry problem and motivating people into action.

The predominant industry in the catchments is dryland farming such as cattle and sheep farming with some cropping and horticulture and the region also includes smaller landholdings with absentee owners.

Blackberry has substantially reduced land productivity in the area and a community-wide approach is needed to tackle the invasive weed.

The Action Group is planning its first field day in Spring to demonstrate blackberry control approaches and encourage more local landholders to sign up to voluntary blackberry control agreements.

09

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

2344

TOTAL PRIVATE
PROPERTY VISITED
(HA)

09

NUMBER OF NEW
LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS

09

TOTAL NUMBER
OF LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS





DABYMINGA BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Dabyminga Blackberry Action Group is off to a great start, signing 22 landholders to voluntary blackberry control agreements since it formed in February 2015.

The Action Group targets blackberry around Seymour, specifically the historic Reedy Creek goldfields area and the Tallarook plateau.

Mitchell Shire Council has treated blackberry along 35 km of local roads since the Action Group formed and has also sent letters to property owners highlighting blackberry control responsibilities, linking them to the Action Group for advice and support.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning is another partner, along with Southwest Goulburn Landcare, which offers private landholders subsidies on blackberry control chemicals.

The Action Group is also galvanising the community, with more than 10 local volunteers attending its first community spraying days in February 2016 to treat blackberry on private and public land, including in cleared soft wood plantations.

24

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

1091

TOTAL PRIVATE
PROPERTY VISITED
(HA)

22

NUMBER OF NEW
LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS

22

TOTAL NUMBER
OF LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS





MERTON-CATHKIN BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Merton-Cathkin Blackberry Action Group has signed up 57 landowners to voluntary blackberry management agreements in Victoria's upper Goulburn region since it formed in 2014.

Blackberry control efforts are now underway across a combined 11617 ha and community awareness and action continues to build momentum.

A field day at the Action Group's demonstration sites in 2015 was well attended and its test site at a blackberry infestation stretching 4.5 km along a local waterway on private land remains an important focus.

The group continues to provide signage for landholders tackling blackberry to display on their property boundaries that recognise their efforts and encourage more local blackberry action. It is also planning to extend its target area to include more small landholders in the region.

26

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

5000

TOTAL PRIVATE
PROPERTY VISITED
(HA)

04

NUMBER OF NEW
LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS

57

TOTAL NUMBER
OF LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS





MITTA TO MURRAY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Mitta to Murray Blackberry Action Group shows how community-led action on blackberry generates success and multiple benefits for all.

The group has long surpassed its original target of 50 landowners on voluntary blackberry management agreements since forming in 2012, with 144 private landowners in the Upper Murray region signing up, many of whom have subsequently signed up for additional 3-year agreements.

Together, they are tackling blackberry across more than 29,000 hectares of private land with some almost eradicating blackberry from their land.

The focus on trialling and demonstrating different approaches to blackberry control continues, including in the region's steep and hilly areas. Community awareness activities and the success of landowners in blackberry control have strengthened interest in broader environmental issues across the area.

ONGOING GROUP

44

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

44

NUMBER OF NEW
LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS

144

TOTAL NUMBER
OF LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS





NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The North East Blackberry Action Group has celebrated ten years and continues to successfully tackle blackberry across the landscape with commitment and collaboration.

Now into its second decade targeting blackberry in Victoria's upper Murray region, the Action Group has led the way for others and remains focused and active in its community today.

Providing long-term practical advice and support to local landowners has helped them to reclaim substantial areas of productive agricultural land and the Action Group's collaborations with public land managers has seen blackberry reduced on Crown land including in vital water catchments.

Many of the first landowners who signed up to voluntary agreements with the Action Group, signed subsequent voluntary agreements, and remain in contact as they maintain their blackberry-free properties.

The Action Group's field days and demonstration sites continue to be important for motivating landowners to keep up the work and its successful approaches are being shared with and adopted by other communities tackling blackberry in their local area.

ONGOING GROUP

40

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

02

NUMBER OF NEW
LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS

206

TOTAL NUMBER
OF LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS





NORTHERN YARRA BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Northern Yarra Blackberry Action Group had another successful year tackling blackberry in the state's picturesque Yarra Ranges.

Another 39 local landowners signed up to voluntary blackberry management agreements, including landowners who had previously shown reluctance to get involved.

The action group has now signed a total 183 landowners to voluntary blackberry management agreements since the group formed in 2009 shortly after bushfires swept through the area.

These landowners manage a total 3,939 ha of private land and work is well underway to eradicate blackberry across a combined 259 ha infested with the weed.

The group has received funding for its activities over the past five years and aims to attract ongoing funding in 2016

ONGOING GROUP

78

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

39

NUMBER OF NEW
LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS

183

TOTAL NUMBER
OF LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS





SANDY CREEK WOODY WEED ACTION GROUP

The Sandy Creek Woody Weed Action Group had a stellar second year raising awareness and action on blackberry across the Maldon region.

It has employed a dedicated project officer who is raising awareness of the action group in the local media and visiting private landowners in the region to offer support with their blackberry management activities.

Twenty-six landholders signed up to 3-year voluntary blackberry management agreements this year, with each receiving 10 free native plants and tree guards as an incentive. Blackberry management is now underway on these properties, including along the banks of the local creek.

The action group also worked with government agencies to treat priority blackberry infestations in the Parks Victoria reserve within the Maldon Historic Area. Students from the Maldon Primary School also got involved, planting trees in the area to improve its environmental and tourism values.

30

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

500

TOTAL PRIVATE
PROPERTY VISITED
(HA)

26

NUMBER OF NEW
LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS

26

TOTAL NUMBER
OF LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS





TRIANGLE BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Triangle Blackberry Action Group signed another 28 landowners to voluntary blackberry management agreements this year, taking the total to 106 since it formed in 2013.

A \$25,000 grant from the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority enabled the launch of the Andrew's Creek Rehabilitation Project this year to tackle blackberry and Japanese honeysuckle choking the waterway.

The action group also received \$2,000 from the Good Neighbour Program to support the project, with 20 ha of blackberry infestations in the Cathedral Range State Park treated.

The Murrindindi Shire sprayed 90 km of blackberry along local roadsides and government agencies including Parks Victoria continued their efforts in blackberry control.

Absentee landowners remain a challenge but the group was able to contact some with help from partners and it continues to encourage plantation owners to tackle blackberry.

33
LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

1531
TOTAL PRIVATE
PROPERTY VISITED
(HA)

28
NUMBER OF NEW
LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS

106
TOTAL NUMBER
OF LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS





UP2US BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Up2Us Blackberry Action Group maintained its success with blackberry control across the Mansfield region this year.

It signed another 20 local landowners to voluntary blackberry management agreements, taking the total to an impressive 150 landowners now working to eradicate blackberry from their properties.

Building and strengthening community and government partnerships remains vital to the action group's activities and success and it worked with government agencies including the Mansfield Shire, Department of Environment and Primary Industries

and Parks Victoria. Its project officer has also talked to various community groups, including local farmers, to highlight the support it offers in blackberry control.

The action group's contract with the Mansfield Shire Council to map weed infestations on local roads has helped build a wider map of weeds across the area that is proving useful to government agencies and other groups.

ONGOING GROUP

135

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

20

NUMBER OF NEW
LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS

147

TOTAL NUMBER
OF LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS





WELLINGTON DISTRICT BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

The Wellington District Blackberry Taskforce continued to drive blackberry reduction efforts across east Gippsland this year.

Its project officer is now supporting 52 private landowners across the irrigation farming region to either get started on eradicating blackberry or to maintain their efforts and success.

The taskforce has mapped a total 550 ha of blackberry infestations across private properties since it formed in 2013, with 345 ha treated to date.

Blackberry remains a priority threat to the region's natural environment and agricultural producers and

the taskforce has built productive partnerships with Wellington Shire, Southern Rural Water and Murray Goulburn Water.

Highlighting the blackberry threat to local landowners and community remained a focus, with the taskforce presenting a successful information session 'Fighting blackberry makes cents' that attracted 50 participants. The information day also received good coverage across local media, including television, print and radio.

31

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

789

TOTAL PRIVATE
PROPERTY VISITED
(HA)

09

NUMBER OF NEW
LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS

52

TOTAL NUMBER
OF LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS



GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, LAND, WATER & PLANNING
GOOD NEIGHBOUR

The Victorian Government's Good Neighbour Program aims to build positive partnerships with neighbours to reduce weed and pests along shared public and private land boundaries.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and Parks Victoria work with private land managers and community groups such as Landcare and the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and its community action groups to plan and deliver blackberry control activities.

In 2015–16, the Good Neighbour Program invested approximately \$420,000 in projects to tackle blackberry on public land.

DELWP invested more than \$270,000 on 47 projects during 2015-16 which included a focus on blackberry eradication and control.

Parks Victoria invested almost \$150,000 on 29 Good Neighbourhood Projects during the year.

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS
PARKS VICTORIA

Parks Victoria continued its support for the Good Neighbour program which helps tackle blackberry along the shared boundaries of public and private land.

In 2015-16, approximately 350 km of shared public and private land boundaries was treated for blackberry. Parks Victoria also managed blackberry in over 100 Victorian public parks, covering around 50,000 hectares.

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS PARKS VICTORIA

Parks Victoria supported the following blackberry control groups in 2015-16.

NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

Good Neighbour funding treated blackberry across 132 ha of the Mt Mittamatite Regional Park (\$6,200).

Upper Murray landcare groups and Northeast Blackberry Action Group contributed funding from various sources for blackberry control on Parks Victoria managed assets.

- 60 ha at Pheasant Creek Flora Reserve (\$10,560)
- 5 ha at Jeremal Wildlife Reserve on the Murray River (\$1000)
- 6 ha in Mountain Creek Education Area (\$2,200)

- 10 ha at Neil's Bend and Greenhills Murray River Reserve (\$2,200)

North East Catchment Management Authority funding treated:

- blackberry across 100 ha at Koetong Creek which includes habitat areas for the endangered Brooroolong Tree Frog (\$11,500)

TRIANGLE BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

- blackberry control activities across 20 ha in the Cathedral Range State Park to support the Andrew's Creek Project

MITTA TO MURRAY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

- Good Neighbour funding to tackle blackberry across 11 ha in the Jarvis Creek Regional Park (\$8,500)
- Good Neighbour funding for blackberry control activities across three areas totalling 61 ha at Wagra – Granya (\$12,000)

SANDY CREEK WOODY WEED ACTION GROUP

- blackberry control activities in the Maldon Historic Reserve, including the Caledonian Kiln site



DEDJTR IMPROVED ENFORCEMENT

The Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources completed its fifth year of improved enforcement in 2015-16, targeting priority widespread weeds and pests of greatest concern to the community such as blackberry.

Under this improved approach, DEDJTR provides enforcement action for landowners who fail to participate in community action to meet their legal responsibility to control weeds and pests such as blackberry on their property.

In 2015-16 58 improved enforcement projects were conducted over a wide range of pest species across Victoria. 8 of these included blackberry, which resulted in 266 properties inspected, 12 Land Management and 80 Direction Notices issued.

BIOLOGICAL CONTROL UPDATE ON PURPLE BLOTCH DISEASE

One of the roles of The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) is to oversee the 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 on-going 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 that will be used to leverage other funds and continue the research. HVP Plantations has also committed \$5000 to the target of \$50,000 required for the next stage.

The public land estate, private remnant native forest and commercial tree crops may benefit if the research were to be 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.

www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au

VBT WEBSITE

blackberrytheweed.com.au

VBT BLOG

[@vbt_blackberry](https://twitter.com/vbt_blackberry)

VBT ON TWITTER

vbt@vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au

EMAIL THE VBT



