

# VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE PROGRESS REPORT 2016/17



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## CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT 2016/17

### Collaborative partnerships between the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT), local communities, public land managers, local governments and industry continue to drive blackberry reduction in Victoria.

As set out in this report, the efforts of all involved in investigating and applying innovative and tailored solutions to reduce blackberry infestations demonstrates the commitment of the VBT and the communities it supports.

The principle objective of the VBT is to oversee implementation of the Victorian Blackberry Strategy (VBS), with the key goal to reduce the growth and spread of blackberry across the state. The emphasis is on education,

advocacy and providing accessible information and support for public and private land managers to treat blackberry.

The benefits and challenges of collaboration in blackberry control were set out in one edition of the VBT Newsletter this year. The newsletter provided examples of how people are tackling blackberry and shared some of the challenges and innovation from real life experiences. The VBT Newsletter has proved important for

connecting groups and individuals, who present their achievements in articles with tips for what has worked for them and what they have learned, prompting discussion and the exchange of ideas.

Community Service Announcements were once again screened on three Victorian television channels over three months. The theme of 'blackberry control is everyone's responsibility' generated a large increase in hits to the VBT website and email requests for information. Analysis of the requests and web use provide a valuable insight into the information that people are seeking and the best ways to provide it.

The VBT received funding this year from the Australian Government's Agricultural White Paper, enabling a reprint of the very popular 'Blackberry Control Manual' and Summary Brochure. The funding also enabled resources for a well-attended

forum on 'Challenges for Invasive Species Management' at Toora in South Gippsland. This forum included presentations from leading researchers and specialist speakers on blackberry biocontrol, as well as increasing deer populations and the management of land with shared public and private boundaries and along roadsides.

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

I would like to thank the DEDJTR for funding support for the VBT. I also thank our partnership groups, communities and public land managers for their contribution of knowledge and experience in implementing the VBS.

**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 2016/17

- Supported hundreds of Victorians to reduce blackberry in their local area.
- Helped seven Blackberry Action Groups with community activities.
- Established the first peri-urban program.
- Victorian Blackberry Taskforce representatives visited four communities.
- Three community service announcements were produced and broadcast on the ABC, Prime and Win TV.
- Information provided to more than 30 email enquiries from landowners and managers about blackberry control.
- One newsletter published to highlight community success stories in blackberry management and to promote demonstration sites.
- Co-hosted an Invasive Species Forum with the Corner Inlet Blackberry Action Group.
- Produced six case studies highlighting the work of three community blackberry action groups.

## 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.

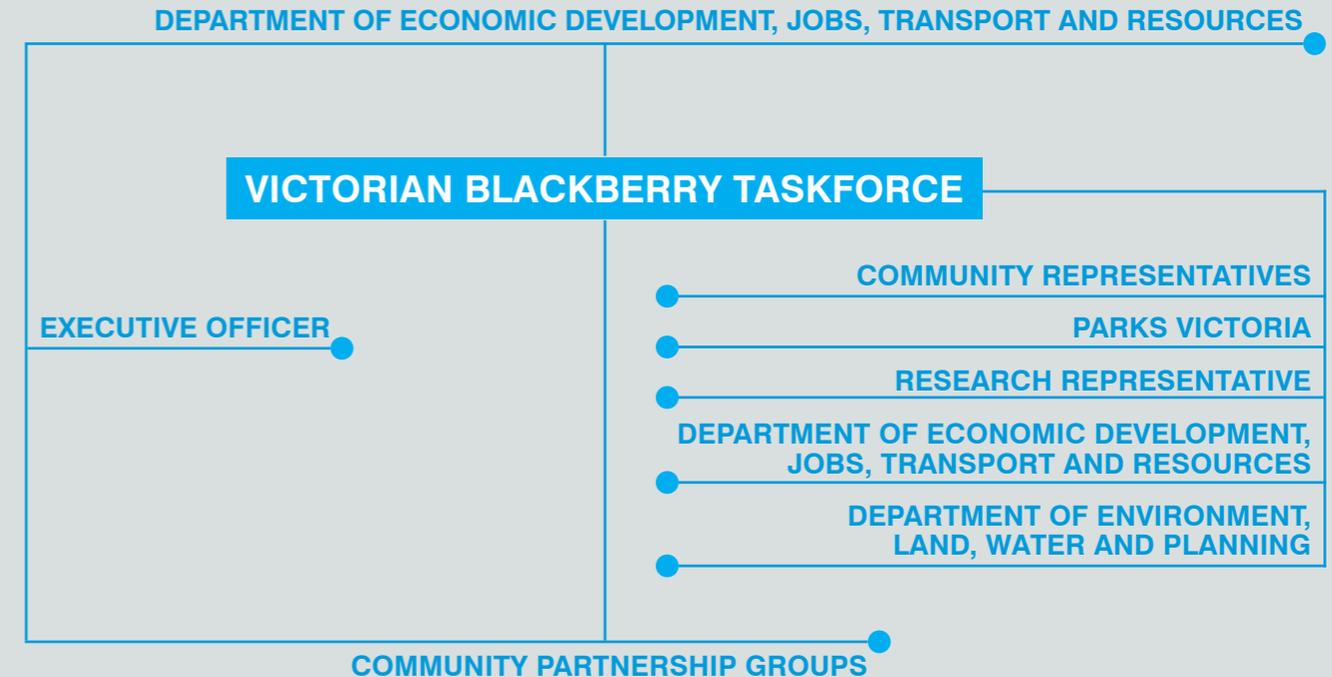
The Taskforce comprises eleven members, including seven community members, a research scientist and representatives from Parks Victoria, Department of Economic

Development, Jobs, Transport & Resources and the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning.

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 2016/17

The Community Partnerships Program continues to support community-led action groups across the state to reduce blackberry in their local area. It funds groups to employ a project officer to help drive their activities, including mapping local blackberry infestations and working with landowners to reduce the weed.

Our Community Partnership Program supported six community blackberry action groups this year.

- These groups signed 80 landowners to 3-year voluntary management agreements.
- Two community action groups continued to showcase effective blackberry control techniques at local demonstration sites.
- More than 1,300 Victorian landowners and managers are now registered on the Blackberry Action Database Information System.
- Former Community Partnership Groups signed 30 landowners to 3-year voluntary management agreements.





## CENTRAL GIPPSLAND WOODY WEEDS ACTION GROUP

The Central Gippsland Woody Weeds Group signed another 19 landowners to blackberry control this year.

Despite a lack of funding to subsidise chemical costs for treatment, momentum was maintained with the success of the group's initial participants encouraging newcomers to the effort.

The group formed in 2009 when rampant blackberry regrowth following bushfires in the region threatened to reach 1950s levels, when the weed covered large swathes of the landscape.

Properties around the township of Boolara in the Strzelecki Ranges are a key focus, where many landowners are ageing while others are hobby or lifestyle landholders who work off-farm or are retired.

The group has now signed a total 107 to the blackberry control effort and its project officer continues to build partnerships with plantation owners, VicRoads and the local council.

35

LANDHOLDERS  
VISITED

1,875

TOTAL PRIVATE  
PROPERTY VISITED  
(HA)

19

NUMBER OF NEW  
LANDHOLDER  
AGREEMENTS

107

TOTAL NUMBER  
OF LANDHOLDER  
AGREEMENTS





## CORNER INLET BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Corner Inlet Blackberry Action Group had a successful fourth year encouraging South Gippsland landowners to reduce their blackberry infestations.

Its work focuses on the area between the townships of Toora and Foster and bounded by the hill country around Toora North and Corner Inlet, which contains diverse agricultural land and important environmental values.

The group used funding from several grant programs to subsidise blackberry control chemicals for landowners, which helped encourage many who were previously reluctant to start spraying infestations.

Partnerships continued to be important, including with the South Gippsland Shire, Parks Victoria, Toora Lions Club, Friends of Agnes Falls and the local newspaper. The group held several community events during the year, including information sessions that attracted up to 40 people. A local citizens science project began tracking results to better understand the most successful ways to reduce blackberry in the area, which will inform them and the Action Group in future.

62

LANDHOLDERS  
VISITED

852

TOTAL PRIVATE  
PROPERTY VISITED  
(HA)

21

NUMBER OF NEW  
LANDHOLDER  
AGREEMENTS

87

TOTAL NUMBER  
OF LANDHOLDER  
AGREEMENTS





## CREIGHTONS CREEK-GOORAM BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Creightons Creek-Gooram Blackberry Action Group continued to build local awareness and action on blackberry during 2016/17.

The Action Group targets the owners of small lifestyle blocks and farms in the hilly region near Euroa, where blackberry has gradually spread across the landscape to become an increasing threat.

Landowners who sign up to blackberry control are eligible for herbicide subsidies from the taskforce as well as financial

assistance to employ a contractor to help with blackberry control.

A field day the Action Group hosted in October 2016 proved successful, with the number of landowners signing up to the blackberry control effort more than doubling.

15

LANDHOLDERS VISITED

1980

TOTAL PRIVATE PROPERTY VISITED (HA)

15

NUMBER OF NEW LANDHOLDER AGREEMENTS

24

TOTAL NUMBER OF LANDHOLDER AGREEMENTS





10

LANDHOLDERS VISITED

409

TOTAL PRIVATE PROPERTY VISITED (HA)

10

NUMBER OF NEW LANDHOLDER AGREEMENTS

32

TOTAL NUMBER OF LANDHOLDER AGREEMENTS



## DABYMINGA BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Dabyminga Blackberry Action Group signed another 10 landowners to voluntary management agreements in 2016/17.

The group is now supporting 32 landowners in the Tallyrook region of central Victoria in blackberry control efforts. Together, they're tackling a combined 300 hectares of blackberry infestations.

Local people showed their support, volunteering their time and effort at four community blackberry spraying days the action group organised

during the year. The group also worked in partnership with the Strath Creek Blackberry Action Group to organise a helicopter to spray blackberry, with several private properties pooling their resources to cover the costs.



## MITTA TO MURRAY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Mitta to Murray Blackberry Action Group has achieved a real difference in the local area. 8,000 hectares of blackberry has been treated by 170 local land owners with the group's support since it was formed in 2012.

Work continued this year to investigate effective ways to tackle blackberry, including using biocontrol agents. The group also provided gate signage for participating land owners to highlight their individual effort and promote the wider community blackberry control focus across the region.

The work of the Mitta to Murray Blackberry Action Group was recognised with the Community Group Award in the 2017 North East Natural Resource Management Awards. The group's president, Jim de Hennin, received the Leadership Award.

43

LANDHOLDERS  
VISITED

28

NUMBER OF NEW  
LANDHOLDER  
AGREEMENTS

170

TOTAL NUMBER  
OF LANDHOLDER  
AGREEMENTS





23

LANDHOLDERS VISITED

903.5

TOTAL PRIVATE PROPERTY VISITED (HA)

10

NUMBER OF NEW LANDHOLDER AGREEMENTS

10

TOTAL NUMBER OF LANDHOLDER AGREEMENTS



## MOORABOOL BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Moorabool Blackberry Action Group got off to a great start in its first year of work. It became the 21th local action group to be supported by the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce when it formed in September 2016.

The group is driving the first coordinated blackberry control efforts between public and private land managers between Bacchus Marsh and Ballarat.

Ten landowners signed up to voluntary blackberry control agreements in the first year, and it received \$30,000 from the Port Philip and Westernport Catchment

Management Authority to offset blackberry treatment costs, as well as \$5,000 from Moorabool Shire for roadside blackberry control.

The group also hosted a chemical training session for landowners and an information session with the Greendale Wombat Landcare group.



## NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The North East Blackberry Action Group has shown how community-wide action achieves results in blackberry reduction.

It has engaged 125 landowners in Victoria's upper Murray region since forming in 2005, supporting them to reduce a combined 5,270 hectares of blackberry to 740 hectares.

Collaborations with public land managers has reduced blackberry on Crown land and a sustained and successful roadside blackberry control program is now in place.

The group is currently working with 84 local landholders, although most require little active support these

days as they continue blackberry control efforts. Financial support for spraying activities was provided to 23 landowners over the last year.

The group stands as an example to others, who have adopted its successful approach of field days, follow-up visits and financial support to reduce blackberry across a local landscape.



## WELLINGTON DISTRICT BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

The Wellington District Blackberry Taskforce continues to develop resources that support community blackberry control.

This year it produced a ‘tips and traps’ fact sheet for landowners in the Gippsland region tackling blackberry along the Thompson, Macalister and Avon rivers.

It also launched a Facebook page to share information on blackberry control approaches.

A good turnout to the group’s annual community information day was achieved with strong local media support and a Dow Chemicals representative attending to provide expert information.

Raising awareness of the responsibilities that landowners have in treating blackberry along riverbanks continued in partnership with Southern Rural Water and Wellington Shire Council.

43

LANDHOLDERS  
VISITED

5,756

TOTAL PRIVATE  
PROPERTY VISITED  
(HA)

05

NUMBER OF NEW  
LANDHOLDER  
AGREEMENTS

57

TOTAL NUMBER  
OF LANDHOLDER  
AGREEMENTS



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

DELWP continued working with Victorian communities to manage weeds along the shared boundaries of private and public land during 2016/17. Approximately \$225,000 was invested into Good Neighbour activities at over 40 local sites targeting weeds including blackberry.

DELWP invested an additional \$300,000 into blackberry control activities through its Weeds and Pests on Public Land Project.

The Victorian Government also provided \$2.5 million to support local councils with roadside activities including the spraying of blackberry.



## GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS PARKS VICTORIA

Parks Victoria delivered 19 Good Neighbour projects focusing on blackberry along the shared boundaries of public and private land in 2016/17. Blackberry control works were also conducted across a combined 7,500 hectares in 36 Victorian parks. Blackberry reduces native water and land habitats for indigenous animals, can block rivers and streams used for recreation and continues to be an important focus for the management of Victoria's park areas.

### MITTA TO MURRAY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP TARGET AREA

Good Neighbour funding: Mount Wagra/ Tallangatta Creek /Bullioh Bush Land Reserve	\$6,000
Good Neighbour funding: Mount Granya State Park	\$7,000
Recurrent Funding was used to follow up 15/16 Good Neighbour funding in Jarvis Creek Regional Park (including Mount Mittamatite Regional Park)	\$10,000

### NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP TARGET AREA

NEBAG contribution to blackberry control in Parks Victoria: managed assets at the Mountain Creek Education Area, and Pheasant Creek Flora Reserve at Shelley.	\$2,000
Good Neighbour funding: Mount Lawson National Park	\$8,000
Recurrent funding was used to follow up blackberry control works conducted in 2015/16 with Good Neighbour funding in Mount Mittamatite Regional Park (including Jarvis Creek Regional Park)	\$10,000
NECMA funded blackberry control at Koetong Creek (including habitat areas for the Brooroolong Tree Frog)	\$10,000

## BIOLOGICAL CONTROL

One of the roles of The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce 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 Blackberry Taskforce continues to advocate for ongoing research into biological control options.

Funding for research into *Septocytia ruborum*, Purple Blotch Disease (pbd) ceased in June 2012 and a proposal to the Australian Weeds committee to seek financial support to restart the program created little interest.

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce has successfully applied for funding from the Australian Government Agricultural White Paper to work with the RMIT to improve a diagnostic tool for purple blotch disease.

Public land, private remnant native forest and commercial tree crops may benefit if the research was continued and pbd was found to be suitable for release. Public land, private forests and tree crops are usually difficult areas to implement successful chemical control programs

for a variety of reasons, including the potential damage to non-target species and access issues. Another tool is needed.

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce continues to seek support for research into biological blackberry control agents and to raise awareness of the impacts of uncontrolled blackberry on the conservation and productive values across all land tenures.

[www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au](http://www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au)  
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