

# VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE ANNUAL REPORT 2008/2009



Victorian Blackberry Taskforce Progress Report, 2008/2009  
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# CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT



As the Chairperson of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) I have the pleasure of providing you with the 2008-09 Annual Report. This year has been one of consolidation for the Taskforce. We have strengthened our strategic direction through the development of a new strategy and our community partnership groups continue to achieve significant on-ground results.

There is no quick fix solution for managing blackberry across the State and resources are limited. With this in mind, the Taskforce launched the Victorian Blackberry Strategy 2008-13, outlining a new direction. Crucial to achieving the goals of the strategy will be a continuing focus on working together, across state, regional and local organisations and communities.

The Community Partnership Programs continue to achieve significant on-ground results and capacity building. As new partnership groups such as far East Gippsland develop local solutions to manage their blackberry infestations, our North East partnership groups have begun to address issues of rehabilitation of previously infested sites, land use options and whole farm planning. To assist in the promotion of community-led solutions, the Taskforce commissioned the development a documentary in partnership with La Trobe University entitled 'Blackberry Control is More Than Science'. This focuses on using community voices to inspire other communities to take responsibility for local blackberry management. We also recognise that we need to continue to develop and refine our approach in engaging communities, and subsequently developed a paper for the "Partnerships for Social Inclusion" conference.

This financial year marks the end of the funding for the Taskforce provided by the Federal Government's Natural Heritage Trust programme and I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge this investment which was crucial in the development of the Taskforce. I would also like to acknowledge the Victorian State Governments funding contribution and support for the program through the Future Farming Strategy.

In addition, the Victorian State Government has provided support through the Good Neighbour Program, the Interim Roadsides Weed Control funding and 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 has also contributed to our success over the 2008/09 financial year.

THE TASKFORCE WILL CONTINUE TO DRIVE A STATEWIDE, COOPERATIVE,  
COMMUNITY-LED APPROACH TO THE MANAGEMENT OF BLACKBERRY INTO THE FUTURE.

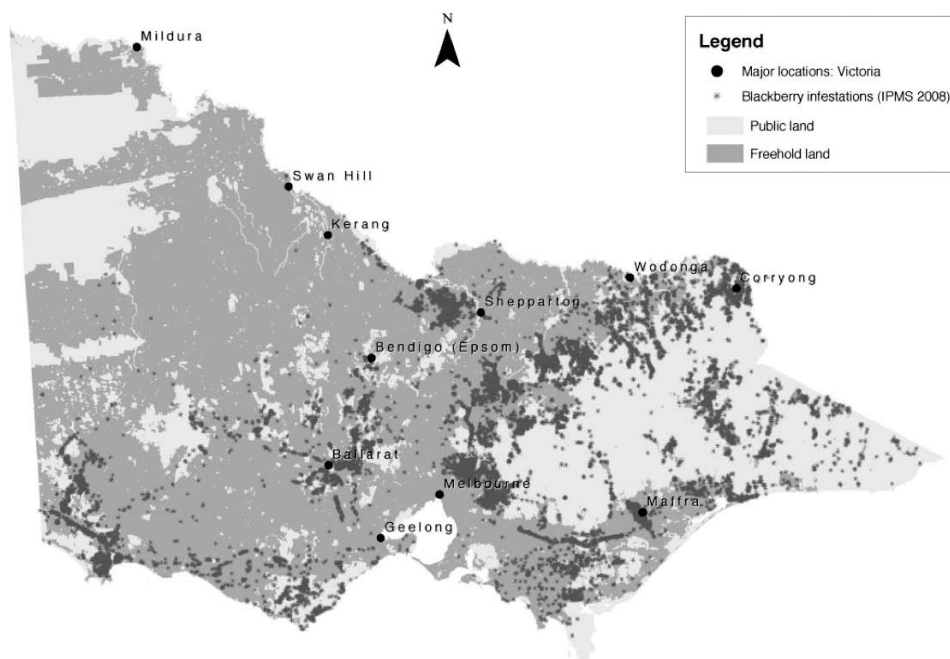
Lyn Coulston  
**Chairperson**

# THE PROBLEM

European Blackberry, *Rubus fruticosus*, was first introduced into Australia in the 1830s. Similar to the introduction of many pests into Australia, the origins of its introduction can be traced back to the cultural needs of the earlier settlers, with plantings occurring in Sydney gardens to produce hedgerows, and provide fruits for jams and pies. In 1851, the Government Botanist in Victoria, Baron von Mueller and the first Curator of the Gardens at Melbourne University, Alexander Elliot, recommended that blackberry be planted to control soil erosion along creek banks. With its preference as a plant for erosion control, assistance from the earlier settlers, combined with its invasiveness, blackberry's status as a pest grew exponentially.

Now, 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. Figure 1 provides an overview of the distribution of blackberry across the state.

**FIGURE 1** Blackberry distribution recorded by DPI across Victoria.



Blackberry infestations have significant detrimental effects on the landscape. It reduces productivity of primary industries, particularly grazing and forestry, degrades natural environments, hindering the provision of eco-system services, provides a harbour for vermin and hinders the recreation and ascetic value of regions. It 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 also 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).

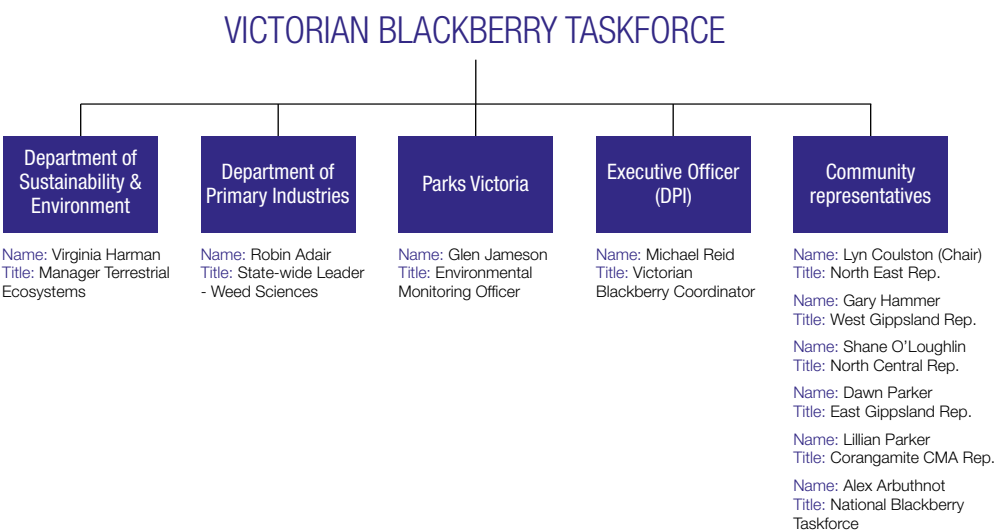
# THE RESPONSE

## THE VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) was formed in 2001 as a result of community support for blackberry control and is charged with renewing the battle against blackberry across the State of Victoria. The VBT is one of three Community Pest Management Groups that mediate and facilitate relationships between community groups and government for the delivery of blackberry control programs. The taskforce constitutes state-wide representatives from community and government agencies with an interest in pest management (refer figure 2).

ONLY BY WORKING TOGETHER IN A COMMUNITY-LED ATTACK OVER THE LONG TERM  
WILL WE MAKE HEADWAY AGAINST BLACKBERRY. Victorian Blackberry Strategy 2008 -2013

**FIGURE 2** A conceptual diagram of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce outlining the state-wide representation.



The VBT delivers services that provide for the sustainable development of Victoria's primary industries and protect biodiversity assets for the benefit of the Victorian community, both now and in the future. It strives to promote and develop partnerships with those who directly manage the natural resource base including rural landholders, public land managers and local government.



**FIGURE 3** Members of the VBT and community group representatives from far-East Gippsland on a recent field tour.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION

There is no quick fix solution for managing blackberry across the state and resources remain finite. With this mind, the Taskforce understands the importance of having a co-ordinated and strategic direction, ensuring we get a significant return on investment for controlling blackberry.

When it first formed in 2001, the VBT developed a strategy to guide its initial direction, which has since been evaluated. In order to reflect revised changes to relevant Government policy and direction, and developments in the VBT's community partnership program, the Taskforce commissioned the development of a new strategy, the Victorian Blackberry Strategy 2008-2013.

The new strategy sets the vision for controlling blackberry across the state, with goals, objectives and accompanying strategic actions until 2013. The new vision of the Taskforce is that,

*The wider community accepts responsibility for blackberry control and contributes to on-going protection of social, environmental and economic assets through reducing the impact of blackberry on Victoria.*

The strategy was launched by Joe Helper, Minister for Agriculture and Small Business, in the Upper Murray, home to the active North East Blackberry Action Group, in late 2008. A copy of the new strategy can be obtained by logging onto our website, [www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au](http://www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au)



**FIGURE 4** Minister for Agriculture and Small Business, Joe Helper, with Lyn Coulston, Chair of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce, launching the new Victorian Blackberry Strategy 2008-13

# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

NEVER DOUBT THAT A GROUP OF CONCERNED CITIZENS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD... INDEED IT IS THE ONLY THING THAT EVER HAS. Margaret Mead, Anthropologist

An important aspect of the work of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce is facilitating and supporting the development of community partnership projects to tackle blackberry.

The community partnership programs are geared towards providing greater community ownership in managing blackberry, through developing joint projects between community and government, encouraging local ownership of blackberry management problems and promoting local solutions. The Taskforce strive to promote principals of community engagement, inclusion in decision making, representation and deliberation within these programs. DPI support may be necessary at the end of a project to assist with recalcitrant land holders.

The community-led attack had provided significant outcomes for both community and government, improving the delivery of services to farmers.

During 2008-09, the Taskforce had sponsored 4 community partnership projects across the state.



## BASS COAST

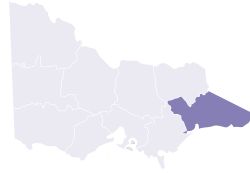
The Three Creeks Landcare Group initiated a blackberry control project in 2007. The intent was to raise community awareness about the importance of blackberry control on private and public land in the area. Important initiatives and activities included extension visits, publicity, field days, information mail-outs, roadside spraying and mapping.

FIGURE 5 Summary of work undertaken on blackberry in the Bass coast area.

2008/2009	Number of landholders on work plans	Number of landholders visited	Total private property visited (ha)	Private property infestations mapped (ha)	Private property infestations treated (ha)
	0	15 (as part of broader BCLN PPA Program)	600	0	unknown

The roadside spraying program, field days, mail-outs and mapping have been well received by the community and in 2008-2009 rust releases with the new strains of blackberry rust were released.

## FAR-EAST GIPPSLAND BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP



Blackberry infestations in Far East Victoria cause ongoing production losses to agricultural and plantation land, degrading ecosystems, waterways and large areas of public land.

The Far East Community Blackberry Action Group is a voluntary organisation, formed from a representation of the seven Landcare groups across the Far East Victoria. The group was formed in 2008 after a series of community meetings organised by the VBT and the Landcare to outline options available to communities, the process on establishing a community partnership group and sharing other community's experiences with managing a community partnership program.

Goongerah was subsequently identified as the initial pilot region for the project and targeted for its proximity to the Brodribb River, Erinunderra Plateau, Snowy River and Erinunderra National Parks. The national significance and public interest of this region reflect their ecological importance and social value. It is approximately 70km north of Orbost on the Bonang Road, in Far East Gippsland Victoria and generally considered remote.



**FIGURE 6** The Brodribb River below Goongerah, a key environmental asset.

## ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

A Project Officer was commissioned to assist private landholders acknowledge their responsibilities in managing blackberry, develop 3 year voluntary compliance plans and commit to their plans. As part of this project and voluntary compliance, landholders are encouraged to develop rehabilitation and ongoing management plans for treated areas. The project manager reports that factors inhibiting control include limited awareness of responsibility, absentee landholders and lack of coordinated programmes.

This project has initially focused on the Goongerah area, commencing in October 2008. Expansion into other Far East areas is planned for 2010 to support existing landholder interest and enthusiasm.

**FIGURE 7** Summary of landholder visits undertaken by the project manager in the Goongerah region.

2008/2009	Number of landholders on work plans	Number of landholders visited	Total private property visited (ha)	Private property infestations mapped (ha)	Private property infestations treated (ha)
	13 Specific Plan 10 Formal	32	Approx 450 ha	300 ha	100 ha

The group has hosted a Community Awareness Field Day, incorporating the use of goats and or herbicides as possible control tools and inspections of rust release sites and discussion on its effectiveness.

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Goongerah is a former timber, logging and primary production area which experienced a 'Tree change' from the early seventies onwards. It now tends to attract residents who are passionate about the natural surrounds, the ecological significance of the area, indigenous flora and fauna, new and old growth forests. Many residents are proud activists who are committed to lobbying to ensure preservation of the regions natural beauty and resources.

Many Goongerah managers have a preference not to use herbicides and encourage the use of alternative methods to reducing blackberry. Several properties are endeavouring to achieve organic accreditation which has implications for the use of herbicides.

A high number of absentee landowners exist, who are often unaware of the extent or problems associated with their blackberry infestations. Many of the properties would not qualify as primary producers and due to their size and isolation minimal income is derived from traditional farming.

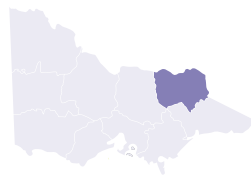
This project has received support from relevant government agencies with planning for combined and collaborative efforts to address blackberry on public land. This in turn has tended to demonstrate landowners need to take responsibility for pest plants on freehold land.

The programme has raised awareness for the need to be proactive against blackberry. Some land managers have indicated their reluctance to develop formal 3 year voluntary compliance plans, due to the formality of the process and possible binding implications. The Project Officer's challenge is to maintain the sense of ownership freehold land managers have and their responsibility and the need to address blackberry infestation.



**FIGURE 8** Participants at a field day in Goongerah in using goats to control blackberry.

## NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP



The North East Blackberry Action Group (NEBAG) formed in 2005 as a result of community desire to address the impacts of blackberry in the region. Since then, the project has continued to develop and expand and their approach has been used to assist the Taskforce for forming similar groups.

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 area is estimated to contain approximately 140,000 hectares of both public and private land.

## ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

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, the project officer also undertakes roadside mapping of blackberry for the group.

WE ARE TRYING TO MOVE BEYOND SEEING IT JUST AS A BLACKBERRY PROBLEM...  
UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUES OF WHY IT IS THERE, LOOKING AT THE CAUSE  
AND EFFECT... Project Officer - NEBAG

A significant focus for 2008-09 was revisiting landholders who have initially entered into three year property management contracts with NEBAG. These work plans outlined a commitment on behalf of the landholder to commit to significantly reducing the growth and spread of blackberries on their property. To date, significant on ground change has been achieved with the selected region, with 46 percent removal of blackberry.

**FIGURE 9** Summary of work undertaken on blackberry in the NEBAG area.

2008/2009	Number of landholders visited	Total private property visited (ha)	Private property infestations mapped (ha)	Private property infestations treated (ha)
	47	24,580	3,233	1,286

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Dealing with life after the removal of blackberry has always been a priority for NEBAG and they have embarked on various approaches. With the project now entering into fourth year there are parcels of previously infested farm land being re-established for production and biodiversity purposes.

Continuing to provide a coordinated approach to blackberry management between public and private interface remains key to the projects success in certain regions in the pilot area. Access to infestations remains a key barrier to the effective management of blackberries, with infestations located on steep country, which is addressed. There has also been growing interest in the area in using goats as an integrated control approach.

The group have also been working closely with Towong shire in the management of blackberry along roadsides. Effort has focused on mapping and monitoring infestations, ensuring best practice with spray contractors. Since the inception of the program, the group have demonstrated a 40 percent reduction in the blackberry along roadsides (refer figure 11 below).



**FIGURE 10** Land managers at a field day in the NEBAG area discussing blackberry management options on steep country.

**FIGURE 11** Change in total kilometres of blackberry infestations on roadsides from 2006 to 2009.



**FIGURE 12** A series of photos demonstrating spraying and rehabilitation on private property within the NEBAG project region.



**YEAR 1:** Site was aurally sprayed (helicopter mid photo).



**YEAR 1:** Spring that same year



**YEAR 3:** Success and some re-growth. Areas that have been completely killed have been pushed up via dozer and perennial pasture is being reintroduced.

## 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 both 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 to begin to manage blackberry on their terms.

## 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 and six inspections were arranged resulting in all land managers signing a blackberry management plan. The management contract outlines 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.



**FIGURE 13** Hugh Patton (Mitta Mitta Blackberry Action Group) and Lyn Coulston (Chair VBT) at the official launch of the Mitta Mitta community partnership group.

**FIGURE 14** Summary of work undertaken on blackberry in the Mitta Mitta project area.

2008/2009	Number of landholders on work plans	Number of landholders visited	Total private property visited (ha)	Private property infestations mapped (ha)	Private property infestations treated (ha)
	3	4	1595	256	138

The project has attracted some attention from the wider community through establishment of access tracks in high profile sites on the Omeo Highway. As a consequence, the local news circular has published two articles on the group's progress.

The group maintains high volunteer commitment, and private landholder investment in their program, doubling initial investment from the VBT. In some areas, land managers remain hesitant to act on large scale blackberry infestations out of sheer futility due to the size of the problem. The program is continuing annual liaison with these landholders and creating a relationship that is built on regular meetings, updates and continued financial support. Significant work has been undertaken by absentee land managers, through contact with the program.

# STATE GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

## INTERIM ROADSIDES WEED CONTROL PROJECT

Roadsides act as critical pathways for the introduction and spread of pests, having detrimental impacts to roadside values as well as adjoining public and private land.

The Victorian Government's Future Farming Initiative project, 'Building the Capacity of Local Government to Respond to Pests' (BCLG) is a four-year initiative aimed at building a partnership with municipal councils to manage Regionally Prohibited weeds, Regionally Controlled Weeds and Established Pest Animals on municipal roadsides in Victoria.

This project is working in partnership with the Municipal Association of Victoria and investing \$6.8 million over four years with the objective of providing support to Municipal Councils through an interim roadside grants program, building on past initiatives that the DPI has completed with municipal councils.

To date there have been two rounds of the BCLG project,

- \$1.064 million in grants was distributed during Round One for on-ground and capacity building works, funding 46 projects involving 47 municipal councils.
- Round 2 allocated \$496,790 to 32 municipal councils that included 5 fire affected municipal councils.
- In total 10 of the 19 fire affected municipal councils received approximately \$143,500 from Round 2 for capacity building projects to strengthen their pest management approach. Eight of the nine other fire affected municipal councils received funding in Round 1.

The interim roadside grants program has had formal project agreements with 52 rural, regional and interface municipal councils (approximately 83% of targeted municipalities), totalling over \$1.56 million (\$1,064,045 in Round 1, \$430,250 in Round 2A and \$66,540 in Round 2B). In total 80 projects across Victoria have been funded, including 5 multi-municipal partnership projects involving 15 Councils.

The issue of roadside responsibility is a complex one. As a way forward, The Minister for Agriculture has decided to establish an independently chaired working party comprising of officers from the MAV, Department of Primary Industries and other key stakeholders to examine the fundamental questions of what the objective of roadside weed and pest animal management is, who is best placed to efficiently and effectively deliver it and potential legislative options to provide best outcomes.

In the interim, **Round three of this program will run for the next two years and will comprise a number of calls for applications.**

## STATE-WIDE COMPLIANCE PROGRAM

The Department of Primary Industries undertakes extension and compliance programs across the state for blackberry. These programs engage land managers, ensuring that the land management requirements under section 20 of the Catchment and Land Protection Act, 1994 are being met in terms of weed management. Figure 15 provides a summary of key activities of the program.

Rural Extension officers are applied for by community groups to deliver targeted extension programs that align with both the DPI's strategic direction and the community group's needs. The program focuses on increasing the community's understanding of the weed's impact and 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
- Reporting on the work back to the community, and;
- Integration with the DPI compliance program

Compliance officers provide extension to individuals and community groups with some targeted non-discriminatory compliance activities to ensure landowners are meeting their obligations.

This year has seen a significant step in the linkage of DPI's compliance program with the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce through developing a process of shared approval with projects from the catchments, which will continue to be improved in 2009-2010.

**FIGURE 15** A summary of the state-wide extension and compliance data for blackberry for 2008-2009.

Activity 2008-2009	Count
Number of priority properties inspected	414
Area of priority land inspected (ha)	39,861 ha
Area treated (ha)	237 ha
Number of directions served	147
Number of Land Management Notices (LMNs) served	2
Number of Property Inspection Notices issued	7
Number of compliance entries	2
Number of awareness raising events held	2
Number of letters received requesting action	14
Number of letters sent to reported land owners	28
Number of phone calls received	134
Number of phone calls made	86
Number of front counter calls	58
Number of information items sent	98

## BIO-CONTROL RESEARCH: 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*. Eight additional strains of the leaf-rust fungus were approved in early 2004 for release in Australia to improve prospects of biologically controlling European blackberry across the wide range of taxa and genotypes that exist.

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

Tests have shown that fungus spores, when established will reduce the volume of blackberry bushes by up to 10% per year. They also reduce the ability of canes to produce daughter plants or runners by up to 90%. Blackberry rust can be seen as yellow spots on the bottom of the blackberry leaves. Signs that the rust is working are areas of dying canes or reduced bush size.

In 2008-2009 the new rust strains were released at 30 sites in West and East Gippsland. Rust releases were made in conjunction with DSE, DPI, VicRoads and local communities. Disease symptoms followed releases suggest establishment has occurred at release sites.

A five-year rust impact evaluation study was terminated in 2009 and results clearly indicate the beneficial effects of the rust fungus during periods of normal to high spring-early summer rainfall. The study is being prepared for publication in a scientific journal.



**FIGURE 16** Rust spores on the underside of a blackberry leaf.

## 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 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.

As apart of the new program, research is being undertaken in Montpellier, France on the Purple Blotch Disease (PBD). Protocols for screening of disease against desired rubus species have been difficult to finalise due to long development times and an apparent need for vernalisation. PBD is expected to be more effective than leaf rust in infestations under canopy. PBD has recently arrived in New Zealand and offers excellent opportunities to further assess the potential of this pathogen for biocontrol in Australia.



## GOOD NEIGHBOUR PROGRAM

The Good Neighbour Program (GNP) aims to build positive relations 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 pest plant and animal management. Over 500 projects were delivered across Victoria in the past 12 months, approximately 100 of these targeted blackberries in parks, reserves and forests.

The GNP requires agency staff of Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria to consult with landholders, community and interest groups and incorporate their concerns into new project bids. Successful projects feature this requirement strongly in their planning and delivery.



**FIGURE 17** Blackberry control works funded through the Good Neighbour Program (Photo courtesy of Ged Mahoney).

Areas that receive higher rainfall in the eastern and south western areas of the state continued to invest in blackberry control. The release and establishment of blackberry rust strains continued in parallel with the above work with sites across Gippsland and the North East. Previously released rust persisted in a proportion of sites from the previous season.

Fires that burnt in February 2009 resulted in the removal of significant areas of canes of blackberry and good access and regrowth are expected similar to that observed elsewhere after the 2006 fire activity. Early signs of regrowth promise blackberry rust release potential.

Partnerships with community groups specifically targeting weeds including blackberry and follow up of former bushfire works on Blackberry in both the North East and Gippsland have resulted in significant outcomes with maintenance being an important issue.

Figure 18 shows a summary of funding provided for Blackberry projects across the state in 2008-2009 according to respective CMA areas. Of the \$2.7 million allocated to the GNP program around 17% is targeted at Blackberry across 6 CMA areas.

**FIGURE 18** Summary of Good Neighbour Blackberry projects by CMA.

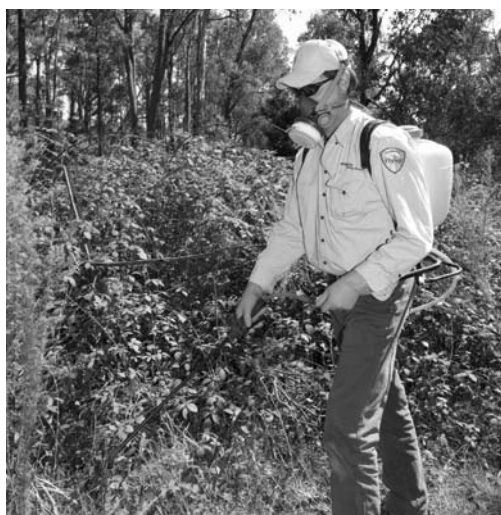
	East Gippsland	Glenelg Hopkins	Goulburn Broken	North Central	North East	West Gippsland	Total
Hectares	2196	40	554	6	2251	4718	9766
Projects	16	1	23	1	38	20	99
Investment	\$ 79,500	\$ 10,000	\$ 77,000	\$ 780	\$ 20,600	\$ 91,500	\$ 466,780

## PARKS VICTORIA BLACKBERRY PEST 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.

As a result of this process, a wide range of pest plant and animal species were treated on land managed by Parks Victoria. In particular, during 2008-2009 more than 15,000 hectares of land across more than sixty parks and reserves was treated for Blackberry, which represents the largest allocation of funding spent on any one pest plant species by Parks Victoria. This included 489 Parks Victoria staff days and 151 volunteer days spent working on this pest plant.

Programmes of control were undertaken across a range of parks and reserves including major operations in the Alpine National Park, Cooperacambra National Park, Yarra Valley Parklands, Burrowa Pine National Park and Snowy River National park.



**FIGURE 19** A Parks Victoria employee spraying blackberry.

# COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA

Blackberry remains a key issue for many landholders across the state, ensuring that a consistent and clear message is delivered to community is crucial in promoting a coordinated, strategic and united effort to battle the weed. The VBT strive to effectively communicate with its various stakeholders and the wider community in order to:

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

An integral part of the VBT communications has been the continued upgrading of the website ([www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au](http://www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au)) which provides key information for both community and government on blackberry information.

## BLACKBERRY CONTROL IS MORE THAN SCIENCE

Learning from each others experience can be powerful mechanisms for on ground change. Whether it is a chat over the fence or a catch-up at the footy, farmers share stories about their farming experiences. Using these networks stimulates thinking and people are often more inclined to listen to the advice offered by others who are in similar contexts and facing similar issues. With this in mind the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce commissioned the development a documentary in partnership with La Trobe University entitled 'Blackberry Controlled is More Than Science.'

The title of the documentary arose from the premise that there are sufficient tools available to land mangers to control blackberry, yet blackberry still remains prevalent across much of the landscapes, therefore, controlling blackberry is more than science and that is it is also strongly embedded in a socio-economic context.

The documentary focuses on capturing local experiences and on the process that the North East community have used to address blackberry management in their region. So far, it has been requested by communities across Victoria, providing an opportunity for communities to listen to the story of the North East Blackberry Action Group, which in turn aims to stimulate thinking about how their community can potentially address similar issues. It is also being used by LaTrobe University in a variety of subjects exploring community development and natural resource management.

A copy of the documentary can be obtained by logging onto our website, [www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au](http://www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au) alternatively; the documentary is also loaded onto the site for online viewing.

**FIGURE 20** A scene from the documentary of a landholder in north east Victoria on his property.



## BLACKBERRY HITS “PARTNERSHIPS AND SOCIAL INCLUSION” CONFERENCE

Publishing at selected conferences provides opportunity for the Taskforce to reflect on its process and to communicate with key stakeholders. The theme of the 2008 “Partnerships for Social Inclusion” held in Melbourne was that participation in social, economic and civic life should be open to everybody and it’s important to the wellbeing and prosperity of individuals, families and communities. The conference was jointly organised by the Centre for Public Policy at the University of Melbourne and the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development.

A joint paper, between La Trobe University and the Department of Primary Industries entitled, “Providing Flexibility in Land Management Policy: the case of the community weed model in Victoria,” was submitted.

It reflected on both the Serrated Tussock Working Party and the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce’s approaches to engaging with community for managing weeds into the future, exploring issues of community, inclusive processes and the place of local ideas in conservation and sustainability debates.

## MEDIA SUMMARY

FIGURE 21 VBT Media Activity Summary

Date	Media Type	Title	Comments
August	DPI news	Weeds and India	Promotion of visiting fellow through DPI and VBT
August	VBT news article	Blackberry Goes Gold Class	Promotion of the VBT community partnerships documentary to external stakeholders
November	Get Farming Website	New Victorian blackberry strategy released	Article outlining the release of the strategy
November	Premier of Victoria	Minister Launches New Strategy	Press release outlining strategy launch
Sept – November (spring edition)	Primary Voice	Highlands tackle blackberry	Promotion of the VBT community partnerships documentary to farming community
June-August (winter edition)	Victorian Landcare and Catchment Magazine	Community tackles a thorn in its side	Promoting the community partnership project
May	DPI news	Ways of working together – Blackberry documentary	Promotion of the VBT video to internal DPI staff
January	DPI news	Minister Helper launches the new Victorian Blackberry Strategy	DPI news article on blackberry launch
January	Stock and Land	State boosts fight against serrated tussock	Article outlining the investment from the Future Farming Strategy
April	DPI external website	Better Services to Farmers (BSTF) Case Study: Victorian Blackberry Taskforce	Case study article outlining VBT alignment with BSTF

# FUNDING REPORT

Project title: Victorian Blackberry Taskforce, Project Officer

Project proponent(s):

- National Heritage Trust, Victorian Blackberry Taskforce, Project Officer and Operational Funding.
- Future Farming Strategy, Supporting community-led action on pests through voluntary compliance.
- Capacity Building State Investment, Department of Sustainability and Environment and Department of Primary Industry.

A final funding report was submitted to the National Heritage Trust concluding their investment in the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce project.

**FIGURE 22 SUMMARY:** Expenditure report

Milestone	Progress	Expenditure
Maintain Victorian Blackberry Coordinator	Senior Pest Management Officer employed by DPI from 2008-09	\$ 146,500
Quarterly VBT meetings	Quarterly meetings convened, including accommodation and travel costs for members.	\$ 8,371
Communications	Victorian Blackberry Taskforce website maintenance. Editing, design and printing of the Victorian Blackberry Strategy 2008-2013 and printing and development of community stories DVD, VBT business cards, photography and misc. postal expenses.	\$ 16,400
Community weed mapping	Roadside mapping for Mitta Mitta community partnership project	\$ 5,000
Community capacity building	Training for VBT members in communications, strategic planning and governance. Funding of community partnerships projects and field day travel expenses.	\$ 38,054
Summary	National funding and subsequent final reporting through NHT was finalised in February, 2009. The VBT focused on capacity building, both at the state-wide level for the Taskforce members, and also investment into community capacity through community partnerships support program and roadside mapping.	\$ 214, 325

# REFERENCES

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