



## CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Victorian communities are embracing opportunities to drive their own solutions to blackberry management. A coordinated and collaborative effort supported by the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and led locally is achieving results in reducing the growth and spread of blackberry across public and private land.

The Taskforce supported 10 community blackberry action groups in 2011–12, and their combined efforts and achievements highlight the success of the community-led approach to blackberry management.

Taskforce members also continued working to strengthen public and private partnerships in blackberry control and add to our educational and information resources with an updated website and a new Blackberry Blog.

I thank everyone who is committed to and taking action on blackberry control. Every infestation treated makes a difference, and the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce will continue to support your activities over the next year.

This summary Annual Report gives an update of Victoria's blackberry control efforts and I encourage you to learn more and get involved. The full version of this annual report can be accessed on the memory stick attached to the back cover. You can join our Blog at www. blackberrytheweed.com.au or find us on Twitter at @vbt\_blackberry.

Lyn Coulston Chairperson



## **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, 2011-12

- 235 private landowners in Victoria took action against blackberry with support from the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce in 2011–12.
- The Community Partnerships Program helped fund the local activities of 10 community blackberry action groups.
- The Taskforce continued its work facilitating partnerships between public and private managers to tackle blackberry along shared boundaries.
- The launch of our Blackberry Blog to share news, information and success stories www.blackberrytheweed.com.au.
- Development of the Blackberry Action Database Information System (BADIS) also progressed to support better mapping and tracking of blackberry across priority regions.

# THE VICTORIA BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce drives a vital strategic and collaborative approach to controlling blackberry on public and private land.

Taskforce members include local residents, land and business owners as well as government agencies involved in land and pest management.

The Taskforce funds the activities of community-led blackberry action groups and provides technical, scientific and other support to help reduce blackberry in their local area.

It facilitates cooperation between public and private land managers to tackle blackberry, particularly along shared boundaries, and Taskforce members represent and advocate community interests on blackberry control to government.

The Taskforce also investigates new ways to tackle blackberry, and is monitoring research on the effectiveness of a plant pathogen Septocyta ruborum (not present in Australia) that grows on blackberry causing Purple Blotch Disease to limit its growth and spread.

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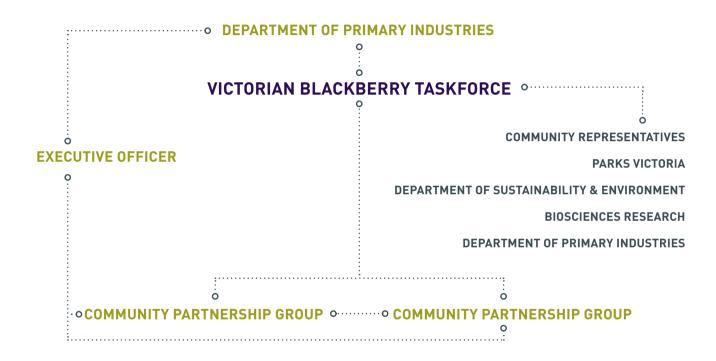
COLLABORATIVE
AND CONCERTED
APPROACH
TO CONTROL
BLACKBERRY ACROSS
THE LANDSCAPE

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# THE VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE



# **COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM**

ONI Y BY WORKING **TOGETHER IN** A COMMUNITY-LED ATTACK OVER THE LONG **TERM WILL WE** MAKE HEADWAY **AGAINST BLACKBERRY** 

Chairperson, Victorian Blackberry Taskforce

Supporting community action to tackle blackberry is a priority for the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce.

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

This funding helps the groups employ dedicated project officers to drive their activities, which includes mapping the location and extent of blackberry in their region and working closely with local landowners to reduce the weed.

- Our Community Partnerships Program supported the work of 10 community blackberry action groups in 2011–2, including three new groups in areas affected by severe fires and floods.
- These action groups are motivating and supporting hundreds of private landowners to control blackberry on their properties.
- They are also sharing vital knowledge and experience in blackberry control and encourage other Victorian communities to join the effort.
- In 2011–12, the Taskforce met with communities concerned about blackberry in the Maffra and Yea districts and is working with them to establish blackberry action groups in their region.





## BARKERS CREEK BLACKBERRY AND GORSE ACTION GROUP

The Barkers Creek Blackberry and Gorse Action Group was established in 2012 and targets private properties within the Loddon River Basin along the Barkers Creek area.

The group employs a dedicated project manager with funding from the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce, who visits the region's small properties to encourage landowners in their blackberry control. Many landowners have now signed a voluntary 3-year blackberry management plan that commits them to controlling the weed on their property.

The group has also partnered with the North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA) to offer landowners a \$1 for \$1 subsidy for on-ground works. Approximately \$35,000 has been committed to date from flood recovery funding to help with blackberry and gorse spraying. The CMA has also provided participating landholders with free willow treatment valued at \$9,500 of added incentives.

#### BARKERS CREEK BLACKBERRY AND GORSE ACTION, 2011–12

:	Number of new	Number of	Total private	Private property	Private property
:	landholders on	landholders	property visited	infestations	infestations
:	agreements	visited	(ha)	mapped (ha)	treated (ha)
	11	15	83.44	15	0





## CENTRAL GIPPSLAND WOODY WEED ACTION GROUP

The Central Gippsland Woody Weeds Action Group was established following the 2009 bushfires that swept through the area. The group aims to help fire-affected landholders recover by helping them control blackberry as well as gorse and broom. It employs a project officer with funding from the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce to plan and manage activities with local landowners.

In 2011–12, the group focused on following up land owners into the second year of their voluntary blackberry management plans and also succeeded in winning commitment from more local landowners to reduce blackberry on their property.

Working together, the group and local landowners have substantially reduced blackberry across the region and it is now investigating new funding sources to maintain the momentum.

#### CENTRAL GIPPSLAND WOODY WEED ACTION GROUP, 2011-12

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	Number of new	Number of	Total private	Private property	Private property	
:	landholders on	landholders	property visited	infestations	infestations	
:	agreements	visited	(ha)	mapped (ha)	treated (ha)	
:	3	86	2800	557	557	



## MITTA TO MURRAY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Mitta to Murray (M2M) Blackberry Action Group was formed by members of the Mitta to Murray Landcare Network in December 2011 with funding from the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce. Its focus includes highly productive agricultural land as well as State forests and national parks in the region.

The M2M Steering Group includes local farmers and residents, two plantation industry representatives, the Department of Primary Industries, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Parks Victoria and the Towong Shire.

The group is now mapping local infestations to help guide priority actions and track its success. Thirteen local landowners have signed 3-year voluntary blackberry management plans that set out how they will control blackberry on their property.

#### MITTA TO MURRAY COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP, 2011-12

	Number of new	Number of	Total private	Private property	Private property
	landholders on	landholders	property visited	infestations	infestations
-	agreements	visited	(ha)	mapped (ha)	treated (ha)
	13	15	15	15	0



## MUDGEGONGA AND DISTRICT BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Mudgegonga and District Blackberry Action Group formed in 2010 after community concern about blackberry outbreaks following bushfires across the region in 2009. The area includes beef and dairy farms as well as significant water catchments and areas of public land such as Mt Jack, the Pinnacles and parts of Mt Stanley.

The group has achieved remarkable success in its first two years, with 100 private landowners now signing a 3 year voluntary blackberry management plan (50 landowners in 2011–12). Support from the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce to employ a dedicated project officer to drive the group's activities has been important to its success. In early 2012 the group also hosted a field day featuring experts from government agencies and chemical companies outlining best practice options for controlling blackberry.

The Mudgegonga and District Blackberry Action Group is also working closely with public land managers to control blackberry along shared boundaries through the Department of Sustainability and Environment's Good Neighbour program.

#### MUDGEGONG AND DISTRICT COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP, 2011-12

Number of new	Number of	Total private	Private property	Private property
landholders on	landholders	property visited	infestations	infestations
agreements	visited	(ha)	mapped (ha)	treated (ha)
50	55	5,965	3,093	2,000



### NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The North East Blackberry Action Group formed in 2005, with its approach being adopted by the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce to help establish similar groups across Victoria.

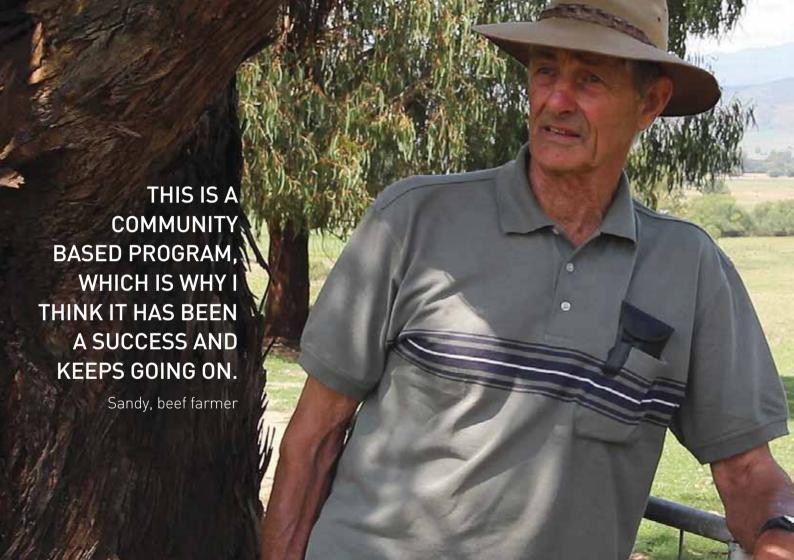
This year has seen the project officer engage landholders into a second 3 year Blackberry Management plan. Such sustained effort demonstrates the long-term nature of weed control and longevity of the community program.

New landholders are also joining the program each year, whilst others have reduced their blackberry infestations to a manageable level and no longer require support. This is evidence that the program is achieving its objective of reducing the spread of blackberry and its impacts at both the property and landscape scale. The Blackberry Group continues to be a trusted partner within the community.

#### NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP, 2011-12

Number of new	Number of	Total private	Private property	Privata proporty
:	:			
: landholders on	landholders	property visited	infestations	intestations :
agreements	visited	(ha)	mapped (ha)	treated (ha)
57	110	8101	5898	2974





## UPPER CAMPASPE BLACKBERRY GORSE ACTION GROUP

The Upper Campaspe Blackberry Gorse Group was established in 2011 after blackberry and gorse were identified as the key environmental threat to the region's landscape and natural assets. Most residents live on small allotments with some supporting cattle, sheep and horses. Many are retired or do not live on their land.

The group is a partnership between the Ashbourne Landcare Group, the Macedon Ranges Shire Council, the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and the Victorian Gorse and Blackberry Taskforces. It aims to motivate 60 landholders in a particular area of the region to undertake a 3-year voluntary blackberry management plan and control the weed on their property.

Members of the group attended a field day hosted by the North East Blackberry Action Group in early 2012 which included visiting farms in the area where landholders are successfully controlling blackberry. This proved extremely useful and the Upper Campaspe group is now planning its own field day to motivate and support private landowners in the region to control blackberry and gorse on their properties.

### UPPER CAMPASPE BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP



## NORTHERN YARRA BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Northern Yarra Blackberry Action Group was formed with support from the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce after local concerns about blackberry following the 2009 Black Saturday fires. The group is initially focusing efforts on small fire-affected communities in the Yarra Ranges where tourism, wine and food production are important.

Local landowners have shown remarkable commitment to a sustainable recovery of their land, with 42 signing 3-year voluntary blackberry management agreements in the group's first year of operation.

The group employs a project officer with funding from the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce to help coordinate activities across public and private land, and has hosted three blackberry control events since Black Saturday, attracting more than 150 local landowners. It is also working closely with various government agencies to treat blackberry on public land and along shared boundaries.

An application to the Australian Government's Biodiversity Fund was successful in 2011–12 and will allow the group to expand its program to fire-affected land with high biodiversity values.

#### NORTHERN YARRA BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP, 2011-12

Number of new	Number of	Total private	Private property	Private property
landholders on	landholders	property visited	infestations	infestations
agreements	visited	(ha)	mapped (ha)	treated (ha)
42	101	937	89	52



## **GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS**

### DEPARTMENT OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT

## **GOOD NEIGHBOUR PROGRAM**

The Victorian Government's Good Neighbour Program takes a collaborative approach to managing pest plants and animals along shared public and private land boundaries, including community groups and private landowners as well as state, regional and local agencies in its activities.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) administers the Good Neighbour Program, which incorporates the activities of DSE and Parks Victoria to control pest plants and animals on public land.

In 2011–12, the program allocated \$2.3 million to almost 400 weed and pest control projects across Victoria, many focusing on blackberry. Projects were mainly in State forests, national parks and on Crown land, with some actions on private land where public benefit was evident.



## **GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS**

### DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

## IMPROVED ENFORCEMENT

The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) completed the first year of its improved enforcement approach in 2011–12, targeting priority widespread weeds and pests of greatest concern to the community such as blackberry.

Under its improved approach, DPI provides enforcement action for landowners who fail to act on their legal responsibility to control weeds or pests on their property.

In 2011–12, DPI conducted eight enforcement programs targeting blackberry across priority areas, inspecting private properties and serving compliance notices to owners who were failing to control the weed on their land.

### **BIOLOGICAL CONTROL**

Research has been undertaken to monitor the effectiveness of the plant pathogen Septocyta ruborum, otherwise known as Purple Blotch Disease. Purple Blotch Disease is systemic to the blackberry plant, targeting the stems of the plant rather than the leaves. Initial research has shown impressive results in terms of significantly reducing both the sexual and vegetative propagation. In addition, the agent is suitable to conditions such as underneath tree canopies.

## **GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS**

### **PARKS VICTORIA**

## **BLACKBERRY MANAGEMENT**

Weed management is a priority for Parks Victoria and it treats an average 40,000 hectares of land across more than 70 parks and reserves for blackberry each year.

Parks Victoria conducted over 30 blackberry control projects on public land in 2011–12 under the Good Neighbour Program, and its 'Protecting the Best' program supported blackberry control activities in Gippsland's high-value natural catchment areas to reduce the flow of blackberry seed down local waterways and into the valley.



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03





VIEW THE VICTORIAN
BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE
FULL REPORT
An extended version of
the Victorian Blackberry
Taskforce Report is available
as a PDF document on the
attached USB key

