



VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY **TASKFORCE**  
ANNUAL REPORT 2011-2012





THE VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY  
TASKFORCE COMMITTEE  
MEMBERS HAVE COMMITTED 512  
VOLUNTEER DAYS  
THIS YEAR



# CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Several years on since the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce focused its support for community led groups to control blackberry, there are some very positive results emerging.

There are now 10 community blackberry action groups operating in Victoria with support from our Community Partnerships Program.

They are working with hundreds of private landowners to successfully reduce the growth and spread of blackberry on their properties.

These local action groups are sharing vital knowledge and experience in blackberry control and their success is encouraging other communities to join the effort.

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce feeds this valuable knowledge and experience into its work with other government agencies and public land managers involved in blackberry management.

A major new project the Taskforce launched in 2011–12 will aid this work, with the development of a Blackberry Action Database Information System (BAD(S) to better capture, track and inform the work and achievements to control Victoria's blackberry.

I take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in reducing blackberry on public and private land over the last year. Many live and work in areas severely affected by fires and floods in recent years and have shown dedication and commitment in challenging time to a sustainable recovery of their land as well as the recovery of the wider landscape.

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce will continue supporting action to reduce blackberry on public and private land over the next year, and I encourage you to keep in touch with our efforts at our new Blackberry Blog log at [www.blackberrytheweed.com.au](http://www.blackberrytheweed.com.au).

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the Department of Primary Industries for their continual funding and support of the program.

Lyn Coulston

Chairperson







# BLACKBERRY CONTROL IS VITAL TO VICTORIA

Blackberry the weed (*Rubus fruticosus* aggregate) is a serious issue across much of Victoria, and a serious concern for farmers, public land managers and landholders in peri-urban areas.

First introduced into Australia in the 1830s, it was used by settlers to grow hedgerows and provide fruit for jams and pies. In 1851, Victoria's chief botanist, Baron von Mueller, recommended blackberry to control soil erosion and as a food source.

The conditions of the Australian landscape provided a favourable environment and blackberry rapidly infested landscapes, leading to it being declared noxious in parts of Victoria by the 1890s and across the whole state in 1908. It remains one of Australia's national 20 weeds of significance for its invasiveness and economic and environmental impacts.

Blackberry now affects substantial tracts of grazing land in Victoria, severely degrading its productive capacity. The tangled prickly infestations can form impenetrable thickets several metres high on land and along waterways, which can harbour pest animals and alter water flows, creating erosion problems. Blackberry also hinders forestry and timber operations as well as water and land-based recreational activities. It can out-compete and displace native plant species and poses a significant threat to our biodiversity.

Blackberry readily invades new areas, establishing on disturbed sites such as along access tracks, on freshly harvested forest lands, and in areas affected by fires and floods.

# THE VICTORIA BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce was established in 2001 to work with Victorian communities and government agencies on a collaborative effort to reduce the growth and spread of blackberry across the state.

A key focus is encouraging and supporting community and individual actions to tackle blackberry, supported by technical, scientific and enforcement approaches.

A key focus of the Taskforce's is its Community Partnership Program, which covers a combined 280,000 hectares of public and private land in Victoria identified as a priority for blackberry control.

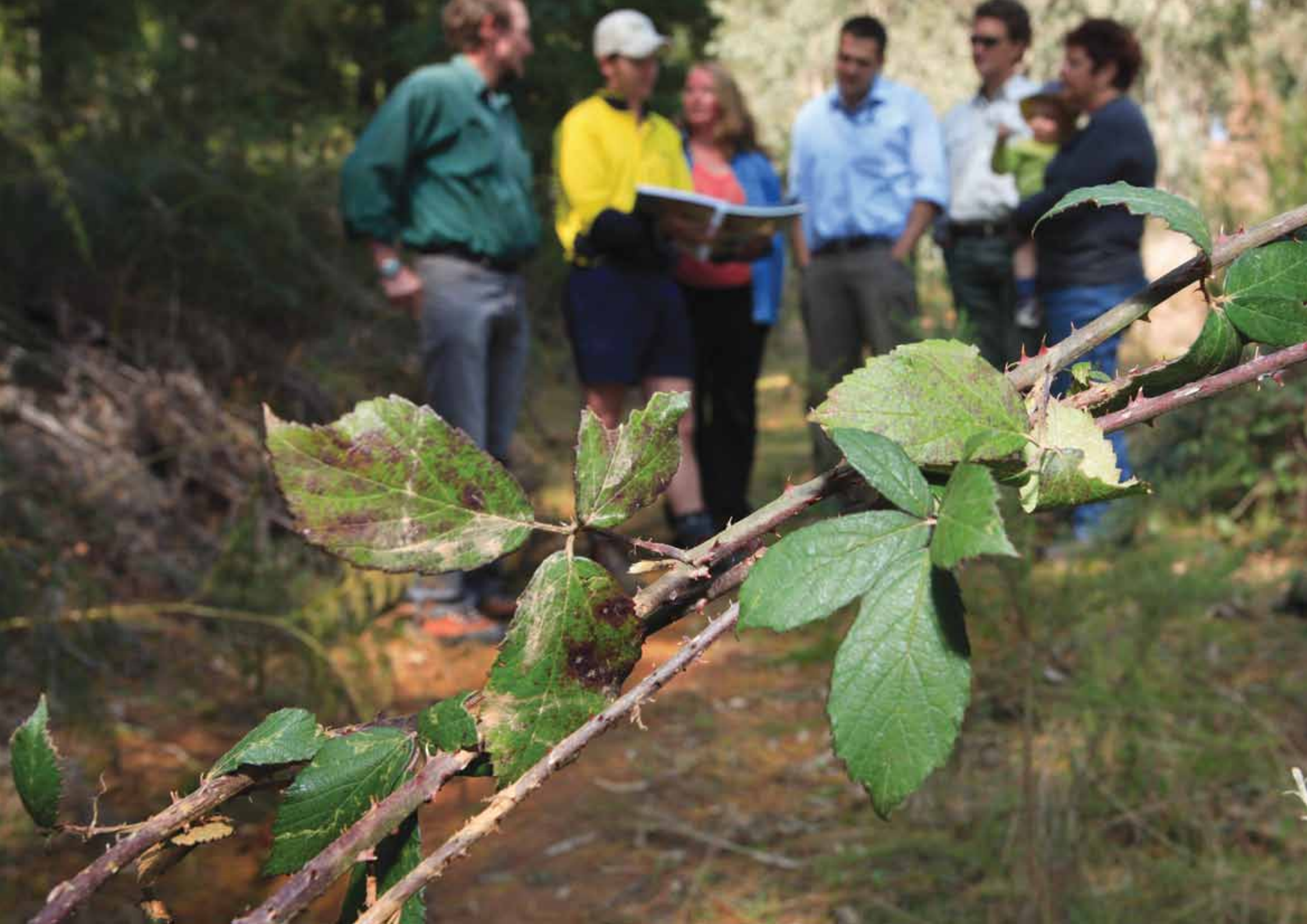
Local residents from communities in water catchment management areas where blackberry is a serious issue are members of the Taskforce, as well as representatives from government agencies involved in policy development, public land management and research and development relating to blackberry and pest management.

The key roles of the Taskforce are:

1. To represent and advocate community interests to government on blackberry across the various water catchments.
2. To deliver the Community Partnership Program, working with communities to help them develop blackberry control actions in their local area.
3. To ensure a strategic approach to controlling blackberry, with a 5-year strategy to guide actions and decisions that support a wider strategic plan for the management of blackberry across the state.

The support of other government organisations and agencies is vital to the work of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and local action groups:

- The Department of Primary Industries oversees compliance and enforcement activities and also provides valuable knowledge and support on blackberry control.
- The Department of Sustainability and Environment with essential work on public land.
- Parks Victoria is working with private landowners to maximise the efficiency of its Good Neighbours program to tackle blackberry on the shared boundaries of public and private land.
- Water catchment management authorities are mapping and treating blackberry in priority areas of their region.



# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

**Communities  
working together  
and with others in  
partnership are  
vital to blackberry  
control Victorian  
Blackberry  
Taskforce**

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce launched its Community Partnership Program in 2006 to invest in and support local people in community-led action to control blackberry in their region.

These local groups are vital to blackberry management across Victoria, reducing its growth and spread and also generating valuable insights, information and knowledge to encourage and support others to tackle the weed.

They also highlight the importance of supporting pest management in ways that reflect the individual histories, circumstances and experiences of local people and communities.


There are now 11 community blackberry action groups working across Victoria to reduce blackberry across a combined 280,000 hectares.

Over 450 private land managers and owners are involved in these groups, with many signing 3-year voluntary management agreements that set out their commitment and actions to control blackberry on their properties.

Activities and achievements in 2010–12 as well as the future plans of selected Victorian blackberry action groups are outlined below.

**Collaborative and  
concerted action that  
involves local communities  
is vital for blackberry  
control**





**WE ARE ENCOURAGING  
LANDHOLDERS IN ALL AREAS TO  
GET ON TO THEIR PROBLEM. IF  
YOU WORK YEAR AFTER YEAR,  
YOU WILL GET THERE.**

Cindy, dairy farmer







# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## BARKERS CREEK BLACKBERRY AND GORSE ACTION GROUP

The Barkers Creek Blackberry and Gorse Action Group was established in 2012 by members of the Barkers Creek Landcare Network. The project area falls within the Loddon River Basin and the major townships in or near the project area include Castlemaine and Harcourt. The project currently targets properties along the Barkers Creek area.

Long-term widespread vegetation clearing since European settlement has retained only scattered remnants of native vegetation in most areas of the region, including many small remnant areas of older trees. Blackberry has been a concern in the region for decades and a number of Landcare activities have attempted to control the weed. There is anecdotal evidence the recent long-term drought slowed its growth and extent but local landholders report blackberry (and gorse) has spread since the high summer rainfalls of 2010–11.

### Activities

The Barkers Creek Group employs a project manager with funding from the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce, who coordinates its program and conducts property visits. Most landholders in the area are retired or semi-retired and many are 'tree changers' moving from Melbourne or other urban locations with little experience in weed management. The project manager has visited 15 properties to date (mostly small allotments) to build awareness of blackberry and 11 property owners have signed a voluntary blackberry management plan to control the weed on their property.

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

The group has found many landholders are keen to reduce their blackberry and other weeds but are uncertain of the options and how to implement them. Some have indicated the time and effort of initial control works as well as follow-up activities is a challenge.

Treating blackberry along the creek catchment has been important in reducing the spread of its seed downstream.

### Future plans

The Barkers Creek Group continues to build its partnerships in blackberry control, working with the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the CMA and also communicating with Parks Victoria, V/Line, VicRoads and the Mount Alexander Shire to build awareness of its activities among public land managers and to encourage their participation.

The group is investigating future funding opportunities and intends to continue providing financial support for signed-up landholders. There is also opportunity to expand the current land area the group focuses its efforts on.

To find out more on the project, visit [www.castlemaineindependent.org/2012/06/barkers-creek-you/](http://www.castlemaineindependent.org/2012/06/barkers-creek-you/)

BARKERS CREEK BLACKBERRY AND GORSE ACTION, 2011–12

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





A photograph of three people standing in a field. On the left is an older man with white hair wearing a light blue button-down shirt and white trousers. In the center is a younger man with dark hair wearing a white polo shirt with a 'RED-GUM' logo and dark trousers. On the right is a woman with dark curly hair wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt and khaki trousers. They are all looking towards the left. The background shows a grassy hill with some trees and a utility pole under a cloudy sky. A white vehicle is partially visible on the far left.

**A BLACKBERRY  
CONTROL PROGRAM  
DELIVERED BY A  
COMMUNITY GROUP,  
AS OPPOSED TO AN  
AGENCY, IS POSITIVE.  
THIS HAS BEEN AN  
APPEAL TO MANY.**

Ian Ewart  
Chair, Central Gippsland Woody  
Weed Action Group

# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## 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.

### Activities

This year the project has been heavily focused on delivering on-ground works scheduled to be completed last financial year. This included 11 properties treating 202.7 ha of blackberry infestation. This work included re-engaging with the landholders to ascertain if they were still keen to proceed with the agreements and planned works which were developed by the previous Project Officers. The time

lapse and change of Project Officer was a definite stumbling block and did lead to several landholders not accepting the planned incentive and several other landholders never returning call or emails after many attempts to contact them.

This year involved assessing all the Properties under agreements with the first priority being the properties that undertook works and received a financial incentive in the 2010-11 financial year. The first properties visited included the sites that undertook Helicopter spraying in the 2010-11 financial year. This investment was assessed for outcomes on the ground with extensive conversations with the landholders about the pros and cons of the method. It became clear that the

approach was not a great success for a variety of reasons. On-ground spray crews were deployed as follow-up to the works as part of the second year incentive as outlined in the agreements to most of these properties. These results lead to a change in approach and no Helicopter spraying was undertaken in the 2011-12 financial year.

### Future plans

Having achieved a significant dent in the woody weed problem, the group is keen to continue to ensure the project continues in the future. To this end, they are working with the Taskforce and applying for additional funding through various community grants.

CENTRAL GIPPSLAND WOODY WEED ACTION ACTION, 2011-12

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





# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## 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. The group focuses its activities in the north east region of Victoria extending from the Mitta River in the south to the Murray River in the north, and Tallangatta Creek in the east to Sandy Creek in the west.

The area includes highly productive agricultural land as well as public land with State forests and national parks popular for recreational activities. Beef and dairy farms are the dominant agricultural activities, with smaller areas of sheep farms. Townships in the region include Tallangatta, Mitta Mitta, Eskdale, Dartmouth, Bethanga, Bellbridge, and Bullioh.

While M2M members have pursued blackberry control programs over several years, these were independently managed and taken up by landowners who demonstrated a responsible approach to blackberry management on their properties. Efforts were also made to encourage public land managers to control blackberry to stop infestations spreading to neighbouring private land. The results were considered patchy and frustrating.

In contrast, the M2M group is community-driven and takes a whole-of-community approach to managing and controlling blackberry in targeted areas. A Steering Group represents key stakeholders including the group's members, two local pine plantation owners (HVP and Agri-wealth), the Department of Primary Industries,

Department of Sustainability and Environment, Parks Victoria and the Towong Shire. Funding is for a limited period only and is aimed at establishing the group with a view of it becoming self-sustaining.

### Activities

The M2M group has conducted a letterbox drop to all landowners in three locations informing them of their group and its activities, asking them to express interest in participating. The project officer it employs with funding from the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce has helped 15 landowners map their blackberry infestations, with 13 signing 3 year voluntary blackberry management plans and encouraging others to get involved.

The hilly and rugged terrain of many farms adds to the enormity of the blackberry problem in the region and the financial cost on farmers trying to control its spread is substantial. While encouragement and support are helpful, it is essential that various forms of incentives are available to farmers to provide tangible recognition of the financial cost of effective and ongoing blackberry management controls. These incentives need to be flexible to meet the different needs of particular properties and farmers' capabilities.

### Future plans

The M2M group has formed a very functional Blackberry Action Steering Group with key stakeholders with a direct interest in blackberry control, which has been vital to the program's initial success.

The group has also identified priority areas to make better use of its project manager's time, which has proved effective in utilising the limited on-ground time the funded provided for. Public land managers in the region are also cooperative participants, which is encouraging for the Steering Group and local private landowners.

The M2M group expects more activity in the next year, and will continue its collaborative approach. Mapping local infestations is building a better picture of the extent of blackberry across the region, helping to guide priority actions and also track success in control actions.

MITTA TO MURRAY COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP, 2011-12

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





# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## MUDGEONGA AND DISTRICT BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Mudgegonga and District Blackberry Action Group was formed in 2010 after bushfires severely affected parts of the region the previous year. Following a series of community meetings and funding from the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce to employ a project officer, the program officially launched in 2011 and covers the districts of Mudgegonga, Murmungee, Rosewhite, Kancoona and Dederang.

Beef production is the dominant land use in the region, with small dairy farms also scattered throughout the area. Blackberry infestations appear regularly, typically in gullies and hillsides.

The area is a significant water catchment for the region and includes the Kiewa River and many small streams and creeks. The program area

contains significant areas of public land including Mt Jack, the Pinnacles and parts of Mt Stanley.

### Activities

The project officer has visited property owners in the region to build their awareness and commitment to control blackberry on their land, with over 100 now having signed a 3-year voluntary blackberry management plan (50 this year) that sets out how they will tackle the weed. A mapping system to identify the location and size of infestations has substantially helped with efficient allocation of resources and costing as well as timeframes on spraying blackberry.

The Mudgegonga and District group is also working closely with public land managers in the area to control

blackberry along private and public land boundaries and has received funding through the Department of Sustainability and Environment's Good Neighbour program.

The group also hosted a field day in 2012 featuring experts from government agencies and chemical companies outlining best practice options for spraying blackberry on private land.

### Future plans

Community commitment and the employment of a project officer with good communication skills and technical knowledge has been essential to the success and achievements of the Mudgegonga and District group, particularly in getting private landholders on board.

Higher rainfall in the region has supported the growth of blackberry and on some occasions has prevented access to particular areas for spraying. In some cases, a challenge has been

working with landholders who do not possess equipment to spray large blackberry infestations.

Blackberry infestations identified as a priority for action are being identified and communicated to public land managers.

The program will continue into 2012 with various promotional activities as well as new and follow-up visits with landholders.

MUDGEGONG AND DISTRICT COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP, 2011-12

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





# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## 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 many landholders into their 6th year or second 3 year Blackberry Management plans. Such sustained effort demonstrates the long-term nature of weed control and longevity of the community program.

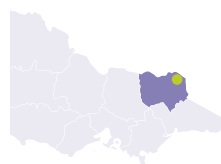
New landholders are also joining the program each year, whilst others have reduced their blackberry infestations to a manageable level and no longer require support. This is evidence that the program is achieving its objective

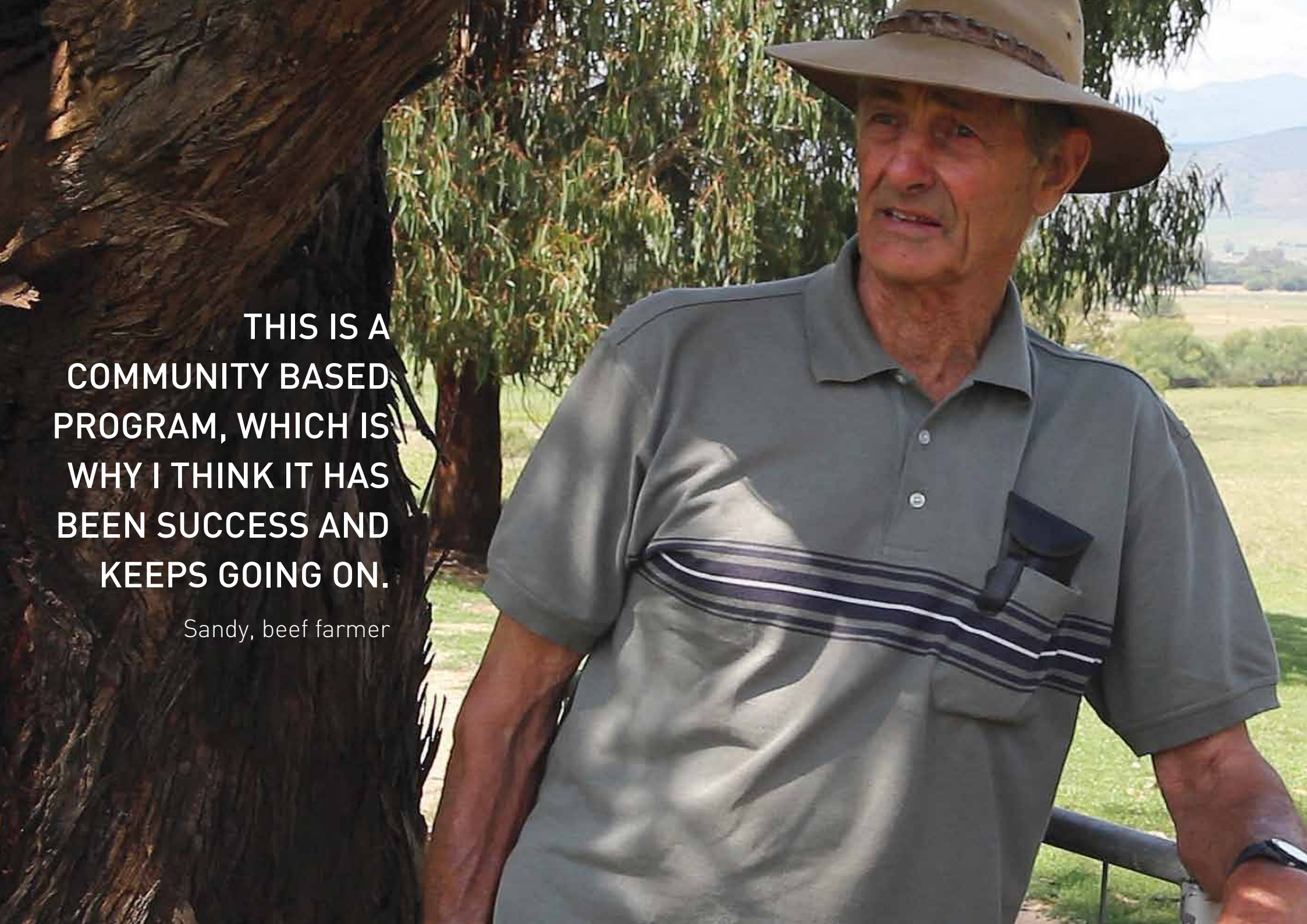
of reducing the spread of blackberry and its impacts at both the property and landscape scale. The Blackberry Group continues to be a trusted partner within the community.

Blackberry infestations are a concern and there still remains some hesitancy to act on large scale blackberry in some areas for a fear of futility. The program is continuing annual liaison with these landholders and creating a relationship that is built on regular meetings, updates and continued financial support.

NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP, 2011-12

Number of new landholders on agreements	Number of landholders visited	Total private property visited (ha)	Private property infestations mapped (ha)	Private property infestations treated (ha)
57	110	8101	N/A	N/A



A man, identified as Sandy, a beef farmer, is the central figure. He is an older man with a weathered face, wearing a light-colored wide-brimmed hat and a grey polo shirt with a striped band across the chest. He is leaning against the thick, textured trunk of a large tree on the left. The background shows a lush green field, a line of trees, and distant mountains under a clear sky. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

**THIS IS A  
COMMUNITY BASED  
PROGRAM, WHICH IS  
WHY I THINK IT HAS  
BEEN SUCCESS AND  
KEEPS GOING ON.**

Sandy, beef farmer



# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## 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, which includes the Campaspe River.

Most private landholders in the region are 'lifestyle' property owners or operate small farms with 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 has set a target to engage 60 landholders in a particular area in the region with blackberry and gorse infestations, encouraging them to sign a 3-year voluntary blackberry management plan that sets out their commitment and activities to controlling the weed on their properties.

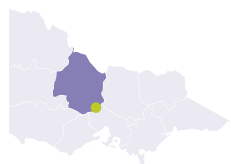
The group has identified a lack of awareness amongst absentee landholders of their responsibilities to control pest plants as well as a lack of capacity due to limited knowledge of treatment options or the physical ability to undertake works.

In early 2012, community representatives from the group attended a field day hosted by the North East Blackberry Action Group to learn

more about blackberry control options and to visit farms in the area where landholders had successfully eradicated the weed from their properties. This proved extremely useful, providing motivation and practical approaches to drive community-based weed management programs in Upper Campaspe.

The group is now planning its own field day later in 2012 to motivate and support private landowners in the region to control blackberry and gorse on their properties.

UPPER CAMPASPE BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP



# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## NORTHERN YARRA BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Northern Yarra Blackberry Action Group was formed following concerns about blackberry infestations after the 2009 Black Saturday fires. The group was launched as part of the Northern Yarra Landcare Network, holding its first meeting in mid 2011.

The group focuses its efforts on fire-affected communities in the Yarra Ranges, including Steels Creek, Dixons Creek, Chum Creek and parts of Yarra Glen, Tarrawarra, Toolangi and Healesville. Combined, the area totals 13,000 hectares.

The Northern Yarra region consists mostly of foothill forest, riparian woodland and open farmland south of the Great Divide and contains several important tributaries of the Yarra River.

It is bound by the Kinglake National Park to the west, and the Toolangi and Pauls Creek State Forests in the north and east, whilst the Yarra River forms the area's southern boundary.

The region is well known for its wine production and tourism drawing thousands of visitors to the area each year. Beyond the townships of Yarra Glen and Healesville, properties range in size from lifestyle blocks through to small and mid-size farms (up to 100 hectares), with some larger vineyards.

The Northern Yarra group's blackberry control program consists of a steering group that includes local residents as well as representatives from government agencies responsible for managing public land, including

the Yarra Ranges Council, Melbourne Water, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Parks Victoria and VicRoads.

Regular and valuable support is also provided by the Port Philip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority, with the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce playing an important advisory role.

### Activities

A part-time project officer is employed with funding from the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce to encourage and support landowners to commit to and conduct blackberry control on their properties. The group supports their efforts with assistance to

NORTHERN YARRA BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP, 2011-12

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





# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## NORTHERN YARRA BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

map blackberry infestations and by coordinating activities of owners and land managers and offering small incentives for contractor work.

The Northern Yarra Landcare Network provides small discounts on the cost of herbicides and safety wear, facilitates training in chemical use and also hires its spray equipment to landowners. It has hosted three blackberry control events since Black Saturday, attracting more than 50 people to each.

The group is initially targeting landowners in the northern reaches of the area's sub-catchments, systematically working south to ensure outbreaks of blackberry are not overlooked.

This work has been complemented by the involvement of other agencies, particularly the Yarra Ranges Council (which has sprayed infestations along local roads) as well as Parks Victoria and DSE, and the group is hoping

to secure funding from the Good Neighbour program for controlling blackberry along the borders of more properties in the next year.

Melbourne Water is also an important partner, activating (or re-activating) up to 22 properties in its Healthy Waterways Program. The Northern Yarra group is also building a stronger partnership with VicRoads.

In its first year of operation the group succeeded in signing 42 landowners up for the program. In many cases, owners of properties burned by the bushfires remain unwilling absentees as they decide if they will rebuild. Those in the process of rebuilding and those who have completed their rebuild often have scarce time or resources for the recovery of their land. The 2009 fires exacerbated blackberry issues even on properties where the impact of the fires is not so visible. The community's commitment and action to

blackberry control in these challenging circumstances is a testament to the resilience of local people.

While the small financial assistance for blackberry control the group offers is appreciated, the strength of the program is its coordination activities which link individual landowners to collective action. Knowing there is joint effort amongst neighbours supported by a dedicated project officer and range of land management agencies is central to the group's success.

The Northern Yarra Landcare Network has also been vital to the group's achievements, with its Landcare project officer supporting administration activities so field work can progress at a good rate. The officer is hosted by Yarra Ranges Council and largely funded by the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority.

The major concern of the group is its ability to keep pace with the spread of

blackberry infestation in a community that remains unsettled since the bushfires.

An application to the Australian Government's Biodiversity Fund was successful in 2011–12 and will allow the Northern Yarra group to expand its program in the next year, with the employment of an additional project officer dedicated to blackberry control activities as well as incentives over 5 years to fire-affected areas containing high biodiversity values.

This new funding will assist with controlling blackberry on fire-affected land where the biodiversity values are high and owners wish to see the regenerating forest protected from the major threat of blackberry invasion. Blackberry control in complex regenerating forest structures is time consuming to plan and execute, and the group is very pleased to offer this as another option to the community.

## **FRESHLY SOWN: BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS**

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce convened meetings with concerned farmers in the Maffra and Yea districts of Victoria. New community blackberry actions groups are expected to be developed later this year, to be reported on in the next annual reporting cycle.



# GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

## DEPARTMENT OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT

### GOOD NEIGHBOUR PROGRAM

Managing weeds and pest animals is a priority where public and private land share boundaries.

The Victorian Government's Good Neighbour Program takes a collaborative approach to managing weeds and pest animals on the shared boundaries of public and private land and involves community groups and private landowners as well as state, regional and local agencies.

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

In 2010–11, the program allocated \$2.3 million to almost 400 weed and pest control projects across Victoria, many of them focusing on blackberry. Projects were mainly in State forests, National Parks and on Crown Land, with some supporting control actions private land where public benefit was evident.

## 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 on established weeds where it can achieve the greatest public benefit.

It considers enforcement action to support sustained community-led action if a group of landowners have taken coordinated action over several years to achieve a common standard of pest control. DPI also considers enforcement action to support the protection of high value catchment assets, and where there is significant impact on the wider public from a landowner failing to act on their legal responsibility to control weeds or pests on their property.

Supporting community-led groups which have taken coordinated action over several years maximises the efficiency of government resources for enforcement and encourages long-term community-led ownership. Under this principle, DPI provided enforcement support to two of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce's community partnership groups in 2011–12.

There were 82 projects completed in Victoria in 2011–12, with eight targeting blackberry across the North Central, North East and East Gippsland catchments. As a result of these projects, 273 properties were inspected across 11,800 hectares and 87 property owners were served a compliance notice to control blackberry on their land.

## PARKS VICTORIA

### BLACKBERRY MANAGEMENT

Parks Victoria's environmental management framework focuses on works that protect the highest values at greatest risk. Pest plant management is Parks Victoria's largest program area for natural values management. A wide range of weed species were treated in 2011–12 and Parks Victoria treats an average 40,000 hectares of land across more than 70 parks and reserves for blackberry each year. The approach includes helping to implement the Good Neighbour Program, a Department of Sustainability Environment initiative that targets the shared boundaries of public and private land and supported over 30 projects to control blackberry in 2011–12.

One of these Good Neighbour projects was funded to map and treat blackberry along the Goongerah Creek, which forms the western boundary of Errinundra National Park and the shared boundary with private property.

The program also supported the efforts of the Far East Gippsland Blackberry Action Group, a community landholder group based in Goongerah and established with support from the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce. This project aims to increase community capacity to control blackberry in cooperation with public land managers and develop a coordinated, united and cooperative approach to blackberry control.

Parks Victoria also conducted broader landscape-scale blackberry control works in the region as part of its 'Protecting the Best' program. A goal of this program is to protect high value natural catchment areas, such as areas with warm temperate rainforest. In this case, tributaries of the Brodribb River which flows through the Goongerah Valley were treated for blackberry, adding value to the community's work by reducing the flow of blackberry seed down the valley.





# RESEARCH UPDATE: BIOLOGICAL CONTROL

The stem pathogen *Septocytia ruborum* infects European blackberry causing a decline of its condition and fruit production. The disease is being evaluated as a biological control agent for European blackberry in Australia and has been subject to ecological and laboratory studies in Europe.

In-vitro host-specificity testing indicates host specificity exists, but whole plant inoculation procedures were not achieved, which limits interpretation of the host range of the pathogen. The detection of *S. ruborum* in New Zealand provided new opportunities to test the host specificity of the pathogen and develop whole-plant inoculation procedures.

Using the susceptible boysenberry cultivars Tasman and Riwaka Choice, inoculum of *S. ruborum* derived from commercial boysenberry plantations infected test plants 2 months after application.

Infection symptoms occurred on leaf blades, but were not apparent on inoculated stems. Control plants remained largely uninfected. The disease is known to have a prolonged latent period and stem infections are expected to develop after winter.

Wild populations of European blackberry supported a range of stem and leaf pathogens, but *S. ruborum* was not detected on the stems of wild blackberry. The restriction of the New Zealand population of *S. ruborum* to commercial *Rubus* cultivars (particularly those with boysenberry and youngberry in their pedigrees) suggests the disease has a high level of fidelity in host selection. It is this characteristic that could be exploited to locate and develop pathotypes that are restricted to problematic invasive *Rubus* taxa in Australia.

The development of a simple inoculation protocol for *S. ruborum* provides an opportunity to continue its development as a biological control agent for blackberry in Australia.

## COMMUNICATE BETTER – LET’S CHAT

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce is always exploring how it can improve communications with stakeholders. This year we have embarked on using social media and other online tools as a new way to engage people in the effort to control blackberry across the state.

An upgraded Victorian Blackberry Taskforce website better reflects our direction and provides information about blackberry to property owners and other interested people. We have also launched a Twitter account, allowing up-to-date information on all things blackberry.

Visit our Blackberry Blog at [www.blackberrytheweed.com.au](http://www.blackberrytheweed.com.au) to get news, information and stories on the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce, and learn from the experience of communities successfully tackling blackberry in the region.

## BLACKBERRY ACTION DATABASE

In 2011–12, the Taskforce placed greater emphasis on capturing the on-ground achievements of the community blackberry action groups it supports.

The Taskforce has commissioned and started development of the Blackberry Action Database Information System (commonly referred to as BADIS), and has trained six project officers to use the database system to date.





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