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# CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

As the Chairperson of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce I am pleased to present the combined 2009–10 and 2010–11 Annual Reports.

These reports provide an overview of the activities of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce over the last two years.



## THE VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE HAS MAINTAINED ITS FOCUS ON WORKING WITH VICTORIAN COMMUNITIES LEADING COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS TO CONTROL AND REDUCE BLACKBERRY INFESTATIONS IN THEIR AREAS.

Our partnership programs support communities to design and drive local blackberry management activities that are tailored to their needs. Activities range from education and training programs to voluntary management agreements with landowners to take action to tackle blackberry on their properties.

In addition to the three partnership programs we established in 2009 which continue today, the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce also supports two major projects in Victorian fire-affected areas in Gippsland and north east Victoria that aim to establish post-fire sustainable blackberry and woody weed management programs. Negotiations are also in progress for a similar program with the Yarra Ranges community.

There is no easy solution to blackberry control but the best way to protect and restore productive land and biodiversity values is by building an aware and active community. Encouraging communities to understand why blackberry infestations are widespread in their local area and their impact is the first step to a successful management program.

In response, the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce published a 'Start-Up Kit' in February 2011. This consists of a booklet and multimedia presentation that showcases how others have planned and implemented successful blackberry control projects in their local area. It offers a valuable resource and guide for landholders wishing to establish their own community blackberry action groups. More information on the Start-Up Kit package including how to receive one is available on the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce website at [www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au](http://www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au).

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce has continued to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and exchange of ideas in blackberry control. For example, community representatives from across Victoria attended a forum sponsored by the Taskforce in Traralgon in 2010 which brought together technical experts with those experienced in community engagement and included a field trip to inspect on-ground works and talk to local land managers.

While communities use various methods of blackberry control, including chemical and mechanical approaches, sourcing an effective biocontrol is vital for complementing these efforts. Rust strains released in Victoria several years ago are part of this, and research continues into investigating the potential of purple blotch disease as an effective biocontrol under a canopy.

I would like to thank the Victorian Government for its continuing support of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce through its Future Farming Initiative, Good Neighbour Program and the Interim Roadside Weed Control Program.

Lyn Coulston  
Chairperson

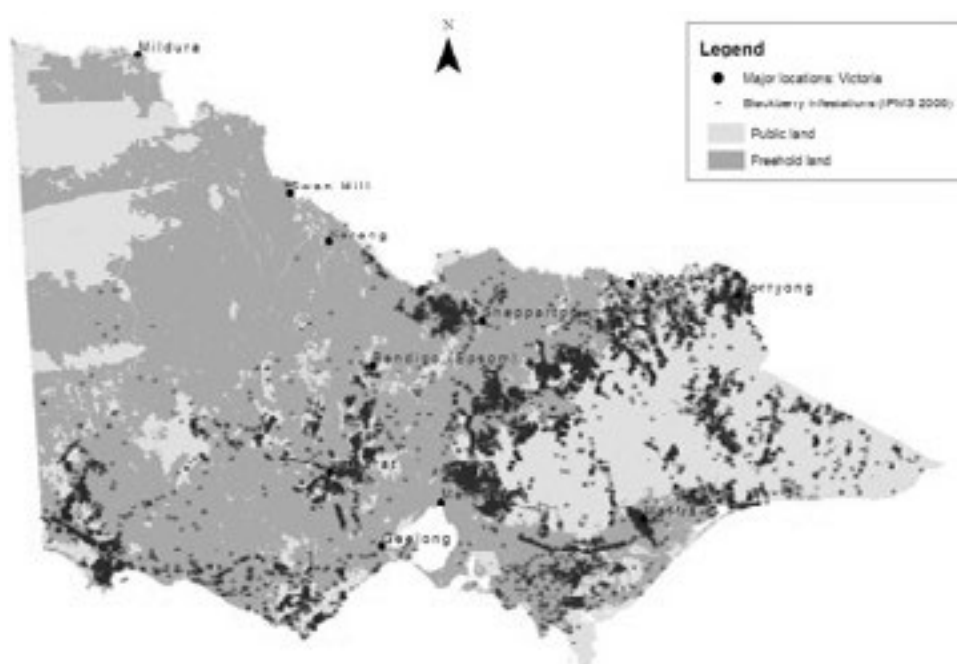
# INTRODUCTION

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 to 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 the planting of blackberry to control soil erosion along creek banks. The subsequent preference of early settlers to use blackberry for erosion control combined with its invasive potential saw it quickly recognised as a serious weed.

Due to its highly invasive nature, potential to spread and the environmental and economic damage it causes, Blackberry is recognised as one of Australia's 20 *Weeds of National Significance* and is one of the three *Victorian Community Weeds*.

It is classified as a Regionally Controlled species in nine of Victoria's 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 classified as a Restricted Weed in the Mallee and cannot be sold or traded within this catchment. Figure 1 shows the substantial distribution of blackberry across the state.

**FIGURE 1** Blackberry distribution across Victoria (Source: Department of Primary Industries)



Blackberry infestation can potentially impact the landscape. It often reduces the productivity of primary industries (particularly grazing and forestry), degrades natural environments which hinders the provision of eco-system services, provides a harbour for vermin and detracts from the recreational and ascetic value of regions.

Blackberry is considered a significant threat to our biodiversity and affects almost 9 million hectares of grazing land. In 2006 it was estimated that blackberry cost Victoria approximately \$100 million each year in control activities and lost production (Page & Lacey 2006). This was an increase of \$60 million compared with survey results in the 1980s (Bruzzeze & Lane 1996).

While the environmental costs of blackberry remain to be quantified they are undoubtedly high.

## THE VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

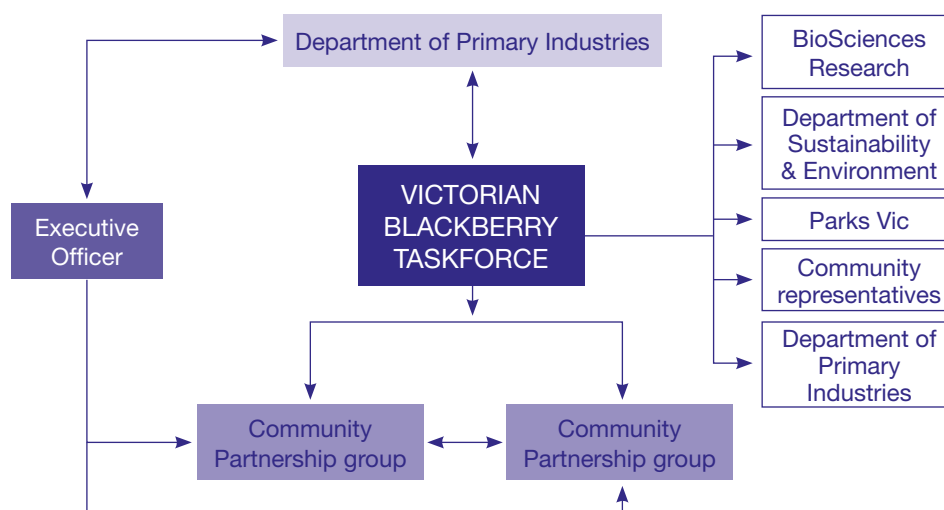
The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce was formed in 1999 and in 2001 was charged with renewing the battle against blackberry across Victoria as a result of community support for blackberry control.

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

A key guiding principal of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce is the concept that *blackberry control is more than science*. The Taskforce delivers services that provide for the sustainable development of Victoria's primary industries and protect biodiversity assets for the benefit of the Victorian community, now and in 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 governments.

The Taskforce is one of three Community Pest Management Groups that mediate and facilitate relationships between community groups and government in the delivery of control programs for priority weed species. The Taskforce consists of state-wide representatives from community and government agencies with an interest in pest management (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2 Victorian Blackberry Taskforce partners and projects



# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

**“IF YOU EVER THINK YOU’RE TOO SMALL TO BE EFFECTIVE,  
YOU’VE NEVER BEEN IN BED WITH A MOSQUITO!”** Wendy Lesko

An important aspect of the work of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce is facilitating and supporting the development of projects under its Community Partnership Program. These projects empower communities to tackle blackberry on their own terms within the guidelines of the program.

Community partnership projects are geared towards providing community with greater ownership of blackberry management by developing joint projects between community and government and promoting local solutions. The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce strives to promote the principals of community engagement, inclusion in decision-making, representation and deliberation within these projects.

It focuses on partnership and relationship development using a collaborative approach to encourage community capacity building.

This community-led attack has generated significant positive outcomes for community and government and has improved the delivery of services to land managers. From 2009 to 2011, the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce sponsored five community partnership projects across the state, including two bushfire recovery groups.

## BUSHFIRE RECOVERY PROGRAM

Over the two financial years from 2009 to 2011, the community partnership model of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce was adopted for bushfire recovery projects for woody weed management in regions affected by the 2009 Black Saturday fires.

The Bushfire Recovery Program of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce aims to mobilise community action to manage and reduce priority woody weeds species within fire-affected areas. These pest plants can have environmental, economic and social impacts.

The post-bushfire environment provides a unique opportunity to reduce pest animals as the cover that protects them is removed. Many pest plants also regenerate rapidly after fire and quick action is needed to ensure these do not increase rapidly during regrowth, further affecting rural businesses and biodiversity.



**FIGURE 3** Scalping work conducted in a fire-affected area in Gippsland.

# REPORTS

## 2009-2010



### CENTRAL GIPPSLAND WOODY WEED ACTION GROUP

The Central Gippsland Woody Weed Group Action Group was established in response to community concern about blackberry regrowth following the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires. The group aims to help fire-affected landholders recover by supporting them to control blackberry as well as gorse and broom.

Chair of the Central Gippsland Woody Weed Group Action Group, Ian Ewart says:

*"The post-fire environment provides an ideal opportunity to tackle woody weeds in the second year of growth and where access has been a problem.*

*"It's a community-led project, but we recognise that working with the other agencies has been essential in planning and achieving widespread change."*

Many landholders in the fire-affected area of Central Gippsland lost sheds and machinery and thus the capacity to spray weeds on their properties. The Central Gippsland Woody Weeds Action Group's bushfire recovery project has worked with landowners to help reduce the impact of this.

The aims of the Central Gippsland Woody Weed Group Action Group are:

- Map blackberry infestations in fire-affected areas including but not limited to: Boolarra, Yinnar South, Mirboo North, Darlimurla, Hazelwood North, Churchill, Koornalla, Le Roy, Traralgon South, Callignee, Balook and Jeeralang.
- Employ two project officers to liaise with landholders in fire-affected areas and provide professional advice on how to best manage blackberries and other woody weeds on their properties.
- Provide resources to help construct tracks to help landholders access areas of infestation.
- Reduce the degradation of native vegetation and biodiversity values and the impact of control measures on water quality and remnant vegetation.
- Reduce blackberry infestation in the project area by 20 per cent in 5 years.
- Decrease the area of feral animal harbour.



**FIGURE 4** Chair of the Central Gippsland Woody Weeds Action Group. From left: Ian Ewart, North East Blackberry Action Group project officer Damian Wall and Chair of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce, Lyn Coulston.

## FAR EAST GIPPSLAND BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP



The Far East Community Blackberry Action Group was formed by Landcare groups in the region in 2008 in response to concerns about blackberry infestations in the area.

The Group received funding for a 3-year pilot project to reduce blackberry in the Goongerah Valley. This remote area was targeted for its proximity to rivers and parks of national significance and the ecological importance and social value of the region.

Initial efforts focused on raising awareness of the ecological damage and productivity losses that blackberry causes. This involved relevant agencies communicating their efforts toward managing blackberry on public land and a concerted effort by the Far East Community Blackberry Action Group to liaise with private land managers.

Learning has centred on:

- identifying, exploring and using individual motivators across a variety of values sets and capability spectrums
- defining 'community' (for example, in relation to the Steering Committee composition)
- building knowledge of the region's geography, terrain and composition of public and private land and how to best influence perceptions of responsibilities of the community in controlling blackberry
- the critical role of the project officer in contacting and communicating with landholders
- the importance of rising to the challenge of inevitable and unforeseen developments
- the benefits of the support of the existing and respected structure the Landcare network provides
- the importance of inter-agency communications and of exploring how agencies can operate as part of the community rather than as separate entities.

The focus for the final year of the pilot project was maintaining land manager interest and enthusiasm to continue efforts to control blackberry.

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Goongerah has an interesting history in that it originally evolved as a timber milling and logging area supported by local primary production. Economies of scale has seen a shift and rationalisation of timber mill processing and centralisation in the region and Goongerah no longer relies on timber production as a primary income source.

Community thinking has shifted and environmental issues are now a focus with lobbying and raising awareness regarding timber harvesting and clear felling. Many residents are working to preserve the region's natural beauty and resources.

Many Goongerah land managers have subsequently preferred not to use herbicides and now encourage alternative methods to reduce blackberry. Several properties are working to achieve organic accreditation, which has implications for herbicide use. Achieving quick and wide-spread reduction of blackberry using alternatives to herbicides is challenging for some land managers.

Goongerah has a large number of small properties. As size and location make viability as primary producing enterprises difficult, productivity needs are only a minor motivator. Environmental restoration tends to carry more weight.

Like much of far eastern Victoria, Goongerah and Buldah have a high number of absentee landowners. This can create management issues due to a lack of awareness, time constraints and a general disassociation with the local community. Absentee landholders are also removed from peer influence to a large extent.



**FIGURE 5**  
A blackberry infestation being addressed as part of the Far East Community Blackberry Action Group

This pilot project has received support from government agencies for planning combined and collaborative efforts to address blackberry on public land. This in turn has demonstrated to landowners the need for them to take responsibility for pest plants on their land.

Some land managers have indicated their reluctance to develop formal 3-year voluntary management agreements due to the formality of the process and a possible perception of binding implications. The project officer's challenge is to maintain the sense of ownership private land managers have for their responsibility and the need to address blackberry.

## ENGAGING LAND MANAGERS

A project officer employed by the Community Group Steering Committee has liaised with private land managers to support them to acknowledge their responsibilities in managing blackberry. In some instances, 3-year voluntary management agreements have been developed while other land managers have made a general commitment to addressing blackberry, encouraged by the presence of the community group.

The project officer has personally met landholders each year and reviewed their compliance voluntary management agreements, commitments and actions. This discussion and consultation helps reinforce the responsibility of land managers to manage blackberry and helps them identify obstacles to control and address large infestations in manageable 'bites' with consistent follow-up activity.



**FIGURE 6**  
Members of the Far East Community Blackberry Action Group with Victorian Blackberry Taskforce representatives in Goongerah

## ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE GOONGERAH REGION, 2009-10

Community engagement and participation in Goongerah has been positive to date, reflected by significant action to reduce blackberry by some landowners.

Activities in 2009–10 included:

- 34 landowner and managers were identified and contacted for follow-up.
- 13 landowners and managers agreed to formal voluntary management agreements that were reviewed with site visits.
- Seven property inspections conducted with informal management agreements reviewed at site visits.
- Absentee landholders were contacted and indicated their intention to reduce blackberry.
- Two combined agency and community group meetings were held to table planned blackberry treatments.
- Contract weed sprayers were commissioned to spray private and public land.
- Information sharing events such as forums and a field day were held to raise awareness and present alternative methods to manage blackberry, such as the intensive grazing of goats, as well as herbicide use and blackberry leaf-rust fungus.
- The effectiveness of blackberry leaf-rust fungus in the area was monitored.
- Newspaper articles in local media were placed to raise awareness and acknowledge the participation and support of local people.

The community consultations are believed to have generated significant action by land managers in the Cann Valley and Buldah areas to reduce blackberry.

## ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE CANN RIVER – BULDAH AREAS, 2009-10

While blackberry infestations are apparent in the Cann River and Buldah areas, embracing the community weed model in the form of developing formal management agreements and coordinated control is not a high priority in these communities at present to address blackberry infestation on private land.

Achievements in 2009–10 included:

- One community meeting was held to raise awareness, which was attended by representatives from the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, Parks Victoria, the Victorian Department of Primary Industries and the Victorian Department of Sustainability to enable information sharing about completed and planned blackberry control works on public land.
- 210 landowners were contacted to help raise awareness of their responsibilities in reducing blackberry.
- 15 properties were identified with agencies and community engagement requiring project manager follow-up.
- The project officer conducted 19 one-on-one site and contact visits.
- 130 hectares (known) were treated for blackberry in 2009–10.

**FIGURE 7** Achievements (total) of the Far East Community Blackberry Action Group

2009-2010	Number of landholders on work agreements	Number of landholders visited	Total private property visited (ha)	Private property infestations mapped (ha)	Private property infestations treated (ha)
	13 specific agreements 10 formal agreements	53	Approx 450 ha	300 ha	224 ha

## MITTA MITTA BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP



The Mitta Valley is nestled in the upper reaches of north-east Victoria. With an annual rainfall of more than 1,200 millimetres and some rugged steep slopes, the valley provides favourable conditions for blackberry infestation.

In March 2007 the Mitta Valley Landcare group started discussions with the North East Blackberry Action Group about establishing 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. Investment in the group is expected to finish in 2010, with discussion underway for future projects.

### ENGAGING LANDOWNERS

The Mitta Valley Blackberry Action Group employed a project officer to provide mapping and extension services to identified landholders in the area. Mapping services included assessing blackberry infestation on private land and on boundaries where public and private land intersected. Services also included roadside mapping of blackberry.

A list of landholders was provided to the project officer and property inspections were arranged offering voluntary management agreements. These agreements outline the land manager's blackberry management responsibilities and detail a plan to manage blackberry on their land.

Blackberry management in the Mitta has a long and chequered history. Efforts to engage the community have met various obstacles and an ongoing effort is required. Previous projects have lacked a coordinated approach and follow-up emphasis. In addition, a lack of education and best-practice information has not always reached landholders.

Gaining accesses to blackberry infestations has been an issue for many landholders within the valley and to help address this, 5.28 kilometres of access track was established during the project.

The Mitta Mitta Blackberry Action Group also monitors blackberry on local roadsides in partnership with local government which also invests in the group and together, they have achieved a 9 per cent reduction in total target sites across 300 kilometres of roadside monitored and managed.

**FIGURE 8** Achievements of the Mitta Mitta Blackberry Action Group

2007-2010	Number of landholders on work agreements	Roadside mapping (kms)	Roadside spraying (kms)	Private property infestations mapped (ha)
	9	15	4028	441

## NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP



The North East Blackberry Action Group was established in 2005 as a result of community interest and continued to develop and expand its activities in 2009–10. Its successful approach has been adopted by the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce to form similar groups to tackle blackberry in local areas.

The project area of the North East Blackberry Action Group is the administrative boundary of the Upper Murray Landcare Network in north-east 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, which is estimated to contain 140,000 hectares of public and private land.

## ENGAGING LAND MANAGERS

The North East Blackberry Action Group employed a project officer in 2009–10 to provide mapping and extension services to community-identified landholders in the area. Mapping services included assessing blackberry infestations on private land and the shared boundaries of public and private land. The project officer also mapped roadside blackberry infestations.

A significant focus for 2009–10 was revisiting landholders who had entered into 3-year voluntary management agreements to reduce blackberry on their properties. These agreements outlined the commitment of landholders to take significant action to reduce the growth and spread of blackberry. This has achieved significant success, with a reduction in blackberry of 46 per cent in targeted areas.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

The blackberry program has gained further momentum in the Upper Murray regions and has been the catalyst for many landholders to reconsider how they manage areas particularly susceptible to blackberry infestations (such as steep slopes, wet gullies and riparian zones under heavy trees). The program coordinator has used this opportunity to introduce several land management concepts in the Upper Murray agricultural landscape that were previously viewed as 'fringe methodologies'. Grazing management, stocking rates, fencing for land capability, alternative stock options and leasing have been some topics discussed, with landholders entering voluntary management contracts and those continuing on contracts from previous years.

A noticeable shift towards landholders committing to contractor spraying on their land has occurred. Earlier in the program, some landholders were reluctant to invite contractors on to their land (for various reasons) but with fuel prices settling, more 'generic' chemical options becoming available and increases in stock prices, landholders are now questioning spending their time 'on the side of a hill'. Instead, interest has grown in engaging local contractors who can often cover more ground in less time and provide value for money.

Roadside mapping is continuing and the entire area is expected to be completed by April 2011.

Achievements for 2009–10 included:

- Eight contracts were signed in Nariel and Thowgla and the Biggara valleys.
- 40 kilometres of access tracks were installed.
- 25 landholders in Burrowye and Walwa were revisited to review the third and final year of their management agreement.
- 20 landholders from Cudgewa and Tintaldra and two landholders from Nariel and Thowgla were revisited to review the second year of their management agreements.
- 11 new landholders were visited in Biggara and Nariel and Thowgla.
- 17, 035 hectares of property were visited in Burrowye and Walwa, 7,069 hectares in Cudgewa and Tintaldra and 3,463 hectares in the Nariel, Thowgla and Biggara region.
- 1,658 hectares were mapped on private properties in Burrowye and Walwa, 1,514 hectares in Cudgewa and Tintaldra and 258 hectares in the Nariel, Thowgla and Biggara region.
- 761 hectares were treated for blackberry on private property in Burrowye and Walwa, 504 hectares in Cudgewa and Tintaldra and 64 hectares in the Nariel, Thowgla and Biggara region.

**FIGURE 9** Achievements (total) of the North East Blackberry Action Group

2009 - 2010	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	58	27,567	3,430	1,329

# GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS 2009-2010



## DEPARTMENT OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT: **GOOD NEIGHBOUR PROGRAM**

### Working together across public and private land

The Victorian Government's Good Neighbour Program aims to build positive relations with neighbours by reducing weeds and pests on public land that affect private land.

The Good Neighbour Program allocated more than \$600,000 to over 100 blackberry projects in 2009–10.

The Good Neighbour Program focuses weed and pest animal management on land managed by Victoria's Department of Sustainability (DSE) and Environment as well as Parks Victoria where it adjoins private land.

Local DSE and Parks Victoria land managers consult with adjoining private landholders and community groups (such as Blackberry Action Groups and Landcare) in planning its complementary weed and pest animal control works on public land. Most Good Neighbour Program projects operate for 3 years so follow-up treatment can continue after initial knockdown.

Figure 10 below outlines 2009–10 Good Neighbour Program investment in blackberry management in the Catchment Management Areas.

**FIGURE 10** Good Neighbour Program blackberry projects in Catchment Management Areas

Catchment Management Area	East Gippsland	Glenelg Hopkins	Goulburn Broken	North East	Port Phillip	West Gippsland
Number of projects	18	3	22	42	4	20
Investment	\$64,500	\$53,000	\$121,320	\$263,800	\$25,300	\$79,000

## CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY: **BUSHFIRE RECOVERY PROGRAM**

Two Caring for our Country Bushfire Recovery projects were funded by the Victorian Government to treat blackberry in Victoria's high country. The projects worked to protect habitats of the Spotted Tree frog (25,000) and the Alpine Tree frog (\$3,000) following the 2009 Black Saturday fires.



**FIGURE 11** Spotted tree frog



**FIGURE 12** Alpine tree frog

## INTERIM ROADSIDES WEED CONTROL PROJECT

Roadsides provide critical pathways for the introduction and spread of pests, with detrimental impacts to roadside environmental 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' is a 4-year initiative aimed at building a partnership with local governments to manage Regionally Prohibited weeds, Regionally Controlled Weeds and Established Pest Animals on Victoria's municipal roadsides.

This project is working in partnership with the Municipal Association of Victoria and investing \$6.8 million over 4 years with the objective of supporting local governments with an interim roadside grants program, building on past initiatives of Victoria's Department of Primary Industries.

Two rounds of funding for the Building the Capacity of Local Government project were distributed to 2009–10. Round 1 distributed \$1.064 million in grants for on-ground and capacity building works, funding 46 projects involving 47 local councils. Round 2 allocated \$496,790 to 32 local councils, including five in fire-affected regions.

Ten of the 19 councils in fire-affected regions received approximately \$143,500 from Round 2 for capacity building projects to strengthen their pest management approach. Eight of the nine other fire-affected councils received funding in Round 1.

## PARKS VICTORIA BLACKBERRY MANAGEMENT

Parks Victoria's environmental management framework focuses its on-ground works to protect 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 the State of the Parks report (2005), together with the 'Levels of Protection' framework provided a basis for setting strategic priorities.

A wide range of pest plant and animal species were treated on land managed by Parks Victoria as a result of this process. In 2009–10, more than 15,000 hectares of land across more than 60 parks and reserves were treated for blackberry, which represents the largest allocation of funding spent on any single pest plant species by Parks Victoria. This included 489 Parks Victoria staff days and 151 volunteer days working to control and reduce blackberry.

Control programs were undertaken across a range of parks and reserves including major operations in the Alpine, Coopracambra, Burrowa Pine and Snowy River national parks as well as the Yarra Valley parklands.



**FIGURE 13** A Parks Victoria employee spraying blackberry.

## BIOCONTROL RESEARCH

Current research into blackberry biological control agents has focused primarily on purple blotch disease (*Septocyta ruborum*). This is a priority agent for further development as it is systemic, is capable of killing canes and whole plants, has a broad climatic range and many invasive taxa are susceptible.

Biological studies have been undertaken by the Department of Primary Industries in Montpellier, France using the CSIRO facilities. The focus of research has been improving the understanding of genetic diversity, natural host range, infection processes, pathogenicity profiling, development of inoculation procedures and host specificity testing. The fungus is readily cultured and a rich collection of accessions from across Europe is held in storage at Montpellier. While the fungus shows little variation in ITS sequences across Europe, there is enormous variation when viewing RAPDs data.

Purple blotch disease was recently detected in New Zealand on Boysenberry and Youngberry crops at Riwaka on the South Island. Only one accession is present in Landcare Research collections and database. However, the disease is widespread on cultured Boysenberry and Youngberry on the South Island, with infection occurring on plants many hundreds of kilometres apart.

The detection of purple blotch disease in New Zealand has provided the Australian program a new opportunity to progress development of its use as a biocontrol agent for invasive blackberry. New Zealand is more accessible for the Australian-led program and provides unique opportunities for furthering the biocontrol program.

The Australian biocontrol program for blackberry has developed a strong interest in developing an understanding of the biology of purple blotch disease, its infections processes and host range in New Zealand as the two countries share similarities in climate (in part) and the composition of invasive European blackberry. As blackberry is also a weed that significantly challenges New Zealand, this research program is likely to directly benefit management of blackberry in New Zealand.

# REPORTS 2010-2011

## 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.

### LOCALITY

The group is focusing on two areas: the area burned by the January 2009 Delburn fire and the area burned by the February 2009 Churchill fire. The Delburn fire-affected area includes the communities of Delburn, Darlimurla, Boolarra and Yinnar. The Churchill fire-affected area includes the communities of Jeeralang North, Hazelwood South, Koornalla, Callignee, Ballook, Callignee South and Gormandale.

### ENGAGING LAND MANAGERS

A variety of media was used to notify fire-affected residents about the program. The most successful of these was a letter posted with assistance from the Latrobe City Council. On-site meetings were conducted by two project officers employed by the Central Gippsland Wood Weeds Action Group. These project officers visited sites with land owners where blackberry was mapped and 3-year voluntary management agreements were developed that set out the best control and reduction approaches. When works were completed, an inspection was conducted and landholders reimbursed for a variety of activities including helispaying, constructing access tracks, contractor spraying and agricultural chemicals.



**FIGURE 14**  
Helicopter spraying  
in the central  
Gippsland fire-  
affected area.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

This project has been very successful, with 82 voluntary blackberry management agreements developed in a fairly small geographical area. The 3,182 hectares under agreement make up a large proportion of private land burned in the 2009 fires (a conservative estimate is 22.7 per cent). There was also a high level of focus on on-ground works with a minimal amount of red tape.

The other major achievement of this project is the capacity building within the community. Many landholders engaged during the project did not previously have the knowledge, equipment or expertise to control and reduce blackberries in the long term. This has now been provided and will provide long-term benefits.

**FIGURE 15**

Achievements of the Central Gippsland Woody Weed Action Group, 2010

Number of agreements signed	82
Area of properties mapped and under agreement	3,182 ha

## FAR EAST COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP



The Far East Community Blackberry Action Group has completed its 3-year pilot program of the Community Weed Model under the auspices of the Far East Victoria Landcare Group. Established in 2008 as a result of public interest, the Far East Community Blackberry Action Group evolved primarily to assist private land managers better understand their roles and responsibilities in addressing blackberry in the Goongerah area.

The Far East Community Blackberry Action Group has also worked to help land managers by providing opportunities for developing mutual respect between public and private land managers. Far East Victoria is approximately 80 per cent public land and 20 per cent private land. Public land managers thus have a significant role in blackberry control in the region.

Significant effort over the 3-year pilot project has focused on maintaining private land manager interest and enthusiasm to continue efforts to control blackberry.

The Far East Community Blackberry Action Group has also directed efforts in the Cann River and Buldah areas. The community-led model has been challenged in the Buldah area as most private land is unoccupied and owned by absentee landholders. Some follow-up continues in the Cann Valley region, particularly with private land managers with significant blackberry infestations. Much of the Cann valley private is highly productive agricultural land, with land managers tending to be proactive toward blackberry management.

## ENGAGING LAND MANAGERS

A project officer commissioned by the Community Group Steering Committee has liaised with private land managers to help them acknowledge their responsibilities in managing blackberry. In some instances, 3-year voluntary management agreements have been developed while other land managers have made a general commitment to addressing blackberry, encouraged by the presence of the community group.

Key focus areas in 2010–11 were:

- identifying motivators relevant to each land manager
- identifying responsibility for public and private land
- enabling managers to better realise their responsibility toward blackberry
- encouraging land managers to be proactive in addressing their blackberry infestations.
- assisting land managers in identifying obstacles to controlling their blackberry
- assisting landholders to develop and commit to manageable blackberry control programs
- providing opportunities for developing mutual respect between public and private land managers
- maintaining ongoing interest and momentum.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

The Far East Community Blackberry Action Group has hosted several awareness raising and information-sharing sessions to showcase alternative methods to manage blackberry, such as intensive goat grazing, herbicide use and blackberry leaf-rust.

While formal voluntary management agreements have been encouraged, the concept has not been embraced by most private landholders. Annual one-on-one discussion with the project manager has reminded land owners and managers of their commitments and responsibilities and raised awareness of the need for continued action over the longer term.

Discussions at times have focused on the need for land managers to manage blackberry infestations to avoid long-term enforcement by relevant authorities.

Now entering its fourth year, the Far East Community Blackberry Action Group has sought assistance from government agencies to conduct formal inspections of properties where little or no efforts to address blackberry is evident. Staff from the Department of Primary Industries will liaise with landowners with uncontrolled blackberry infestations on their properties.

The community-led action has achieved positive results, with a large percentage of landholders and managers taking responsibility and action for blackberry infestations:

- 13 land owners signed formal voluntary blackberry management agreements
- seven land owners entered into informal voluntary management agreements
- 17 landholders engaged in rehabilitation works after blackberry control
- 210 private landholders were contacted over 3 years
- 230 hectares were treated for blackberry control over 3 years
- 100 hectares were targeted for follow-up treatment over 3 years
- over 60 people attended field days over 3 years.



**FIGURE 16** Many land managers in the Goongerah Valley are not land owners and prefer a no-chemical approach to blackberry control and reduction

## NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP



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

The North East Blackberry Action Group project area is the administrative boundaries of the Upper Murray Landcare Network in north eastern Victoria. The nearest large population centre is Corryong and the localities of Walwa, Burrowye, Tintladra, Cudgewa, Nariel, Biggara and Koetong all fall within the project area (see Figure 17).

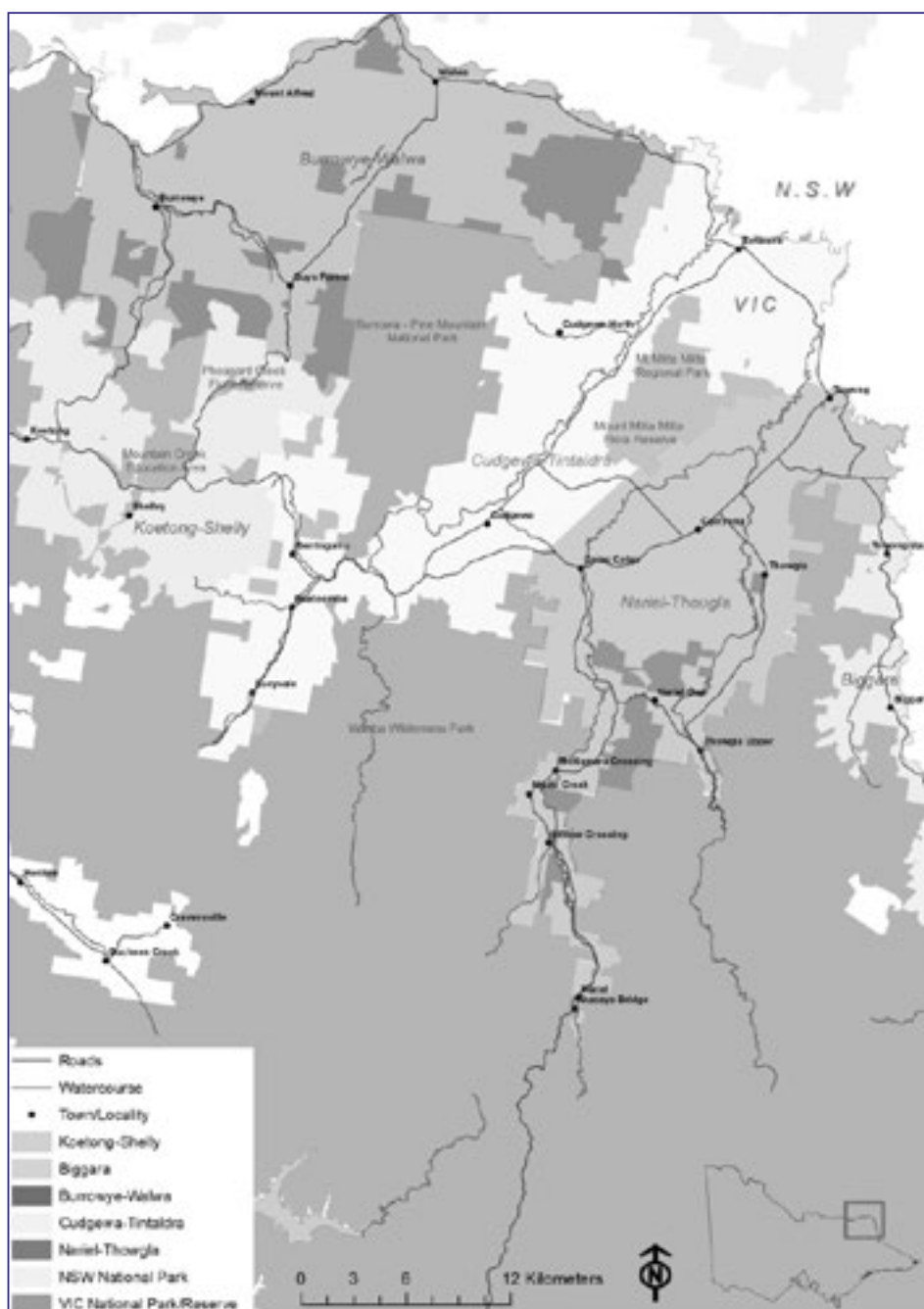


FIGURE 17 Project areas of the North East Blackberry Action Group

## ENGAGING LAND MANAGERS

The North East Blackberry Action Group employed a project officer to provide mapping and extension services to community-identified landholders in the area. Mapping services included assessing blackberry infestations on private land and on public-private land boundaries. The project officer also conducted roadside mapping of blackberry for the group.

Landholders are engaged and 3-year voluntary blackberry management agreements are negotiated. While some incentive payments are negotiated with the landholder on a dollar-for-dollar basis, no investment is made in chemicals. Incentives provided to achieve long-term success consist largely of providing assistance to construct access tracks into steep sites and to employ contractors to spray herbicides. Figure 18 lists the key achievements of the North East Blackberry Action Group in 2010–11.

FIGURE 18 Group achievements to date.

2010 - 2011	
Blackberry mapped (ha)	6214
Access track installed (km)	49.7
Number of new property visits	55
Management agreements signed	61 covering 4,891 ha
Management agreements under negotiation	15 covering 1308 ha
Number of second generation agreements signed (landholder in at least their 4th year of the program)	46



**FIGURE 19** Access tracks in steep country has aided blackberry management efforts by land managers in north east Victoria

## ACHIEVEMENTS

Land management following the removal of blackberry has always been a priority for the North East Blackberry Action Group with various approaches adopted. The project is now entering its sixth year, with parcels of previously infested farmland now re-established for production and providing vital biodiversity values.

Ensuring a coordinated approach to blackberry management on public and private land boundaries remains central to the success of the project in certain regions in the pilot area. Access to blackberry infestations remains a key barrier, with infestations located in steep country. There is also growing interest in goats as an integrated control approach.

Many in the district claim the program has been the most successful weed management program in the last two decades. It focuses on education, support, coordinated action and continuous site visits over the life of the 3-year voluntary compliance agreements. More importantly, it aims to change the 'attitude' of participants towards blackberry and its management to:

- improve and protect local and regional biodiversity
- regain valuable grazing land and improve productivity and profitability
- minimise growth, spread and impact on neighbours
- provide ongoing support for land managers
- encourage consideration of land use options.

The North East Blackberry Action Group has also been working closely with Towong Shire Council to manage blackberry along roadsides. Effort has focused on mapping and monitoring infestations, ensuring best practice with spray contractors. Since the program started, the group has demonstrated a reduction in blackberry on roadsides (see Figure 20). While the group and shire continued mapping on local roadsides in 2011, no comparative data is available as mapping was not conducted during 2010.

FIGURE 20 Change in total kilometres of blackberry infestations on roadsides, 2006–09

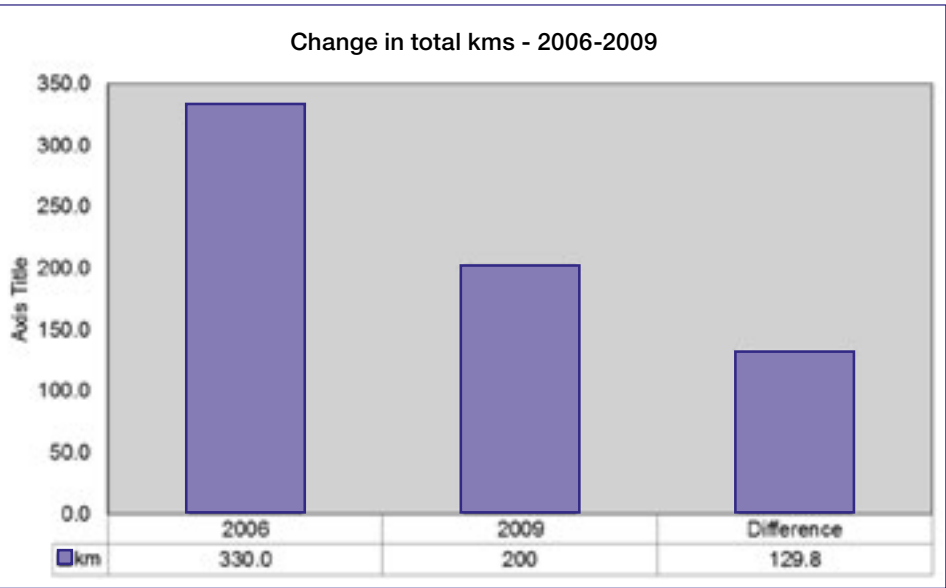


FIGURE 21 North East Blackberry Action Group members at an infestation site

## MUDGEONGA AND DISTRICT BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The districts of Mudgegonga, Murmungee, Rosewhite, Kancoona and Dederang were severely affected by the 2009 bushfires. Productive pasture and native vegetation was dramatically denuded by the fires and the heavy rains that followed in 2009–10. This allowed woody weeds and thick native regrowth to flourish.

The Bushfire Recovery Program has provided funding for the Mudgegonga and District Blackberry Action Group to employ project officers and offer financial support to landowners directly affected by the fires.

This program is facilitated by the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and offers communities well-coordinated and effective group action for control of pest plants.

An eight-person steering committee has been established and a project officer employed to coordinate this program. Milestone reporting will be determined by key objective achievements:

- All landowners whose property lies within the Mudgegonga Fire Complex will commit to 3-year voluntary management agreements to control, contain or eradicate woody weeds that have encroached, invaded or regrown following the 2009 fires.
- Community involvement and awareness will be encouraged via the production and distribution of extension material as well as at field days, on farm visits and in the media.
- GPS mapping of properties and capturing data with Geographic Information Systems will record, monitor and report project area activities more effectively.
- Long-term community weed management plans will be developed to ensure catchment protection from agriculture and environmental pest plants.
- Working partnerships with Vic Roads, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Parks Victoria and local councils will be developed to encourage them to direct works to areas prioritised by the Mudgegonga and District Blackberry Action Group.



**FIGURE 21** Chemical trial site at Kancoona (pre-treatment April 2011)

## ACHIEVEMENTS

The assistance and support offered to the Landowners of the Mudgegonga and District Blackberry Action Group has had an enormous uplifting effect on the community. All landowners interviewed have expressed appreciation for the support as they have struggled with many post-fire land management issues, including with woody weed infestations.

The program is showing signs of providing a catalyst for developing a longer term weed management plan for the district.

Strong commitment has been shown from partners, including the Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the North East Catchment Management Authority, Parks Victoria, Vic Roads and local councils.

It is envisaged 150 landowners will eventually participate in this program and the financial incentives offered for blackberry control and reduction measures has been a major reason for its success.

Achievements for 2010–11 include:

- Andrew Knowles of Greenacres Land Management was employed to provide project management.
- The steering committee offered to provide 50 per cent of the cost of contractor rates (to a maximum of \$2,000) to participating landowners.
- An information day was held and expressions of interest posted and distributed throughout the project area.
- A mapping and recording system was developed using Arcpad (ArcGIS).
- Inspections and interviews were conducted on 49 properties.
- 239 infestation sites were mapped covering 3,188 hectares.
- ArcGIS was used to develop 3-year voluntary management agreements and hard copy maps, and voluntary management agreements were personally delivered to landowners for signing.
- Control programs were conducted on 37 properties.
- The remaining 12 properties were late in implementing control but are committed to action in 2011–12.
- A trial site was established on a Kancoona property exploring chemical choice and rates.
- Maps and site recommendations were offered to the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Vic Roads and the Alpine Shire Council to consider for Good Neighbour and weed control allocations.
- The Department of Sustainability and Environment committed via the Good Neighbour Program to four areas within the project area.
- The steering committee developed a framework for a District Weed Action Plan.

## FUTURE PLANS

Proposed actions for 2011–12 are:

- organise a planning meeting with the steering committee
- identify sub-districts and organise expressions of interest meetings with local landowners
- develop a promotional plan including media releases, field days, extensional material and website
- inspect, interview and map approximately 100 new properties and landowners
- develop 100 new 3-year voluntary management agreements with landowners.

# GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

## 2010-2011



### DEPARTMENT OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT: **GOOD NEIGHBOUR PROGRAM**

#### Working together across public and private land

The Victorian Government's Good Neighbour Program aims to build positive relations with neighbours by reducing the extent of weeds and pests on public land that impact on private land.

It focuses weed and pest animal management on land managed by Victoria's Department of Sustainability and Environment (DESE) and Parks Victoria where it adjoins private land.

The Good Neighbour Program allocated over \$550,000 to more than 100 blackberry projects in 2010–11.

Local DSE and Parks Victoria land managers consult with adjoining private landholders and community groups such as Blackberry Action Groups and Landcare when planning complementary weed and pest animal control works on public land. Most Good Neighbour Program projects operate for 3 years so follow-up treatment can continue after initial knockdown.

Figure 23 summarises 2010–11 Good Neighbour Program investment in blackberry management in Catchment Management Authority areas.

**FIGURE 23** Good Neighbour Program blackberry projects by Catchment Management Authority (CMA) area, 2010–11

CMA	East Gippsland	Glenelg Hopkins	Goulburn Broken	North East	Port Phillip	North Central	West Gippsland
Number of projects 2010-11	15	4	19	38	8	2	16
Investment 2010-11	\$53,000	\$35,000	\$115,700	\$220,200	\$29,800	\$15,273	\$78,500

## INTERIM ROADSIDES WEED CONTROL PROJECT

Three rounds of funding for the Building Capacity of Local Government project have been distributed to date.

Ten of the 19 fire-affected municipal councils have 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.

In 2009–10 under Round 3 funding, \$962,854 was distributed to 50 projects involving 42 shires. An additional \$196,991 of Bush Fire Recovery funding was allocated towards projects involving 11 fire-affected municipalities.

Of the 50 Round 3 Call 1 projects to receive funding in 2009–10, a total of 35 continued into the 2010–11 financial year with a funding total of \$616,853. In addition, \$474,308 of Bush Fire Recovery funding was allocated to projects involving 10 fire-affected communities.

In 2010–11, a second call of Round 3 projects was funded, with \$513,380 in grants distributed to 22 projects across 21 municipalities.

The Interim Roadside Grants Program has developed formal project agreements with 53 rural, regional and interface local councils (approximately 91% of targeted municipalities), totalling over \$4.3 million dollars:

- \$1,064,045 in Round 1
- \$430,250 in Round 2A
- \$66,540 in Round 2B
- \$1,078,605 Round 3 Call 1, 2009–10
- \$737,853 Round 3 Call 1, 2010–11
- \$513,380 Round 3 Call 2, 2010–11.

A total of 151 projects across Victoria have been funded to date.

FIGURE 24 Statistics.

Number of extension, education activities, products conducted and produced	93
Number of roadside weed management procedures and codes of practice developed	26
Number of staff and contractors successfully completed pest management training	1,098
Roadside mapped for rabbit control (km)	2,713.5
Roadside treated for rabbit control (km)	3,101.2
Total km's of roadside mapped (km).	73,146
Total km's of roadside treated (km).	38,389

## PARKS VICTORIA BLACKBERRY MANAGEMENT, 2010–11

Parks Victoria's environmental management framework focuses its on-ground works on protecting the highest values at greatest risk. Pest plant management is Parks Victoria's largest program area for natural values management. Information on the values of the parks system and the risks identified in the *State of the Parks* report (2005) together with the Levels of Protection Framework provided a basis for setting strategic priorities.

A wide range of pest plant and animal species were treated in 2010–11 with almost 40,000 hectares of land across more than 70 parks and reserves specifically treated for blackberry.

A comprehensive program of post-fire weed control was conducted in the Black Saturday fire recovery areas, including in the Kinglake, Yarra Ranges, Wilsons Promontory and Tarra Bulga national parks.

More than 25,000 hectares of high priority parks were surveyed or treated for blackberry to protect high-priority biodiversity or recreational assets, including in the Kinglake, Alpine, Errinundra, Snowy River and Coopracambra national parks as well as Wabba Wilderness Park and Bunyip State Park.

## BIOCONTROL RESEARCH

While blackberry rusts are established in Australia, including in Victoria, high impacts are largely confined to open situations in regions with cool summer temperatures and regular summer rainfall.

Shaded habitats and those that experience moisture or temperature stresses are generally not subject to sufficient levels of defoliation to induce acceptable control. Consequently, a new program is underway to search for and develop new biological control agents for blackberry that are compatible with the blackberry leaf-rust fungus.

A new research program is being undertaken in France and New Zealand on purple blotch disease (Current research into blackberry biological control agents has focused primarily on the fungal pathogen *Septocytia ruborum*). Purple blotch disease is a systemic fungus that kills canes of European blackberry and is known to be host-specific. It is expected to be more effective than blackberry leaf-rust in infections as whole plants are killed. Purple blotch disease is native to Europe but recently arrived in New Zealand and now offers excellent opportunities to assess the potential of this pathogen for biocontrol in Australia.

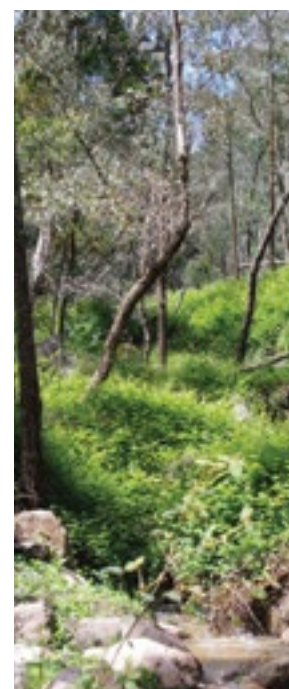
In partnership with Landcare Research and the Plant and Food Research in New Zealand, the distribution, impact and DNA profiling of purple blotch disease has commenced. Inoculation trials using field plants are expected to be more successful than using potted laboratory plants, which for a range of possible reasons were resistant to infection. This work is being funded by the Rural Industries Research Development Corporation and the Victorian Department of Primary Industries.

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**LEFT** FECBAG group members and VBT representatives meeting at the Brodribb River - Goongera

**TOP RIGHT** NEBAG group members discussing blackberry management

**BOTTOM RIGHT** Chair of the Central Gippsland Woody Weeds Action Group Ian Ewart (left) with NEBAG project officer Damian Wall (centre) and VBT chair Lyn Coulston (right) on site in Central Gippsland

VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE  
**COMBINED ANNUAL REPORT 2009 - 2010 / 2010 - 2011**



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