



VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY **TASKFORCE**

ANNUAL  
REPORT  
2012/2013



# CHAIR PERSON'S REPORT

The past year has been productive as well as challenging for the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce as we have taken opportunities to use innovative ways to deliver the Victorian Blackberry Strategy.

A coordinated and collaborative effort supported by the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and local communities is achieving results in reducing the growth and spread of blackberry across public and private land.

The Taskforce continued to support community Blackberry Action Groups, and their combined efforts and achievements highlight the success of the community-led approach to blackberry management.

Taskforce members also continued to work at a strategic level to find resources to resume research into blackberry biocontrol. This research, which had funding support for 10 years, ceased a year ago and to date the Taskforce has not been successful in finding new funding.

The Taskforce website continues to be important for delivering information about blackberry control as have the field days and information sessions held by our groups across Victoria.

The Victorian Blackberry Strategy 2008-2013 is currently being reviewed and will be published early 2014.

I thank everyone who is taking action on blackberry control. Every infestation treated makes a difference, and the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce will continue to support actions and activities which contribute to blackberry management.

This report updates Victoria's blackberry control efforts and I encourage you to learn more and get involved.

The report is also available at [www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au](http://www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au) and you can join our blog at [www.blackberrytheweed.com.au](http://www.blackberrytheweed.com.au) or find us on Twitter at @vbt\_blackberry.

Lyn Coulston  
Chairperson

# BLACKBERRY IS ONE OF VICTORIA'S WORST WEEDS

Left unchecked, it can rapidly infest entire local landscapes.

On private land, it costs millions of dollars in lost agricultural productivity.

On public land, it hinders our recreational, commercial and environmental activities.

Blackberry can alter water flows and cause soil erosion, it harbours pest animals and can out-compete native plants and it reduces biodiversity.

Blackberry is a serious issue and one of Australia's most noxious weeds.



# VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE ACHIEVEMENTS 2012/2013

**We supported hundreds of Victorians in their efforts to reduce blackberry in their local area.**

This included helping 14 local Blackberry Action Groups to employ a project officer to drive activities in their region.

Our Community Partnership Program also supported them by providing funding and other assistance.

A new technology for spraying blackberry using a remote control mini-helicopter was demonstrated at field days in the Upper Murray and King Parrot Creek areas.

Different approaches to blackberry management were showcased at a Northern Yarra Ranges field visit.

We continued to investigate new funding sources for research into Purple Blotch Disease.

The VBT contributed to the 2013 Victoria Pest Management Groups Workshop.



A paper we delivered at the 18th Australasian Weeds conference in December 2012 focused on the success of the community-led approach to blackberry action in Victoria.

# VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce was formed to help tackle the spread and impact of blackberry. It has initiated diverse blackberry control programs in partnership with state, regional and local natural resource managers, as well as community organisations and private landholders.



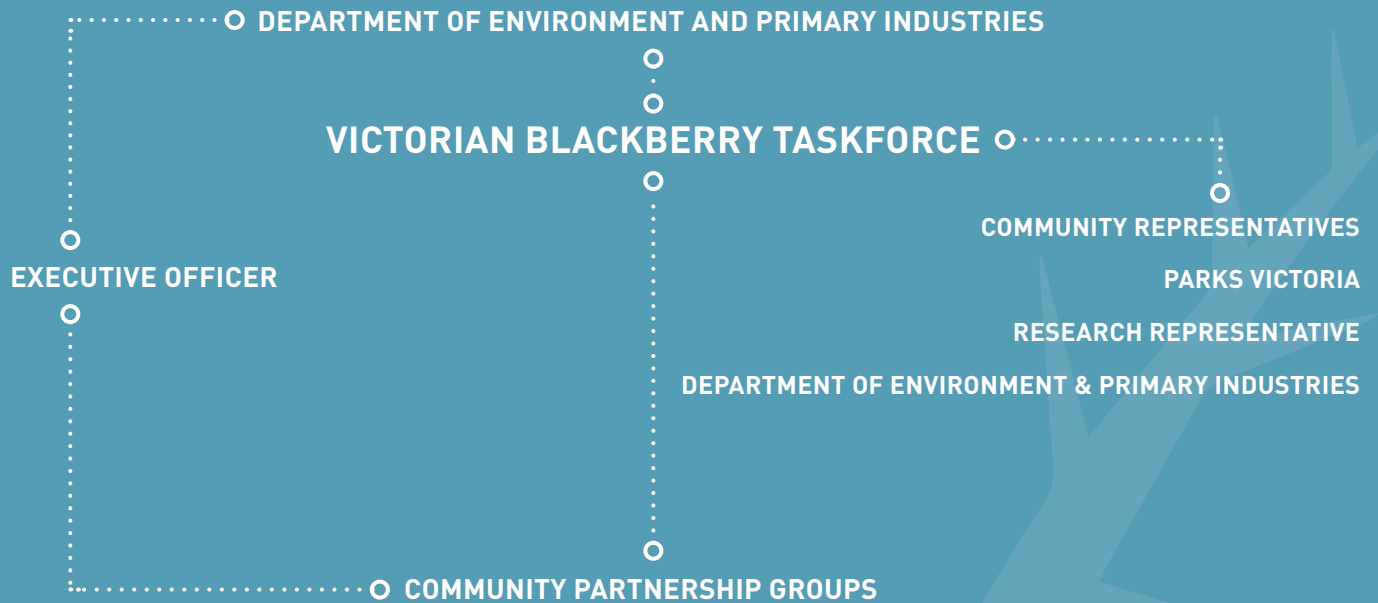
One of three Victorian Community Weed Model Groups, the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce encourages and supports community participation in blackberry control by adopting new approaches, community capacity building and providing incentives for action.

The Taskforce has eight appointed volunteer community members from across each Catchment Management Authority where blackberry is an issue. There is also representation from Parks Victoria and the



Department of Environment and Primary Industries including a research scientist advising on technical aspects of blackberry management.

Since the release of the previous Victorian Blackberry Strategy in 2008, many of its objectives have been achieved and there have been a number of changes in the policies and institutions involved in weed management. In response, the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce has developed and will implement a revised 4-year strategy for 2014–2019.



# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

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

Our Community Partnerships Program supports the activities of community-led action groups to reduce blackberry in their local area. This funding helps the groups employ project officers to plan and drive their activities, which includes mapping the location and extent of blackberry in their region and working closely with local landowners to reduce the weed.

- Our Community Partnerships Program supported the work of 14 community blackberry action groups in 2012–13, including four new groups.
- These action groups are motivating and supporting hundreds of private landowners to control blackberry on their properties.
- They are also sharing vital knowledge and experience in blackberry control and encourage other Victorian communities to join the effort.
- In 2012–13, the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce met with communities concerned about blackberry in Corner-Inlet and Maffra districts and work is now underway to assist them with forming blackberry action groups in their region.







# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## BARKERS CREEK BLACKBERRY AND GORSE ACTION GROUP

Blackberry that has grown unchecked for decades in the Loddon River Basin is now being controlled with a community-wide effort underway.

The Barkers Creek Blackberry and Gorse Action Group was established in 2012 to reduce infestations along Barkers Creek and its tributaries near the towns of Harcourt and Castlemaine in central Victoria.

Just 18 months after the group was formed, long-standing major and minor blackberry infestations are under control or are in the process of being controlled, and community support is strengthening with 48 new landholders signing up to the effort over the last year.

A well-attended public workshop hosted by the Barkers Creek Action Group has allowed locals to get involved with a community-wide blackberry control plan, and the group's Woody Weed Control field day to demonstrate blackberry control techniques was valued by landholders.

The Greater Bendigo Council and Mount Alexander Shire Council has lent its support with mail-outs and the group continued its partnerships with the North Central Catchment Management Authority, the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, V/Line, Parks Victoria and Connecting Country.

### BARKERS CREEK BLACKBERRY AND GORSE ACTION GROUP, 2012–13



# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## CENTRAL GIPPSLAND WOODY WEED ACTION GROUP

Personal contact with landholders is vital to blackberry control in central Gippsland.

The Central Gippsland Woody Weed Action Group was formed in 2010 to reduce the regrowth of blackberry, gorse and broom in the Strzelecki Ranges following the 2009 bushfires.

A grant from the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce this year allowed an expansion of the group's activities into the northern part of the Strzelecki Ranges between Callignee and Boolarra and it also employed two project officers, who again proved vital to driving its activities.

Although only 3 new landholders signed voluntary agreements this year, the project officers contacted or visited 121 landowners to check on and support their progress in blackberry control, or to encourage them to join the effort. Many landholders were unaware they had a blackberry infestation or had underestimated its spread before project officers visited their properties.

The Woody Weed Action Group is seeking funding to continue its activities and to enable it to offer landowners still recovering from bushfires some financial assistance to tackle blackberry. Latrobe City Council, VicRoads, Hancock Victorian Plantations and the Latrobe Catchment Landcare Network remain important partners in the group's activities.

CENTRAL GIPPSLAND WOODY WEED ACTION GROUP, 2012-13





# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## CORNER INLET BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

A new group is focusing on blackberry control in South Gippsland.

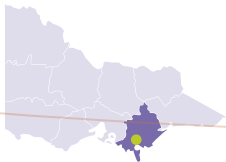
The Corner Inlet Blackberry Taskforce was formed in June 2013 to tackle blackberry in the Mt Best, Dingo Creek, Toora North and Nine Mile Creek Catchment regions bordering the Strzelecki State Forest in South Gippsland.

The area is a prime dairy, tourism, fishing and forestry area and is also increasingly attracting smaller lifestyle property owners. It includes areas of State forest important to koalas as well as land and coastal parks and regions protected by international environmental conventions.

The Corner Inlet Taskforce includes representatives from the Wonyip (Yarram Network), Agnes River and Franklin River Landcare groups (South Gippsland Network) as well as the South Gippsland Shire and Parks Victoria.

The Corner Inlet Taskforce has employed a project officer who is now engaging with land managers to tackle a conservative estimate of 1,200 hectares of long-term blackberry infestation in the area. It expects to sign up its first landowners to voluntary blackberry control agreements for their properties in 2013–14.

CORNER INLET BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP





# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## KING PARROT CREEK BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The King Parrot Creek Valley is a mixture of beef and sheep producers and smaller land owners.

The King Parrot Creek Blackberry Action Group was formed in 2012 and tackles blackberry in the King Parrot Creek valley, one hour's drive north of Melbourne. The region includes the towns of Strath Creek and Flowerdale which experienced the 2009 bushfires, and there are beef and sheep producers as well as smaller properties, many with absentee owners. The area features endangered native vegetation, heritage-protected landscapes and the King Parrot Creek is home to the endangered Macquarie Perch.

The group's Steering Committee includes Murrindindi Shire, the Strath Creek Landcare Group and the King Parrot Environment Group. The Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority is also a member and helps the group to subsidise blackberry control chemicals to local landowners.

A co-ordinated helicopter spray program across multiple properties that shared boundaries proved successful this year and motivated some landowners to join the effort to control blackberry for the first time. The group has also employed a project officer who is building relationships and trust with landowners and in its first year the King Parrot Creek Action Group has supported landowners to treat 700 hectares of blackberry on their properties.

### KING PARROT CREEK BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP, 2012-13

**31**

Number of new  
landholders on  
agreements

**60**

Number of  
landholders  
visited

**3300**

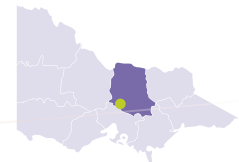
Total private  
property visited  
(ha)

**1487**

Private property  
infestations  
mapped (ha)

**700**

Private property  
infestations  
treated (ha)



# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## MERTON TO CATHKIN BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

**A new group is reigniting community efforts to control blackberry in Victoria's north east.**

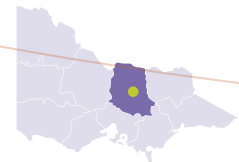
The Merton to Cathkin Blackberry Action Group (MCBAG) is a new group formed in late 2012 to help encourage and coordinate blackberry control efforts in the region surrounding the two towns.

It comprises the Merton and the Home Creek–Spring Creek Landcare groups, which work across the Shires of Mansfield and Murrindindi. The area features private and public land including water catchments and roadsides with endangered vegetation and high conservation values.

The group launched its activities in February 2013 and its project officer has proved vital in highlighting the blackberry issue to long-standing as well as new landowners, and for informing them on how to best treat the weed.

All 22 of the first landholders it visited have signed up to voluntary blackberry control plans and the project officer has also connected with landholders in the region already working to control blackberry, as well as with the Murrindindi Shire and other partners. MCBAG expects strong interest from more landholders next year as its project officer promotes the group's activities and the assistance it can offer smaller landholders to help purchase blackberry control chemicals and employ spray contractors.

### MERTON TO CATHKIN BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP, 2012–13







# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## MITTA TO MURRAY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

Confidence is growing that blackberry can be controlled across public and private land in north east Victoria.

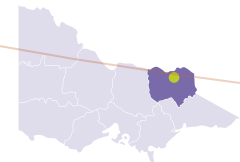
The Mitta to Murray Blackberry Action Group (M2MBAG) was formed in 2012 by the Mitta to Murray Landcare Network which comprises six Landcare groups in north east Victoria.

Its Steering Group includes landholders, pine plantation owners, the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Parks Victoria, the Towong Shire and the North East Catchment Management Authority.

This year M2MBAG developed a comprehensive Strategy and Action Plan to guide its activities to 2015, along with guidelines and an application process for landholders to access financial and other incentives to control blackberry. Work continued in the Mitta Valley, Tallangatta and Tallangatta Valley and the group extended its activities to sign up 37 new landholders in Huon, Charleroi, Sandy Creek and Bethanga. A successful Blackberry Field Day also attracted over 70 people to learn about effective blackberry control methods.

Blackberry is now being controlled on 52 properties covering over 10,000 hectares of private land in the region and landholders are working with public land managers through the Good Neighbour program to reduce blackberry along shared boundaries.

MITTA TO MURRAY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP, 2012-13



# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## MUDGEONGA AND DISTRICT BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

Blackberry control is underway and progressing well in the Mudgegonga region.

The Mudgegonga and District Blackberry Action Group (MADBAG) was formed in 2010 following the bushfire in the area bordering the Alpine National Park the previous year.

The group has made a substantial positive contribution to blackberry control in its first three years, with another 27 landowners signing up to voluntary work agreements this year, taking the total to 140 across the region.

MADBAG has significantly raised the importance of tackling blackberry in the local area and the encouragement and support it offers landowners has proved important to them joining the effort. The group has also worked with the Good Neighbour program and land management agencies to treat blackberry on shared boundaries of public and private land in the region.

The comprehensive GIS database that maps blackberry infestations and control activities across the area that MADBAG has developed has been important in helping it and its partners invest resources for the most efficient outcomes. It will continue its efforts to maintain the momentum and success it has achieved to date over the next year.

### MUDGEONGA AND DISTRICT BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP, 2012-13







# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

A drone mini-helicopter to spray blackberry was tested in the upper Murray region.

The North East Blackberry Action Group (NEBAG) was formed in 2005 and covers almost 200,000 hectares of public and private land in the Upper Murray Landcare network area, including the Snowy Mountains foothills.

NEBAG helped pioneer Victoria's community approach to weed control and it has encouraged and facilitated blackberry treatment across thousands of hectares in the region with just about all landholders who have signed voluntary blackberry control agreements honouring their 3-year action plans. Many have since increased their overall land care efforts and others have begun controlling blackberry although they have not signed a voluntary agreement and formally joined NEBAG's effort.

NEBAG continued to lead the way this year, testing the Rmax unmanned mini-helicopter at its Nariel Valley field day. This drone allows better targeted spraying with less over-spray in rugged terrain and NEBAG is among those now working to allow its use in Victoria.

Blackberry assessments that NEBAG helped conduct across the Towong Shire showed a large and visible reduction in roadside blackberry infestations since control works began. Local pine plantations, public land managers and private landholders also continued working to control blackberry along shared borders.

NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP, 2012–13



# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## NORTHERN YARRA BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

Options, partnerships and collaboration drive blackberry control in the Yarra Ranges.

The Northern Yarra Blackberry Action Group (NYBAG) was formed to reduce blackberry regrowth in the Yarra Ranges following the bushfires that swept through the area in 2009. In just two years, over 80 landholders have signed voluntary blackberry control agreements and they are now helping each other to tackle blackberry across the important tourism, wine and food region.

Non-chemical blackberry control options were introduced this year, with Conservation Volunteers Australia visiting properties to use specialist mechanical equipment where chemical treatment is not an option. NYBAG also helped fund chemical spray contractors, organised a blackberry control workshop and a farm chemicals course.

Funding from the Australian Government's Biodiversity Fund is allowing NYBAG to increase blackberry control efforts in areas with high biodiversity values, and the Department of Environment and Primary Industries and Good Neighbour Program continue to address blackberry along shared public and private land boundaries. Melbourne Water also provided funding from its Corridors of Green program and Yarra Ranges Council, Parks Victoria, VicRoads and the Port Philip and Westernport Catchment Management Authorities remain key partners in blackberry control.

NORTHERN YARRA BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP, 2012–13

**44**

Number of new  
landholders on  
agreements

**107**

Number of  
landholders  
visited

**2400**

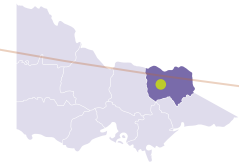
Total private  
property visited  
(ha)

**72**

Private property  
infestations  
mapped (ha)

**22**

Private property  
infestations  
treated (ha)



# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## TRIANGLE BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

A new action group is driving blackberry control on Melbourne's north-east fringe.

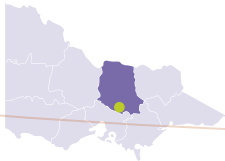
The Triangle Blackberry Action Group (TBAG) was formed in February 2013 by members of the South Cathedral Landcare Group after it identified blackberry as a priority action for the region.

It covers areas on Melbourne's north-east fringe and includes the towns of Narbethong, Marysville, Taggerty and Buxton, which were devastated by bushfires in 2009.

TBAG spent its first months establishing a Steering Group with broad representation from organisations relevant to blackberry control in the area. It also developed its procedures and policies and an action plan to drive its activities. This included a marketing plan, an operational plan, financial plan and people plan.

The group also planned its public launch for October 2013 and will employ a project officer in 2013–14 to drive its engagement and activities across the general community and with public land managers, local government and industry. It expects to start visiting properties over the next year to sign up its first landholders to voluntary blackberry control agreements.

## TRIANGLE BLACKBERRY AND GORSE ACTION GROUP



# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## UP2US LANDCARE BLACKBERRY ALLIANCE GROUP

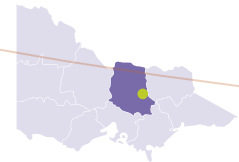
A new combined blackberry control approach has launched across Victoria's Alpine region.

The Up2Us Landcare Alliance Blackberry Group is a new group in the Mansfield region which formed in 2012 as an umbrella organisation for Landcare and environmental groups in the Alpine region. It comprises the Victorian Farmers Federation, Mansfield Shire and the Ancona, Delatite, Howqua Valley and Upper Broken River Landcare groups.

The Up2Us Blackberry Group employed a project officer in January 2013 to boost communication and collaboration across its members and to strengthen partnerships with the Goulbourn Broken Catchment Management Authority, Department of Environment and Primary Industries and Parks Victoria. It is already working with Mansfield Shire to help it map roadside weeds for future treatment.

The group highlighted the importance of offering assistance to landowners, with membership in the Delatite and other Landcare groups increasing when it could help them to purchase blackberry control chemicals. The group's project officer also highlighted their vital role, with all 22 of the first landholders they visited signing up to voluntary blackberry control agreements for their properties.

### UP2US LANDCARE BLACKBERRY ALLIANCE GROUP, 2012-13





# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## UPPER CAMPASPE BLACKBERRY GORSE ACTION GROUP

Community blackberry action in the Macedon Ranges is achieving the best results ever.

The Upper Campaspe Blackberry Gorse Action Group was formed in 2011 to target 60 private properties in the Ashbourne area near Woodend, including those owned by 'weekenders' from Melbourne. The group is a partnership between the Upper Campaspe Landcare Network and its Ashbourne Landcare group with the Macedon Ranges Shire, the Department of Primary Industries and the Victorian Gorse and Blackberry Taskforces.

A total of 36 landholders have now signed voluntary blackberry control agreements and blackberry control efforts on their properties are well underway. The group has also expanded its activities to include all the headwaters of the Campaspe River and further downstream, and is working with the Council to tackle blackberry at Ashbourne and other public reserves where large infestations also choke the Campaspe River.

The Upper Campaspe Action Group has also helped with roadside blackberry mapping and spraying, and over 50 local people attended its first blackberry control field day in late 2012. Its blackberry activities have attracted more members to the Landcare group and it is planning a local demonstration site of blackberry control options to further promote weed management across the community.

UPPER CAMPASPE BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP, 2012-13

**36**

Number of new  
landholders on  
agreements

**36**

Number of  
landholders  
visited

**802**

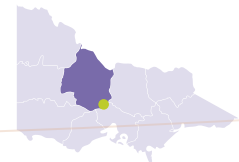
Total private  
property visited  
(ha)

**162**

Private property  
infestations  
mapped (ha)

**80**

Private property  
infestations  
treated (ha)



# COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUPS

## WELLINGTON DISTRICT BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

Coordinated blackberry control efforts have started in Gippsland's prime dairy region.

The Wellington District Blackberry Taskforce was formed in mid-2012 to tackle blackberry across the Macalister Irrigation Area in central Gippsland.

The area extends for 53,000 hectares around the Macalister River and the town of Maffra, from Lake Glenmaggie to Sale, with around 30,000 hectares irrigated for dairy pasture.

The group employed a project officer in early 2013 and got the ball rolling with two local farmers signing up to voluntary blackberry control agreements for their properties.

It has established relationships with the Wellington Shire and land management agencies and is now building a collaborative approach to blackberry control in the region. It expects to sign up more landowners to voluntary blackberry agreements next year and will explore ways to work with public land managers to reduce blackberry on shared public and private land borders.

### WELLINGTON DISTRICT BLACKBERRY ACTION TASKFORCE





# GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

## DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

### GOOD NEIGHBOUR PROGRAM

The Victorian Government's Good Neighbour Program aims to build positive partnerships with neighbours to reduce weed and pests along shared public and private land boundaries.

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) and Parks Victoria work with private land managers and community groups such as Landcare and the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and its community action groups to plan and deliver blackberry control activities.

In 2012–13, the Good Neighbour Program invested approximately \$400,000 in 79 projects to tackle blackberry on land managed by DEPI and Parks Victoria.

# GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

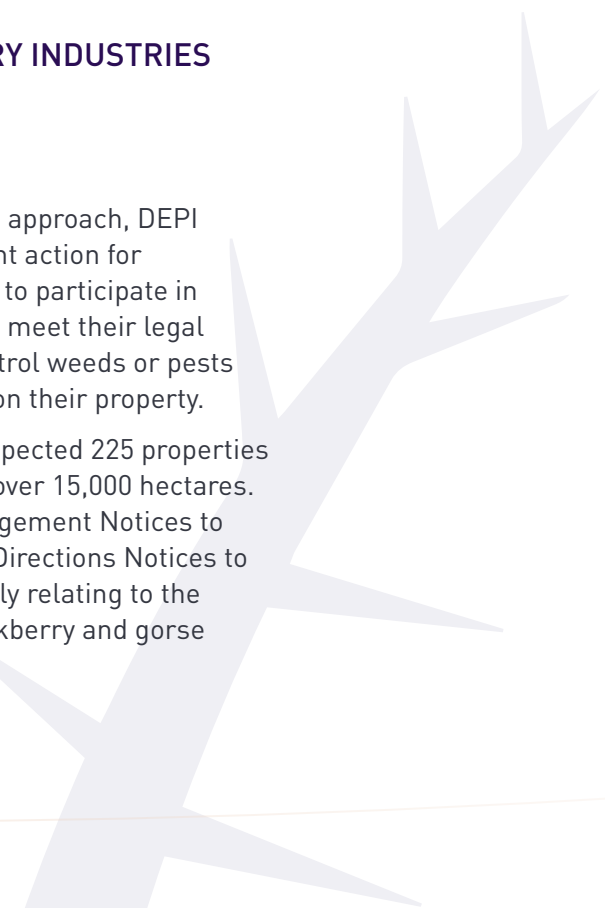
## DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

### IMPROVED ENFORCEMENT

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) completed the second year of its improved enforcement approach in 2012–13, targeting priority widespread weeds and pests of greatest concern to the community such as blackberry.

Under this improved approach, DEPI provides enforcement action for landowners who fail to participate in community action to meet their legal responsibility to control weeds or pests such as blackberry on their property.

In 2012–13, DEPI inspected 225 properties in Victoria covering over 15,000 hectares. It issued Land Management Notices to 32 landowners and Directions Notices to 91 landowners mainly relating to the need to control blackberry and gorse on their properties.



# GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

## PARKS VICTORIA

### BLACKBERRY MANAGEMENT

The eradication, containment or management of invasive plants and animals to protect natural and cultural assets continues to be a major area of work for Parks Victoria.

In 2012–13, around 200 invasive plant programs were implemented across the parks estate treating 104,000 hectares. A large proportion of this effort (80,000 hectares) was delivered in areas scheduled under the National Parks Act 1975.

The Good Neighbour Program encourages and supports pest plant and animal control on public land that shares boundaries with private land. In 2012–13 it invested in 49 invasive plant projects covering 20,000 hectares. The focus was on highly invasive weeds that can affect agriculture, including serrated tussock, blackberry and broom.

In 2012–13 Parks Victoria treated around 35,500 hectares of blackberry through 84 projects over 145 parks and reserves.





In the Grampians, source populations and emerging blackberry infestations were treated in locations impacted by the January 2011 flood, and around the greater Halls Gap area to complement work undertaken by the Wimmera Catchment Management Authority on private land and roadsides.

In the north, works in Lower Goulburn National Park built on previous control programs funded through the Good Neighbour Program and Flood Recovery works from the March 2010 flood, aiming to reduce blackberry and limit new infestations following flooding and seed dispersal.

Blackberry control was delivered in Barmah National Park as part of a broader program to contain the weed and where possible reduce infestation in areas with high value flora or fauna. A partnership with the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority through Caring for our Country was used to develop a Pest Plant and Animal Strategy for the park to guide future control programs.

At Burrowa - Pine Mountain National Park, 58 km of boundary was treated for weeds including blackberry to complement works by adjoining private landholders and the North East Blackberry Action Group.

Parks Victoria is now working to more accurately define key environmental assets in landscapes and the things that impact upon them to inform more effective investment in action to control and manage pest plants where it matters most. It is also continuing to adapt and improve its operations to enable the most appropriate tools to be used with the available resources.

# BIOLOGICAL CONTROL

Biological methods can complement other approaches to blackberry control in areas where chemical spraying is difficult due to the location of infestations or because over-spraying might damage native vegetation or commercial tree crops.

Rust strains, which affect the leaves of the blackberry plant and inhibit plant growth, were released several years ago but none are effective in shady areas. Purple Blotch Disease (*Septocytia ruborum*), a potential bio agent for blackberry, shows promise for treating infestations beneath tree canopies.

Victoria's 10-year research program into Purple Blotch Disease was suspended in June 2012 after its funding ceased. The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce is now working with Biosecurity Victoria to explore new funding partners so it can resume the research program. This includes developing a proposal for the Australian Weeds Committee to seek financial contributions from other states and territories to contribute to the research program.





# VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

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