

The background of the entire page is a teal color. A blackberry branch with several sharp thorns runs diagonally from the top left towards the bottom right. The text is overlaid on this background.

VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

17|18

PROGRESS REPORT



CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

The principle objective of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) is to oversee implementation of the Victorian Blackberry Strategy (VBS), with the key goal being to reduce the growth and spread of blackberry across Victoria. The emphasis is on education, advocacy and providing accessible information and support for public and private land managers to manage blackberry.

The key to achieving this objective is collaboration by all land managers to implement control programs. The VBT offers support through the provision of diverse education and information resources to enable all land managers to undertake best practice blackberry management tailored to individual needs.

Two editions of the VBT Newsletter have been published this year to provide examples of how people are tackling blackberry and to share some of the challenges and innovation from real life experiences. The VBT Newsletter is an important tool for connecting groups and individuals, prompting discussion and the exchange of ideas.

Community Service Announcements were once again screened on three Victorian television channels over three months. The theme of 'blackberry control is everyone's responsibility' generated a large increase in visits to the VBT website and email requests for information. Analysis of the requests and web use provide a valuable insight into the information that people are seeking and the best ways to provide it.

The VBT received further funding this year from the Australian Government's Weeds and Rabbits Program, enabling projects which will have lasting benefit to the community. A Cost Benefit Tool is being prepared so landholders can calculate the cost of returning blackberry infested land to productive use. It will assist those wishing to purchase or lease a property to better understand the costs involved.

The funding also enabled resources for a well-attended forum on 'Challenges for Invasive Species Management' at Whittlesea. This forum included presentations from leading researchers and specialist speakers on blackberry biocontrol, as well as information on projected deer population increases and management. Public land managers and Local Government outlined the way they work with communities on shared public and private boundaries and along roadsides.

The VBT welcomes all enquiries about blackberry related issues. An email or telephone call will be responded to promptly or visit our website to browse the extensive resources there.

I would like to thank the DEDJTR for funding support for the VBT. I also thank our partnership groups, communities and public land managers for their contribution of knowledge and experience in implementing the VBS.

LYN COULSTON OAM CHAIRPERSON VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE



A close-up photograph of several blackberry stems. The stems are light brown and woody, with numerous sharp, dark thorns protruding from them. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting foliage.

BLACKBERRY IS ONE OF VICTORIA'S WORST WEEDS

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Left unchecked, it can rapidly infest entire local landscapes.

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

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

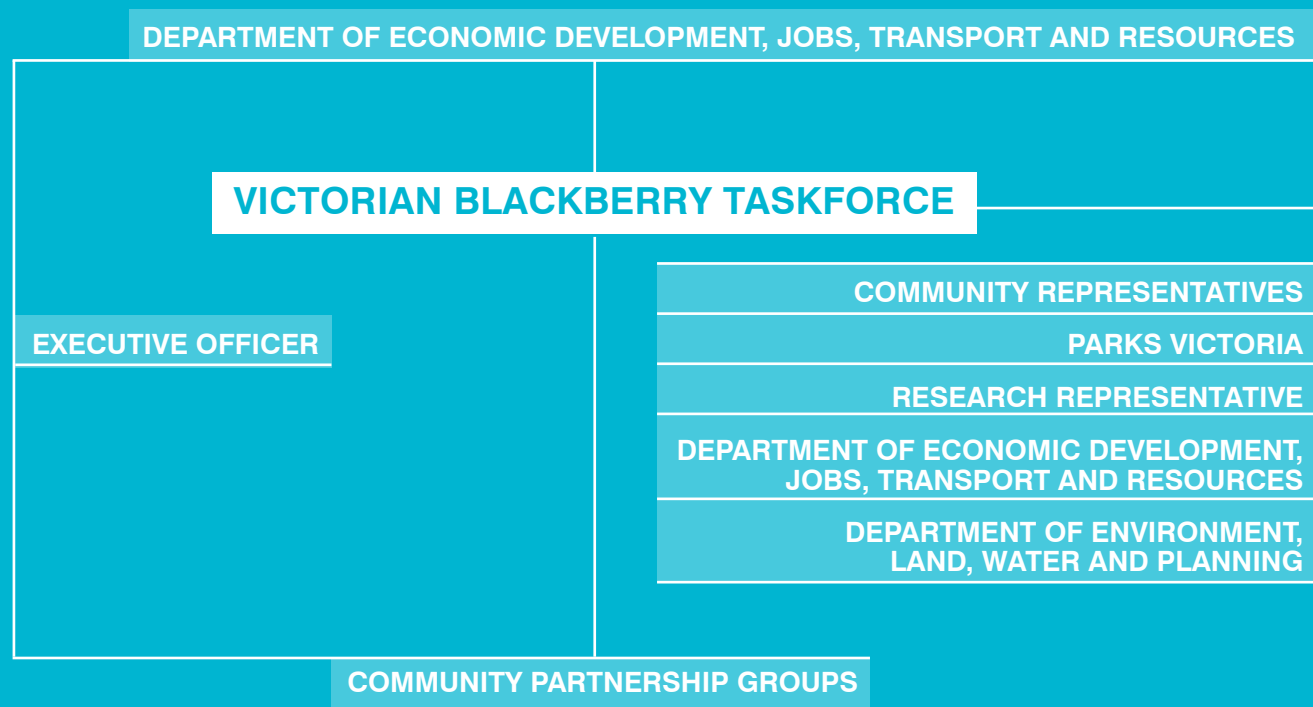
Blackberry can alter water flows and cause soil erosion, it harbours pest animals, can out-compete native plants and it reduces biodiversity.

Blackberry is a serious issue in Victoria and is recognised as a weed of national significance and one of Australia's most noxious weeds.

VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE - ACHIEVEMENTS 2017/18

- Funded local project officers to facilitate community engagement.
- Helped four Blackberry Action Groups with community activities: Wellington District Blackberry Taskforce; Creightons Creek-Gooram Blackberry Action Group; Moorabool Blackberry Action Group; Whittlesea & Surrounds Blackberry Action Group.
- Supported a peri-urban program implemented by the Whittlesea and Surrounds Blackberry Action Group.
- Victorian Blackberry Taskforce representatives visited four communities.
- Three community service announcements were broadcast on the ABC, Prime and Win TV over a 3-month period.
- Three new community service announcements were produced for the 2017/18 blackberry season focusing on production.
- Information provided to over 30 email enquiries from the public with support material including VBT newsletters and blackberry control information.
- Published two newsletters (December 2017 and May 2018) to highlight community success stories in blackberry management and to promote demonstration sites.
- Hosted a Community Pest Management forum in October 2017, with representatives from the Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party, Victorian Gorse Taskforce and the Victorian Rabbit Action Network attending.
- Co-hosted an invasive species forum.
- VBT website visits increased by 38% to 5,579 sessions.
- Established VBT Youtube video channel, with 779 views recorded during the first six months of 2018.





The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce was established in 2001 to drive and support efforts to tackle blackberry across public and private land.

One of four Victorian Community Pest Management Groups, the Taskforce encourages and supports community grass-roots action, with partnerships and collaboration a key focus.

This approach has reinvigorated blackberry control efforts across Victoria, and public and private land managers are working together to reduce blackberry and protect economic and environmental values.

The Taskforce comprises 11 members, including seven community members, a research scientist and representatives from Parks Victoria, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources.

It oversees implementation of the Victorian Blackberry Strategy and provides state-wide leadership in blackberry management.

The Taskforce's Community Partnership Program supports communities to motivate local land managers to work together to manage blackberry across landscapes.

It also provides feedback to policy makers on successful community approaches to blackberry control and helps drive research and innovation in blackberry control measures.



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM 2017/2018



Our Community Partnerships Program continues to support community-led action groups across the state to reduce blackberry in their local area.

The program funds groups to employ project officers to help drive their activities, which include mapping the location and extent of local blackberry infestations and working closely with landowners to help them reduce the weed.

- Our Community Partnership Program supported two community blackberry action groups in 2017/18.
- These two groups signed 49 landowners to 3-year voluntary management agreements.
- More than 1,300 Victorian landowners and managers are now registered on the Blackberry Action Database Information System.



CREIGHTONS CREEK-GOORAM BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP



Persistence is reducing blackberry in the Creightons Creek and Gooram areas of Strathbogie Shire.

The first landowners to sign up when the action group formed in 2015 to tackle blackberry in the region around Euroa have now significantly reduced their infestations.

The group's efforts and success has also encouraged landowners who were initially reluctant to join the effort to get on board. A \$12,000 Landcare grant has enabled the group to subsidise herbicide and spraying contractors for participating landowners over the last 3 years.

The action group hosted its second field day on a local property in November 2017, with a mulcher, excavator and spraying demonstration.

14

NUMBER OF NEW
LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS

35

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

4450

TOTAL PRIVATE
PROPERTY VISITED
(HA)

200

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATION MAPPED
(HA)

160

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATION
TREATED (HA)





35

NUMBER OF NEW
LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS

48

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

3282

TOTAL PRIVATE
PROPERTY VISITED
(HA)

48.2

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATION
TREATED (HA)

MOORABOOL BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP



An integrated effort is reducing blackberry between Bacchus Marsh and Ballarat.

The Moorabool Blackberry Action Group (MooBAG) is driving the first coordinated efforts between public and private land managers to reduce blackberry between Bacchus Marsh and Ballarat.

Since launching in September 2017, the action group has signed up 45 private landowners to voluntary blackberry control agreements. MooBAG's support for them in 2017/18 included a weed forum, subsidies for control chemicals and training sessions on using the chemicals.

The action group received \$10,000 from the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority in 2017/18 to continue subsidising the costs of control chemicals. This followed on from \$30,000 received from Port Philip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority the previous year. Moorabool Shire has also invested \$15,000 in roadside blackberry control over the last two years and in 2017/18 launched a pilot project to mulch heavily infested local roadsides.

Other project partners VicRoads, Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning have prioritised work along their shared boundaries with private landowners. Melbourne Water has also treated blackberry through its stream frontage and capital works program.





WELLINGTON DISTRICT BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE



The Wellington District Blackberry Taskforce has a focus on sharing best-practice in blackberry control.

The group has turned its focus to landowners in the Glenmaggie and Licola regions, hosting a 'Beating Back The Blackberries' community field day in February 2018. The event featured practical demonstrations of chemical control techniques as well as expert advice from chemical company representatives.

More than 18 local landowners attending and the taskforce is following them up to encourage them to sign up to a voluntary control agreement and join the local effort to reduce blackberry.

The group's fact sheets tailored to local landowners and its Facebook page continue to be important for communicating and encouraging blackberry control efforts.

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NUMBER OF NEW
LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS

14

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

723

TOTAL PRIVATE
PROPERTY VISITED
(HA)

389

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATION MAPPED
(HA)

14

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATION
TREATED (HA)





25

NUMBER OF NEW
LANDHOLDER
AGREEMENTS

29

LANDHOLDERS
VISITED

1046

TOTAL PRIVATE
PROPERTY VISITED
(HA)

48

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATION MAPPED
(HA)

TBC

PRIVATE PROPERTY
INFESTATION
TREATED (HA)

WHITTLESEA AND SURROUNDS BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP



Local people are the force behind the Whittlesea and Surrounds Blackberry Action Group.

Formed by the City of Whittlesea in early 2017, the action group is now driven by landowners tackling blackberry on their properties.

Many group members have lifestyle properties that burned in the 2009 bushfires that swept through the Kinglake area, sparking vigorous blackberry regrowth.

Twenty-five landowners signed up to the challenge in the group's first full year of operation. They've received advice and support from its project officer to get their blackberry control efforts underway.

Landowners are eligible for a herbicide subsidy and the City of Whittlesea subsidises the cost of a Farm Chemical Users Course.

The action group has produced a film case study to encourage more landowners to join the effort and in May 2018 it hosted a local forum/workshop to promote collaboration across land managers and with other pest plant and animal programs.





NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP



The North East Blackberry Action Group (NEBAG) continued its successful efforts to reduce blackberry in the Upper Murray region.

The North East Blackberry Action Group (NEBAG) formed in 2005 as a community initiative in the Upper Murray. The project has continued to develop and expand and this approach was the template for the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce Partnership Groups.

Landholders are visited and encouraged to undertake 3-year voluntary blackberry management agreements. Incentive payments are sometimes negotiated with the landholder to assist with installation of access tracks to protect remnant vegetation from blackberry infestations. Once established, tracks allow ongoing follow up treatment to occur.

This year the group has visited more than 30 landholders and been able to provide incentives to 11 landholders. Several new landholders join the program each year thus the base number of landholders on management agreements remains steady.

The group is also participating in a pilot program in which landholders with boundaries adjoining public land have combined with the Government agency responsible for the management of that land to undertake a program of blackberry control 'over the fence'.



GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, LAND, WATER & PLANNING

Blackberry was a target weed species in 29 projects implemented by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) in 2017/18.

Total investment in its Weeds and Pests on Public Land Project was \$180,000.

Control methods included high volume spraying and mulching, with a drone used in one instance.

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

DEDJTR ENFORCEMENT

The Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources completed six blackberry projects in 2017/18.

Compliance officers inspected 137 properties for blackberry, with 27 Directions Notices and 3 Land Management Notices served. No infringement notices were served nor any court action taken.





BIOLOGICAL CONTROL

DIAGNOSTIC TOOL DEVELOPED FOR PURPLE BLOTCH DISEASE (PBD)



A Victorian Blackberry Taskforce project funded by the Federal Government's Weeds and Rabbits project, has successfully produced a diagnostic tool for purple blotch disease (PBD) Septocyta detection.

Septocyta and Septoria are spot and blotch diseases which affect Rubus plants such as berry fruits. Previously, if Septocyta was detected in a commercial berry farm there was no way of quickly identifying the causative species.

Timely identification is important as one species, Septoria rubrorum, which is not known to be in Australia, is under investigation as a potential biological control agent. Its impact on wild European Blackberry is severe and can produce disease symptoms similar to commonly occurring Septoria spot diseases. Strains of Septocyta suitable for release in Australia are under evaluation. The next step will be to engage with berry growers to inform them of the relevance of this technology to commercial crops.



www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au
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