

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of blackberry leaves and branches, tinted with a warm, golden-yellow color. The leaves are serrated and have a prominent vein pattern. The branches are thin and woody, with some small thorns visible. The overall effect is a textured, naturalistic backdrop.

# VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE PROGRESS REPORT

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2018-2019



# PROGRESS REPORT

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# CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

The emphasis is on education, advocacy and providing accessible information and support for public and private land managers to manage blackberry.

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 and support the provision of education and information to enable land managers to undertake best practice blackberry management. Partnership groups and Local Government are critical links in the distribution of information.

The VBT has an emphasis on making sure information is available in diverse formats to ensure that no matter how people wish to access it they are able to do so. 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 hits to the VBT website and email requests for information. Analysis of the requests and web use provide a valuable insight into the information which 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 benefits for the community. A Cost Benefit Tool was produced by professional valuers so landholders can calculate the cost of returning blackberry infested land to productive use. It will also assist those wishing to purchase or lease a property to better understand the costs involved and help landholders to calculate the potential increase in carrying capacity by removing blackberry.

The funding also enabled the delivery of three onground demonstrations of 'best practice' blackberry control methods. These events included demonstrations of chemical and non-chemical control options including drone delivery of herbicide, products for use on organic farms and mechanical means using a mulcher or slasher and the Ecoblade which cuts and paints the stump with herbicide.

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

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



LYN COULSTON OAM CHAIRPERSON VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE





# VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE ACHIEVEMENTS 2018-2019

- Funded local project officers to facilitate community engagement.
- Helped five communities with activities at West Strzelecki, Creightons Creek-Gooram, Ballan/Bacchus Marsh, Whittlesea and Eden Park regions.
- Supported two peri-urban programs auspiced by the City of Whittlesea.
- Victorian Blackberry Taskforce representatives visited four communities - Eden Park, Whittlesea, Mount Worth and Silvan.
- Two community service announcements were broadcast on the ABC, Prime and Win TV over a 5-month period.
- One new community service announcement was produced for the 2018-19 blackberry season focusing on the Agricultural Productivity Tool.
- Seventy people have signed up for regular updates from the VBT website.



- Published one newsletter (October 2018) and one Mailchimp article (Demonstrating Effective Blackberry Control Techniques – Creswick, May 2019) to highlight community success stories in blackberry management and to promote best practice blackberry control techniques.
- Filmed four demonstrations at a demonstration event and uploaded onto the VBT YouTube Channel.
- Co-hosted three Invasive Species Forums with local communities at Eden Park, Silvan and Hepburn.
- Developed a decision-making support tool, related to the economics of blackberry management.
- Developed a brochure for the engagement of berry growers - 'Spot, blotch and rust diseases of Rubus in Australia, and biocontrol of wild blackberry'.
- 5065 sessions recorded for the VBT website..
- 1909 views of the 29 videos on the VBT Youtube channel, with 7 new videos uploaded during this period.





Blackberry  
is one of Victoria's  
worst weeds.

- Left unchecked, it can rapidly infest entire local landscapes.
- On private land, it costs millions of dollars in lost agricultural productivity.
- On public land, it hinders our recreational, commercial and environmental activities.
- Blackberry can alter water flows and cause soil erosion, it harbours pest animals, can out-compete native plants and it reduces biodiversity.
- Blackberry is a serious issue in Victoria and is recognised as a weed of national significance and one of Australia's most noxious weeds.





# VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

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 Blackberry Taskforce encourages and supports community grassroots 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, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions.

Taskforce members oversee implementation of the Victorian Blackberry Strategy and provide 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.

The Taskforce also provides feedback to policymakers on successful community approaches to blackberry control and helps drive research and innovation in blackberry control measures.







# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM 2018-2019







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 five community blackberry action groups in 2018-19.
- These five groups visited 58 landholders, signing 26 of these to 3-year voluntary management agreements.
- More than 1,350 Victorian landowners and managers are now registered on the Blackberry Action Database Information System.





## CREIGHTONS CREEK-GOORAM BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The Action group has held another event to educate landholders on blackberry control options.

The Creightons Creek-Gooram Blackberry Action Group trialled a gas gun on steep hill country this year with excellent results that it will continue to monitor. Heli-spraying was also conducted on several large infestations on private land with varying results.

While the action group failed to reach its target of 10 new sign-ups this year, four new landowners joined the group, taking the total to 30 since the group formed in 2015.

Drought conditions and grasshoppers may have been an influence, with a reduced spraying season that saw landholders finding it difficult to maintain their focus on blackberry control after summer.

The action group held another field day to demonstrate blackberry control approaches and its project officer will continue to encourage current and potential participants.



NUMBER OF NEW  
LANDHOLDER  
AGREEMENTS



LANDHOLDERS  
VISITED



TOTAL PRIVATE  
PROPERTY VISITED  
(HA)



PRIVATE PROPERTY  
INFESTATIONS  
TREATED  
(HA)







## EDEN PARK BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

Smaller landowners in Eden Park are being targeted in Whittlesea’s northern region.

The Eden Park Blackberry Action Group was formed in 2018 to encourage and support local landowners to tackle blackberry. Many own smaller properties where blackberry has returned in force following the 2009 bushfires.

Landowners signed up to 3-year blackberry control agreements have benefited enormously from the advice and support of the action group’s project officer. Some have significantly reduced their blackberry to improve land value, biodiversity and agricultural pasture.

While the action group failed to achieve its target of signing 25 landowners to voluntary control agreements this year, the local council reported many property owners were independently treating the weed. A field day in the local area showcased herbicide spraying using drones and how to mulch the weed, and the group’s project manager will continue promoting the benefits of signing up to landowners.

Two participating landowners submitted Expressions of Interest to receive funding from Melbourne Water’s Stream Frontage Management program for weed control, revegetation and fencing along their sections of Barbers Creek. One also hired the Kinglake Landcare Group spray rig to increase the efficiency of herbicide spraying on large infestations.



NUMBER OF NEW  
LANDHOLDER  
AGREEMENTS



LANDHOLDERS  
VISITED



TOTAL PRIVATE  
PROPERTY VISITED  
(HA)



PRIVATE PROPERTY  
INFESTATIONS  
TREATED  
(HA)







# MITTA2MURRAY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

## Community teamwork is reducing blackberry in Victoria’s north-east.

The Mitta to Murray Blackberry Action Group (M2MBAG) has demonstrated what a community-led effort can achieve in blackberry control.

Since M2MBAG was formed in 2012, more than 137 landowners across Victoria’s north-east region have tackled blackberry across 36,000 hectares of land.

Outstanding results have been achieved, with farmers reclaiming valuable pastoral land and ecological values in the region increasing.

Just as importantly, there is a great sense of pride and achievement for those who have successfully tackled blackberry, and there is now a waiting list for other landowners to join the effort.

The group’s project officer has been vital in the work, supporting and facilitating land managers across private and public land.

M2MBAG is now a leader in community blackberry control, hosting events and workshops to share knowledge and experience and appearing in community-targeted videos to highlight what can be achieved.

The group is also involved in biocontrol research and this year continued its partnership with Dr Raelene Kwong, Agriculture Victoria’s Senior Research Scientist of Pests and Diseases, to explore new ways to tackle the weed.







## MOORABOOL BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

### A cultural heritage site is one target for blackberry control in the Ballarat region.

The Moorabool Blackberry Action Group (MOOBAG) continued to tackle blackberry between Ballarat and Bacchus Marsh this year.

Now in its third year, the group supported the Central Highlands Water Authority to map infestations on steep hazardous terrain using a drone at Lal Lal Falls, a highly valued cultural heritage site and a local recreational and tourism drawcard.

The group plans to expand use of the drone to map inaccessible areas on private land as it signs up more landholders to blackberry control and revisits those who have been taking action over the last few years.

Partnerships with public land managers also saw Moorabool Shire Council spray blackberry along five kilometres of local roadsides and V/Line spray 20 kilometres of railway track.







# NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

## Partnerships are the key to successful blackberry control in the Upper Murray.

The North East Blackberry Action Group (NEBAG) has supported more than 125 landowners to tackle their blackberry since forming in 2005. A Group Steering Committee oversees the program and meets 4 times a year. Members are from 5 Landcare groups, DELWP, Parks Victoria, plantation companies and Towong Shire Council.

Anyone who has participated in the program over the past 14 years receives an annual visit or phone call to see how their control program is going. This year, the group continued its work, visiting and engaging with landholders and provided incentives to three, for the installation of access tracks to support their blackberry control works.

Many of the group’s original members have reduced blackberry to a maintenance level and are keeping the weed in check with an annual control program. More productive land, healthy remnant vegetation and elimination of the blackberry seed bank are the results reported to the group by participating landholders.

The group continued its 3-year pilot program, commenced in 2017, of a variation on the Good Neighbour Program. Four landholders with contiguous boundaries adjacent to public forest are participating. Blackberry is treated on both sides of the boundary. Results after two years confirm that constant, annual follow up treatment is the best way to achieve long-term control. Adjoining land managers are best placed to carry out this work.

Before (insert) and after images:  
blackberry management in the Upper Murray



LANDHOLDERS  
VISITED







# WEST STRZELECKI BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

Long-term blackberry infestations are the target in the Strzelecki region.

The West Strzelecki Blackberry Action Group targets landowners with long-standing blackberry and other weed infestations.

Established in 2018 with funding from the Commonwealth Government’s Weeds and Rabbits Project, the action group focuses on landowners who have shown reluctance to tackle blackberry, or to use herbicides that may impact organic agriculture.

The group’s project officer succeeded in having two landowners sign voluntary control agreements, prepare action plans and start control works this year. Another four expressed interest in joining the effort.

The group will co-host a blackberry control information event before the next blackberry season. This will be an opportunity to educate landholders on their responsibilities.







# WHITTLESEA AND SURROUNDS BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

## New drone technology demonstrated at Eden Park event.

Whittlesea and Surrounds Blackberry Action Group demonstrated drone spraying as part of a field day hosted in partnership with the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and Whittlesea Council at Eden Park in October 2018.

The demonstration showed how drones can help apply herbicides on blackberry in hard-to-get-to locations, as well as speed up spraying on flat land.

The field day also showcased a mulcher in action on blackberry that was sprayed the previous year.

The Whittlesea action group achieved its target of signing 15 more landowners to 3-year voluntary blackberry control agreements this year.

Landowners valued the advice and support of the action group’s project manager and the mapping of their blackberry, with some hiring the Kinglake Landcare Group’s spray rig to efficiently treat larger infestations.

Five landowners submitted Expressions of Interest to receive funding from Melbourne Water’s Stream Frontage Management Program for weed control revegetation and fencing along their sections of the Plenty River, Bruces Creek and Scrubby Creek.







# LOCAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORT 2018-2019

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and community blackberry groups have benefited from Local Government support in 2018-19. This includes participation on community group committees, assistance in running and advertising blackberry control information events, and aligning roadside blackberry control with community efforts.

Municipal Councils with representation on local community blackberry groups include City of Whittlesea, Towong, Morrabool and Baw Baw.

City of Whittlesea (Eden Park) and Hepburn Shire Council (Creswick) both co-hosted local Blackberry Information Field Days with the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce in 2018-19.

The VBT has distributed a communication pack to interface councils, which aims to assist them in providing information and education material about blackberry to their residents. The pack also contains resources and suggestions to enable Local Government conduct on ground activities to demonstrate 'best practice' control methods.







# VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

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[www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au](http://www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au)

VBT WEBSITE

[blackberrytheweed.com.au](http://blackberrytheweed.com.au)

VBT BLOG

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VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE