



# 01 FOREWORD

## VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY STRATEGY 2020-2025

### THE VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY STRATEGY SEEKS TO REDUCE THE GROWING THREAT AND IMPACT OF BLACKBERRY, A WEED OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE, ON OUR AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSETS.

By taking a landscape-scale approach to blackberry management, community-led action is proving to be effective in achieving long-term and sustainable success. This approach recognises that integrated and coordinated action is needed across public and private land, requiring the cooperation of State, regional and local organisations as well as communities and private landowners.

Underpinning the approach however is the realisation that effective control of blackberry can only be achieved when local communities assume greater responsibility for action.

Providing support to local communities to develop solutions tailored to suit their landscape and circumstances can be a powerful catalyst for achieving successful control of blackberry, lifting agricultural productivity and protecting significant environmental values.

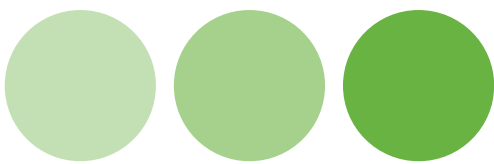
The extent and impact of blackberry in Victoria is significant, however by working together in a coordinated, community-led approach over the long term, we can and will make headway against blackberry. Appropriate resources are required and partnerships are critical.

The importance of having effective biological control options to complement existing control methods cannot be underestimated, and the Taskforce will continue to promote the need for on-going research in this area.

I encourage you to get involved in control activities and initiatives in your local area and help reduce the spread and impacts of this noxious weed.

*Lyn Coulston*

Lyn Coulston OAM  
Chairperson – Victorian Blackberry Taskforce



# 02 INTRODUCTION

## CONTEXT

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce has initiated a diverse range of blackberry control programs in partnership with state, regional and local natural resource managers, as well as community organisations and private landholders. The Taskforce became an incorporated association in 2013.

One of four Community Pest Management Groups in Victoria<sup>1</sup>, 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 five appointed community members, in a voluntary capacity, representing the Catchment Management Authority regions where blackberry is an issue.

In addition, there is representation from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Parks Victoria, Agriculture Victoria and an independent research scientist providing input into technical aspects of blackberry management.

From over a decade of experience with community-led control programs, the Taskforce has great confidence in the ability of communities to achieve effective blackberry control.

The Taskforce believes strongly in the importance of being able to provide flexible and locally-specific support for public and private land managers and their communities which reflect their individual circumstances and experiences. This offers the best opportunity to deal with blackberry (and pest management in general) at a local level and to contribute to broader landscape sustainability.

Since the release of the previous Victorian Blackberry Strategy in 2014, many of the objectives have been achieved and there have been a number of changes in the policies and institutions involved in weed management.

Consequently, the Taskforce has revised the Strategy to provide direction for the period 2020-2025. The Taskforce is responsible for coordinating and monitoring implementation of the Strategy.

<sup>1</sup> Alongside the Victorian Gorse Taskforce (VGT), the Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party (VSTWP) and the Victorian Rabbit Action Network (VRAN)

## EUROPEAN BLACKBERRY

### Blackberry - the weed

**THERE ARE NINE SPECIES OF BLACKBERRY (RUBUS FRUTICOSUS L. AGG.) CURRENTLY RECOGNISED AS BEING PRESENT IN VICTORIA.**

If left unchecked, blackberry forms a thorny, sprawling and impenetrable thicket that can reach over four metres in height. It has biennial canes and a hardy and long-living root system.

It reproduces through seed and can propagate through root suckers and by daughter plants when stems contact the soil. Some blackberry plants in Australia are known to produce 30,000 seeds annually.

Blackberry is a successful weed because of its hardiness, vigorous growth, its effective seed distribution by fruit-eating birds and mammals, its ability to propagate vegetatively from cane tips and because its prickliness keeps most grazing animals away.

### How it spreads

Blackberry invasion and establishment relies on three factors: it needs a means of entry; a place to grow; and it must successfully compete against other plant species.

It can be carried to a site by water, attachment, by birds and other animals that eat it as well as by humans as they move through landscapes. It usually establishes where competition is removed or reduced to a level where it has an advantage.

Land is particularly susceptible to blackberry invasion following a disturbance such as bushfire, and the greater the disturbance the more likely an invasion. The worst blackberry problems often occur in areas that feature bare, soft soil, high nutrient availability, moist conditions and high light intensity.

### Distribution

Blackberry is found in areas with greater than 760 mm annual rainfall, mainly on fertile soils, and in irrigation areas. While the blackberry aggregate has probably reached the climatic limits (rainfall and temperature) of its potential range in Victoria, individual species have not.

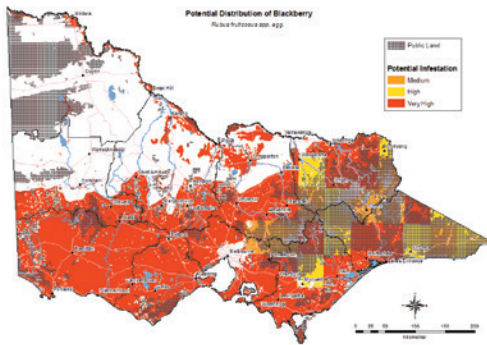


Figure 1: Potential distribution of blackberry  
Source: Victorian Resources Online [http://vro.agriculture.vic.gov.au/dpi/vro/vrosite.nsf/pages/pot\\_dist\\_blackberry](http://vro.agriculture.vic.gov.au/dpi/vro/vrosite.nsf/pages/pot_dist_blackberry)

Figure 1 illustrates the potential distribution of blackberry in Victoria.

Expected changes in Victoria's temperature and rainfall (based on climate modelling) indicate that although its potential range may decrease in time, large areas of the state will remain climatically suitable for blackberry establishment in future (Steel et al., 2008).



## BIOSECURITY & PEST MANAGEMENT

**THE VICTORIAN AND AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS HAVE ADOPTED A BIOSECURITY APPROACH TO THE MANAGEMENT OF PESTS. INFORMED BY THE PEST INVASION CURVE (SEE FIGURE 2), THIS APPROACH ADOPTS A RISK-BASED STRATEGY TO INTERVENTION FEATURING FOUR KEY RESPONSES: PREVENTION, ERADICATION, CONTAINMENT AND ASSET PROTECTION.**

An objective of this approach is to ensure early detection of and rapid action against new pest problems. Preventing serious new introductions is significantly cheaper and less time-consuming than waiting until a species spreads to a larger area. The approach also considers the level of economic, environmental and social impact of a particular species.

For widespread weeds such as blackberry, gorse and serrated tussock which cause significant social, environmental and economic impacts, the biosecurity approach indicates that the most cost-effective response is the protection of priority assets. The asset-based approach recognises that it is not realistic to aim to eradicate any widespread pests, so effort

should be focussed on reducing their impact on those things that are valuable to the community. This includes things like productive agricultural land, wetlands, rivers, popular fishing areas, parks with high cultural or historical significance, threatened species or vegetation communities or stands of intact native vegetation.

Central to the success of this approach is the role of partnerships between government departments and agencies, industry and the community. Partnerships are essential to achieve impacts at a landscape scale – by coordinating actions and working across a range of land tenures, and increasing cost-effectiveness through effective sharing of knowledge, information and resources.

### Blackberry Management Options

Effective management of blackberry requires an integrated approach using a combination of control measures. These include slashing, grazing, fire, grubbing, herbicides and biological control. The key aim of a blackberry management plan should be to prevent new infestations, reduce current infestations and rehabilitate previously infested land.

For more information on blackberry and management options, visit:

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

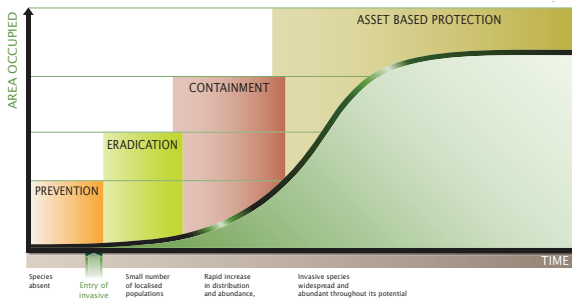


Figure 2: Generalised invasion curve for invasive plants and animals



# 03 ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

A REVIEW OF THE VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY STRATEGY 2014-2019 IDENTIFIED THE ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROGRESS MADE IN TACKLING BLACKBERRY IN VICTORIA AS WELL AS FURTHER CHALLENGES TO BE ADDRESSED.

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2014-2019

The Taskforce has been instrumental in motivating, inspiring and supporting local communities to see that they can make a difference. As a result, land that had been overrun by blackberry is now becoming productive again and this is motivating communities to undertake long-term control that will see blackberry diminish as a threat to agricultural land and environmental and social values.

### Providing leadership on blackberry management

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce plays a key role in leading and coordinating blackberry management across the State, and acts as an important link between government and community groups. Key achievements include:

- Securing funding for an Executive Officer responsible to the Taskforce for project management and administration tasks;
- Supporting a state-wide network of blackberry control groups, including funding local project officers to facilitate community engagement activities and visiting a number of local community action groups;

- Building partnerships with Local and State Government and key organisations. This includes: government agencies (Agriculture Victoria, Parks Victoria, VicRoads), local councils (including the City of Whittlesea and Hepburn Shire Council), and water authorities (e.g. Melbourne Water, via their Stream Frontage Management Program).

### Engaging local communities

Engaging land managers and local communities was central to the Victorian Blackberry Strategy (2014-2019). Key achievements include:

- Using websites and social media to engage community members. This includes a successful Facebook campaign, and over 5,000 views to the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce website annually;
- Supporting local groups through the Community Partnership Program. Since 2014, a total of 16 groups have participated in the program;
- Targeting peri-urban land managers through a peri-urban program implemented by the Whittlesea and Surrounds Blackberry Action Group;

- Providing information to communities through Public Service Announcements. Nine community service announcements on blackberry control have been broadcast on ABC, Prime, and Win TV since 2014.

### Building community capacity

The Strategy aimed to empower landholders and local groups to take action on blackberry through increased knowledge, skills and confidence. Key achievements include:

- Delivering a range of training events across the state including demonstration days and Invasive Species Forums;
- Developing lasting resources for landholders including case studies, management guides and demonstration videos for the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce YouTube channel.

### Innovative solutions for cost-effective blackberry management

The Taskforce recognize the ongoing need for innovation to complement existing control methods, and to work with a range of partners to increase the knowledge and understanding of effective blackberry management. Key achievements include:

- Development of a decision-support tool to increase awareness of the economics of blackberry management, focused on costs and benefits for agricultural productivity;
- Development of a blackberry disease diagnostic tool to support engagement with the Rubus industry. This was developed in collaboration with an independent research scientist and the RMIT, and links to work on blackberry biocontrol led by CSIRO;
- Demonstration of new drone technology to improve spatial mapping and the application of herbicide in hard-to-reach areas.

### Reducing the impact of blackberry

The ultimate aim of the Strategy was to reduce the threat and impact of blackberry on social, environmental and economic assets across Victoria. Key achievements include:

- Over 690 landholders signed up to 3-year voluntary management agreements to control blackberry since 2014;
- Hundreds of hectares of blackberry infestation treated by landowners and local groups through the Community Partnerships Program.

## CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES: 2020-2025

Looking ahead, the potential advances in biological control options as well as the development of new technology for blackberry management demand on-going investment in research and development, and this is a topic of great interest to the VBT.

Providing support to the existing network of blackberry control groups across the State, as well as assistance to newly formed groups is a key commitment for the VBT, but presents an ongoing challenge under the current level of resources. Partnerships and coordination will be essential in order to maximise impact and efficiency with constrained funding.

Victoria's network of blackberry control groups has a wealth of information and experience that is of significant value to other communities dealing with local land management issues, if it can be captured and accessed simply and easily. Building capacity to capture, report and share this information remains an ongoing priority for the new strategy.

Finally, new digital technology and social media creates an enormous opportunity to generate and share new resources (including videos, online tools and blogs) and to engage a much wider audience about blackberry management. Capitalising on this opportunity will also be a key focus of the new strategy.

## WIDER CONTEXT

### THE VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY STRATEGY RECOGNISES THAT A COMMUNITY-LED APPROACH ON BLACKBERRY REQUIRES A STATE-WIDE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK.

It highlights the importance of community groups working in partnership with government departments and agencies, and encourages increased support, incentives and investment in sustainable land management in Victoria. This strategy takes an integrated approach across regions and catchments as well as at the local and farm levels. Particular consideration is given to production, environmental and social factors affecting blackberry control.

Direction and guiding principles for this strategy are informed by legislation and key documents:

**The Invasive Plants and Animals Policy Framework (Victoria)** – the framework presents the overarching Victorian Government approach to the management of existing and potential invasive species within the context of the Biosecurity Strategy for Victoria. The framework is underpinned by the recognition of the importance of partnerships and building the capacity and confidence of land managers to achieve effective invasive species management.

### Victorian Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994

– The Act is Victoria's primary legislation for invasive plants and animals. The Act requires all landowners, including the Crown, public authorities and licensees of Crown lands, to take all reasonable steps to:

- prevent the growth and spread of regionally controlled weeds such as blackberry on their land.

### The Australian Weeds Strategy 2017-2027

The Strategy, prepared by the Australian Weeds Committee, recognises that weed management is essential to the sustainable management of natural resources, the economy, the environment, human health and amenity and requires an integrated

whole-of-government and community-wide approach. The Strategy was based on seven principles, of which three are most relevant to the Victorian Blackberry Strategy:

- Effective weed management is a responsibility shared between landholders, community, industry and government.
- Coordination amongst landholders, community, industry and government is necessary to manage weeds at a landscape scale.
- Sustaining capability and capacity across landholders, community, industry and government is fundamental to effective weed management.



## INNOVATION, PARTNERSHIPS AND INVESTMENT

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce believes strategic alignment with broader objectives is critical for achieving the large-scale goals for blackberry management.

Our partnerships across the Victorian Government and with local governments, catchment management authorities, community groups and industry are essential to developing a coordinated approach to blackberry management and will continue to evolve. Effective partnerships can occur between government and the community where this is a common commitment to working together on dealing with blackberry, and this can be independent of any funding arrangement.

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce works closely with other groups, agencies, organisations and departments on blackberry control. We will build new partnerships and links with innovative projects to share resources, knowledge, ideas and creative energy. These partnerships will save costs and see new technologies and strategies developed for sustainable resource use in Victoria.

A collaborative approach is essential across all tiers of government with different land tenures. The variety of activities undertaken to implement this strategy represents a focus not just on weeds as 'the problem' but on wider sustainable land management as 'the solution'.



# 04 OUR VISION: 2020-2025

**'ALL LAND MANAGERS SEE THE VALUE IN BLACKBERRY CONTROL AND WORK IN PARTNERSHIP TOWARDS THE ON-GOING PROTECTION OF SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC ASSETS BY REDUCING THE GROWTH AND SPREAD OF BLACKBERRY IN VICTORIA.'**

## VISION

The vision of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce is a future where the community understands the impact of blackberry on biodiversity and land productivity and takes action.

A partnership approach is needed to achieve the goals and objectives of this strategy.

This new strategy confirms the integral role of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce in its advisory role to the Victorian government.

## OBJECTIVES

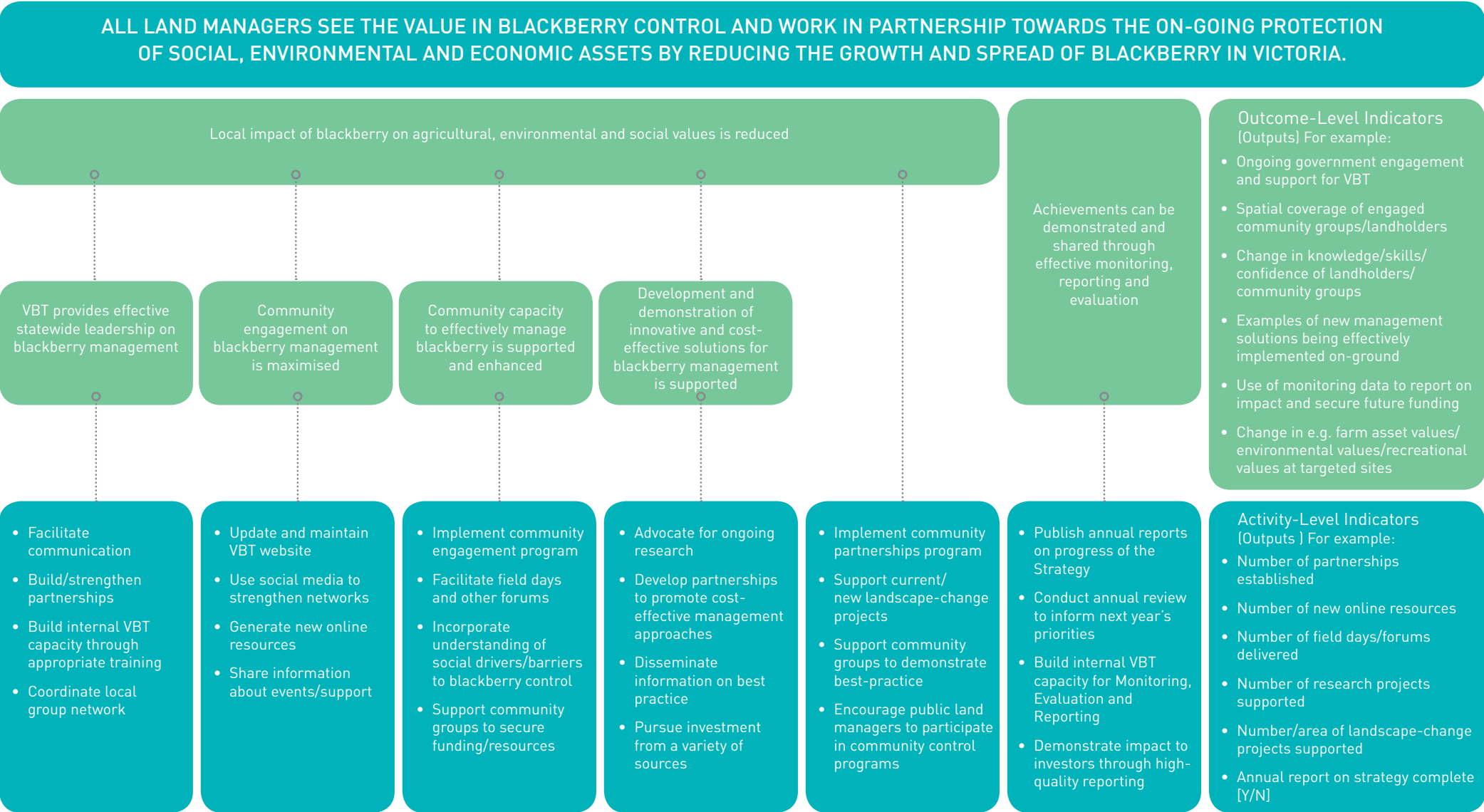
Through implementation of this strategy, the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce aims to:

1. Provide effective state-wide leadership on blackberry management
2. Maximise community engagement in blackberry management across Victoria
3. Support and enhance community capacity to effectively manage blackberry
4. Support the development and demonstration of innovative and cost-effective solutions for blackberry management

5. Reduce the local impact of blackberry on agricultural, environmental and social values through coordinated action by engaged communities
6. Demonstrate and share achievements through effective monitoring, reporting and evaluation.



05FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION





# 06STRATEGIC ACTIONS

## OBJECTIVE 4: SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT AND DEMONSTRATION OF INNOVATIVE AND COST-EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS FOR BLACKBERRY MANAGEMENT

ACTION	STATEMENT	PARTNERSHIPS	OUTCOME
4.1	Advocate for ongoing research into biological control options for blackberry	VBT, CSIRO, RMIT, Agriculture Victoria	There is ongoing investment in applied research to develop innovative solutions for blackberry management.
4.2	Work in partnership with research institutions and other stakeholders to promote the development and uptake of innovative, cost-effective management approaches to blackberry control	VBT, CSIRO, RMIT, Agriculture Victoria	Research provides practical and cost-effective approaches to blackberry management.
4.3	Capture and disseminate information on best practice blackberry control to increase community and land manager understanding	VBT, Agriculture Victoria, CSIRO, RMIT, community	Research results are integrated into blackberry management approaches by land managers.
4.4	Investigate and pursue investment from a variety of sources, including agricultural and forestry industries, to support long-term planning, incentives and resources for blackberry management	VBT, community, industry	Industry supports and contributes to blackberry management, including rehabilitation and revegetation.



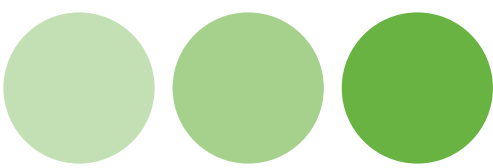
## OBJECTIVE 5: REDUCE THE LOCAL IMPACT OF BLACKBERRY ON AGRICULTURAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL VALUES THROUGH COORDINATED ACTION BY ENGAGED COMMUNITIES

ACTION	STATEMENT	PARTNERSHIPS	OUTCOME
5.1	Implement the Community Partnership Program where community groups demonstrate commitment and capacity to work effectively together and engage other stakeholders in land management	VBT, community groups, Local Government	Investment in community groups to deliver on-ground actions.
5.2	Support current and new landscape change projects that enhance the environmental, social and productive capacity of land and water through effective blackberry control	VBT, Agriculture Victoria, Local Government	Increased effectiveness of investment through landscape-scale projects.
5.3	Support community to adopt and demonstrate best management approaches, especially in areas with complex issues relating to blackberry control, such as non-arable and steep marginal land, riparian and upper catchment areas	VBT, CMAs, community, Landcare, Local Government	Improved management of blackberry on complex sites is achieved through increased knowledge, skills and adoption of best practice.
5.4	Encourage public land managers to participate in community control programs, allocate resources to invasive species control and demonstrate good land management practice	VBT, public land managers, community, Local Government	Blackberry control on public and private land is coordinated to maximise impact.



## OBJECTIVE 6: DEMONSTRATE AND SHARE ACHIEVEMENTS THROUGH EFFECTIVE MONITORING, REPORTING AND EVALUATION

ACTION	STATEMENT	PARTNERSHIPS	OUTCOME
6.1	Publish annual reports on the progress of this Strategy (and annual work plan targets – see Action 6.2)	VBT	Blackberry management is reported annually to key stakeholders and investors.
6.2	Conduct an annual review of progress on the Strategy to inform the next year’s priorities, targets and the Executive Officer work plan	VBT	Victorian Blackberry Taskforce maintains its focus on strategic priorities over the life of the Strategy.
6.3	Build internal capacity (knowledge, skills, confidence) to undertake monitoring, evaluation, reporting and continuous improvement	VBT, community groups	Taskforce members and community group project officers are better able to demonstrate their achievements.
6.4	Demonstrate effectiveness, efficiency and impact to external investors through high quality monitoring and reporting	VBT	Demonstration of good governance and project delivery enhances investors’ trust and support for the Taskforce.



### NOTES

#### VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE MEMBERSHIP

Lyn Coulston OAM – Community Member, Chairperson  
Shane O’Loughlin – Community Member, Secretary  
Anthony Jarvis – Community Member, Treasurer  
Terry Hubbard - Community Member  
Alex Arbuthnot AM – Community Member  
Stefan Kaiser – DELWP Representative  
Nigel Ainsworth – Agriculture Victoria - Policy  
Ben Fahey – Parks Victoria Representative  
Katherine Whittaker- Local Government Representative  
David Smith – HVP Plantations Representative  
Barton Roberts - Agriculture Victoria, Executive Officer

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#### Websites

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

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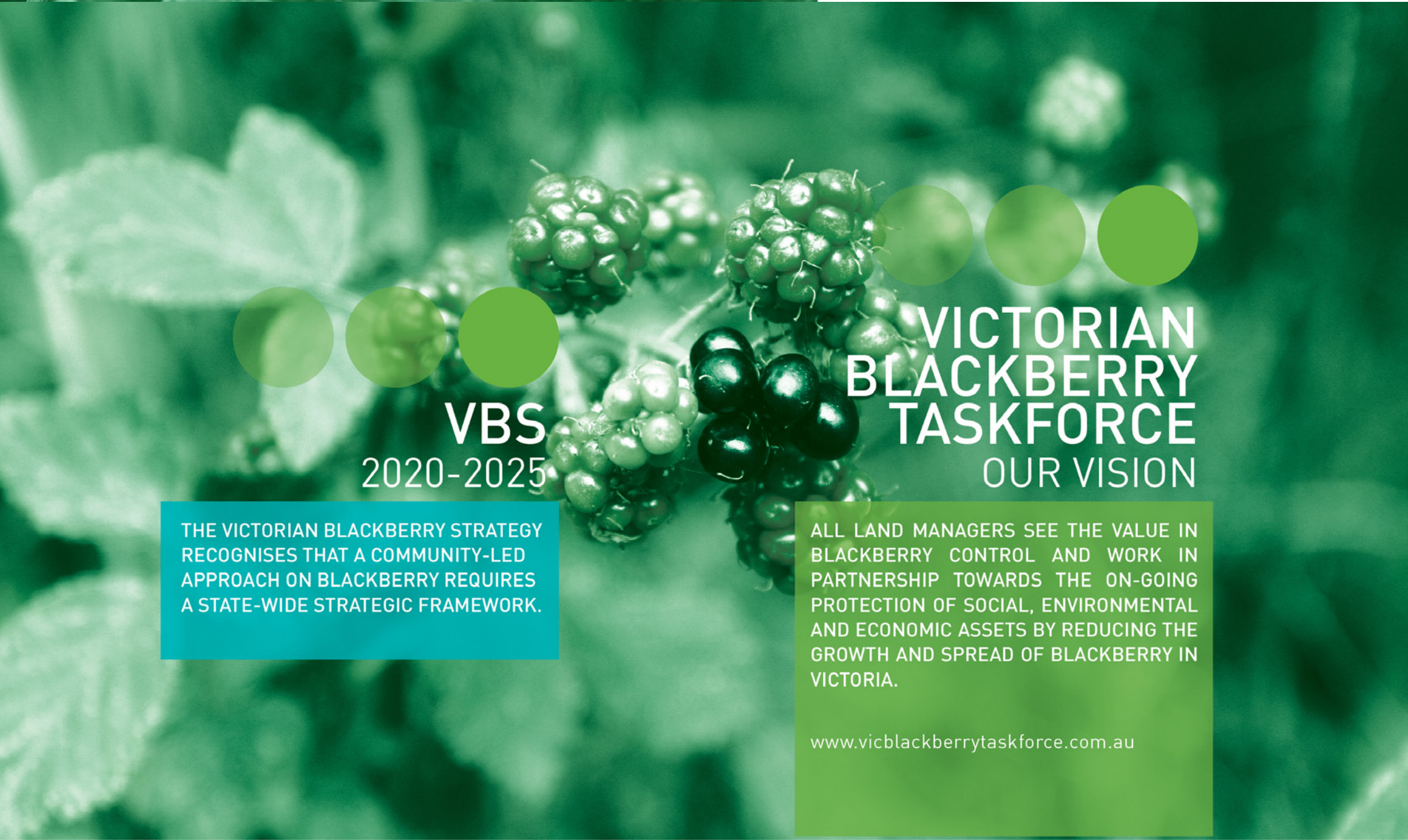
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For more information about Agriculture Victoria visit the website at: [www.agriculture.vic.gov.au](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au) or call the Customer Service Centre at 136 186



VBS  
2020-2025

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OUR VISION

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