



# VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

## PROGRESS REPORT 2019/2020



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.



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# 01

## Chairperson's Report

2019 and 2020 has been very challenging for our communities with devastating impacts of drought and bushfires in many localities, followed by the Covid19 pandemic. The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce has continued to operate throughout the year to offer support to the many people who sought assistance with blackberry or weed issues.

We have endeavoured to ensure our resources and information are easily accessed and offered through a variety of platforms and media channels. The VBT continues to provide valuable ongoing support on our website, YouTube channel, Facebook page and regular online newsletters. The VBT website was upgraded with additional resources and we regularly respond to community enquiries through post, telephone and email.

Due to lockdowns and restrictions on gatherings our Demonstration Days, usually held across the State in spring, were unable to go ahead. However, these will resume in December and, all being well, continue until April 2021.





As can be seen by this Progress Report, our Partnership Groups continued supporting their communities in spite of the constraints. Some activities supported by the VBT, such as Field Days and Forums, had to go on hold and will resume next year.

The revised Victorian Blackberry Strategy 2020-2025 (VBS) was finalised and is now on the VBT Website. The VBS is the guiding document for blackberry control in Victoria and we look forward to achieving its objectives over the next five years.

The VBT continues to provide support, information and resources to all those wanting to control blackberry for conservation or productive outcomes. Working together with our communities and other partners is the foundation of our successful approach to reducing blackberry in Victoria.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lyn Coulston".

LYN COULSTON OAM  
CHAIRPERSON VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE



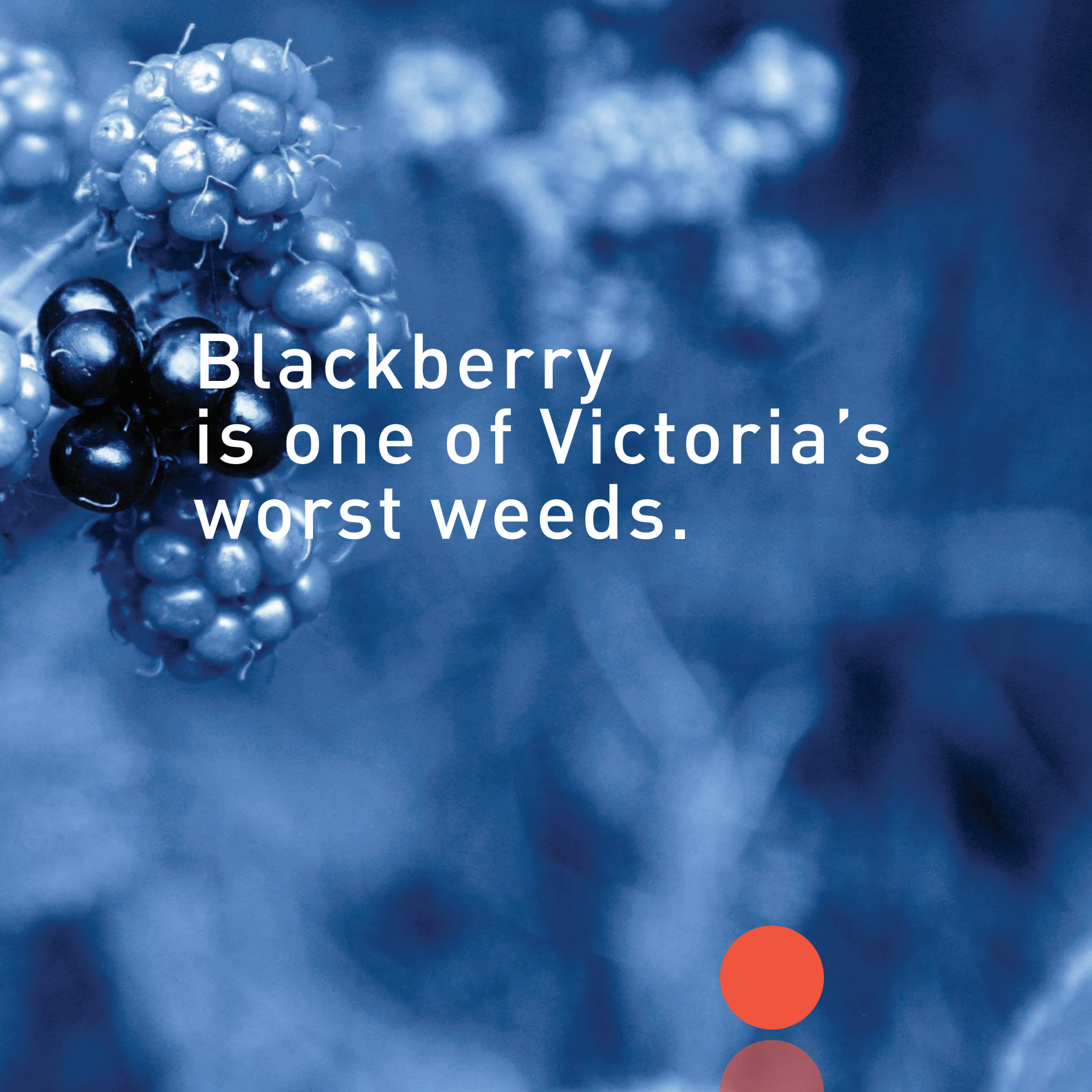


# 02

## VBT Achievements 2019-2020

- Funded local project officers to facilitate community engagement.
- Helped four communities with landholder engagement activities at Silvan, Ballan, Whittlesea and Eden Park.
- Supported two peri-urban programs auspiced by the City of Whittlesea.
- Aired five community service announcements on the ABC, Prime and Win TV over a 6-month period.
- Established a VBT Facebook page and ran a 6-month advertising campaign to encouraged people to visit our website for information and resources in blackberry control.
- Attracted 300 visitors to the website to sign up for regular updates.
- Distributed three Mailchimp articles to the VBT's 'Need Ideas' subscribers with information on the importance of planning for success in blackberry control as well as information on non-chemical control options, including how goats can help keep blackberry at bay.
- Published two VBT newsletters on the website.
- Co-hosted five invasive species forums with local communities at Warragul, Hepburn, St Andrews, Fish Creek and Silvan.
- Presented at the City of Whittlesea's sustainability event.
- Distributed a resource kit to peri-urban councils to help raise landowner awareness of the need to control blackberry.
- Incorporated community feedback into the new Agricultural Productivity Tool to enable land managers to perform a cost benefit analysis of the cost of blackberry control and potential production increases achieved.
- Collected 150 plant samples from 30 Rubus growers for the implementation of the diagnostic tool to identify spot and blotch diseases.
- Produced an Information note and engaged 21 landholders in the Wandin-Seville region addressing barriers to controlling European blackberry in commercial Rubus growing regions.





# 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 recreational and commercial activities and severely impacts Biodiversity and environmental values.
- 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.



# 03

## Victorian Blackberry Taskforce

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

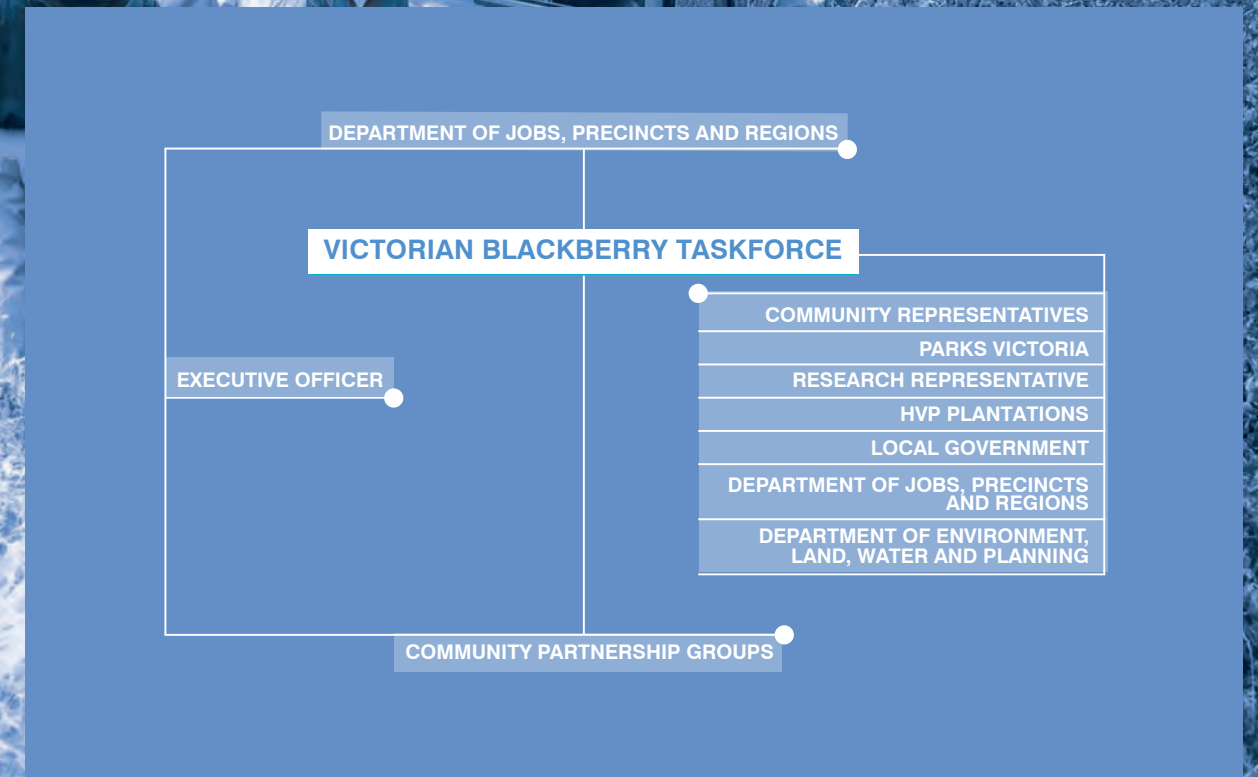
This approach has reinvigorated blackberry control efforts across Victoria, and public and private land managers are working together to reduce blackberry and protect economic and environmental values.

The Taskforce comprises eleven members, including five community members, a research scientist and representatives from Parks Victoria, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, local government and HVP Plantations.

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





# 04

## VBT Community Partnership Program 2019-2020

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 activities including mapping the location and extent of local blackberry infestations and working closely with landowners to help them reduce the weed.

- We supported four local blackberry control action groups in 2019-20.
- This enabled them to employ project officers who visited eighty-four properties, signing fifteen more landowners to 3-year voluntary blackberry management agreements.



04

VBT SUPPORTED BLACKBERRY  
CONTROL ACTION GROUPS

84

NUMBER OF PROPERTIES  
VISITED

15

NUMBER OF NEW LANDHOLDERS  
ON AGREEMENTS



**EDEN PARK  
BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP**  
BLACKBERRY CONTROL CONTINUES TO  
PROGRESS IN WHITTLESEA'S EDEN PARK AREA

The Eden Park Blackberry Action Group supports landowners across a diverse mix of properties ranging from broadacre farms to lifestyle blocks. Some are motivated to control blackberry to improve agricultural values while others seek to improve biodiversity and ecological values.

In 2019-20 the action group's project manager signed three more landowners to 3-year voluntary management agreements and visited nine participating properties to check on their progress.

Landowners were supported with hiring a spray rig and one landowner was helped with their successful submission for funding from the Melbourne Water Stream Frontage Program for weed control, revegetation and fencing along Barbers Creek.



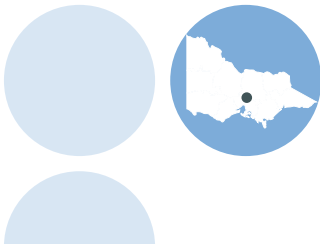
09  
NUMBER OF LANDHOLDERS  
VISITED

03  
NUMBER OF NEW LANDHOLDERS  
ON AGREEMENTS

70  
TOTAL PRIVATE PROPERTY  
VISITED (HA)

70  
PRIVATE PROPERTY  
INFESTATIONS MAPPED (HA)

70  
PRIVATE PROPERTY INFESTATIONS  
TREATED (HA)





**MOORABOOL  
BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP**

**MORE THAN 50 MOORABOOL  
LANDOWNERS HAVE NOW SIGNED UP  
TO CONTROL THEIR BLACKBERRY**

More than 50 Moorabool landowners have now signed up to control their blackberry.

The Moorabool Blackberry Action Group (Moobag) is supporting their efforts including through partnerships with public land managers.

The action group has good relationships with Parks Victoria, Moorabool Shire Council, Vic Track, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, as well as Central Highlands Water Corporation.

This year, Parks Victoria aided local efforts by spraying blackberry at Mount Warrenheip reserve, reducing the risk of seeds spreading to nearby private land. Follow-up spraying over the next two years will maintain the focus.

Moorabool Shire mulched and sprayed blackberry along three local roadways as well as numerous small infestations on roadsides across Dunnstown.

Vic Track sprayed the Ballarat to Melbourne rail line between Millbrook and Warrenheip, gaining good control of blackberry with follow-up spraying critical for the next few years.

The action group also worked with Central Highlands Water Corporation, which has six reservoirs across the region with large infestations. The Moobag project officer helped to map blackberry in its difficult to access areas with a drone this year and will continue to support blackberry control in natural resource areas.

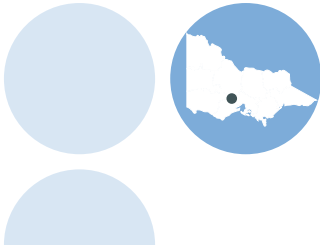


23  
NUMBER OF LANDHOLDERS  
VISITED

885  
TOTAL PRIVATE PROPERTY  
VISITED (HA)

885  
PRIVATE PROPERTY  
INFESTATIONS MAPPED (HA)

25  
PRIVATE PROPERTY INFESTATIONS  
TREATED (HA)





**WHITTLESEA AND SURROUNDS  
BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP**  
A COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY CONTROL  
EFFORT IS WELL UNDERWAY IN WHITTLESEA

More than half the approximately 80 rural landowners targeted by the local blackberry action group have signed up to 3-year voluntary management agreements.

Properties across Humevale, Kinglake West and Glenvale range in size from two hectares to more than 100 hectares. Some landowners have got blackberry under control the last few years and a review of 27 properties in 2019-20 found others are progressing well.

The action group’s project officer supported landowners to hire a spray rig this year as well as to submit successful funding applications to the Melbourne Water Stream Frontage program for weed control, revegetation and fencing along their sections of Plenty River and Scrubby Creek.

The group also succeeded in its submission for a Landcare Australia grant for weed control along VicTrack rail easement land at Whittlesea.

In addition to its work with private landowners, the action group works with public land managers in the area to coordinate blackberry control efforts.



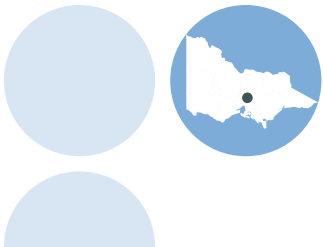
34  
NUMBER OF LANDHOLDERS  
VISITED

07  
NUMBER OF NEW LANDHOLDERS  
ON AGREEMENTS

1196  
TOTAL PRIVATE PROPERTY  
VISITED (HA)

1196  
PRIVATE PROPERTY  
INFESTATIONS MAPPED (HA)

1102  
PRIVATE PROPERTY INFESTATIONS  
TREATED (HA)





**SILVAN  
BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP**  
A NEW ACTION GROUP IS FOCUSING  
ON BLACKBERRY IN SILVAN

The Blackberry Action Group Silvan grew from the Wabbit Action Group Silvan after it became evident the weed was harbouring the region’s growing rabbit population.

More than 40 interested local landowners attended the action group’s launch workshop in February 2020 where guest speakers discussed the various approaches to blackberry control.

Many landowners signed up for a visit from the group’s project officer before Covid restrictions kicked in so contact continued by telephone, with five signing up to 3-year voluntary management agreements. The group will continue to support and encourage others to join the community effort.



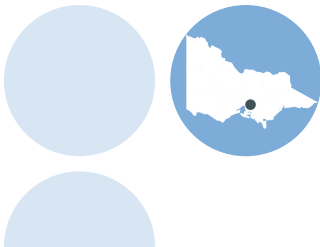
18  
NUMBER OF LANDHOLDERS  
VISITED

05  
NUMBER OF NEW LANDHOLDERS  
ON AGREEMENTS

300  
TOTAL PRIVATE PROPERTY  
VISITED (HA)

22  
PRIVATE PROPERTY  
INFESTATIONS MAPPED (HA)

05  
PRIVATE PROPERTY INFESTATIONS  
TREATED (HA)





**MITTA TO MURRAY  
BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP (ON GOING GROUP)**

THE MITTA TO MURRAY BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP IS AN ESTABLISHED LEADER IN COMMUNITY BLACKBERRY CONTROL

The Mitta to Murray Blackberry Action group is an established leader in community blackberry control.

The group has supported almost 150 property owners to control their blackberry and reclaim land since 2011.

Members of the action group have built a wealth of knowledge and experience in blackberry control, with a particular interest in using bio-control agents as part of the approach.

While 2019-20 was a difficult year with dry conditions, bushfires and Covid restrictions, the group and participating landowners still managed to achieve some success.

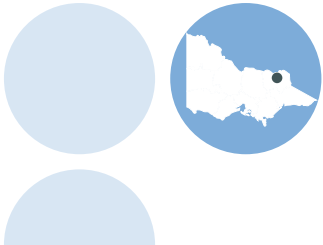
Before the pandemic cancelled events and property visits, action group committee members attended the Tallangatta Expo and the Dartmouth Bio-Control Field Day and their information stand at the Omeo Show attracted strong interest.

The action group’s steering committee includes local farmers and residents as well as representatives from the plantation industry, Towong Shire and Victorian Government departments and agencies involved with agriculture and natural resource management.



10  
NUMBER OF NEW LANDHOLDERS  
ON AGREEMENTS

177  
LANDHOLDER AGREEMENTS  
IN TOTAL





**NORTH EAST  
BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP- (ON-GOING GROUP)**  
PARTNERSHIPS ARE A KEY TO SUCCESS TO  
BLACKBERRY CONTROL IN THE UPPER MURRAY.

The North East Blackberry Action Group (NEBAG) has supported more than 125 landowners to control blackberry since forming in 2005. This year, the group continued its work with a fire recovery focus, visiting and engaging with land managers with emerging blackberry and providing assistance to support control works, post-fire. The warm and wet spring is promoting growth on most fire affected properties and early intervention is essential.

Many of the group’s original members had their blackberry under control and are now managing regrowth and seed germination to ensure the re-infestations won’t seed and are contained.

Eighty-five additional properties have had mapping undertaken ready for chemical treatment commencing in November 2020. NEBAG was able to immediately respond post-fire through the existing landholder contacts and inviting expressions of interest from all landholders who had blackberry emerging and needed assistance.



97

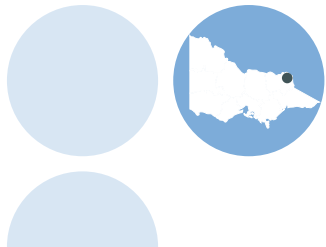
NUMBER OF LANDHOLDERS  
VISITED

41

NUMBER OF NEW LANDHOLDERS  
ON AGREEMENTS

345

PRIVATE PROPERTY INFESTATIONS  
TREATED (HA)





**STRATH CREEK  
BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP (ON GOING GROUP)**  
A RENEWED FOCUS ON BLACKBERRY CONTROL  
IS UNDERWAY IN THE STRATH CREEK REGION

The Strath Creek Blackberry Action is the second life of the King Parrot Blackberry Action Group, which achieved impressive results during its operation from 2012 to 2014.

In 2019 the Strath Creek Landcare Group revived and renamed the action group. The Strath Creek Blackberry Action group is focusing on the King Parrot Creek catchment area from Coonans Reserve in Flowerdale downstream to the Goulburn River.

The action group’s project officer has visited and mapped blackberry on 12 local properties to date. Eight have signed up to 3-year voluntary blackberry management agreements and the group’s project officer encourages and supports them in their work.



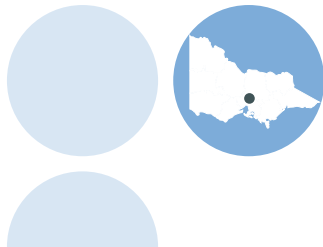
12  
NUMBER OF LANDHOLDERS  
VISITED

08  
NUMBER OF NEW LANDHOLDERS  
ON AGREEMENTS

473  
TOTAL PRIVATE PROPERTY  
VISITED (HA)

473  
PRIVATE PROPERTY  
INFESTATIONS MAPPED (HA)

20  
PRIVATE PROPERTY INFESTATIONS  
TREATED (HA)





# 05

## Local Government Support 2019-2020

Local governments are important partners in community action groups and blackberry control.

Representatives are part of blackberry action group committees, they support their demonstration and information events, and help align local roadside blackberry control with community efforts.

Yarra Ranges Shire Council, Moorabool Shire Council and the City of Whittlesea are involved with Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) funded community blackberry groups.

This year the VBT worked with Baw Baw Shire Council, Hepburn Shire Council, Nillumbik Shire Council and Yarra Ranges Shire Council to co-host blackberry information field days.

A City of Whittlesea officer also joined the VBT committee, bringing a wealth of pest management knowledge and experience from the local government perspective.

The VBT also distributed a resource kit to peri-urban councils to help raise landowner awareness of the need to control blackberry. The kit equips councils with information on blackberry control as well as VBT content for its social media and other communication platforms.







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