

# VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

Progress Report 2020-2021





# 2020-2021 Progress Report - Contents

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Cover Image:  
Blackberry Control Demonstration Event  
Walwa - 30th March 2021  
Representatives of the North East Blackberry Action Group and  
the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce with a remote control mulcher.

## Chairperson's Report

The main objective of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) is to oversee implementation of the Victorian Blackberry Strategy (VBS), with the key goal 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.

Given the constraints placed on field events by the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions, the VBT focused on upgrading online resources to support communities and individuals to decide the best options for treatment of blackberries on their properties. Additional Facebook posts, case studies, new Community Service Announcements, and maintaining a service of timely responses to emails and phone enquiries has enabled us to stay in touch with our community and assist with their blackberry control queries.

Community Service Announcements were once again screened on two 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 Federal Government's Weeds and Rabbits Program, enabling projects that will have lasting benefit to the community. A Cost Benefit Tool for calculating the costs and benefits of controlling blackberry for conservation outcomes has been completed and is on our website. It will assist those wishing to purchase or manage a property for non-agricultural outcomes - such as increased biodiversity, environmental offsets or asset

improvement - to better understand the costs. This tool complements the Agricultural Productivity Tool, which has been on the website for several years and helps farmers with livestock to calculate the productivity benefits of returning blackberry-infested land to grazing.

The funding also enabled resources for three well-attended practical demonstration days at Swifts Creek, Goongerah and the Upper Murray. This forum included presentations from specialist speakers on hands-on blackberry management. Chemical and physical methods were demonstrated including drone technology.

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.

I would like to thank Agriculture Victoria 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.

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink, reading "Lyn Coulston". Above the signature is a short, thick horizontal blue line.

Lyn Coulston OAM  
Chairperson, Victorian Blackberry Taskforce

# Blackberry: 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, harbours pest animals, out-competes native plants and 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

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.

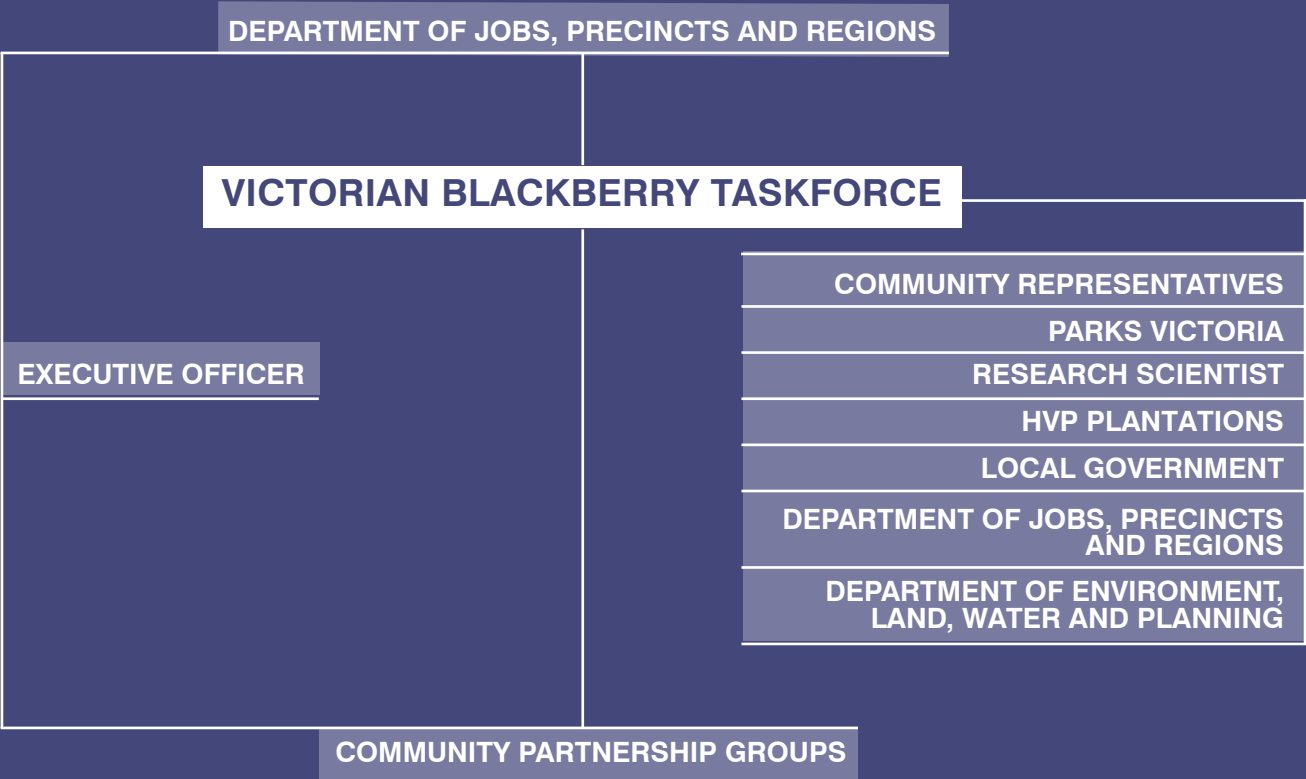
This approach has reinvigorated blackberry control efforts across Victoria, and public and private land managers are working together to reduce blackberry and protect economic and environmental values.

The Taskforce comprises 11 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.





## Victorian Blackberry Taskforce Achievements 2020-2021

**The Federal Government's Weeds and Rabbits funding initiative was a major driving force for the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce in developing a range of resources to motivate landholders. This follows on from previous Weeds and Rabbits projects.**

Further support was provided by the Victorian Government's annual allocation, allowing the VBT to continue supporting communities via the Community Partnership Program, run events and broadcast community service announcements on television.

### Weeds and Rabbits Project achievements

Project 1 - Integration, co-ordination and value-adding to deliver community-based projects in blackberry management

- Introduced the Environmental Productivity Tool to enable landholders to calculate the cost of controlling blackberry and identify potential environmental benefits.
- Produced an instructional video for the Agricultural Productivity Tool.
- Co-hosted three Blackberry Control demonstration days with local communities in Walwa, Goongerah and Swifts Creek.
- Conducted four landholder case study interviews, focusing on the Black Summer fires and biodiversity.
- Ran two Facebook advertising campaigns, with more than 60 media pieces produced and posted on the platform.
- Conducted a survey assessing the effectiveness of Mailchimp articles to VBT subscribers.
- Developed a Risk Management Plan using the Pestle approach. Risks to the implementation of the Victorian Blackberry Strategy were identified and ranked with actions.



Project 2 - Engaging with rubus growers and their local communities

- Collaborated with the Royal Institute of Technology to analyse 94 plant samples from 25 commercial rubus growers across Tasmania and Victoria with spot/blotch disease symptoms.
- Conducted three European blackberry roadside surveys in the commercial rubus-growing regions of Wandin/Seville, Deans Marsh and Trafalgar.
- Engaged with more than 20 land managers in the Wandin/Seville region, distributing blackberry control information.
- Co-hosted two blackberry control demonstration days with local communities in Bambra and Trafalgar.

### Victorian Government's Annual Funding Achievements

- Funded local project officers to facilitate community engagement.
- Helped two communities within the City of Whittlesea and the Yarra Ranges Shire.
- Aired four community service announcements on the ABC and Win TV over a 6-month period.
- Co-hosted a Bus Tour with the North East Blackberry Action Group, assessing the effects of the 2019-20 Black Summer fires in the Upper Murray region.



## Weeds and Rabbits Project

**The Federal Government's Weeds and Rabbits Project, designed to manage invasive species, has been successfully implemented. It invested in groups that manage rabbits, blackberries, serrated tussock and gorse, and introduced initiatives to improve ways of working together and ultimately control these species.**

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce, Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party, Victorian Gorse Taskforce and Victorian Rabbit Action Network have received three funding allocations since 2017 to design and deliver projects that achieve that long-term legacy.

The VBT has developed a range of tools and communication initiatives to motivate landholders, including case studies, online calculators, blackberry control demonstration days, and communication packs for local government and landholders living in environmentally and commercially sensitive areas.

The Taskforce has set up a Facebook page publishing motivational posts and updated the VBT website. That inspired 350 landholders to sign up as a 'Need Ideas Subscriber', giving them access to regular updates. Postcode data gathered from such subscribers is used to advertise future VBT events. The Taskforce is also maximising online communication via Facebook, YouTube and the VBT website.

Barriers to controlling blackberry were addressed in the Wandin/Seville region where commercial rubus growers operate. An information pack was distributed to landholders covering safe chemical usage, blackberry control and Melbourne Water's Stream Frontage Management Program.

The Weeds and Rabbit Project also funded collaboration between the Taskforce and Berries Australia and commercial rubus growers in Victoria and Tasmania in applying the newly-developed diagnostic tool for Purple Blotch Disease, *Septocytia ruborum*, a promising biocontrol for European blackberry. This can also identify similar pathogens that can affect the commercial rubus industry.





## Blackberry Control Demonstration Events 2020-2021

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce conducted a series of blackberry control demonstrations partnering with communities and local government. Baw Baw Shire Council, North East Blackberry Action Group, Upper Barwon Landcare Network, Swifts Creek Landcare Group and Goongerah Landcare Group provided logistical and promotional support to the VBT at their events.

Demonstrations were conducted at Trafalgar, Bambra, Walwa, Swifts Creek and Goongerah between March and May. All events demonstrated non-chemical, chemical, physical control methods, and drone technology. The goal was to provide all landholders with options, whether they use chemicals or are certified organic, and depending on the terrain.

Drones proved to be a highlight, showing how they can be deployed to reach areas where blackberry is hard to access. Walwa and Bambra residents explained their unique challenges associated with controlling blackberry. The Swifts Creek event highlighted other pests, including a presentation on Chilean Needle Grass.





Social Media 2020-2021

Social media has proven a vital tool for the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Online platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Mailchimp helped the VBT reach additional people during this time of limited face-to-face contact. The VBT is using Facebook to motivate landholders to control blackberry and to direct more traffic to our website and YouTube channel.

Key Social Media Metrics

VBT YouTube Channel:
2 new videos uploaded
1507 views across 32 videos
VBT Facebook:
287 followers on Facebook, with 256 likes
60 posts motivating landholders to control blackberry
VBT Mailchimp:
3 informative articles sent to VBT subscribers
347 Mailchimp contacts





## Community Partnership Program 2020-2021

**Our Community Partnership 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 blackberry infestations and working closely with landholders to help them reduce the weed.

- We supported two local blackberry control action groups in 2020-2021.
- This enabled them to employ project officers who visited 61 properties, signing 8 more landholders to 3-year voluntary blackberry management agreements.
- The project supported communities including Eden Park, Humevale, Kinglake West, Silvan and Wandin East to better advocate for co-operative blackberry management across all land tenures.

### Community Partnership Program - Current Groups

Silvan Blackberry Action Group

Whittlesea and Surrounds Blackberry Action Group / Eden Park

### Community Partnership Program - Ongoing Groups

North East Blackberry Action Group

Mitta to Murray Blackberry Action Group

Strath Creek Blackberry Action Group





## Silvan Blackberry Action Group

The Silvan Blackberry Action Group is going from strength to strength in its fight against blackberry and rabbits. The Wabbit Action Group Silvan established the group in the Summer of 2019-20 after realising blackberry was harbouring the growing rabbit population. It targets landholders within the Silvan/Wandin East region consisting of small landholdings to 30-hectare farms.

The project officer contacted landholders directly and on social media. Landholders were offered a free assessment and a long-term plan of action. Further assistance was offered via the ‘Caring for Our Local Environments’ initiative grants program.

Facebook has provided a vital link during Covid-19 restrictions, delivering targeted messages to Silvan residents. One post received more than 3000 views at the start of the spraying season.

Links to the ‘Silvan and Surrounding Areas’ page have provided information about blackberry control. The action group also uses its Instagram page to spread the message.

Yarra Ranges Shire Council sent mailouts to landholders about blackberry workshops and allowed the use of council roadside banner poles in Silvan. Collaborations with Melbourne Water and the Birds to Butterfield project have provided additional funds.

Number of landholders visited

40

Total private property visited (ha)

120

Private property infestations mapped (ha)

10

Private property infestations treated (ha)

05



Silvan Blackberry Action Group - before/after images



Whittlesea and Surrounds Blackberry Action Group / Eden Park

A community blackberry control effort is thriving in the Whittlesea area. A total of 54 private landholders from properties across Eden Park, Humevale and Kinglake West have joined the program since 2018. The project officer has provided advice on controlling blackberry and further assisted where required, including obtaining quotes from contractors for absentee landholders.

The action group targets private rural landholdings ranging in size from two hectares to more than 100 hectares. It comprises community members and representatives from Whittlesea City Council, Melbourne Water and Parks Victoria. It liaises with key public land partners including the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, VicTrack, VicRoads and Melbourne Water.

As part of the City of Whittlesea’s Blackberry Education and Compliance program, a letter was sent to blackberry-infested properties offering support from the action group.

Regular articles are published in the City of Whittlesea Rural Newsletter and the council’s Biodiversity and Land Management website.

The project officer helped older landholders submit successful applications with Melbourne Water’s Stream Frontage Management Program for weed control, revegetation and fencing along their section of the Scrubby Creek.

The group also received grants from Landcare Australia and VicTrack, funding contractors to control blackberry and other weeds across 20 hectares on the VicTrack Whittlesea-Yan Yean rail reserve.

Number of landholders visited

24

Total private property visited (ha)

1232

Private property infestations mapped (ha)

46

Private property infestations treated (ha)

1214



Whittlesea and Surrounds Blackberry Action Group  
Landholder action – Eden Park’s community engagement project delivering a better environment



## Strath Creek Blackberry Action Group

**The action group continues to work with a range of partners and private landholders to control blackberry. The project officer signed three new landholders and followed up with 10 existing landholders to monitor and support their efforts.**

The group is continuing to work alongside Murrindindi Shire Council and Agriculture Victoria to encourage non-compliant landholders to control blackberry. Murrindindi Shire has helped advertise the program via a mailout to ratepayers within the project area.

A major plantation company has agreed to control blackberry in two plantations via aerial and ground control measures.

The action group is helping two landholders apply for 'Good Neighbour Funding' to control blackberry on neighbouring Crown land.

Number  
of new  
landholders  
signed

03

Existing  
landholders  
supported  
and monitored

10

Supporting

02

Landholders  
applying for  
Good  
Neighbour  
funding



Strath Creek Blackberry Action Group  
Landowner participation - reducing blackberry on the ground







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

VBT WEBSITE

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