

# VBTnews

VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

## CONTROLLING BLACKBERRY POST-FIRE

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) acknowledges the severe impacts the fires have had on communities and the environment, not only in Victoria but nationally.

Landholders are now dealing with the effects of fire on their properties and assessing the present and future impacts on land and water and how best to manage them into the future.

Previously, the VBT has assisted communities in the aftermath of fire events, specifically in 2009, by providing support through community led Blackberry and Woody Weeds groups in Central Gippsland, Mudgegonga and Yarra Ranges. This support focused on the opportunity for landholders to control blackberry as it recovers and regrows after the fire event. Controlling blackberry at one metre high is much easier and more cost effective than controlling blackberry when it reaches three metres.

Landholders planning to use translocating chemicals as part of their blackberry control program, will achieve better results when there is sufficient growth and leafy area to ensure the chemical can be taken up and absorbed by the plant. At least one metre of hardened regrowth will usually provide enough leaf coverage for chemical uptake to the extensive root system.

For those using non-chemical treatments, the opportunity is there to keep on top of blackberry by regular physical control or the use of non-chemical products such as pine oil.



POST-FIRE BLACKBERRY REGROWTH - UPPER MURRAY

For landholders who would like further information about post-fire blackberry control including a hard copy of the Blackberry Control Manual, please contact the VBT.

VBT email - [vbt@vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au](mailto:vbt@vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au)

### BARRIERS TO CONTROLLING BLACKBERRY IN COMMERCIAL CROPPING AREAS

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) is embarking on a new project to engage landholders in commercial horticultural regions, particularly where commercial Rubus (Raspberry and Blackberry) growers operate.

The project will investigate the barriers to controlling European blackberry and provide extension materials to address these issues.

The project has begun in the Wandin-Seville region, where the VBT's Engagement Officer has distributed extension material to assist landholders in controlling blackberry effectively and safely.

A key message will be minimising the risk of chemical off-target damage, which is a real possibility in close vicinity to commercial cropping enterprises. The project will also run a series of blackberry control demonstration events.

# Blackberryaction



COLIN ARNOLD - BLACKBERRY CONTROL INFORMATION DAY

## GOATS OFFER AN EFFECTIVE TOOL IN WEED CONTROL

Grazing goats can provide landholders with an effective alternative tool in controlling blackberry and other woody weeds. Using goats to control blackberry can be a stand-alone measure or an important step in an integrated control program.

Goat grazing offers landholders a chemical free option and can be successfully used in locations that are difficult to access where more traditional chemical or mechanical control techniques are not suitable.

The use of goats is a proven method of managing blackberry infestations, because they preferentially graze blackberry over improved pasture species. Follow-up monitoring and treatment once the goats are removed is necessary.

The Orange City Council in NSW has successfully integrated goat grazing and chemical control on a heavily infested 12-hectare reserve. Council staff were amazed by the results with large infestations substantially reduced. The case study showed that goat grazing was a cost-effective control method compared to chemical treatment. For further information refer to the Weeds of National Significance Blackberry Control Manual case study: [https://vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au/VBT\\_staging2018/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/blackberry-control-manual-complete.pdf](https://vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au/VBT_staging2018/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/blackberry-control-manual-complete.pdf)

There are several important considerations before using goats as a control technique including the need for good fencing to keep goats contained, access to water, impact of grazing on non-target native plants, grazing period and careful monitoring to ensure adequate feed is available.



Colin Arnold from GrazeAway - keynote speaker at a Blackberry Control Information event co-hosted by the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and the Silvan Blackberry Action Group on the 22nd February, has been advocating and demonstrating the use of goats for weed control for over 15 years.

Colin takes a holistic approach to weed control and believes that looking after the environment and soil health should be considered when controlling weeds. This is where goats come in, according to Colin. 'Goats can give you a big hit by opening up the site, by selectively grazing blackberry and other weed species. If you keep goats on long enough, you will eventually kill the blackberry.'

All types of goats can be effective in controlling blackberry, although the Angora breed has issues with blackberry getting caught in the fleece.

Goats need to be managed well, which includes adequate fencing. Colin uses a standard ring lock fence - 8 15/30, which allows goats to put their heads through and keep the fence line clean of weeds. It is also important to remove goats at the right time before they overgraze a site.

Revegetating areas controlled by goats is important with native species such as Lomandra, Poa or Sedges being suitable. Goats will selectively graze around these species, preferring exotic grasses and woody weeds.

Further information of a typical program that uses goats to manage blackberry in grazing land are provided in 'Weed control using goats: A guide to using goats for weed control in pastures' (MLA, 2007) available at <https://www.mla.com.au/>

## Successful Launch of Silvan Blackberry Program

Over forty Yarra Valley landholders attended the official launch of the Silvan Blackberry Action Group's new engagement program, held at the Wandin East Recreation Reserve on 22 February.

With funding provided by the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce, the newly formed group will employ a project officer who will target thirty landholders offering a free property assessment and three-year Blackberry Control Plan. Landholders may also be eligible for financial incentives for control works funded by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning's (DELWP) 'Caring for Our Local Environments' Initiative grants program.

The launch provided an opportunity for guest speakers to provide valuable information on a range of topics to the landholders attending.

Adam Upton, the group's Project Officer, gave an overview of available blackberry control chemicals, which included legal responsibilities, timing and application techniques. Colin Arnold from Grazeaway explained the benefits and requirements for using goats. Nick Sell from Quickcorp demonstrated how Bioweed TM, a pine oil-based product controls blackberry. Nick emphasised the different mode of action and application rate compared with translocating chemicals. Finally, Rob Fallon - Northern Yarra Blackberry Action Group's facilitator gave an insightful talk on how their blackberry program had a positive impact on the



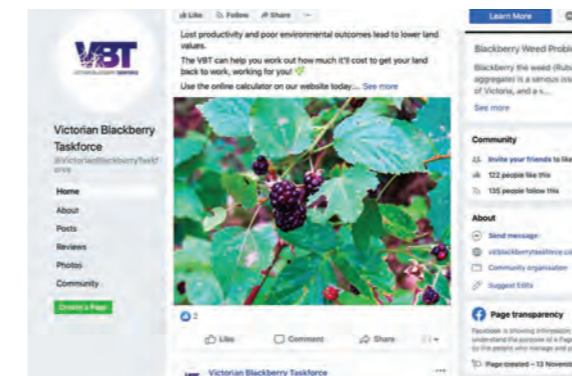
ADAM UPTON PRESENTING AT THE LAUNCH OF THE SILVAN BLACKBERRY PROGRAM

communities of Chum Creek, Steels Creek and Dixons Creek after the 2009 fires.

Adam Upton was very happy with the attendance. He said, 'I was really pleased with the interest shown in controlling blackberry, but more importantly ten landholders have registered for a property visit'.

The group's committee has representatives from community, Yarra Ranges Shires Council, Yarra Ranges Landcare Network and Yarra Valley Agri-business. The group's president Coby Tromp, was grateful for the level of support and will draw on their experience in running the program. She said 'The Yarra Ranges Landcare Network has been an important partner in getting this project up and running, and the Council has shown a willingness to align their pest program with ours. Melbourne Water has also attended a Group meeting to explain their Stream Frontage Program'.

## New Social Media Facebook Campaign



[In November 2019, the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce \(VBT\) launched a six-month Facebook campaign to promote the VBT website and encourage more visitors to the site.](#)

The VBT published 30 Facebook posts focusing on blackberry control options and the impacts blackberry has on landholders and the wider community.

Since the campaign started, the website has received 120 new 'Need Ideas' subscribers which represents an unprecedented spike in subscribers and website visits. The VBT uses this information to advertise events and disseminate blackberry control information via bi-monthly E-newsletters and regular emails.

The VBT Chair Lyn Coulston, emphasised the importance of the Facebook campaign. She said, "the increase in 'Need Ideas' subscribers, has provided us with a powerful tool to reach more people than would normally be engaged through our conventional community events and engagement programs alone."

This campaign is funded via the Federal Government's - Weeds and Rabbits Project  
VBT on Facebook: [facebook.com/VictorianBlackberryTaskforce](https://facebook.com/VictorianBlackberryTaskforce)

# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM UPDATE

## Whittlesea and Surrounds Blackberry Action Group (WASBAG)

Over the last three-year period, the Whittlesea and Surrounds Blackberry Action Group (WASBAG) has signed up 51 landholders to their Community Partnership Program.

Their project officer has assessed blackberry infestations on properties and negotiated 3-year control plans with individual landowners. Various options for blackberry control are explored when the project officer visits a property. Mulching, slashing, non-chemical and chemical treatments are discussed. Some landholders decided to engage a contractor and others hired the King Lake Landcare Group's spray rig to carry out the work themselves.

The WASBAG group is supported by the City of Whittlesea and has provided landholders with extra confidence and capacity to take ownership of the Blackberry problem. Carol and John, Eden Park landholder participants highlighted the value of the program and are now looking beyond their 3-year plan. They said, 'We have now safely and effectively eradicated all but a very small regrowth of blackberries on our property. This has once again been



PRIVATE LANDHOLDER, PLENTY RIVER  
BEFORE & AFTER IMAGES

treated, and from now on it will be an easy annual inspection of the property to find and treat any emerging blackberry plants.'

The group's project officer has also assisted three landholders in applying for a grant under Melbourne Water's Stream Frontage Program to help control weeds, revegetate and fence along sections of Plenty River and Scrubby Creek.

WASBAG is determined to get all land managers on board with this project, which includes applying for funding for blackberry control on a Vic Track rail easement at Whittlesea.

## Diagnostic tool assisting *Rubus* growers and future biocontrol options



The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) in 2019 funded the development of a diagnostic tool for Purple Blotch Disease (PBD), which although not currently present in Australia, is a promising bio-control option for European blackberry. This tool will assist researchers in identifying the pathogen if research into PBD recommences.

This tool can also benefit the commercial *Rubus* industry who are affected by similar types of disease pathogens on their commercial cultivars. A leaflet outlining the spot, blotch and rust diseases of *Rubus* was published in 2019 and is available on the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce Website.

The VBT has also engaged a research scientist who has completed the collection of 150 plant samples across 30 commercial enterprises in Victoria and Tasmania. Spot diseases will be identified by the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and communicated back to individual growers with information to assist them in implementing control measures.

This project is funded via the Federal Government's-Weed and Rabbits Project



### CONTACT

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