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VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

WOODNOOK PROJECT PROGRESSING

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) has teamed up with some unusual partners to tackle the increasing prevalence of blackberry along a section of Dixons Creek – goats.

The VBT provided funding to the Northern Yarra Landcare Network's Woodnook Project early this year and will use a combination of goats, a relocatable fence and chemical control to fight the weed.

The VBT has already granted \$16,000 for fencing materials and Melbourne Water will fund the hire of goats and chemical-control contractors. The Northern Yarra Weed Action Group will provide volunteer labour and project management expertise.

This section of Dixons Creek has access issues including potential hazards hidden by dense vegetation. It is hoped the goats will clear areas to safely allow access for chemical-control contractors who will control regrowth.

The area is known as Manna Gum Riparian Forest and is characterised by sensitive vegetation including tree ferns and at least one rare species of plant, *Eucalyptus fulgens*.

Volunteers dedicated 50 hours of labour in September, installing 400 metres of fencing and welcoming the goats.

The Northern Yarra Weed Action Group will monitor the goats over two months in summer to ensure areas are not overgrazed. Goats will



COLIN ARNOLD, GRAZEWAY - PICTURED WITH HIS GOATS



be removed, and blackberry regrowth chemically treated in autumn. This process will be repeated over the next four to five years as the fence is moved downstream.

The project is supported by the Northern Yarra Landcare Network, Northern Yarra Weed Action Group and the Dixons Creek Landcare Group.

The Northern Yarra Weed Action Group's project officer is engaging with neighbours to encourage them to undertake their own blackberry controls.

Blackberryaction



CHOOSING THE RIGHT CHEMICAL IS IMPORTANT

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GLYPHOSATE ON BLACKBERRY

The VBT receives many enquiries about chemical control and is most commonly asked what the best product is to use.

All registered blackberry control chemicals have a role depending on the situation. It is important that landholders obtain expert information from a chemical supplier or an agronomist before selecting a chemical. Glyphosate bioactive is one such product that needs careful consideration.

This product is registered for use in and around waterways. Although less harmful on frogs than other registered blackberry control chemicals, there are potential adverse factors to consider. Feedback from landholders about this product is often about the need for constant follow-up, increased resistance, off-target kills and improved conditions for weed invasion.

One landholder who sprayed a property for several years with Glyphosate, according to the directions, said the chemical seemed less effective as time went by.

"I noticed that blackberries I sprayed regrew and needed follow-up the next year," he said. "After receiving expert advice, I decided to use Triclopyr Picloram and results have improved remarkably and grasses were not damaged or killed either."

Another landholder observed damage to non-target species: "I observed poor control rates on blackberry while at the same time killing other species such as Dianella, Bursaria, Acacias and summer-growing native grasses, leaving bare ground that was recolonised by other weed species."

The VBT recognises that chemical control is one of the best ways of achieving long-term results but acknowledges that each chemical has limitations.

Please be aware, do your research and obtain the best advice for your unique situation.



COMMUNITY SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

The VBT aired three community service announcements on WIN television with key messages concerning 'off-target damage', 'being a good neighbour' and 'having a plan'. The ads ran for six weeks from the start of August, two of which were new.

VBT chairperson Lyn Coulston said the television commercials were a useful tool in getting information out to the community, especially concerning off-target risks.

"The VBT is really keen to make sure landowners are controlling blackberry in an appropriate way," she said. "It's not about controlling blackberry at all costs. We have come across many situations where inappropriate control techniques or the use of chemicals have caused detrimental effects to the environment and industry."

The VBT also ran a community service announcement to make landholders aware of the impacts of not controlling blackberry.

"This is why the VBT will focus on being a good neighbour," Lyn said. "Too often we get complaints from the public about their neighbours not controlling blackberry."

The third community service announcement focussed on planning.

"It is very important to put a plan in place before starting," Lyn said. "It is a good idea to map your blackberry and note any sensitive areas including crops, waterways and native vegetation."

Lyn urged landholders to take "bite-sized chunks of the problem" and carry out follow-up works.

Tackling weeds together at Christmas Hills

Important weed control works have been conducted in Christmas Hills, located on the outskirts of Melbourne, to prevent the spread of invasive plants which can impact native vegetation as part of a joint program.

Staff from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning's (DELWP) Port Phillip region worked with Melbourne Water, Nillumbik Shire Council, Heritage Golf Club and landholders to deliver targeted weed control works across various sites in the district as part of the Good Neighbour program.

Good Neighbour Program Manager, David Miralles said the project had targeted areas adjacent to the Yarra River, which would complement landholder efforts on neighbouring Bend of Isles properties, as well as Melbourne Water works along the Yarra River corridor.

"This work is critical in preventing the spread of invasive weeds and negatively impacting on native plants.

"The work is in response to concerns from neighbours and local groups who are seeking assistance to help reduce the weeds to levels which can be maintained into the future by the Heritage Golf Club, adjacent landholders, and local volunteer groups," Mr. Miralles said.



IMPORTANT WEED CONTROL WORKS CONDUCTED IN CHRISTMAS HILLS

The Blackberry infestations have been reduced over the past two years, strengthening partnerships between DELWP and the community.

These works have allowed landholders, Heritage Golf Club and Melbourne Water to focus their efforts on tackling other emerging weeds within the area.

Mr Miralles said the Christmas Hills project is one of over 200 projects being delivered across the state by DELWP and Parks Victoria through the Good Neighbour Program this year.

For more information about this program please contact your nearest DELWP office. You can also contact our customer service centre on 136 186 or by email customer.service@delwp.vic.gov.au

New Community Engagement Programs To Begin



VBT COMMUNITY VISIT- PHEASANT CREEK
VBT CHAIR - LYN COULSTON (2ND FROM LEFT)

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and the Pheasant Creek Blackberry Action Group are pleased to announce the new Blackberry Action officer Chris Cobern. Chris' role will be to work with the Pheasant Creek Blackberry Action Group to engage landholders in developing management plans for blackberry control within the Pheasant Creek area, specifically the Extons Road and Tooheys Road area.

Chris has been involved in Natural Resource Management and weed control for many years and is also the Landcare Facilitator and Project Officer for the Upper Goulburn Landcare Network.

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce has approved funding for two community programs.

The Pheasant Creek Blackberry Action Group will target 55 properties around the Pheasant Creek region, 10 kilometres northwest of Kinglake. The group is keen to control blackberry to reduce Queensland Fruit Fly within the region. Blackberry is a host species to this damaging pest.

The group's committee includes representatives from Parks Victoria, Murrindindi Shire and Agribusiness Yarra Valley. Parks Victoria will support the program by controlling blackberry within Kinglake Bushland Reserve using goats and chemical control. The VBT will provide a 500-metre relocatable fence to contain the goats. This fence is currently used at Dixons Creek as part of the Woodnook project. The reserve is characterised by tall Eucalypts and tree ferns.

The Flowerdale Blackberry Action Group will target a diverse range of landholders within the Flowerdale region. The area is characterised by larger farming enterprises and small lifestyle blocks. Fifty landholders will be engaged in the blackberry control program, which is supported by Murrindindi Shire.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL BLACKBERRY PROGRAM

The VBT supports grassroots programs that are, importantly, embedded within community and run by community. This unique approach provides support to landholders to help initiate blackberry control and reinvigorate enthusiasm towards ongoing management.

Relationships between community groups or landholders and their project officer is one reason this approach has been so successful.

Danielle Cleland, Project Officer with the North East Blackberry Action Group, said the Project Officer is the direct contact person for landholders.

"From my experience it works well if the Project Officer is not someone directly involved within the community, so as to avoid any perception of bias or personal conflict.

"A good project officer who can relate to people easily, be open to different situations and provide an unbiased point of support will quickly engage landholders.

"The ability to build relationships with people, starting where they want to start - blackberry in this case - is a critical skill. As the reasons for unmanaged blackberry are complex, understanding 'why' is necessary in order to proceed with a negotiated management plan."

Danielle said planning is the key.

"First, establish that weeds are the responsibility of the landholder, understand why the blackberry infestation is out of control then negotiate a plan," she said.

"Make an appointment and sit down with landholders at the kitchen table or the tray of the ute to discuss the problem. Provide a map of the property and negotiate an achievable agreement; a three-year plan."



PLANNING IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Danielle comes prepared with a laptop, mapping software and portable printer and leaves landholders with the action plan.

"This is really important as it completes the process and saves time and money," she said.

"I follow-up annually with a phone call or visit."



Heavy machinery the focus

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and the South Gippsland Landcare Network (SGLN) ran another successful blackberry control demonstration day on the 30 November - attracting 30 people to a Mirboo North private property and adjacent roadside area.

The event was the fourth VBT/SGLN collaboration undertaken during the past ten month period, and featured the demonstration of heavy machinery for the control of blackberry.



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