

PROGRESS REPORT
VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE
2021-2022



PROGRESS REPORT VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE 2021-2022

Cover Image:
BLACKBERRY CONTROL DEMONSTRATION EVENT
SOUTH GIPPSLAND - 05 FEBRUARY 2022

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT 2021-2022

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.

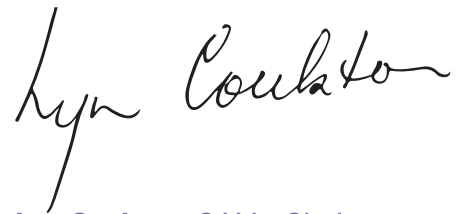
The VBT has a focus on upgrading online resources to support communities and individuals to decide the best options for treatment of blackberries on their properties. Additional Facebook posts, case studies, new Community Service Announcements, and maintaining a service of timely responses to emails and phone enquiries has enabled us to stay in touch with our community and assist with their blackberry control queries.

Demonstration days are being held across the State post pandemic and attendances have been very good. It is valuable for landholders to be able to see in person the different control methods in addition to seeing them on line. Chemical and physical control methods are demonstrated at these events including drone technology, organic control and how to get the best results from using herbicides.

The VBT for the first time funded a television ad campaign which ran for a six week period in August on Win Television focusing on 'off-target damage', being a 'good neighbour' and 'having a plan'. This campaign generated a large increase in visits to the VBT website and phone 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 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.



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

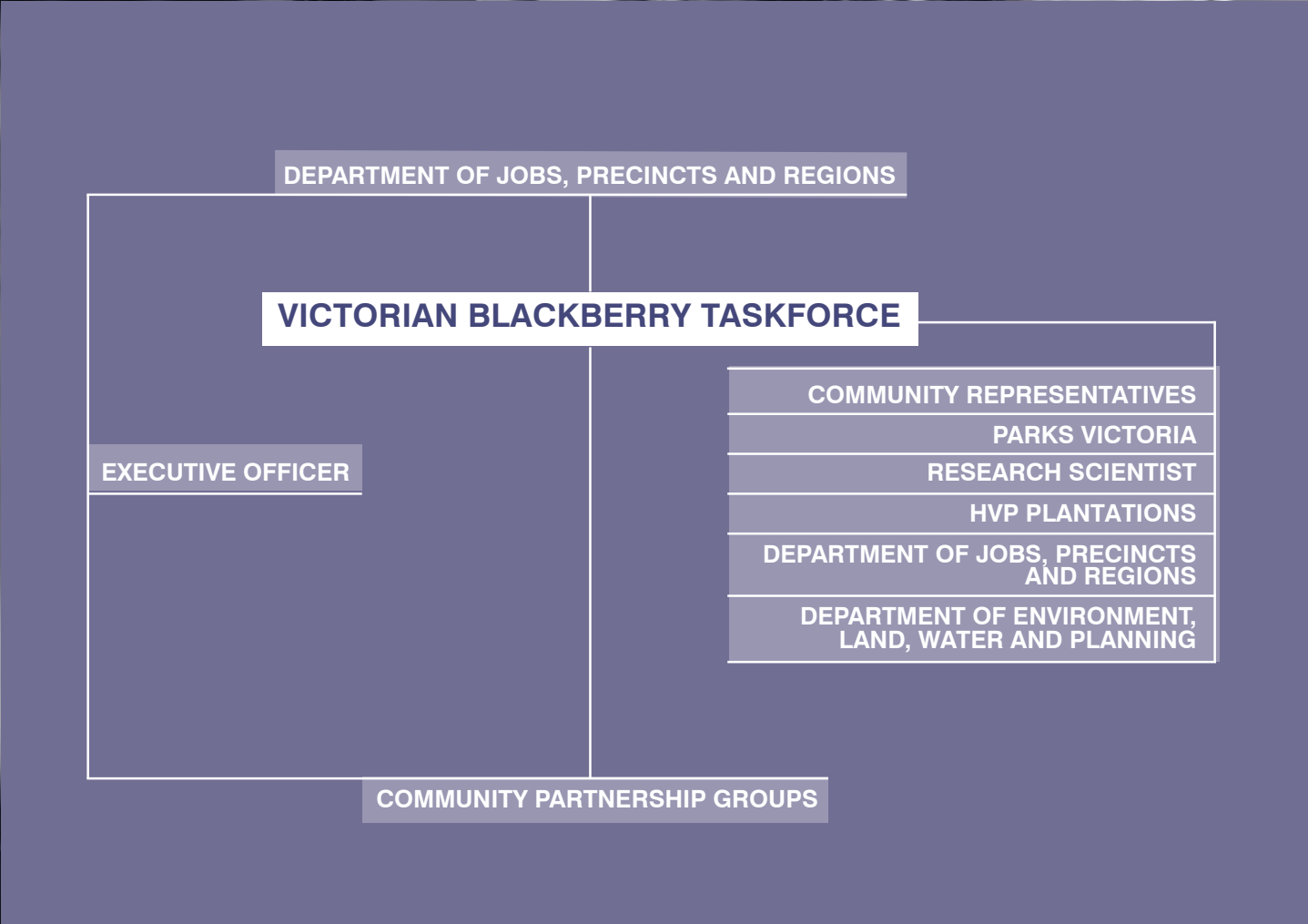
ONE OF FOUR VICTORIAN COMMUNITY PEST MANAGEMENT GROUPS, THE VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE ENCOURAGES AND SUPPORTS COMMUNITY GRASS-ROOTS ACTION, WITH PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION A KEY FOCUS.

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 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.





VBT ACHIEVEMENTS 2021/2022

- Funded two community blackberry Programs at Eden Park and Dixons Creek.
- Co-hosted three blackberry control demonstration days with communities.
- Funded and attended an information stand at the New South Wales & Victoria Combined Weeds Conference and the Tallangatta Expo.
- Visited two communities to outline the VBT's Community Partnership Program.
- Developed a case study focusing on biodiversity values.
- Developed a community service announcement focusing on biodiversity values.
- Aired three community service announcements for three months on WIN Television, Prime TV and the ABC.
- Attracted 4655 Website sessions to the VBT website.
- Posted 19 Facebook posts.
- Produced one newsletter.
- Uploaded five YouTube videos attracting 367 views.

VBT KEY WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA METRICS 2021-2022

Social media continues to be a vital tool in helping the VBT reach landholders, with key messages delivered via our Facebook page, website and YouTube channel.

While email is the main form of communication from the public, Facebook enquiries have increased this year.

The VBT continues to build and improve our website by updating content and design. Our Facebook page remains a powerful medium in motivating landholders and directing traffic to our website and YouTube channel.

KEY STATISTICS

VBT WEBSITE

- 4655 website sessions
- Region's sessions originated - 3335 Victoria; 867 New South Wales; 119 South Australia; 108 Queensland; 92 Western Australia; 80 Australian Capital Territory; 51 Tasmania; 3 Northern Territory
- 50.64% desktop sessions; 46.76% mobile sessions; 2.61% tablet sessions
- 2.04 average page views per session
- 2.07 average minutes per session

TOP 10 VIEWED PAGES

01 VBT Home Page	- 6986 views
02 Managing Blackberry	- 1439 views
03 Goats offer an effective tool in weed control	- 770 views
04 Resources	- 743 views
05 Managing blackberry herbicides helpful tips	- 432 views
06 Blog	- 318 views
07 Community Partnerships	- 281 views
08 New blackberry videos	- 267 views
09 Contact	- 248 views
10 Managing blackberry herbicides at a glance	- 208 views

TOP 10 LANDING PAGES

01 VBT Home Page
02 Goats offer an effective tool in weed control
03 Managing Blackberry
04 Managing blackberry herbicides helpful tips
05 VBT Blog
06 Resources
07 Physical control
08 Weed control using goats
09 Community Partnerships
10 Demonstrating effective blackberry control techniques - Creswick

VBT KEY WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA METRICS 2021-2022

VBT YOUTUBE CHANNEL

- 5 new videos uploaded with 367 views
- 1396 views across 37 videos
- 30 subscribers to the channel
- 6640 overall views of VBT online videos

VBT FACEBOOK

- 313 followers on Facebook, with 276 likes
- 19 new posts / 87 total posts motivating landholders to control blackberry

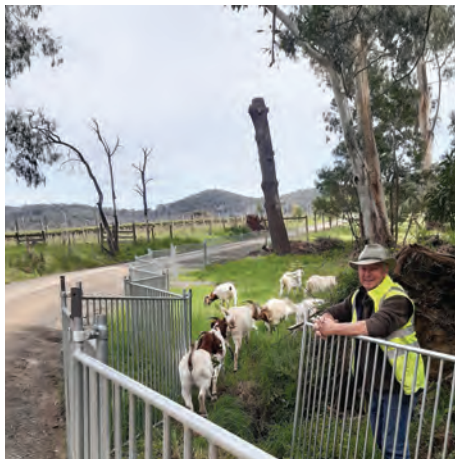
VBT MAILCHIMP

- 1 newsletter & 3 introductory campaigns distributed to VBT subscribers
- 350 Mailchimp contacts



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The VBT continues to engage with community in a variety of ways by funding the Community Partnership Program and Blackberry Control Demonstration Days. This year the VBT has also provided support to an innovative project managed by the Northern Yarra Landcare Network - the Woodnook Project.



WOODNOOK PROJECT

The VBT has thrown its support behind the Woodnook project, which aims to improve the diversity of Dixons Creek.



EDEN PARK PROJECT

The Whittlesea and Surrounds Blackberry Action Group continues to tackle blackberry, focusing on the upper catchment area in Eden Park and Upper Plenty River.



NEBAG

The North East Blackberry Action Group continued supporting the fire affected communities in the Upper Murray to control blackberries and other weeds.



DEMONSTRATION DAYS

The VBT and the South Gippsland Landcare Network (SGLN) co-hosted three blackberry control demonstration events in February.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WOODNOOK PROJECT

The VBT has thrown its support behind the Woodnook project, which aims to improve the diversity of Dixons Creek. The project, coordinated by the Northern Yarra Landcare Network, Northern Yarra Weed Action Group and the Dixons Creek Landcare Group, aims to tackle the increasing prevalence of weeds with the help of goats.

This area is known as Manna Gum Riparian Forest and includes at least one rare species of plant, *Eucalyptus fulgens*. This section of Dixons Creek has access issues with potential hazards hidden by large amounts of weeds. It is hoped grazing goats will clear areas to then allow access by chemical-control contractors.

The VBT granted \$16,000 for a relocatable fence to contain the goats as part of an integrated weed-control program. The goats will be monitored over one to two months in summer to ensure areas are not overgrazed. Once the goats are removed, the regrowth of weeds including blackberry will be chemically-treated in autumn. This process will be repeated over a five-year period, moving the 500-metre fence downstream as each section is treated.

Melbourne Water will fund the hire of goats and chemical-control contractors. Private landholders adjacent to the project area will support the program by controlling their weeds. Extra care will be taken around vineyards with chemical control taking place after harvest.



WOODNOOK PROJECT

Pictured: Colin Arnold, 'GrazeAway' - hired the goats out for the project

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EDEN PARK PROJECT

The Whittlesea and Surrounds Blackberry Action Group continues to tackle blackberry, focusing on the upper catchment area in Eden Park and Upper Plenty River.

The group works alongside private landholders, the City of Whittlesea, Upper Goulburn Landcare Network, Whittlesea Landcare Group, Kinglake Landcare Group, VicTrack, Landcare Australia Ltd, Scouts Victoria - Warringal Scout Camp, Melbourne Water and Regional Roads Victoria.

A total of 29 landholders received support including assistance in developing a blackberry control plan, receiving a chemical rebate, access to a spray unit or help in applying for Melbourne Water's Stream Frontage Program. The Stream Frontage Program provides support in undertaking weed control and revegetation in riparian zones.

VicTrack has continued to fund contractor spraying on the 20-hectare VicTrack Whittlesea-Yan Yean rail reserve for a third year.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT NORTH EAST BLACKBERRY ACTION GROUP

The North East Blackberry Action Group (NEBAG) continued supporting the fire affected communities in the Upper Murray to control blackberries and other weeds.

The 2021-22 spring and summer was very wet and warm which encouraged prolific blackberry growth to add to the large infestations from a similar season in 2020-21 immediately following the bushfires in December 2019 and January 2020.

External funding has enabled assistance to be given with limited contractor spraying days which were a definite help to landholders struggling with fence replacement programs, erosion impacts and reasonably inaccessible terrain. Each landholder received an on-site property inspection and is assisted with preparing a blackberry management plan with other highly invasive weeds also taken into account.

The project officer kept in touch with the landholders as needed to address concerns and with an annual property visit. Over two hundred landholders have been involved in the fire recovery program to date.

The resurgence of large blackberry infestations has demonstrated that blackberry is a weed which can return quickly after fire or soil disturbance and is always present as a seed bank once the plants have been controlled.

NEBAG will continue their partnership program in the 2022-23 season and plan to include at least another 40 landholders in property visits and planning. There have also been several partnership programs with public land managers in high conservation value reserves and along roadsides which will continue until the end of 2023.





COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT **BLACKBERRY CONTROL DEMONSTRATION DAYS 2021-2022**

The VBT and the South Gippsland Landcare Network (SGLN) co-hosted three blackberry control demonstration events in February: two at the Koonwarra Cricket Ground and one at the Hallston Community Hall grounds.

More than 90 people observed drone technology and 'Best Practice' blackberry control techniques and listened to informative presentations from Government and community representatives.

Once again, there was much interest in drones as people seek alternative ways to access blackberry infestations that are hard to reach. The demonstration days also educated people about licensing requirements for operating drones.

Weed-control contractors demonstrated blackberry-control techniques including physical, chemical and certified organic options. Best Practice control techniques were discussed, including the importance of developing a control plan and integrating control methods.

SGLN invited 20 landholders to develop a weed-control plan with a project officer.



COMMUNITY VISITS

VBT community visit to explain the Community Partnership Program. Pictured from left: Bronwyn Koll, Agribusiness Yarra Valley; Lyn Coulston, VBT; Tony Fitzgerald, Parks Victoria and Sue McNair, Murrindindi Shire Council.



WEEDS CONFERENCE 2022

New South Wales & Victoria Combined Weeds Conference 2022, Albury. Pictured from left: Anthony Jarvis, Lyn Coulston and Barton Roberts.

DEMONSTRATION DAY

February 2022, Koonwarra South Gippsland - Physical Control Demonstration

web www.vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au

email vbt@vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au

youtube [Victorian Blackberry Taskforce](https://www.youtube.com/VictorianBlackberryTaskforce)

facebook facebook.com/VictorianBlackberryTaskforce

