

PROGRESS REPORT

VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

2022-2023



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COVER IMAGE:
WOODNOOK PROJECT
VBT COMMITTEE VISIT - 23 MARCH 2023



CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

2022-2023

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 control blackberry.

The key to achieving this objective is by supporting all land managers to implement control programs on their properties. By providing quality information in various formats, we try to make sure everyone has the tools to decide which control methods are the most suitable for their situation.

Resources to make these decisions are available through the diverse education and information material available on the VBT website to enable all land managers who wish to undertake control measures to do so using best practice blackberry management tailored to individual needs.

Individual communities concerned about local blackberry infestations encourage landholders to address their blackberry in their own interest and that of the broader local community. Restricting spread of seed and seedlings and reducing plant biomass protects productivity and biodiversity once a few landholders act to manage their blackberry. This action can prompt others to start and gradually a reduction of blackberry on a landscape scale is evident.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

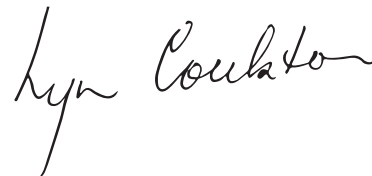
2022-2023

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. Facebook posts, case studies, Community Service Announcements, television campaigns, demonstration days 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. New technology, organic treatments, physical control methods and traditional herbicide treatments are showcased at demonstration sessions held across Victoria.

It is valuable for landholders to be able to see in person the different control methods in addition to seeing them online. The theme of 'blackberry control is everyone's responsibility' 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 an 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 will be responded to promptly or please 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



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

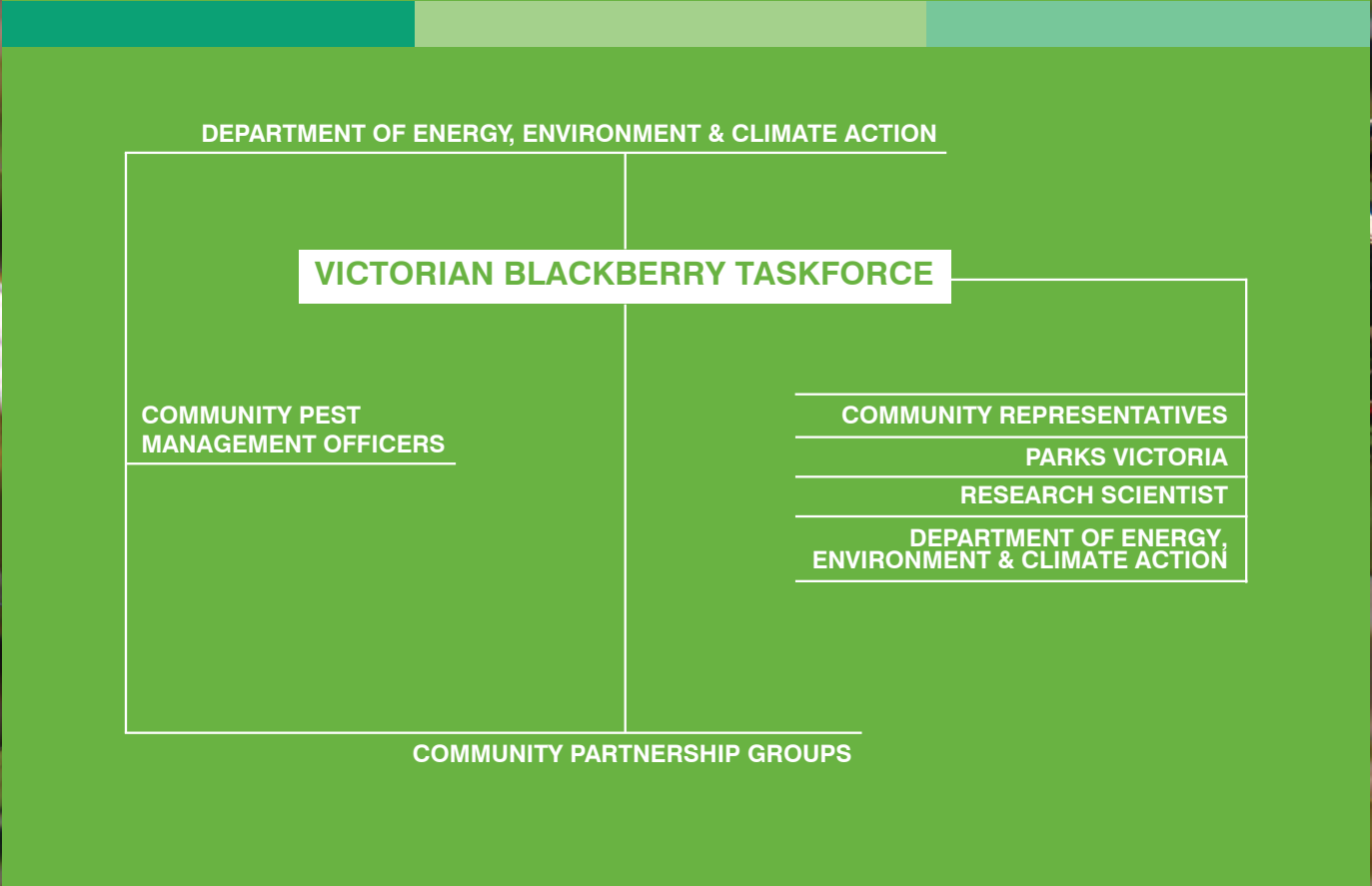
One of four Victorian Community Pest Management Groups, the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce encourages and supports community grass-roots action, with partnerships and collaboration a key focus.

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 ten members, including six community members, a research scientist and representatives from Parks Victoria and Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. 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.





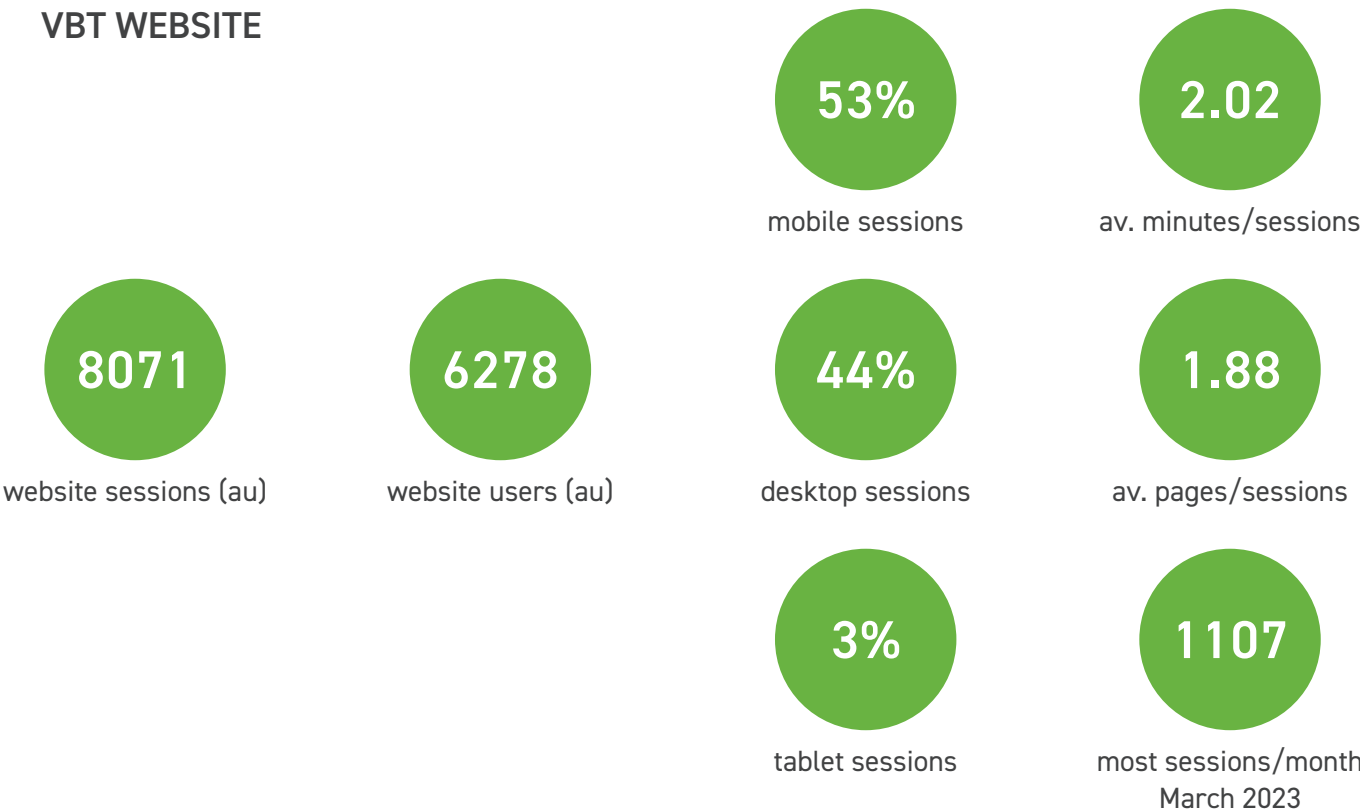
VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE **ACHIEVEMENTS** 2022-23

- Funded a community blackberry program at Pheasant Creek.
- Funded 2 goat control projects at Pheasant Creek and Dixons Creek.
- Co-hosted four blackberry control demonstration days with communities.
- Developed one television commercial focusing on being a 'Good Neighbour'.
- Aired three television commercials for 6 months on WIN Television.
- Funded a research project - Is invasive European blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus* spp. agg.) a viable host to Queensland Fruit Fly (*Bactrocera tryoni*)?
- Attracted 8071 website sessions to the VBT website.
- Posted 17 Facebook posts.
- Produced one VBT newsletter.
- 75 new VBT subscribers (425 in total)
- 3 MailChimp newsletters and 2 introductory campaigns sent to VBT subscribers.
- Uploaded 4 YouTube videos attracting 648 views.

VBT KEY WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT 2022-2023

The VBT website engagement mirrored last year's strong results. The increase in traffic over the past two years has coincided with an annual Win Television advertising campaign.

VBT WEBSITE



TOP 10 VIEWED WEBSITE PAGES

- 01 VBT Home Page - 5,346 views
- 02 Managing Blackberry - 2,220 views
- 03 Managing Blackberry: herbicides helpful tips - 1,604 views
- 04 Resources - 1,137 views
- 05 Goats offer an effective tool in weed control - 867 views
- 06 Managing Blackberry: Biological Control - 528 views
- 07 Physical Control - 502 views
- 08 Managing Blackberry: herbicides at a glance - 463 views
- 09 Community Partnerships - 439 views
- 10 Managing Blackberry: Herbicides - 407 views



VBT Home Page



Managing Blackberry

TOP 10 WEBSITE LANDING PAGES

- 01 VBT Home Page
- 02 Managing blackberry herbicides helpful tips
- 03 Goats offer an effective tool in weed control
- 04 Managing Blackberry
- 05 Physical Control
- 06 Managing Blackberry: Biological Control
- 07 Resources
- 08 Controlling Blackberry
- 09 VBT Blog
- 10 Weed control using goats



Herbicides Helpful Tips

VBT **KEY WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA** ENGAGEMENT 2022-2023

VBT YOUTUBE CHANNEL

- 4 new videos uploaded with 648 views (July 2022 – June 2023)
- 3550 views across 41 videos (July 2022 – June 2023)
- 51 subscribers to the channel
- 9688 overall views (290 hours) of VBT YouTube channel videos (Feb 2018 – June 2023)

VBT FACEBOOK

- 59 new followers / 373 total followers on Facebook, with 319 likes
- 17 new posts / 104 total posts motivating landholders to control blackberry

VBT MAILCHIMP

- 3 newsletters & 2 introductory campaigns distributed to VBT subscribers
- 425 Mailchimp subscribers



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The VBT is the principal source of reliable information on the blackberry weed, prevention measures and management options.

The success of the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce is attributed to engagement with land managers in diverse ways to suit the ability of people to be able to learn through the communication methods available to them.



WOODNOOK PROJECT

The Woodnook project has made terrific gains in restoring a section of Dixons Creek near Yarra Glen.



PHEASANT CREEK

The Pheasant Creek Blackberry Action group is made up of several key partners including Murrindindi Shire Council, Parks Victoria, Yarra Valley Agri-Business-Queensland Fruit Fly Group, and local landholders.



NEBAG

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



DEMONSTRATION DAYS

Four blackberry control demonstration events held across Victoria. An opportunity for landholders to visualise 'best practice' blackberry control measures and interact with experts.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

WOODNOOK PROJECT

Woodnook project: goats changing the landscape - for the better.

The Woodnook Project has made terrific gains in restoring a section of Dixons Creek near Yarra Glen. The relocatable fence - funded by the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce, secured goats that controlled weeds including blackberry during spring and summer last year.

The project is an initiative of the Northern Yarra Landcare Network supported by the Northern Yarra Blackberry Action Group, Melbourne Water, and adjacent landowners.

The project area is characterised by heavy infestations of blackberry which is inaccessible and potentially dangerous for spraying contractors to navigate.

Following the removal of goats, a flora assessment was undertaken to measure the change in flora composition. The assessment indicated a significant change where blackberry was the major understory species. The site is now seeing regrowth of several native species including sedges. The site will now be monitored for blackberry regrowth and controlled by chemical when required.

The Woodnook project team plan to attend the site in spring to shift the fence further down-stream. Goats will arrive shortly after and the process repeated.

The project is anticipated to continue for the next 3-4 years.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PHEASANT CREEK PROJECT

The Pheasant Creek Blackberry Action Group is made up of several key partners including Murrindindi Shire Council, Parks Victoria, Yarra Valley Agri-Business-Queensland Fruit Fly Group, and local landholders. Their project officer successfully engaged with 20 landholders providing guidance on blackberry control.

Parks Victoria (PV) has been a major contributor to the project by controlling blackberry within the King Lake Reserve by using goats in conjunction with the VBT's relocatable fence. PV employees followed up with a brush cutter to remove the defoliated blackberry canes. The area will be monitored for regrowth and spot sprayed when required.

The Murrindindi Shire Council has committed to supporting the project by controlling blackberry on roadsides within the project area.

Further support by the VBT was provided for the program by providing funding for a blackberry control demonstration day. 40 people attended the event which featured drone and EcoBlade™ technology and chemical control application demonstrations.

The group will commence a second year under the VBT's Community Partnership Program this coming spring.

Goats used in this project were provided and actively managed by Colin Arnold - GrazeAway.



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 2022-23 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 following the bushfires in December 2019.

External funding has enabled assistance to be given with limited contractor spraying days which enabled landholders struggling with fence replacement programs, erosion impacts and inaccessible terrain to complete timely blackberry control. 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 throughout the year and with an annual property visit. Over two hundred and fifty landholders have been involved in blackberry management through the fire recovery program to date. Many have also taken the opportunity to assess their property, with assistance from NEBAG, and plan land management works five years ahead.

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. Prompt treatment helps reduce the likelihood of small infestations becoming out of control and difficult to manage in the future.



NEBAG will continue their partnership program in the 2023-24 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 2022-2023

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce co-hosted four blackberry control events with communities. These events demonstrated 'best practice' blackberry control measures including physical, chemical, and organic control measures. Chemical control demonstrations included backpacks and larger spray units.

These events enabled landholders to visualise action on the ground and interact with the experts.

As expected, landholders continue to be impressed with drone technology and heavy machinery. The use of drones has grown exponentially since the Victorian Government allowed the tool to be used for chemical application. Physical control demonstrations featured brush cutters and larger machinery with grabbers and mulching attachments. The EcoBlade™ technology was also demonstrated at the Pheasant Creek event which applies chemicals simultaneously as it mulches.

The Pheasant Creek event was also an opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of goats within sensitive areas. Parks Victoria with assistance of the VBT funded relocatable fence used goats to control a section of a reserve at King Lake.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BLACKBERRY CONTROL DEMONSTRATION DAYS 2022-2023



23 JULY - MURRINDINDI BLACKBERRY CONTROL INFORMATION EVENT
Co-hosted with Yea River Catchment Landcare Group.

Attendance - 25 people

Presentation topics - Murrindindi Shire Council's Roadside Pest Program, safe chemical application techniques and 'Best Practice' blackberry control techniques

Demonstrations - Drone demonstration.



30 NOVEMBER - SOUTH GIPPSLAND BLACKBERRY CONTROL DEMONSTRATION DAY
Co-hosted with South Gippsland Landcare Network.

Attendance - 30 people

Presentation topics - South Gippsland Shire Council's Roadside Pest Program

Demonstrations - Physical, chemical and drone control demonstrations.



12 MARCH - BEECH FOREST BLACKBERRY CONTROL DEMONSTRATION DAY
Co-hosted with The Quarry Project

Attendance - 25 people

Presentation topics - Tour and talk about the 'Quarry Project' and safe chemical application techniques

Demonstrations - Drone, brush cutter, organic and chemical control demonstrations.



19 MARCH - PHEASANT CREEK BLACKBERRY CONTROL DEMONSTRATION.
Co-hosted with Pheasant Creek Blackberry Action Group

Attendance - 25 people

Demonstrations - Drone, chemical, EcoBlade™ and goat control demonstrations.



COMMUNITY VISITS
Victorian Blackberry Taskforce committee visited the Woodhook project site.



WEEDS CONFERENCE
The VBT Chair Lyn Coulston, presented a discussion on 'Striking a balance - understanding community's expectations and encouraging responsible blackberry management in Victoria'.

RESEARCH

Queensland Fruit Fly linked to European blackberry.

The VBT funded project investigating the link between Queensland Fruit Fly (QFF) and European blackberry has found evidence that QFF uses European blackberry as a host.

The VBT will adopt all recommendations from the final report which includes extending the sampling into the 2024 season to strengthen the dataset. The sampling will be more extensive and cover much of northern and north eastern Victoria with emphasis north of the divide. Ballarat and Geelong will be included .

The next round of sampling will begin this coming summer to coincide with the blackberries fruiting season.



Blackberries. Let's take action together.

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce continues to provide support, information and resources for successful blackberry control.



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