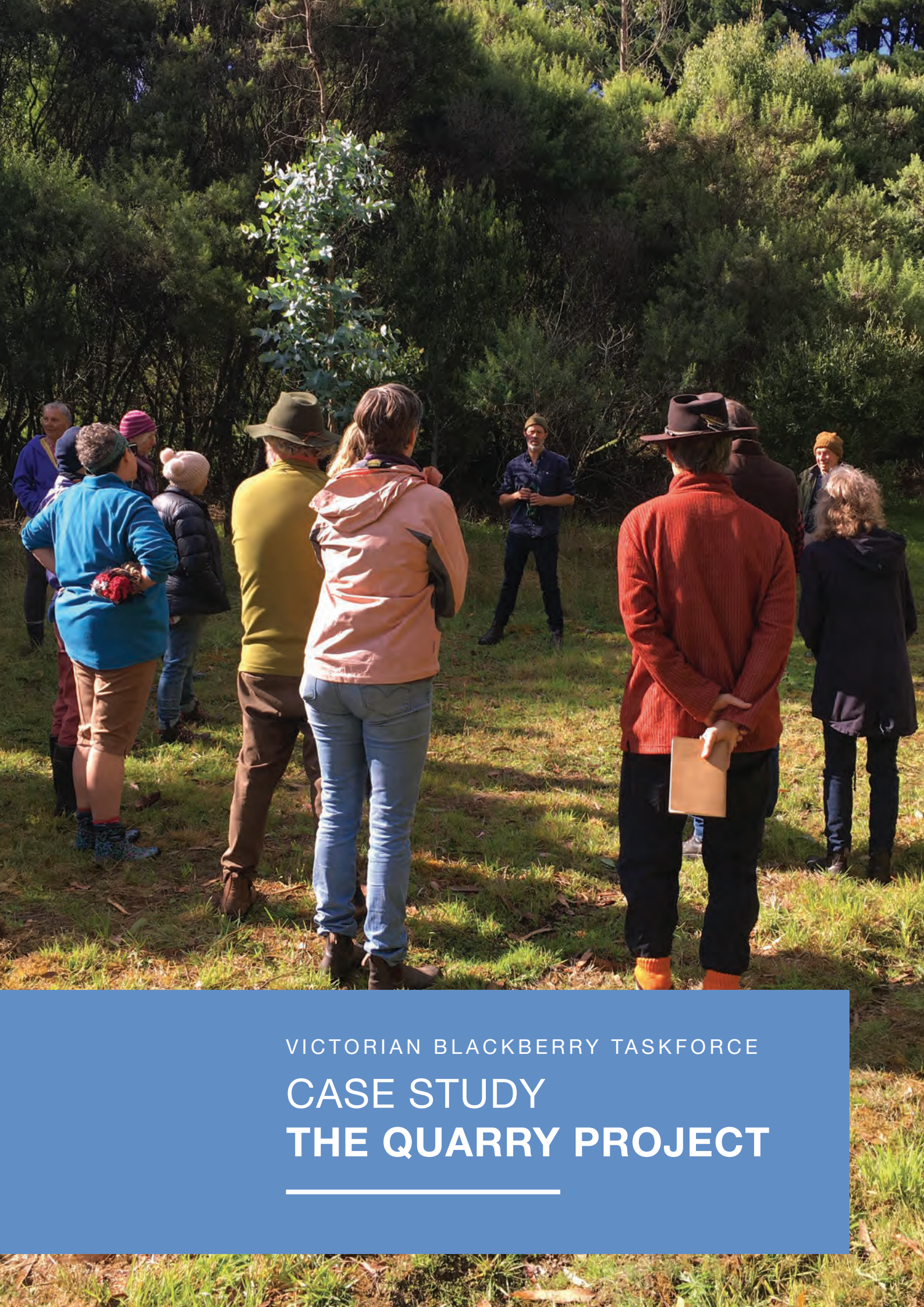

VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

CASE STUDY
THE QUARRY PROJECT

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The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) is committed to working with communities and partner agencies to reduce the growth and spread of blackberry in Victoria. The objectives of the Victorian Blackberry Strategy are very clear and identify education, collaboration and innovation as the basis for achieving a sustained reduction in the areas of productive land and natural areas affected by blackberry.

The Case Study featured here demonstrates the determination of communities and individual landholders, in a range of circumstances, to find a way of tackling blackberry to reclaim and restore land.

The collaborative approach highlighted in the study demonstrates the value of the support offered by the VBT through various avenues. This enables people to access and use best practice information in order to implement the most appropriate management plan for their particular situation.

This Case Study is an inspiration to those who have yet to start their journey to bring blackberry under control and use the recovered land for productive or conservation purposes. The participants demonstrate that no matter how difficult or daunting the task, having a goal and support is the key to success.

VBT
VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

VICTORIA
State Government

CASE STUDY: THE QUARRY PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

Melbourne-based academics Joseph Noster and Millie Cattlin were looking for a damaged site that needed caretaking and rehabilitation. In 2015 they found The Quarry – a sandstone quarry in Beech Forest that had been operating since the 1800s.

Prior to it being a quarry, First Nations Gadubanud people had a long history in the area, including tracks that accessed a permanent spring, which is still an important feature of the site.

The couple run a design and architecture practice and have created a collaborative experimental education space for groups of university students at The Quarry.

They also manage extensive blackberry that dominates the 20-acre site, fed by high rainfall.

‘There was a mixture of heartbreak and awe when we saw the extent of the blackberry infestation.’ – Joseph

WHAT'S THE PLAN?

One of the things they realised early on was the importance of having a long-range management plan to establish achievable goals.

'I think that an incremental approach is actually better for you, better for the land and more successful in the longer term.' – Joseph

In the first year, they briefly attempted to tackle the blackberries by physically removing the plants by hand – with brush cutters then a mattock to pull up the roots – but quickly realised the extent and tenacity of the blackberry *('18 months later it had all grown back' – Joseph)* and began considering other control measures.

Joseph asked his friend Rod Hawksworth – an experienced vegetation manager – to help him develop a management plan. Inspired by the work of sisters Joan and Eileen Bradley, who developed a technique to work in areas of least concern first then in areas of most concern, the plan for The Quarry involves working along the perimeter of the blackberry thickets (no more than five or ten metres at a time) using chemical control for two or three days a year then follow-up monitoring.

'Basically create a working edge … focus on that edge and then just little by little move into where it gets worse. It's not going to happen in one season.' – Rod

Rather than hiring contractors, they decided it would be more economical to purchase a large twin-wheel quick spray unit on a trailer system. The spray unit has been extremely effective, especially in allowing access and reach.

They share the spray unit as a community asset to help locals eradicate blackberry across the region, including the dairy farmer next door who has long battled with a wall of blackberry encroaching along his fence line.

WHAT'S THE PLAN?

In the eight years they have been working on the blackberry, investment into its management *('and we do really genuinely consider it an investment rather than a cost' – Joseph)* has been around $35,000–$40,000 including purchasing the spray unit. They use a selective desiccating herbicide and mix it with a wetting agent to improve effectiveness and a dye to improve accuracy. Management considerations include temperature, to avoid evaporation and drift causing off-target damage, and plant size, as the product is more effective on larger plants.

After spraying, they knock down the dead canes so they can access areas for closer monitoring and spot-spraying of re-emerging seedlings. The flattened canes also provide a mulch layer to keep down other weeds and protect the soil. This step also significantly enhances the aesthetics of previously impenetrable areas re-claimed from blackberry.

Other supplementary management practices after spraying include revegetating with plants to outcompete the blackberry. However, in many areas native seedings have rapidly sprung up of their own accord. Since they started removing blackberry in 2015, some of the trees are now five or six metres tall.

Some of the main challenges have been accessing the difficult terrain, especially steep slopes. They are also mindful to avoid damaging other species and contaminating water sources, such as the spring, which hosts a thriving array of wildlife.

STARTING TO COME BACK

Removing blackberry has allowed other species to emerge. Rather than having one species dominating, a multitude of other species are now returning the environment to a more biodiverse and native state. Improvements in biodiversity include recruitment of flora, including trees such as Acacia and Eucalyptus, ferns, shrubs such as pepper berry and kangaroo apple, herbs and mosses, and fauna including wombats, wallabies, snakes, frogs, freshwater invertebrates and many birds.

‘It’s satisfying when you see the changes over seasons and over years … indigenous species coming through … recruitment of that mid-storey layer and those lower layers, your shrub layers and your herby grassy layer … all the ferns bounce back in a relatively short time.’ – Rod

‘The unfolding … it’s the kind of site that keeps giving. Every time you move through and remove blackberry, it unfolds. It is remarkable. Whole new parts of the site will open up that we haven’t been in. So that’s quite magical.’ – Joseph

WORKING AND LEARNING TOGETHER

Joseph reached out to the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce early on, and in March 2023 they hosted a blackberry control demonstration day at The Quarry.

Education is a key aspect of The Quarry site for Joseph and Millie, so sharing knowledge and learning together is important to them. There was a great turnout of engaged community members.

The caretakers at The Quarry are also pragmatic. They realise the site will never be fully rid of blackberry – they are persistent and can regrow from the finest filament of root, or from seed dropped by birds.

‘I have a huge amount of respect for blackberry. I’ve really come to learn that they are a remarkable plant and hugely successful. I’ve got admiration for what they’re capable of. It’s made me respect them and also learn how to treat them.’ – Joseph

With the plants that remain, Joseph and his family can always make jam.

THE QUARRY PROJECT
CASE STUDY VIDEO

‘The Quarry Project’ case study video is featured on the VBT YouTube channel.

Blackberries.
Let’s take action together.

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

A collection of VBT case studies can be found on our website: vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au/vbt-case-studies

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