

# TACKLING BLACKBERRY 3

CASE STUDY:  
THE EDEN PARK PROJECT  
VBT DIGITAL VIDEO



VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

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.



*This project is funded through the Established Pest Animals and Weeds initiative, part of the Australian Government's Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper, the government's plan for stronger farmers and a stronger economy.*

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The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce established the Eden Park Project in 2018 to help landholders manage blackberry on their land. The initiative revolves around a project officer, Chris Coburn, who provides landholders with information and advice on managing blackberry infestations. This includes linking people to other organisations and support mechanisms, helping to foster a more coordinated approach to managing the weed throughout the area.



## CASE STUDY: THE EDEN PARK PROJECT

Eden Park, around 50 Km northwest of Melbourne, has a rolling landscape of mixed agricultural land and remnant native vegetation.



### A CHANGING SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL LANDSCAPE

Eden Park, around 50 Km northwest of Melbourne, has a rolling landscape of mixed agricultural land and remnant native vegetation. Within that landscape, Katherine Whittaker from Whittlesea Council's land management and biodiversity team notes there are a diverse range of landholders:

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*We've got newer residents who've come in on land that's been subdivided, so they're managing hobby farms and lifestyle properties. We've also got small agricultural enterprises. And then we've got some beautiful bush blocks up in the north.*

Katherine notes that while people in the area are keen to remove blackberry on their property, there's a high rate of land-use change and a desire for support in addressing the weed.

One of those property owners is Nancy, who moved to a subdivided ex-plantation block almost 20 years ago. She says that while there had always been blackberry on her property, it has expanded rapidly in recent years.

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*We started to get some very large patches, both in the pine plantations and in the grassland areas, even around the dam, so we were having a bit of trouble containing the problem. They just kept growing ... it's quite a widespread problem around here.*



## DIVERSE DRIVERS FOR CONTROLLING BLACKBERRY

Reflecting the diversity of properties, landholders in the area have a range of motivations for controlling blackberry. For Nancy, it is about the environment and a love of wildlife:



*We didn't want them to take over the property ... I like wildlife. And they don't like blackberry. The kangaroos and the wombats and the native animals ... the native grasses and flowers ... they're what I like around my property. I don't want a lot of foxes and rabbits who like the blackberry.*

Other landholders have more of an interest in the productive value of their land. Adrian, whose family is around the corner from Nancy, has been visiting the family's 43 hectare property for over 30 years. It is currently used for grazing a small number of cattle, but Adrian wants to clear it of blackberry and other weeds and improve the viability of the farm.



*When I first bought a half-share in the property five-years ago the property was overrun with blackberry. There was probably 15 very large clumps of blackberry and dozens of small clumps. I'm really keen to fix this place up and make it more viable than it is. And eventually run more stock.*

Recognising the need to support residents like Nancy and Adrian, Whittlesea council collaborated with the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce to run the Eden Park Project. At the centre of this project is Victorian Blackberry Taskforce funding for project officer Chris, who visits residents throughout the area providing information, guidance and support.



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## LEARNING ABOUT THE PROBLEM AND PLANNING ITS SOLUTION

The key first step that both Nancy and Adrian made was to start educating themselves about blackberry. Adrian recalls:

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*I didn't know much about blackberry except than I used to like picking and eating them. For the 30 years I was coming here I didn't see them as a weed. But then I realised they're no good for the property to have so many.*

Through a link on the City of Whittlesea's website, Adrian's initial research led him to contact Chris at the Eden Park Project. Chris visited Adrian's property, assessed his issues and worked with him to identify solutions.

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*The first day he came out it was fantastic. He jumped in the car with me and we drove around from paddock to paddock. It was the best hour ... he identified every weed and it got to the stage where I started recording the conversation on my phone because I thought 'gee this is good information'.*

Nancy recounted a similar experience. Chris offered guidance on chemical control, which included spray techniques and timing.

An important part of the solution in both cases was developing a three-year management plan for blackberry. This is a key aspect of the role that Chris plays, helping landholders to understand the importance of follow-up work in subsequent years.

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*The blackberry doesn't actually go away. She's waiting there to come up next year... so we're ready for her to come back and speak to her next year with some more spraying. - Nancy*

For Adrian's property, Chris helped put together a management plan that included a map of where all the weeds were that needed control. It also included a staged approach to removing the large infestations on his property and the ongoing management needs.

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*It's an ongoing management thing. You can't just get rid of a huge amount of blackberry [and leave it alone]— if we don't keep on top of it, they're just going to come back again.*

## LINKING IN WITH A NETWORK OF SUPPORT

In addition to planning and offering technical advice on blackberry control, one of the key roles of the Eden Park Project Officer is also to link landholders to other organisations and support mechanisms. This included rebates on sprays, training on chemical application and spray equipment available for hire.

For Nancy, access to equipment was one of the biggest benefits. She noted that they had previously been using small spray units that had not been particularly effective. Through Chris' network, Nancy hired a boom spray unit that made her task substantially easier and more effective.

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*Before, we couldn't get a handle on them because they were quite vast within their patches ... but with the spray equipment that we got through Chris, it was a lot better ... we were able to do two or three lots of spray and it made it very quick and easy. What would have taken us days, we did in hours. It was wonderful.*

One of the other key links that Chris provided was to Melbourne Water, who have a grant program to help landholders manage their land along rivers and waterway frontage.

## MELBOURNE WATER'S ROLE AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS

As the authority responsible for managing the waterways throughout the catchment, Melbourne Water has a key role in working towards river health and water quality outcomes. As noted by Waterways and Lands Officer, Ryan Hemmens, Melbourne Water works towards these outcomes in a range of ways, including weed control, revegetation and fencing works along riparian corridors.

As part of their approach, Melbourne Water funds the River Health Incentives Program. Ryan notes that the program is designed to:

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*... help landholders achieve good waterway health outcomes on their property ... it's basically a contribution to facilitate fencing, rehabilitation [and] weed control ...*

Anyone that has river or water frontage on their property in target areas is eligible, with applications details available on Melbourne Water's website. Chris referred Adrian to the program because part of his land borders Barbers Creek. With weed infestation along the creek, Adrian pointed out:

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*We needed to control not only what was in our property but what was going on next door.*

After applying to the River Health Incentives Program and receiving a site inspection by Melbourne Water Staff, Adrian received a grant to help manage weeds along the creek. This included funds to help cover the costs of a weed control contractor. It also included funding to help build fences along the creek line. These fencing works are an important component from Melbourne Water's perspective as it helps to protect the waterways from stock damage into the future. Ryan noted that the program works well:

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*Often a small contribution from us allows them to get a really large area of weeds controlled ... it's a really efficient program for us to get good outcomes on waterways and I'd encourage anyone with water frontage on their property to engage us.*



## OUTCOMES ON THE GROUND

Nancy and Adrian are both starting to see substantial benefits from their work controlling blackberry.

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*In the pastures it's noticeably different. People who've come in the past and that come here now, they comment how it's so different. There were probably eight or nine clumps up near the road and you could see them as you drove past – very big clumps – now they're gone. And now the pasture has come back and the neighbours say it's made a huge difference.*

Nancy also considered the impacts on her property to be massive. Inspecting what were once large, impenetrable patches, she now notes that they are effectively disintegrating. But Nancy also recognises that they are only one year in to a longer-term plan.

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*We can honestly say yes we've knocked the tripe out of them this year. But you don't get them in one strike. They're a tough little plant and they will come back again, so we're quite prepared to face that next year.*

## COORDINATION ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE

Beyond this property scale planning and management, all of the stakeholders involved in the Eden Park Project also recognised the need to work at blackberry right across the landscape. While individual landholders can control the weed on their own properties, neighbouring land can often be a source of reinfestation. Ryan from Melbourne Water described the problem from a waterway perspective:

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*What we've seen [from the River Health Incentives Program] is that the best results come when neighbours come together and work collaboratively to replicate the program up and downstream ... you can be doing all the work in the world, but if upstream is not doing it, it can lead to more weeds.*

Whittlesea Council and the Eden Park Project are playing an important role in this regard. Katherine from Whittlesea Council notes that council supports the project from an administrative perspective, but also in aligning council's sustainable land management programs with the work done through project. This includes running a pest plant education and compliance program so that landholders who are part of the Eden Park Project can report any other blackberry infestations, regardless of land tenure. These issues can then be addressed through education, compliance, the rates rebates scheme or environmental works grants.

Katherine highlights that this is not only important in effective weed control, but is critical in supporting ownership of the issue by the community.

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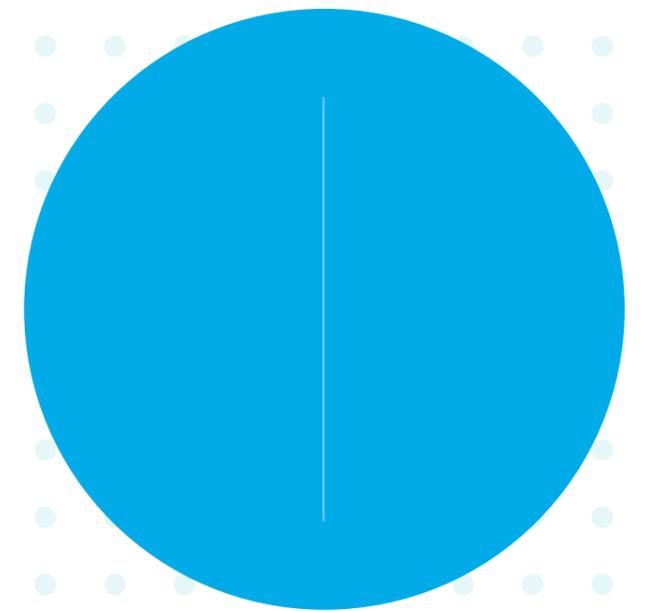
*THE SUPPORT HAS BEEN IMPORTANT FOR LANDHOLDERS OVERALL ... FOR A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP OVER AN ISSUE ... LANDHOLDERS ARE BENEFITING FROM HAVING EVERYBODY ON BOARD. [IT'S] NOT JUST AN AD HOC APPROACH TO WEED MANAGEMENT, BUT REALLY A CONCERTED EFFORT.*



Victorian Blackberry **Taskforce**  
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM

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## **VBT CASE STUDY VIDEO**

The case study video is an encoded mp4 file. Play the file directly from the supplied USB drive or after first copying the file to a computer harddrive.



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