

North East Blackberry Action Group – Upper Murray

2006 Weed Busters

Community led weed groups focusing on the control of Serrated Tussock, Ragwort and Gorse have operated successfully in Victoria for several years. The most recently formed, the North East Blackberry Action Group – Upper Murray, is celebrating the recognition of its achievements with the 2006 State Weed Buster Award, Private Land Category.

An initiative of the Upper Murray Landcare Network, the group was formed in early 2005 in response to community concern about the spread of blackberry in the Upper Murray. There are sixteen private and public land management organizations represented in the group, initially funded through the Victorian Government's 'Tackling Weeds on Private Land Initiative.'

Group Chairperson, Lyn Coulston attributes the success to date to the initial planning undertaken by the group, the commitment of the partner organizations and the communication skills of the Project Manager.

Lyn said "Before we started we had a couple of sessions to come up with an Action Plan. This means that all the partners have ownership of the project and there are no unrealistic expectations about what we are trying to achieve. There is a benefit to the whole community if we can identify the barriers to successful control programs and work with landholders to find ways of achieving better management practices. We were able to get started with the initial DPI funding support and then value add to the project with other successful funding applications such as the National Landcare Program. We have found that the land managers often welcome the opportunity to speak to someone about difficulties they have implementing a successful control program. The technical and communication skills of our Project Manager, Damian Wall, have enabled him to identify barriers, map the blackberry infestations and negotiate a workplan in a single visit. Support is then available by phone until a follow up visit to see how the work is progressing."

The focus of the project is to negotiate a voluntary work plan with land managers, to be implemented over a three year period, then to support them to achieve their goals. Blackberries are mapped on the private land/public land boundaries and adjoining roadsides. This mapping is then provided to the appropriate land managers so they can target future works programs to support the community effort. Sharing resources this way enables all land managers to be involved in a targeted control program that has very visible on ground results.

Education and information sharing is a significant part of the project. A chemical treatment demonstration site has been set up so land holders can see the results of different herbicides, timing and application rates. A forum has also been held to learn about biological control, demonstrate mulching techniques and to provide control options for organic farmers.

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) is interested in the Upper Murray project as a pilot for weed management based on the community led model. VBT Executive Officer, Andy Wernert (Department of Primary Industries), believes that the results so far reflect the willingness of the Action Group and landholders to work together. “The local community is clearly interested in doing something about this threat to agricultural production and biodiversity in the Upper Murray. The project is delivered through existing networks so it wasn’t necessary to form a new group. The results after twelve months are outstanding.”

To find out more about the Upper Murray Blackberry Action Group or the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce contact Lyn Coulston (02) 60727534 or Andy Wernert (02) 60715307.



Victorian Blackberry Taskforce

NORTH EAST ACTION GROUP

UPPER MURRAY