

Final Report



Berry Gorse Grief 3

Report to Victorian Blackberry Taskforce

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Background to the group

- When did the group begin?

Pipers Creek and District Landcare group has been operating for 20 years. The group has been running a weed control project for 3 iterations over roughly 6 years. The first 2 iterations targeted primarily Gorse. The latest iteration, which was made possible in part by the VBT also focused on blackberry.

- What geographical area does the group cover?

The group is primarily focused around the Pipers Creek Area, east of Kyneton. For the Berry/Gorse Grief 3 project the group worked with landholders in Pipers creek and Kyneton. However, due to a lack of interest in the project the group extended the project boundary to include landholders in neighbouring towns of Pastoria, Carlsruhe, Kyneton North and Metcalf.

- What are some of the characteristics /assets in the region?

The area is diverse supporting both productive agriculture and the environment. It provides catchment for the headwaters of the Campaspe River and includes large areas of native vegetation, such as Bald Hill Reserve and is surrounded by large intact areas of remnant vegetation including the Cobaw's and Wombat Forest. The area includes a mix of lifestyle, peri urban and agricultural land holdings. The main agricultural enterprises of the region are beef and sheep.

What was the history of blackberry and concern of community towards it?

There has been a good history of community concern regarding weeds in the Pipers Creek Area. This began to take shape as a community driven plan of action with the first Gorse Grief project which attracted roughly 30 participants. The subsequent Gorse Grief 2 project saw a decline in interested landholders. It was envisaged that by focusing on blackberry as well, the Berry/Gorse Grief 3 (this project) would have a better uptake. This was based on concerns with blackberry from community members and concerns from neighbouring districts about blackberry.

How does your project run?

- How is your project officer working with farmers?

The project officer has attempted contacting landholders via letterbox drops and mail outs, providing information at stalls at the Kyneton show, phone calls, door knocking and with an article in the local paper.

The project officer works one on one with farmers by providing advice and assistance on different control techniques and information on what is the most appropriate for the site, budget and resources of the farmer; providing information on different herbicides, their rates, effectiveness and appropriate applications; legal responsibilities around weeds and their control and on the use of herbicides; developing 3 year management plans; and offering on-going assistance through membership with the Landcare group.

- What other partners or land managers were involved in the project team?
- Pipers Creek landcare was the primary partner for delivery on behalf of Upper Campaspe Landcare Network.
- Macedon Ranges Shire Council provided in kind support through providing advice on landholders and conducting a rural landholder mail out in the project area. MRSC also undertook works at Bald Hill Reserve and targeted gorse in their roadside weed program.
- Friends of Bald Hill Reserve formed during the project and also focused on blackberry and gorse in the public land reserve
- NCCMA Kyneton woodlands project referred landholders and disseminated information.
- Victorian Gorse Task Force provided funding to assist with gorse control as part of the larger project (Berry/Gorse Grief 3).
- Does your group provide any incentive grants?

Yes, landholders involved in the project that returned a signed management agreement were eligible for a rebate of up to 50% of the cost of herbicide and associated chemicals up to \$250 per year for the life of the agreement.

Achievements and Reflections

- What has worked well?

The project managed to engage several lifestyle landholders that were new to the area and to land management. These landholders had very limited knowledge of weeds and how to control them and were most often overwhelmed by the task at hand. By providing advice and developing a 3 year plan for each landholder the project was able to assist these landholders with their new properties.

Conversely the project was also able to help continue to support landholders that have been controlling weeds for over a decade and some for over two decades. Often these landholders welcomed hearing that they were on the right track, and it was good to provide them with other ideas and advice on how they could control their weeds.

- What have been some barriers for control?

- Lack of interest from the community in weed control. The decline in interest between projects one and two was not reversed by this third project.
- A lack of knowledge from some of the community about the threat of weeds and why they should be controlled.
- The size and extent of the problem and the costs of major work (mechanical control) prohibited some landholders from being involved.
- Time to undertake the control works is probably the largest deterrent for involvement.
- It was difficult (from the project officer's perspective) to manage the program with only 1 day a week while managing other work demands.

- Have you had any field days?

No, a gorse and weed control demonstration day was proposed but a suitable date could not be arranged in time. In hindsight, a field day right at the start of the project would have been the best idea to increase participation.

- Have you applied for any other grants?

Yes, \$5000 to assist in the costs of Gorse control through the Victorian Gorse Taskforce to increase the available funds for rebates to participants.

- Did you get any media articles published?

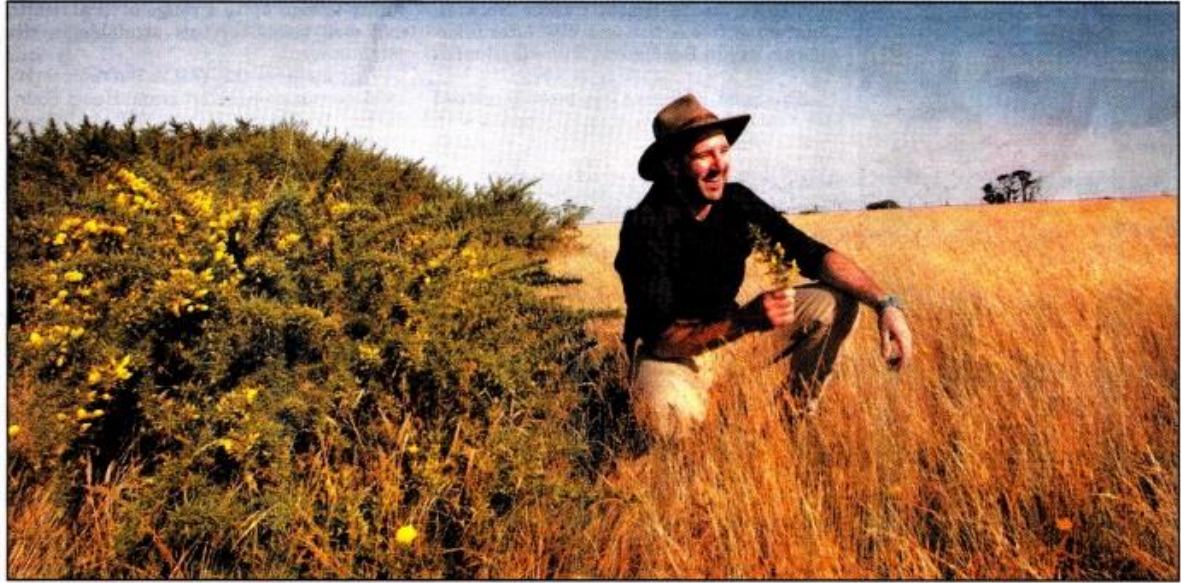
Yes, there was an article published in the Midland Express on 03/03/15.

3/3/15.

MIDLAND EXPRESS

NEWS

Grant wages war on gorse



Blackberry and gorse facilitator for the Kyneton district Grant Godden is offering to help landholders tackle problem gorse infestations. Photo: Sandy Scheltema.

Gorse and blackberry are just two of the many weeds which can cause problems to landowners in the district.

Spreading quickly, the problem can sometimes seem insurmountable and get put in the 'too hard' basket.

However, free help is available. Blackberry and Gorse facilitator Grant Godden is offering a no obligation free inspection and assessment on how to manage gorse and blackberry problems for landowners in the Kyneton district.

Some landowners may even be eligi-

ble for a rebate on the expensive costs of herbicide.

"I will help them tackle this problem step by step," Grant said. "I am available to meet landowners, discuss their concerns about blackberry and gorse problems and recommend control options.

A three-year management plan can be developed in consultation with the landowners. The management plan is based on best practice manuals for controlling blackberry and gorse.

"I can help landowners make a big

problem more manageable. Some landowners may feel this task is too big to manage but I can help them systematically get on top of the issue."

Grant said it was a completely voluntary program.

"If you sign on there is no commitment. I understand the cost of chemicals can be prohibitive, the rebate is a way for landowners to make it easier to manage the weeds on their properties."

Grant can be contacted on grant.godden@outlook.com.au

Evaluation

- What difference did the project make?

The project was able to connect with many landholders, and while some didn't return agreements, anecdotal evidence suggests that the advice given has been taken on board. One of the major differences the project had was the ability to build the capacity of lifestyle landholders new to area and to land management.

- What have you learnt?

One of the biggest learnings was around promotion of the project to engage landholders. Promotion needs to be undertaken at the very start of the project and you should not rely on a single type of promotion to get the interest you want. For example, combining a story in the paper with an upcoming field day may have helped spark interest when the mail out to all rural residents in the project area was undertaken.

- Do you have a particular success story you would like to share?

The "success" story I would like to share concerns the project overall and its ability to relate to and be relevant to the diverse community of the project area.

As previously stated the project area is diverse and includes larger grazing properties, wineries, lifestyle landholders, peri urban blocks and natural assets such as the Campaspe headwaters and Bald Hill Reserve. Blackberry and gorse however are a problem that stretches across property boundary and affects a range of people in the area. With that in mind the project needed to be relevant to all these people – and it did manage to engage people from all these demographics.

It was interesting, challenging and overall rewarding to be able to spend the morning with a new landholder on 8 acres with extensive weed problems and be able to; talk them through it, break it down into smaller chunks and provide them with the information they didn't know; and how to get and see their enthusiasm when an overwhelming problem was now a problem that could be fixed and they had a 3 year plan to do it. Conversely, it was equally as rewarding to kick the dirt with an old cocky in the afternoon; listen to the story of their property and how they've managed it, re-assure them they were on the right track and doing a good job, but even better was when you could help them fix a problem they didn't have a solution to – even if it was as simple as how to control blackberry on a waterway.

The ability of this project to appeal to all types of landowners in the project area (even if uptake was a little less than hoped for) and to remain relevant and engage landholders when talking to them, was the projects real success.

- Is there another aspect of the project you would find important to outline
- Most landholders really wanted the 3 year plan but were reluctant to sign on to it as a management agreement. This was despite the group offering an incentive to help with the works.
- Running a program with a focus on more than just Blackberry (ie also focusing on Gorse) made it difficult to map properties and when entering information into BADIS, difficult to decide what should be included.

Number of new landholders on agreements	Number of landholders visited	Total private property visited (ha)	Private property infestations mapped (ha)	Private property infestations treated (ha)
7	19	820	535	N/A*

* It is very difficult to give an exact figure of infestations treated as several landholders that signed on to an agreement are still in their first year of control and may be waiting until spring to conduct works. Furthermore, not all landholders that received a management agreement signed on but many still did the works regardless and this has not been recorded.

Photos



A complex problem – this landholder recently bought 8 acres just out of Kyneton with Blackberry, Gorse, Hawthorn and Willows. Through the project we were able to break this problem down into manageable chunks and set a plan for control.



A different set of complexities – this landholder had a 21 acre vineyard which had become over run by blackberry in parts. The landholder had left the blackberry as he couldn't use Ester based herbicides in or near the vineyard, but the blackberry was starting to take over. The solution recommended was to brush cut the blackberry back and carefully spot spray regrowth with round up in spring.



It's both amazing and rewarding to see what comes 'back' when you remove weeds like blackberry and gorse. This area was previously infested (see dead gorse in background).



This Creek line used to be (5 years ago) wall to wall blackberry and gorse – it's encouraging to see what can be achieved in such a short period of time with a plan and determination. This landholder was continuing their control work in the bushland at the rear of their farm.