



Victorian Gorse Taskforce
Progress Report



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2016/17

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Chairperson's Report





Victorian Gorse Taskforce

The Victorian Gorse Taskforce has achieved much since it was established in 1999 and work continued this year to achieve the goals and key directions of the Victorian Gorse Control Strategy 2014-19.

Throughout 2016/17, the Taskforce retained its leadership role in community-led weed control through its work with and support of local Landcare groups and its partnerships with local governments and other stakeholders.

Work to map new and existing gorse infestations as well as to measure the success of actions to reduce gorse progressed. Various activities promoted best practice gorse control methods and the efforts of many helped to tackle new isolated patches of gorse and to reduce established gorse infestations in wider landscapes.

Communicating why gorse is a threat and the legal responsibilities of landowners to control their gorse remains important, along with building the capacity of individuals and local communities to reduce gorse.

Partnerships with local governments is vital and many councils continue to contribute to community gorse reduction by treating the weed along local roadsides. Local councils also supported the effort with mailouts to landowners that highlighted the need to control gorse and directing them to the Taskforce and local groups for advice and support.

The Taskforce also upgraded their website with six new video resources, with information on gorse control, fire risk, property evaluation, gorse biology and the grant application process.

Financial support to assist landowners to tackle gorse remained important to success. The Taskforce provided financial support to 19 projects totalling \$157,000 for works during 2016/17.

The Australian Government's 3-year White Paper funding initiative launched this year has provided the Taskforce funding for a website upgrade, a new community service announcement, a community survey and a mapping project. Further White Paper funding for 2017/18 will include contracting a Communications, Community Engagement and Extension Officer to increase our community engagement.

Gorse control demands a sustained and long-term effort to protect land productivity and the natural environment. I take this opportunity to thank the many workers, community volunteers and landowners for their ongoing commitment to helping achieve the vision of the Gorse Control Strategy.

I particularly thank Taskforce committee members, who have made significant contributions to the operations of the Taskforce as well as the Executive Officer Nicole Garfi.

Peter Everist

Chair – Victorian Gorse Taskforce



Background

The primary role of the VGT is to oversee the implementation of the Victorian Gorse Control Strategy 2014-2019.

The nine principal Goals and Key Directions of the strategy are as follows:

1 Provide leadership in community-led invasive plant control

The VGT coordinates and implements the Victorian Gorse Control Strategy (VGCS) across Victoria. In doing so the VGT makes a valuable contribution to preventing the spread of gorse and developing the community-led invasive plant control model.

2 Achieve an accurate knowledge of the extent and threat of gorse in Victoria

Knowledge of the extent of gorse distribution, including 'clean' areas, provides the basis for effective planning and delivery of control programs. Accurate mapping of the extent of gorse distribution is an important management and education tool. The DEDJTR Biosecurity and GIS teams provide important support in this area.

3 Promote Best Practice Management for gorse control in Victoria

Gorse control and site rehabilitation is effective and efficient, using Best Practice Management methods.

4 Prevent the spread of gorse into new areas of the state

The VGT places an emphasis on programs in the areas of the state that are at risk from invasion by gorse, where the focus will be on prevention of spread activities, partnership development, community capacity building and, where necessary, enforcement.

5 Achieve a reduction in the core infestations of gorse across Victoria

Ongoing programs are aimed at protecting key community assets where these are prioritised through regional catchment strategies and regional invasive plant and animal management strategies, and within core infestations.

6 Reduce infestations and the spread of gorse in and along corridors

The VGT and facilitators will work with the community and linear reserve managers in focus areas to reduce the spread of gorse in and along corridors.

7 Increase the community's capacity to be actively engaged in long-term gorse control

Communities are empowered to act and are committed to the long-term control of gorse, and are supported to do so.

8 Ensure communities are aware of their statutory obligations to control gorse

Communities are aware of their statutory responsibilities and the VGT will work with partners to advocate that, where necessary, enforcement complements community-led action.

9 Ensure effective monitoring and reporting of the Victorian Gorse Control Strategy

The implementation of the VGCS is monitored, and stakeholders and the community are informed of its progress.



Focus Areas

To provide strategic direction for the control of gorse throughout Victoria, the state is divided into two focus zones (see Figure 1) considering principles of invasive plant control and mapping of present and predicted gorse occurrence (reference *Victorian Gorse Control Strategy 2014-2019*).

Reduction Zone

The Reduction Zone is the part of Victoria where substantial, scattered but not yet widespread and abundant populations of gorse occur. In this zone the Strategy aims to reduce populations (shaded orange on Gorse Control Areas map).

Eradication and Prevention Zone

The Eradication and Prevention Zone is the part of Victoria where gorse may already occur as isolated infestations or is predicted to occur based on potential distribution modelling (shaded green on Gorse Control Areas map).

Whilst this Strategy focuses on partnership development, capacity building and compliance, it will support eradication of isolated infestations where feasible. Prevention of gorse incursions will be the priority.

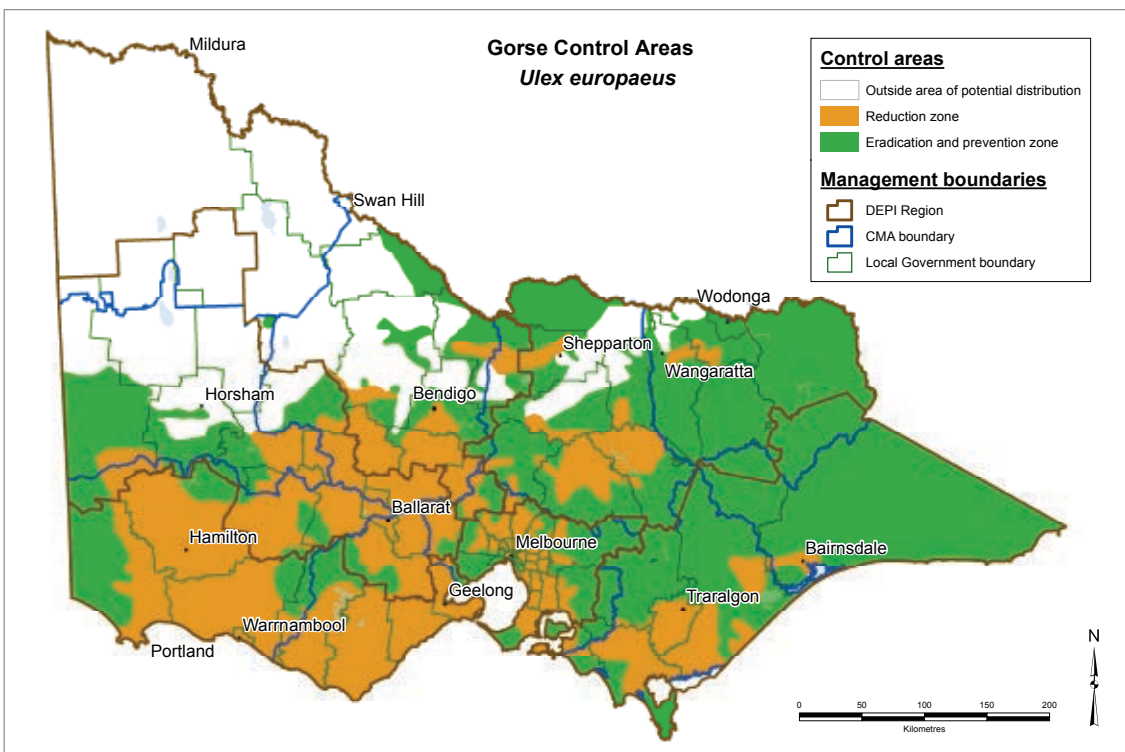


Figure 1: Victoria's gorse control zones. (DEPI, 2014)

On-Ground Gorse Control Projects 2016/17



The Taskforce has supported the implementation of these projects to help communities build successful control programs in their local areas. The aim for these projects is to increase landholder awareness and ownership of the problem so that long term control can be achieved.

The Taskforce actively promotes the implementation of a Community Led Approach to the management of this widespread pest. This is where a collective of concerned community members have come together to take action towards achieving successful control. Local communities have formed small groups to guide the planning and implementation of these projects. The Victorian Gorse Taskforce has supported these projects by providing resources for their implementation.

Facilitated ‘Action Group’ Projects

This approach is about placing a greater emphasis on voluntary compliance for gorse management rather than regulatory enforcement. Through these projects Project Officers are encouraging landholders to sign up to long term voluntary management agreements recognising that successful gorse control involves a commitment over many years. Where this Community Led Approach fails to convince landholders of their obligations to control gorse, Department of

Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR) compliance is then recommended so that the sustained action of the majority of landholders is supported. The seven large projects that were supported by the VGT in 2016/17 assist in implementing the goals and strategies found within the Victorian Gorse Control Strategy 2014-2019. These projects also work to prevent gorse from impacting upon important environmental and agricultural assets.

Ashbourne Gorse Eradication Project

(Proponent: Ashbourne Landcare Group)

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$13,360	\$12,450	11 / 45.6ha

Nearest town: Trentham

Private properties fronting the Campaspe River and its tributaries are the focus of the Ashbourne Gorse Eradication Project. In 2016/17, the Macedon Ranges Shire sent 44 letters to landowners identified as having gorse infestations to highlight their responsibilities to tackle the weed.

Ashbourne Landcare Group members followed up each landowner to encourage them to treat their gorse. A good result was achieved, with 11 landowners signing up to voluntary agreements.

VGT funding helped subsidise the costs for gorse to be mulched / sprayed on the properties of these participating landowners.

Large areas of gorse on some properties remain and the Landcare Group will encourage these landowners to join the effort in subsequent years. Landowners who removed or sprayed their gorse this year will be followed up to encourage them to eradicate any regrowth.



Moyne Weed Eradication Network

(Proponent: St Helens Landcare Group)

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$15,000	\$10,200	4 / 16ha

Nearest town: Warrnambool

St Helens Landcare launched a renewed focus on gorse in the Moyne region after consulting a 2001 mapping of infestations and identifying the weed was on the increase.

While infestations were smaller (less than 10 plants) they had appeared in new areas, including on small blocks in the peri-urban area of Warrnambool and along new lengths of waterways during flood pulses on the Hopkins River.

Letterboxing weed guides and information to targeted small landholders in Warrnambool's peri-urban area achieved great success, with all subsequently treating their gorse. None claimed a rebate for chemicals which indicates a strong commitment and ability to tackle the weed.

Peri-urban landowners who called the Landcare Group for further information about gorse advised they didn't realise the 'pretty yellow shrub' was a weed, highlighting the importance of community education.

A total 17 private and public land owners and managers treated 7 hectares and 9 hectares of gorse respectively in 2016/17.

Two of the largest gorse infestations on private land within Warrnambool City remain uncontrolled despite the Landcare Group and local council's requests over several years, and formal compliance action may be the next step.

The Landcare Group continues to highlight gorse control responsibilities to Crown land managers, particularly linear reserve managers. It's hoped the DLG/VGT mapping program will help encourage Crown land managers to tackle gorse early and not just when complaints are received.

The Landcare Group has also identified that development of industrial land in Warrnambool has increased the risk and incidence of gorse spreading via the removal and redistribution of gorse-infected soil. This risk will be continued to be highlighted to developers, the local council and contractors.



Gorse control in the Moorabool – The Re-emerging threat

(Proponent: Moorabool Catchment Landcare Group)

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$9,600	\$19,600	11 / 9ha

Nearest town: Mt Egerton

From 2011 to 2015, the Moorabool Catchment Landcare Group spearheaded a successful program that treated 5,000 hectares of gorse in the catchment area.

In 2016/17, the Landcare Group focused on preventing the re-emergence and spread of new gorse infestations threatening the biodiversity values of the upper catchment of the Moorabool River.

Most landowners who indicated interest in the project are located in the Morrisons area and have gorse infestations adjacent to waterways such as the East Moorabool River. One landowner has cleared almost 49 hectares of gorse at Mt Egerton. The aim is for 15 landowners to control gorse and adjacent roadside infestations will be coordinated with Moorabool Shire Council.

Infestations on properties at Morrisons are substantial (up to 2 hectares). Infestations are smaller at Mt Egerton but are supplementing other local infestations. Mt Egerton also adjoins the Whipstick Forest and waterways are tributaries for the Moorabool River, making it important to prevent gorse infesting local remnant forest. Minimising the impacts on local waterways of spray chemicals used for gorse control is also important.

These projects will be complemented by the MCLG Biolink project, which will plant local native species in treated areas to help prevent re-growth and improve biodiversity. These sites are also selected to benefit the biolink the Landcare Group is developing between the Wombat State Forest and Brisbane Ranges National Park.

The Landcare Group also provided landowners who hold chemical use permits with one free bottle of spray to encourage them to treat gorse that re-emerges.



Gorse control – Little Coliban River and Tylden Gorse infestation area

(Proponent: Tylden Landcare Group)

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$18,500	\$22,000	6 / 18ha



Nearest town: Tylden

The Tylden Landcare Group has encouraged and supported gorse control on private land over the last few years with funding support from the VGT.

Eight local landowners were supported to treat their gorse in 2016/17 and the Landcare Group continues to engage with others in the region, including commercial enterprises.

Most infestations are along watercourses and landowners are increasingly committing to gorse control with encouragement from the Landcare Group. Fifty landowners were letterboxed or emailed in 2016/17 to promote awareness and action on gorse and this will continue next year, with any subsidies available expected to encourage participation.



Invermay Community take action against gorse

(Proponent: Invermay Landcare Group (UMEC Landcare Network Inc.))

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$18,448	\$12,000	8 / 28ha

Nearest town: Invermay

Invermay has long-standing gorse infestations and adjoins the Miners Rest Landcare Gorse Action Area. While many landowners eradicated gorse with assistance from the VGT around 12 years ago, others continue to treat their infestations and some properties have extensive untreated infestations covering several acres.

The Landcare Group received its third consecutive round of funding in 2016/17. Over the 3 years since 2014/15, project officers have engaged over 60 landowners in the region. Almost 53 hectares of gorse has been controlled across 29 properties.

A large proportion of land in the region is managed by life style tree-changers on small holdings with little experience in land management or gorse control. Many have limited finances and require a rebate for gorse control chemicals. Other landowners include older people with limited resources.

In 2016/17, the Landcare Group targeted an area extending along the northern boundary to the Creswick State Forest, which includes commercial wine and olive enterprises. In the south east of the region there is industrial development with patches of gorse.

The work of a facilitator to raise community awareness and action and to support landowners to treat gorse is key to the project's success.

The Landcare Group continued its work with the City of Ballarat during the year to coordinate gorse control on roadsides. Signs were also placed on fences to highlight that gorse control activities were underway across the region.



Miners Rest Landcare Community Action Against Gorse

(Proponent: Miners Rest Landcare Group (UMEC Landcare Network Inc))

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$20,000	\$16,000	18 / 10.5ha



Nearest town: Miners Rest

Gorse is a long-standing issue in the Miner's Rest area with infestations located mainly around fence lines and creek lines and along local roadsides.

There are more than 500 properties in the area including house blocks, lifestyle properties and large farms. While there is strong community interest in gorse control, the limited financial and labour resources of many landowners is a key challenge for control efforts.

This project is now into its third round of VGT funding with significant success achieved. Since 2014 more than 50 hectares of gorse have been treated and 34 landholders have signed voluntary gorse control agreements.

The project officer continues to work with the City of Ballarat to treat gorse along roadsides and with the Conservation Volunteer Australian Green Army Program.



Creswick Bald Hills Landcare Initiate community action against gorse

(Proponent: Bald Hills – Creswick Landcare Group)

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$25,000	\$15,000	15 / 22ha

Nearest town: Creswick

The Creswick region near Ballarat in western Victoria has a long-term gorse issue with little to no gorse control activities on many large infestations in recent years. This has been exacerbated with a changing demographic in the area as more life-stylers and tree-changers move in with little awareness of weeds and knowledge of land management.

This project has just completed its third round of funding and momentum and success is building with strong community support. It has achieved substantial success to date with an integrated campaign involving private landowners and public land managers, particularly in areas with large gorse infestations north of Creswick around Broomfield and Allendale. The landscape has transformed as gorse is removed on private properties, along local roadsides and on Crown land.

Since 2014, 51 landowners have treated gorse on their properties with a combined 66 hectares of gorse treated. Signs highlighting gorse control efforts underway in the region have been installed on fences and the Landcare Group continues to promote awareness and action on gorse across the local community.

The Landcare Group will continue its work with public land managers to treat gorse along shared boundaries with private land and to encourage private landowners to eradicate gorse on their properties.



‘Small Grant’ Projects

The small grants program is designed so that smaller community based groups can be empowered to implement key gorse control projects in Victoria. The small grants program in 2016/17 funded 11 projects up to \$5,000 (GST exclusive) to support community-led action.



Gorse Control – Post Black Hill Fire (Lightning Strike 7 January 2015)

(Proponent: Langley Landcare Group)

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Approx. hectares of control
\$5,000	\$7,100	4

Nearest town: Kyneton

The Langley Landcare Group continued to encourage and support gorse control in the Kyneton region in 2016/17.

Seven property owners signed up to voluntary gorse control agreements and VGT funding enabled subsidies for chemicals to spray their gorse. The Landcare Group are committed to the landholders involved and will look at assisting them financially in the future where possible.

A combined 4 hectares of gorse was treated on private properties, including gorse that regenerated following a fire at Black Hill in 2015.



Gorse control – Little Coliban River and adjacent paddocks

(Proponent: Tylden Landcare Group)

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Approx. hectares of control
\$5,000	\$8,400	8



Nearest town: Tylden

VGT support has helped the Tylden Landcare Group build awareness and action on gorse along the Little Coliban River and adjacent paddocks for several years.

In 2016/17, the Landcare Group letterboxed and called 50 local landowners to encourage them to reduce their gorse.

Six property owners took up the cause, reducing a combined 8 hectares of the weed along the Little Coliban River and adjacent paddocks, including under old trees.

The Landcare Group also hosted a field day to demonstrate different gorse control approaches and its stand at the Kyneton Show generated significant interest.



Gorse removal – Amphitheatre District

(Proponent: Amphitheatre Landcare Group)

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Approx. hectares of control
\$2,122	\$4,800	15

Nearest town: Amphitheatre

A collaborative community effort is preventing gorse from taking hold in the Amphitheatre region of the Pyrenees Shire.

Gorse has never been a major problem in the area but seedlings have appeared since flooding occurred in the region in 2010. The Amphitheatre Landcare Group is working with private landowners and the Council to identify and identify and tackle gorse growth before it becomes a larger issue.

VGT funding supported the Landcare Group in its work with five private properties to eradicate gorse. The Pyrenees Shire complemented this work with gorse control along local roadsides.



Dallistons Road / Back Creek Corse Control

(Proponent: Campaspe Valley Landcare)

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Approx. hectares of control
\$4,000	\$4,000	4



Nearest town: Redesdale

The VGT continued to support the efforts of Campaspe Valley Landcare's work with private and public land managers to significantly reduce gorse on land along Dallistons Road at Redesdale in Central Victoria. Slashing with an eco-blade and follow-up poisoning has proved successful on open land but gorse persists in less accessible areas.

In 2016/17, control works were undertaken on long-term gorse infestations covering pastoral land and native vegetation along large sections of the Back Creek in Barfold.

Contractors sprayed the weed on pastoral land and the Loddon Prison team cut and painted gorse along less accessible parts of the creek.

Campaspe Valley Landcare is discouraging gorse regrowth by planting native species and will follow-up with more spraying.



Grange Burn Gorse Control Program

(Proponent: Hamilton to Coleraine Railway Line Landcare Group)

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Approx. hectares of control
\$3,553	\$4,500	20

Nearest town: Hamilton

The VGT continued its support of gorse control efforts along the Grange Burn Creek and smaller tributaries of the Wannon River in Hamilton in 2016/17.

The commitment of local farmers and the Southern Grampians Shire remained important, along with support from the Green Army and local CFA brigades.

The Hamilton Coleraine Railway Line Landcare Group produced a calendar and newsletters to keep the community updated of activities, and infestations that have been treated will be monitored for regrowth.



Malmsbury District Gorse Control

(Proponent: Malmsbury District Landcare Group)

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Approx. hectares of control
\$4,650	\$4,650	4.3



Nearest town: Malmsbury

Progress in reducing gorse on six private properties in the Malmsbury region continued in 2016/17. Most of the gorse is located on undulating and hilly land adjacent to creeks and can be difficult to access. VGT funding enabled the Malmsbury District Landcare Group to help cover the cost to landowners for spray and cut activities.

One property is now completely clear of gorse and others have reached the maintenance phase, enabling landowners to tackle more infestations on their land. This is protecting biodiversity in the region as well as valuable grazing pasture.



Getting on Top of Gorse in Darraweit Guim

(Proponent: Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group)

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Approx. hectares of control
\$2,500	\$8,922	5

Nearest town: Darraweit Guim

The Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Landcare Group supported four private landowners to tackle gorse at Darraweit Guim, about 60 km north of Melbourne in 2016/17. A combined 5 hectares was treated on properties along Stockdale Road.

The area was burned in the 2014 Mickleham–Kilmore fire, which provided an opportunity to reduce long-standing gorse infestations as access became easier and the fires reduced the area of gorse.

VGT funding enabled the landowners to employ a contractor who spent 93 hours spraying the gorse. This has reduced the infestations as well as the spread of gorse via the waterways.



Gorse removal – Mount Bolton / Beckworth

(Proponent: Mount Bolton / Beckworth Landcare Group)

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Approx. hectares of control
\$2,250	\$4,350	13.5



Nearest town: Learmonth

A combined 13.5 hectares of gorse on four properties in Learmonth was treated in 2016/17.

This adds to a significant reduction of gorse in the district in previous years with a sustained effort that has included the local council.

The Mount Bolton / Beckworth Landcare Group estimates that gorse will be eradicated in the area within 5 years if the focus and commitment of locals to report and treat outbreaks continues.

Byaduk Area Gorse Control

(Proponent: Napier Landcare Group)

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Approx. hectares of control
\$400	\$800	0.5

Nearest town: Hamilton

Isolated patches of gorse on private land in the Byaduk area of the Southern Grampians were treated in 2016/17. A smaller roadside patch was also sprayed by the Green Army.

The Napier Landcare Group continues to raise awareness and to support gorse eradication across the local community, highlighting the assistance the VGT can offer to help cover the costs of treating infestations.



Corner Inlet Gorse Control

(Proponent: Yarram Yarram Landcare Network auspicing for Corner Inlet Blackberry Action Group)

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Approx. hectares of control
\$2,000	\$2,200	50



Nearest town: Foster

Approximately 50 hectares of gorse was sprayed on private properties between Foster and Toora in South Gippsland in 2016/17.

VGT funding helped the Corner Inlet Blackberry Action Group subsidise the cost of chemicals and its project officer visited landowners to provide advice and often organised a contractor to conduct the spraying.

Landowners took up the offer to pay for their blackberry and other weeds to be sprayed at the same time.

Gorse and other invasive plants have been significantly reduced across the Corner Inlet region in recent years and the Action Group continues to highlight to landowners their responsibilities in weed management.

Muddy Creek Gorse Control Program

(Proponent: Pierrepoint Land Protection Group)

VGT contribution for 2016/17	Other Contributions	Approx. hectares of control
\$3,900	\$5,100	5

Nearest town: Hamilton

The Muddy Creek Gorse Control Program is a collaborative effort between two Landcare Groups to reduce gorse within the Muddy Creek system in the Hamilton region. The VGT supported the successful treatment of infestations in the Buckley Swamp area in 2015/16, and work continued along Muddy Creek in 2016/17.

Efforts this year focused on severe infestations on private land along a 6-kilometre stretch of the creek between Mt. Napier Rd to Portland Rd. Previous control measures have been sporadic and not maintained due to difficult access along the bank edges, and the expense to farmers for little gain of productive grazing land.

The aim is for all landowners along the section of the creek to control gorse on their properties. The long-term goal is to eradicate the gorse and fence the creek off from stock and to re-vegetate it with native vegetation.

The creek provides habitat for native fish, eels, yabbies and spiny crayfish, including some covered under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, such as the growling grass frog. To limit chemicals entering the waterway, gorse control works have comprised slashing and mulching with follow-up maintenance spraying on infestations treated the previous year.



Income and Expenses



Summary of VGT income for 2016/17:

Source	Amount
Grants – DEDJTR	\$65,000.00
Interest Received	\$6,766.48
TOTAL INCOME	\$71,766.48

Summary of VGT expenses for 2016/17:

Source	Amount
Project Subsidies	\$157,573.42
Research and Promotion	\$8,995.77
Administration and Other Expenses	\$10,238.94
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$176,808.13



Appendix



2016/17 VGT Members

Nigel Ainsworth	DEDJTR Principal Officer – Invasive Plants
Ron Cosgrave	North Central CMA, Natural Resource Management Committee
Peter Everist	VGT Chair – Haddon Landcare group/ Woody Yaloak Project
Martin Forbes	Dales Landcare group / Woody Yaloak Catchment Group
Nicole Garfi	Executive Officer
Brian Rowe	Blampied-Kooroocheang Landcare Group
Peter Forster	Upper Hopkins Land Management Group
Margaret Hatton	Sunday Creek / Sugarloaf Sub-catchments Inc
Lisette Mill	St Helens Landcare Group
Karen O'Keefe	Corangamite CMA
John Cable	Glenlyon Landcare Group



