



Victorian Gorse Taskforce
Progress Report



2019/20

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Victorian Gorse Taskforce

Gorse is one of Australia's worst weeds

It infests valuable pastoral land and significantly reduces land values. It's a haven for rabbits, foxes and feral cats, it clogs waterways and damages natural environments.

Tackling gorse takes effort – but doing nothing means it just gets worse.



Chairperson's Report



Peter Stewart Everist:
14 January 1946
– 18 January 2020



This year has been difficult, with Covid 19 creating challenges for everyone. However, the pandemic has not dampened people's enthusiasm and commitment to controlling gorse across Victoria.

It has been 21 years since the Victorian Gorse Taskforce (VGT) was formed and we continue to go from strength to strength. More Victorians understand the need to control gorse in the natural environment and on agricultural land and they have built their knowledge and skills and taken successful action against the weed.

In 2019/20, the VGT continued to support community groups with tackling gorse through funding grants and providing support with networks, information and resources. Covid restrictions have required extensions to some projects but landholders hope to complete their works in the near future.

The VGT moved largely online this year, with all correspondence and meetings held virtually for 2020 due to the Covid restrictions. Despite this, we have continued to develop our partnerships with local governments, catchment management authorities and natural environment management agencies, as well as with diverse community groups tackling gorse.

Passing of VGT Chairman Peter Everist – The VGT lost its longest standing committee member and friend with the passing of Peter Everist this year. Peter showed great commitment to the

gorse fight with his service of 14 years on the VGT committee, 10 of those as Chairperson. Peter was instrumental in shaping the VGT into what it is today through his leadership, knowledge and community spirit. VGT committee members have great memories of Peter and we hope they foster and forge new and exciting paths and endeavours in the future.

New appointments – I have now assumed the position as VGT Chairperson after membership of the committee for the past 12 years. I live in Smeaton and operate a small farming enterprise. I am also a member of my local Landcare group and a member of the Community Leaders Group of the North Central CMA.

This year the VGT added a new position of Deputy Chairperson. This has been filled by Peter Forster, another long-standing member of nine years. Peter's motto is you only control gorse with long-term coordinated community action. That message was reiterated in the VGT's animated community service announcements aired during June 2020 promoting the message that gorse is a generational problem if not controlled.

A big welcome also to new VGT committee members Kylie Stafford from the Mount Alexander Shire Council and Rob Richardson from the Grassland Society of South Australia.

Community funding – In 2019/20, the VGT committed approximately \$116,700, to 13 local projects from the Community Grants Fund. They comprised of six year 1 large grants, one year 2 large grant and six small grants. Covid saw approximately half the grant groups require extensions to complete works.



Victorian Gorse Taskforce

To date more than 125 properties have been involved in these projects, with 79 landholders signing up to 3-year voluntary gorse control agreements. The 2019/20 program saw more than 296 hectares of gorse controlled across the state with more control works still to come as groups work towards completion.

Some long-term projects aimed to reduce large infestations while others targeted isolated gorse patches to prevent them spreading.

Due to Covid, the VGT decided not to operate its annual grants program for 2020/21. We anticipate the program will be back for 2021/22 and encourage communities to plan for potential projects early in 2021. More information is provided on the VGT website at vicgorsetaskforce.com.au.

Communications, Community Engagement and Extension Officer – The VGT continued its partnership with Conservation Volunteers Australia this year through Communications, Community Engagement and Extension Officer Brydie Murrhy. With the last round of White Paper funding, the VGT was fortunate to secure Brydie's position until December 2020.

Brydie helped respond to more than 650 inquiries from landholders about gorse control during the year. She also developed information resources, including our biannual newsletter, Gorse Talk. Four articles were published in community newsletters.

Brydie also completed 15 property inspections as part of the extension service providing individual property management plans to encourage and support landholders in their gorse control.

Events – Brydie and other VGT members attended some events before Covid hit, such as Sheepvention, the Sungold Field Days, Seymour Alternative Farming Expo and the Kyneton Farmers' Market.

Biological controls – Brydie also represented the VGT at a biological control workshop in Daylesford hosted by Hepburn Shire in October 2019. Greg LaFoe from Agricultural Victoria shared his knowledge of the success being achieved with the Gorse soft shoot moth in Tasmania, which scientists have released in Victoria. They are waiting for the population to grow before telling the public the release spot to protect the species from overharvesting and we will follow the results with interest.

CFA partnership – Brydie also worked with CFA Operations Officer Lindsay Barry from South West Victoria to create an educational flyer alerting landowners of the fire risk of gorse and the safety risk it poses to firefighters. The flyer was shared widely from the VGT's social media and is now part of the CFA's community education resources.

Building our online presence – Brydie has strengthened our online presence during the Covid restrictions, including by hosting a virtual gorse demonstration day to replace the four cancelled demonstration days. The demonstration is now available on our website. Brydie was also interviewed by various commercial and ABC radio stations across the year, bringing the gorse control message to a wider audience. The VGT also filmed five gorse control demonstration videos, now available on the VGT website.

Looking ahead – We will continue to develop our online resources in 2020/21, with Brydie planning another virtual presentation on general gorse information, more radio interviews and extension services as well as a stakeholder campaign, mapping project and more.

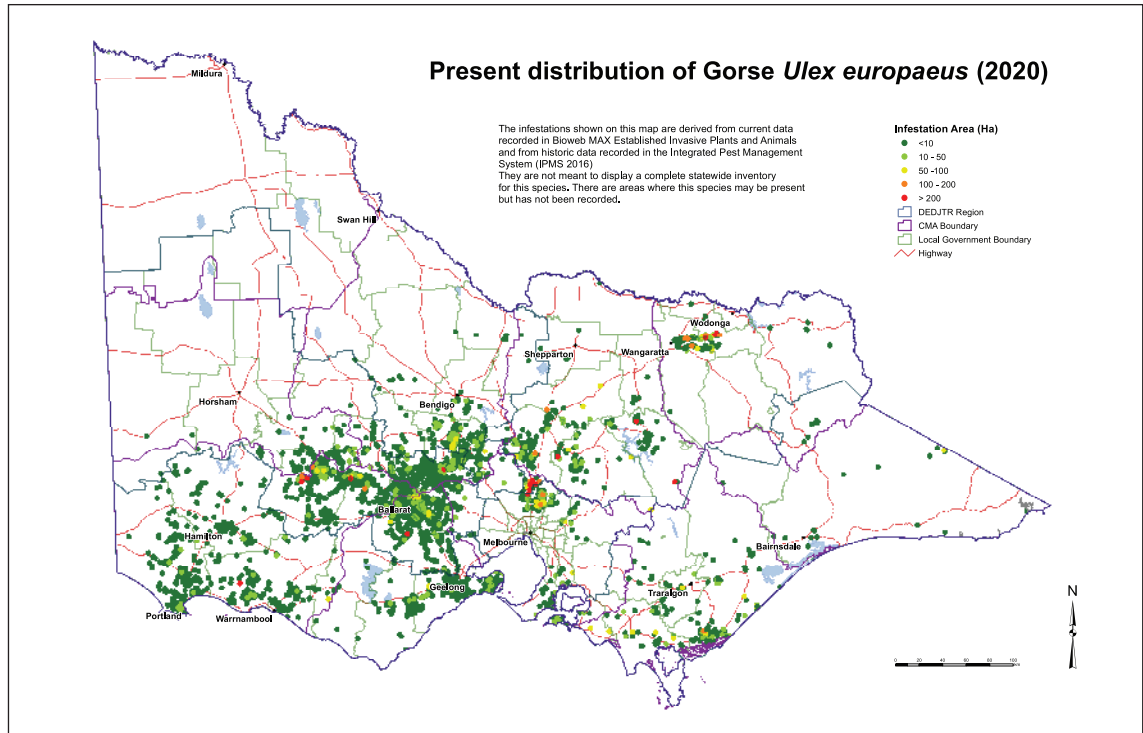
We also look forward to the outcomes of the first evaluation of the VGT since it started, with Malcolm Brown from Scarlet Consulting and Geoff Park from Natural Decisions being engaged to undertake the independent evaluation. The results will help develop the new Victorian Gorse Control Strategy for 2021-2026. We look forward to the evaluation and the exciting direction it will take the VGT.

Our committee members have tackled an increased workload during the year, adding to the demands of Covid. I would like to acknowledge and thank all for their time and dedication, particularly Karen O'Keefe, who left the committee this year after committed service.

I would also like to thank Nicole Garfi for her work in supporting the VGT committee and her capable project management skills.

Ron Cosgrave
Chairperson – Victorian Gorse Taskforce

Background





Victorian Gorse Taskforce

Supporting community-led gorse control projects and activities is the key focus of the Victorian Gorse Taskforce.



On-Ground Gorse Control Projects 2019/20



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.

‘Large Grant’ Projects

The Large Grants program can be a sustained project that can run up to four years. It provides up to \$30,000 for community-led gorse control education and treatment across a local landscape. This program is about placing a greater emphasis on voluntary control for gorse management rather than regulatory enforcement. Through the Large Grant 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 Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) compliance can be recommended so that the sustained action of the majority of landholders is supported. The seven large grant projects that were supported by the VGT in 2019/20 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.

LARGE GRANTS – YEAR 1

Gorse control in the Moorabool – southern control in Morrisons, Meredith and Elaine localities

(Project proponent: Moorabool Catchment Landcare Group)

VGT contribution 2019/20	Other contributions	Landholders involved / approx. hectares of control	
		Current Achievements	Projected Achievements
\$20,000	\$25,500	12 / 13 ha	20 / 50 ha

Nearest towns: Meredith and Elaine

The Moorabool Catchment Landcare Group has supported gorse treatment on more than 5,000 hectares since 2011. The latest targets are persistent infestations along the East Moorabool and Moorabool rivers and on native grasslands and agricultural land. A community meeting in November 2018 and social media campaign identified a new Gorse Target Area and while Covid restrictions have delayed works the group is confident more landholders will get involved. The Landcare Group is also working with public land managers such as Moorabool Shire, Golden Plains Shire, Barwon Water, DELWP and Parks Victoria.



Ashbourne Landcare Group – WAG Gorse Program

(Project proponent: Ashbourne Landcare Group)

VGT contribution 2019/20	Other contributions	Landholders involved / approx. hectares of control
\$21,250	\$52,212	26 / 46 ha



Nearest town: Woodend

Landholders have invested more than \$50,000 in treating their gorse with support from the Weed Action Group Gorse Program. The program was launched in 2012 and aims to help create a bio-link along the Campaspe River connecting the Wombat State Forest with the Cobaw State Forest (via the Campaspe-Maribynong Headwater Bio-Link) and to the Upper Coliban Corridors Bio-Link. A letter from Macedon Ranges Shire prompted 26 landholders to register for the 2019/20 program and 24 have completed their onsite works and 2 are awaiting final inspection from the program's project officer.



Maintain the Gain – Reinvigorating gorse control on Phillip Island and Surrounds

(Project proponent: Bass Coast Landcare Network)

VGT contribution 2019/20	Proposed Other contributions	Landholders involved / approx. hectares of control	
		Current Achievements	Proposed Achievements
\$25,000	\$46,000	14 / 120 ha	20 / 60 ha

Nearest towns: Bass, Grantville, Kilcunda, San Remo, Newhaven, Cowes

The Bass Coast Landcare Network is closer to achieving its goal of an ‘island ark’ for threatened and endangered plants and animals with a long-term effort to eradicate gorse from Phillip Island and the surrounding area. The Landcare Network has extended its reach to Grantville and Kilcunda with VGT funding support and its project officer will target at least 20 properties each year once Covid restrictions have lifted. The Network continues to maintain its networks and partnerships with Phillip Island Landcare Group, Bass Valley Landcare Group, Phillip Island Nature Parks, Bass Coast Shire and Parks Victoria.



Gorse from remorse to rejoice in the NE Mornington Peninsula

(Project proponent: Mornington Peninsula Landcare Network)

VGT contribution 2019/20	Proposed Other contributions	Current Achievements Landholders involved / approx. hectares of control
\$9,500	\$16,000	2 / 4 ha



Nearest towns: Mt Martha/Mornington/Moorooduc/Baxter

Controlling gorse along Peninsula Link is the focus of the Mornington Peninsula Landcare Network. While it planned to support seven landholders with significant infestations (136 hectares) with subsidies and education programs this year, Covid restrictions put these on hold. Two of the seven landholders have signed on and three will be followed up. The program is targeting properties near Balcombe Creek, home to the endangered Dwarf galaxias fish, Growling grass frog and Swamp skink, and the Balcombe Estuary. Gorse control will help protect other local assets including the 230 hectares of public land managed by the local Shire including the Briars, Devilbend Natural Features Reserve as well as smaller reserves. The Landcare Group is also working with Mornington-Baxter railway managers, VicTrack, Mornington Peninsula Shire and Melbourne Water.

Gorse in the Kangaroo Creek valley, Taradale

(Project proponent: Connecting Country)

VGT contribution 2019/20	Proposed Other contributions	Landholders involved / approx. hectares of control	
		Current Achievements	Proposed Achievements
\$10,500	\$28,865	14 / 11 ha	14 / 12 ha

Nearest town: Castlemaine

Taradale residents have joined the community gorse control effort with 14 landholders signing up to a joint project between Connecting Country and the Taradale Landcare Group. A VGT grant has subsidised gorse treatment on 11 of the properties to date, with the others preparing for works. Most properties are small farms or lifestyle properties located on the northern Kangaroo Creek, from the Fryers Range Conservation Reserve to the fringes of Taradale township. Some landholders are new to the area and are keen to control their gorse. A local contractor was employed for physical and chemical gorse treatments to spray cut and paint and mulch Ecoblade gorse. Connecting Country initially teamed up with Taradale Landcare in 2012 to implement the 'Gorse Must Die' strategy. The VGT funding is helping the group achieve its goal to improve the Kangaroo Creek environment, reducing the risk of spread speed into the waterway.



Gorse Control Program

(Project proponent: Southwest Environment Alliance)

VGT contribution 2019/20	Other contributions	Landholders involved / approx. hectares of control
\$5,607	\$17,507	5 / 12.2 ha



Nearest town: Portland

Five landholders are tackling gorse on properties in the Portland area with diverse conditions that require different approaches. Some feature difficult terrain with dense infestations or leech-filled valleys while others support important habitat for birds with significant trees that need protection. All five landholders have completed their initial control works and will continue to treat their gorse. Glenelg Shire Council also treated gorse on local roadsides and reserves in 2019/20.



LARGE GRANTS – YEAR 2

Maintain the Gain – Reinvigorating Gorse Control on Phillip Island and Surrounds 19/20

(Project proponent: Bass Coast Landcare Network)

VGT contribution 2019/20	Other contributions	Landholders involved / approx. hectares of control
\$2,800	\$910	6 / 25.4 ha

Nearest towns: Bass, Grantville, Kilcunda, San Remo, Newhaven, Cowes

Landholders across 20 properties are tackling a combined 190 hectares of gorse on Phillip Island and the surrounding area are progressing well with their efforts. This year the group used their VGT Project Officer funding to facilitate reinspection's on properties that had undertaken gorse control works in the previous year. Six of these landholders provided an in-kind contribution and undertook follow-up works by spraying gorse on their properties. The combined efforts of the landholders have reclaimed valuable productive agricultural land and reduced the habitat for feral cats and other predators of wildlife including the threatened Eastern Barred Bandicoot on Phillip Island. The Landcare Network is now seeking new properties for future control works.



‘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 runs for a single year in a target area. In 2019/20 the VGT funded projects up to \$5,000 (GST exclusive) to support community-led action.



Treating isolated pockets of Gorse in the Woody Yaloak Catchment

(Project proponent: Woody Yaloak Catchment Group)

VGT contribution 2019/20	Proposed Other contributions	Landholders involved / approx. hectares of control	
		Current Achievements	Proposed Achievements
\$4,986	\$9,911	7 / 15 ha	8 / 20 ha

Nearest towns: Mannibadar, Corindhap, Illabarook

The VGT continued its support of the Woody Yaloak Catchment Group with eight landholders undertaking control projects. This project builds on previous work by targeting isolated patches of gorse that have been previously untreated. Works are along fence lines, in drainage lines and amongst remnant vegetation. One project has been completed and another two are awaiting final inspection. Two of the remaining five projects have been delayed because of difficulty employing contractors due to Covid restrictions but it is hoped all will be complete by the end of 2020. Separate to the VGT funding, a further \$8,000 of gorse control work is being undertaken by six landholders and the Smythesdale Cemetery Trust.



Rocky Lead Gorse Roundup

(Project proponent: Rocky Lead Landcare Group)

VGT contribution 2019/20	Other contributions	Landholders involved / approx. hectares of control
\$4,632.50	\$4,514	8 / 22.8 ha

Nearest town: Rocklyn

Gorse is a major threat to this region's agricultural industry, which include seed and potato production, sheep, cattle and grain. Eight landholders ranging from large-scale agriculture professionals to weekenders matched VGT funding to treat gorse on their properties. Most have water frontage to the Rocky Lead Creek that

feeds the Newlyn Reservoir and other tributaries, which can transport gorse seed, especially when flooding occurs. A contractor was employed from November 2019 to May 2020 to spot and boom spray on the eight properties. The work built on a previous gorse control works the VGT has funded.

Langley/Edgecombe Target Area 2019

(Project proponent: Campaspe Valley Landcare Group)

VGT contribution 2019/20	Proposed Other contributions	Landholders involved / approx. hectares of control	
		Current Achievements	Proposed Achievements
\$1,930	\$1,930	5 / 0.2 ha	5 / 2.7 ha

Nearest town: Kyneton

This project contributes to a larger goal of creating a bio-link from Black Hill to Green Hill. Weather has delayed gorse control works by the Campaspe Valley Landcare Group (newly merged with the Langley Landcare Group) and landholders are waiting for warmer weather before embarking on the project. The group is targeting gorse in remnant bushland where gorse is vulnerable to spreading. The Landcare Group

offers landholders its resources including small spray equipment to encourage vigilant and regular action. The Langley Landcare Group has received two previous VGT grants and the merged organisation hopes this latest round of funding will enable follow-up treatments. The Landcare Group is working with Mount Alexander and Macedon Ranges Shire councils to coordinate gorse control works on public land.

Gorse Control on the Northern Bellarine Peninsula

(Project proponent: Bellarine Landcare Group)

VGT contribution 2019/20	Other contributions	Landholders involved / approx. hectares of control	
		Current Achievements	Proposed Achievements
\$3,496.60	\$21,879.53	3 / 4.23 ha	4 / 7.5 ha

Nearest town: Portarlington, Drysdale

The Bellarine Landcare Group has worked with 20 landholders over the last two years to successfully reduce gorse in the local area. The VGT has supported the Landcare Group with funding for three consecutive years on this project and 20 landholders have tackled gorse in the last two years. Promoting the need for gorse control at a field day in May 2019 encouraged four residents to sign up. Two projects have now been completed, another is awaiting a contractor for herbicide control and another is on hold due to Covid restrictions. In addition to the VGT projects, the Landcare Group is engaging a 'Working for Victoria' team to target gorse among native vegetation across two properties adjoining Swan Bay and Yarram Creek at Queenscliff. The Landcare Group will continue to promote information about weed control via combined rabbit/gorse control workshops, its newsletter, website and social media.



Gorse control – Little Coliban River and adjacent paddocks 2019/20

(Project proponent: Tylden Landcare group)

VGT contribution 2019/20	Other contributions	Landholders involved / approx. hectares of control
\$5,000	\$14,746	8 / 14 ha



Nearest town: Tylden

Successful gorse works in the Tylden region ignited action from other landholders to tackle the weed on their properties. The Tylden Landcare Group is using its VGT funding to target waterways, agricultural land and infestations under old growth trees in the region. This is the fifth annual VGT grant the Landcare Group has received which is supporting work on eight properties, some with Coliban River frontage and works have included herbicide control in hard to access areas. The Landcare Group promoted the project at the Kyneton Show and its work is supported by organisations including the Upper Campaspe Landcare Network, North Central Catchment Management Authority, Coliban Water and Bendigo TAFE.



Pipers Creek – The Pines Farm

(Project proponent: J Keane and L Ryan and Pipers Creek Superannuation Fund)

VGT contribution 2019/20	Other contributions	Landholders involved / approx. hectares of control
\$2,000	\$8,900	2 / 8 ha

Nearest town: Kyneton

Two landholders who purchased gorse-infested properties have reduced their infestations with VGT funding support. Gorse was choking dams on one property and the other had infestations along boundary fences and across pasture. Contractors removed the gorse mechanically and followed up with mulching and spraying while landholders hand cut and pasted gorse in areas difficult to access. The landholders experienced a grassfire last summer and said the removal of the gorse had reduced the fuel load to enable the fire to be controlled. Both landholders have discussed gorse removal with neighbours who have also committed to control measures. Macedon Ranges Shire Council has also removed gorse from a neighbouring roadside.



Income and Expenses

Summary of VGT income for 2019/20:

Source	Amount
Grants – DJPR	\$65,000
Refunds	\$0
Interest Received	\$1,735
TOTAL INCOME	\$66,735

Summary of VGT expenses for 2019/20:

Source	Amount
Project Subsidies	\$109,123
Research and Promotion	\$1,287
Administration and Other Expenses	\$8,203
Communications, Community Engagement and Extension	\$21,988
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$140,601





2019/20 VGT Members

Ron Cosgrave	(Chair) North Central Catchment Management Authority – Community Leaders Group
Brian Rowe	(Treasurer) Blampied-Kooroocheang Landcare Group
Peter Forster	(Deputy Chair) ANGAIR and Upper Hopkins Land Management Group
Margaret Hatton	Sunday Creek / Sugarloaf Sub-Catchments Inc
John Cable	Glenlyon Landcare Group
Matthew Menhennet	Landmate and Agricultural Manager – Prison Industries, Corrections Victoria
Rob Richardson	The Grasslands Society of Southern Australia
Kylie Stafford	Mount Alexander Shire Council
Nicole Garfi	Executive Officer
Brydie Murrihy	Communications, Community Engagement and Extension Officer

