

**Victorian Gorse
Control Strategy**
2021-26



The Victorian Gorse Taskforce

The Victorian Gorse Taskforce (VGT) was formed in 1999 with the launch of a community-based and integrated approach to reducing the impact of gorse across the landscape.

The Committee currently comprises land managers who have successfully controlled gorse on their land and in their communities, as well as representatives of Landcare groups, local government, agricultural industries and State Government departments.

The Victorian Government funds the VGT to oversee the coordination and implementation of the Victorian Gorse Control Strategy (VGCS). The VGT is committed to ensuring there is a strong emphasis on building community capacity in gorse control through a mix of extension services, community engagement activities and grants. The VGT encourages the responsible authority to use compliance to support coordinated on-ground action to control gorse.

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Disclaimer:

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THE PROBLEM

Gorse (*Ulex europaeus L.*) is an introduced plant from Europe that is now established in southern Australia.

It is a Weed of National Significance (WoNS) due to its invasiveness, impacts, potential for spread and negative effects on economic, environmental and social values.

Today, gorse is spread across 23 million hectares of Australia and infests up to one million hectares. Its potential range is 87 million hectares.¹ The extent of gorse in Victoria in 2020 is shown in Figure 2.

Gorse is one of Australia's worst weeds. It infests valuable pastoral land and significantly reduces land values. It is a haven for rabbits, foxes and feral cats; it degrades waterways and damages natural environments.

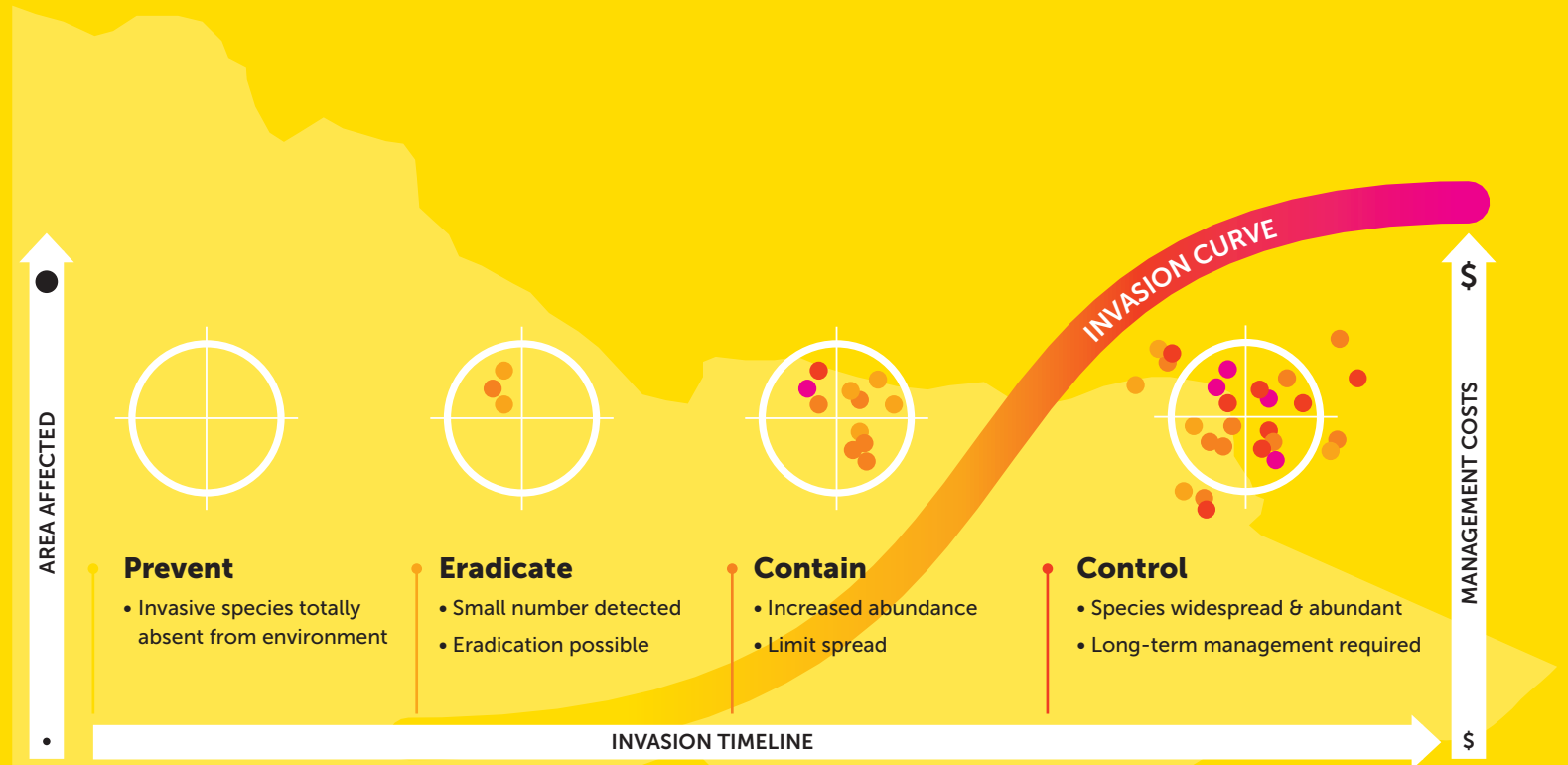


Figure 1: The invasion curve points to the long-term management required to control invasive pest plants like gorse².

1 million hectares infected

From an agricultural perspective gorse reduces carrying capacity, restricts stock and human access and harbours feral animals. In forestry, gorse interferes with access, seedling establishment and harvesting.

23 million hectares impacted

In native vegetation, gorse can form dense monocultural stands and inhibit natural regeneration. It poses a fire hazard and detracts from landscape values across all land types.

87 million hectares threatened

Gorse threatens the integrity of riparian zones, impacts on biodiversity in native vegetation and on threatened species.

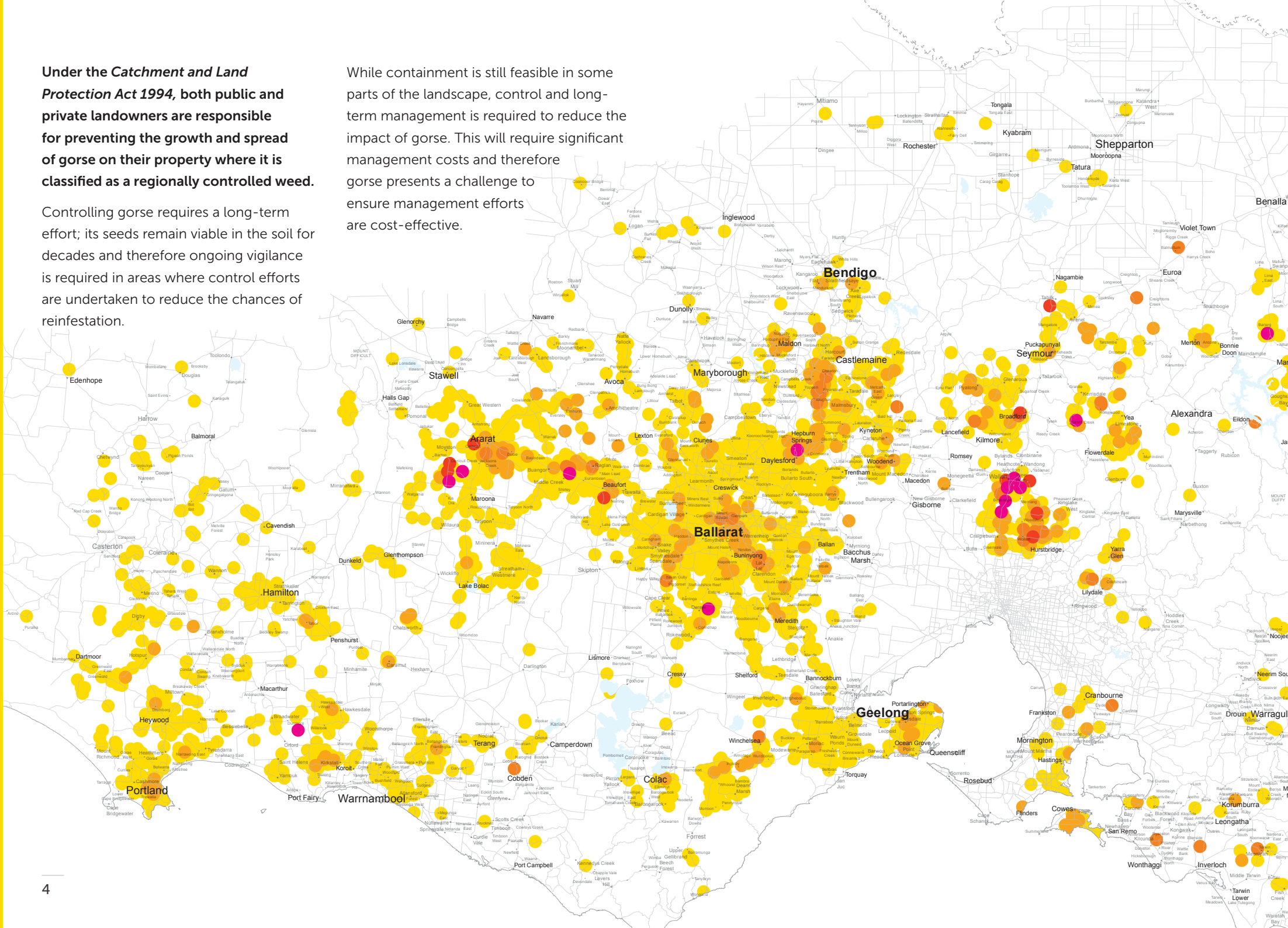
¹ Gorse National Best Practice Manual, Department of Primary Industries and Water, State of Tasmania, 2006

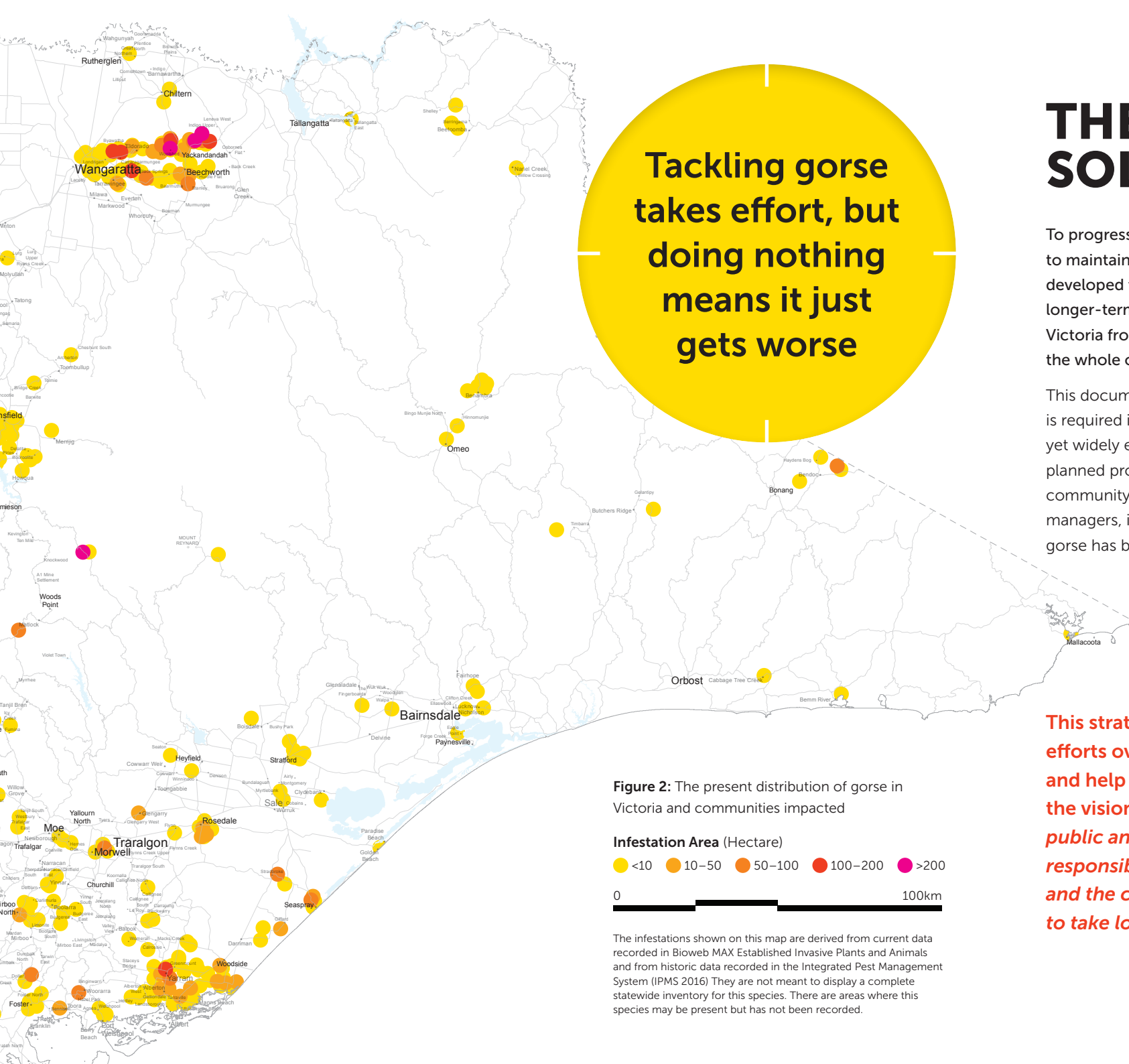
²<https://invasives.org.au/blog/setting-the-stage-for-invasive-species-research/>

Under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*, both public and private landowners are responsible for preventing the growth and spread of gorse on their property where it is classified as a regionally controlled weed.

Controlling gorse requires a long-term effort; its seeds remain viable in the soil for decades and therefore ongoing vigilance is required in areas where control efforts are undertaken to reduce the chances of reinfestation.

While containment is still feasible in some parts of the landscape, control and long-term management is required to reduce the impact of gorse. This will require significant management costs and therefore gorse presents a challenge to ensure management efforts are cost-effective.





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

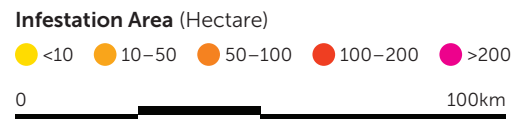
THE SOLUTION

To progress the gains made to date and to maintain momentum the VGT has developed this strategy to help secure the longer-term direction for gorse control in Victoria from 2021 to 2026. It applies to the whole of Victoria.

This document recognises that vigilance is required in areas where gorse is not yet widely established, and a long-term, planned program of extension and community engagement, involving all land managers, is best for those areas where gorse has become a chronic issue.

This strategy will focus the VGT's efforts over the next five years and help move towards realising the vision: "All land managers, public and private, accept their responsibility for gorse control and the community is supported to take long-term action."

Figure 2: The present distribution of gorse in Victoria and communities impacted



The infestations shown on this map are derived from current data recorded in Bioweb MAX Established Invasive Plants and Animals and from historic data recorded in the Integrated Pest Management System (IPMS 2016) They are not meant to display a complete statewide inventory for this species. There are areas where this species may be present but has not been recorded.

1

KEY PRINCIPLES

The following key principles underpin the 2021-26 Victorian Gorse Control Strategy:

1.1

Coordination of Strategy at a state level

The VGT encourages the coordination and implementation of the Victorian Gorse Control Strategy (VGCS) across Victoria, in partnership with private landowners, community groups and networks, state government agencies, local governments, catchment management authorities and other public land managers.

1.2


Community-based approach to invasive plant control

The VGT works in partnership with the Victorian Government to deliver community-based invasive plant control programs³. State funding for on-ground works is essential to the success of the VGCS.

1.3

Alignment with regional, state and national directions and strategies for controlling invasive plants

The VGCS is consistent with the aims and outcomes of the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, the Victorian Government's Biosecurity Strategy⁴, the Victorian Invasive Plants and Animals Policy Framework (IPAPF)⁵, the National Plant Biosecurity Strategy⁶ and the Australian Weeds Strategy 2017 to 2027⁷.



Propagule persistence is created by the gorse seedbank. It's seed production is prolific with the seeds remaining viable for 30 to 50 years or more in the soil. Seed banks can be as high as 100 million seeds per hectare.

3. The VGT is one of four Victorian Community Pest Management Groups who have developed integrated approaches to pest control

4. Dept. of Primary Industries, Biosecurity Victoria, 2009

5. The State of Victoria, Department of Primary Industries, 2010

6. Plant Health Australia 2010

7. Invasive Plants and Animals Committee 2016, Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, Canberra.

1.4

Application of a high level of governance

The VGT's coordination and implementation of the VGCS is underpinned by clear, transparent and consultative processes for decision making.

1.5

Targeted and cost-effective investment

The VGT aims to support the cost-effective investment of public funds to maximise the public benefit of gorse control actions, including those of both private and public land managers.

1.6

Best practice

The VGT promotes control techniques consistent with those outlined in the National Gorse Taskforce's Best Practice Manual (2009) and considers best practice control techniques the cornerstone of implementing this strategy.

1.7

An integrated approach

Gorse control is an essential and integral part of the sustainable management of natural resources for the benefit of the economy, the environment, and society.

Effective gorse control requires a targeted and coordinated approach among both public and private land managers. The VGT will support grant applications that facilitate consolidated fire control, along with applications from landowners whose properties are adjacent to neighbours practising consolidated gorse control.

1.8

Controlling gorse is a shared responsibility

Controlling gorse requires all parties to have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

1.9

Capacity building is vital

Building capacity across government, industry, land and water managers and the community is fundamental to effective and enduring gorse control.

1.10

Compliance with statutory obligations to control gorse

Gorse is an invasive plant that all land managers (private and public) are legally obliged to manage under Section 20 of the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*.

The VGT encourages the responsible authority to use compliance to support coordinated on-ground action to control gorse.

1.11

Monitoring and evaluation

An outcomes-based approach is adopted using monitoring, reporting and evaluation to inform continuous improvement in gorse control.

The VGT aims to support the cost-effective investment of public funds to maximise the public benefit of gorse control actions, including those of both private and public land managers.

2

KEY OUTCOMES

The key outcomes described here can only be achieved with an adequately resourced VGT.

In addition, the VGT encourages the responsible authority to use compliance to support extensive community-based on-ground action to control gorse.

The VGT has operated with minimal funding in recent years and yet some significant gains have been made in gorse control in select areas.

With increased government support the VGT can deliver an effective gorse control program that protects significant natural assets (identified in regional catchment strategies) and provides a net positive return on investment.

It should be noted that the VGT does not have any legislative authority in relation to long-term control and compliance activities and relies entirely on community-based action as well as collaboration with agencies that do have such authority.



2.1

Provide leadership in community-based invasive plant control

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

2.2

Improve VGCS program design and delivery

The VGT is committed to continuous review of its program design and delivery mechanisms, including the current mix of extension/community engagement/small and large grants, to achieve the best possible gorse control for the limited public resources available.

Knowledge of the extent and distribution of gorse, including 'clean' areas, provides the basis for effective planning and delivery of control projects. Mapping of the extent and distribution of gorse is an important management and education tool. However, experience has shown that it is not feasible to accurately map gorse at a state-wide scale with the current level of resourcing. Therefore, the priority of a mapping effort requires further research to ensure it leads to control programs that reduce the extent of gorse. Agriculture Victoria's Biosecurity and GIS teams provide important mapping support in this area.

◀ VGT gorse control demonstration field day at Daylesford 2019. The day featured a practical demonstration of best practice gorse removal and information for long-term control of gorse.

2.3

Prevent the spread of gorse into new areas of the state and achieve a reduction in the impact of gorse on natural resource assets across Victoria

The VGT places an emphasis on programs in the areas of the state that are at risk from invasion by gorse, where the objective is to support activities that prevent the spread of gorse, facilitate partnership development, and build community capacity. The VGT encourages the responsible authority to use compliance to support extensive community-based on-ground action to control gorse.

The VGT and its partners work with the community and public land managers in target areas to reduce the spread of gorse and protect significant natural resource assets - agricultural land and soils, waterways and native vegetation. These assets are prioritised in regional catchment strategies and regional invasive plant and animal management strategies.

2.4

Promote Best Practice Management for gorse control in Victoria

VGT promotes best practice management techniques, so that the control of gorse and site rehabilitation is effective and efficient.

2.6

Ensure effective monitoring and reporting of the VGCS and its achievements

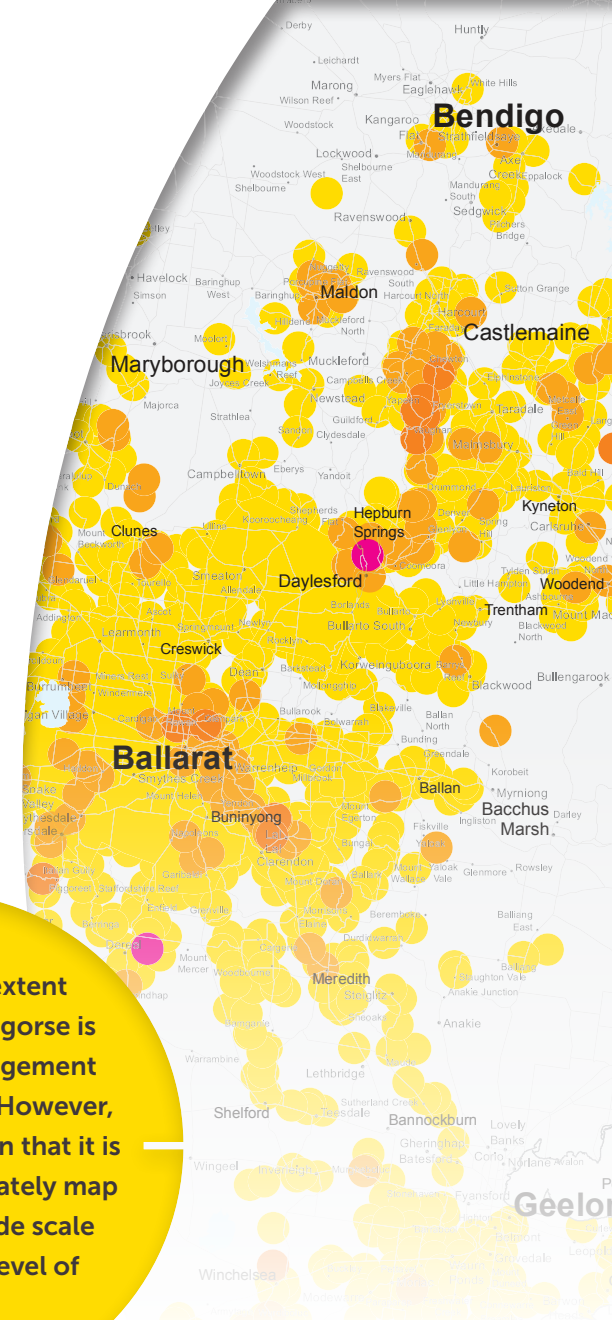
Implementing the VGCS is monitored, and stakeholders and the community are informed of its progress.

2.5.

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

Communities have the knowledge, capability and commitment to undertake the long-term control of gorse.

Mapping of the extent and distribution of gorse is an important management and education tool. However, experience has shown that it is not feasible to accurately map gorse at a state-wide scale with the current level of resourcing.



3 KEY ACTIVITIES

Key activities for achieving each of the key outcomes listed in Section 2.



Key Outcome 2.1:

The VGCS is coordinated at a state level

Activities to achieve outcome:

- 1.1 The VGT leads the state-wide implementation of the 2021-26 Victorian Gorse Control Strategy (VGCS) on private land and strengthens partnerships with public land managers to contribute to a coordinated cross-tenure approach to the control of gorse.
- 1.2 Seek Victorian Government funding to implement an annual on-ground works program to control gorse on private land delivered through a competitive grants program.
- 1.3 Seek sufficient funding from the Victorian Government for an Executive Officer to support the VGT for the period 2021-26 and to fully implement the new strategy.
- 1.4 Liaise with key senior Victorian Government personnel in the biosecurity sector to communicate the VGT's progress and co-ordinate activities.
- 1.5 Liaise with CMAs, local government authorities and other public land managers to achieve a coordinated approach to gorse control that protects high value natural resource assets as identified in regional catchment strategies.
- 1.6 Work with Landcare Victoria. Inc. and the Victorian Government bio-security sector to incentivise gorse control by private landholders.

Key Outcome 2.2:

Improve VGCS program design and delivery

Activities to achieve outcome:

- 2.1 Review the current mix of small and large grants available for gorse control and identify which is most effective. Amend mix of extension/community engagement/grants as appropriate.
- 2.2 Support projects that provide new distribution information for gorse in Victoria, especially where it relates to the protection of high value natural resource assets as identified in regional catchment strategies.
- 2.3 Support mapping, surveillance and recording programs that provide knowledge of the extent and impact of gorse control works and ensure ongoing monitoring of control sites.
- 2.4 For private land, ensure that the selection and mix of policy tools and strategies (e.g. small and large grants, and extension) is guided by an improved understanding of the public and private obligations and benefits of gorse control.
- 2.5 Develop a clear approach to the selection of projects for funding based on consideration of benefits, risks and likelihood of success.



Key Outcome 2.3:

Prevent the spread of gorse into new areas of the state and achieve a reduction in the impact of gorse on high priority natural resource assets

Activities to achieve outcome:

- 3.1 Support 'prevention of spread' programs and control of isolated infestations where feasible.
- 3.2 Aim for a reduction in gorse infestations in areas where there are high priority natural resource assets as identified in regional catchment strategies.



◀ Gorse favours temperate regions with higher rainfall areas of 650 to 900mm annually. The weed has been found growing in a wide range of soil types but ideally prefers low fertility, acidic soils.

Key Outcome 2.4:

Promote Best Practice Management for gorse control in Victoria

Activities to achieve outcome:

- 4.1 Continue to promote and distribute best management practice information for gorse control.
- 4.2 Maintain the VGT website to ensure it provides the most current information for best practice gorse control.
- 4.3 Engage with linear reserve managers to improve gorse management control.
- 4.4 Promote a landscape approach to gorse management and the integration of gorse control programs with other natural resource management activities, particularly other pest plant and animal control and fire prevention programs.

Key Outcome 2.5:

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

Activities to achieve outcome:

- 5.1 Seek financial support to implement an annual Extension/Community Engagement program to ensure that land managers possess the knowledge and capability to control gorse on their land.
- 5.2 Continue to use social media channels to communicate about best practice gorse control and to promote 'good news' stories.
- 5.3 Identify and support champions with zero tolerance for gorse. Establish a support network where members connect quarterly to share their experiences of effective gorse control.

Key Outcome 2.6:

Ensure effective monitoring and reporting of the VGCS

Activities to achieve outcome:

- 6.1 Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan as a first step in implementing the 2021-26 VGCS.
- 6.2 Report annually to stakeholders and the community on the implementation of the VGCS and promote achievements to the community.
- 6.3 Monitor implementation of the VGCS with appropriate milestones and performance indicators for each key outcome.
- 6.4 Ensure that the performance and effectiveness of the key directions identified in the VGCS 2021-26 are reviewed in 2024.

4

ANNUAL TASK CALENDAR

Calendar assumes four meetings per year and lists the core VGT tasks to be achieved.

2021 (January – June)

- Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan as a first step in implementing the 2021-26 VGCS.
- Review the current mix of small and large grants available for gorse control and identify which is most effective. Ensure that for private land the selection and mix of policy tools and strategies (e.g. grants, extension) is guided by an improved understanding of the public and private obligations and benefits of gorse control.
- Seek funding to implement an annual on-ground works program to control gorse on private land delivered through a competitive grants program.
- Seek commitment from the Victorian Government to fund an Executive Officer for the life of the 2021-26 VGCS. Request additional funds to ensure the new strategy can be implemented.
- Explore software platforms for easier, coordinated grant application, project monitoring and reporting.
- Maintain VGT website to ensure it provides current information for best practice gorse control.

2021-22

- Implement the preferred mix of grants and extension on private land guided by an understanding of the public and private benefits of gorse control.
- Review the grant application guidelines and implement the preferred mix of grants and extension on private land to maximise the public benefits of gorse control.
- Support champions with zero tolerance for gorse. Establish a support network where members connect quarterly to share their experiences of effective gorse control.
- Produce the 2020-21 Annual Report.
- Meet with key senior Victorian Government personnel in the biosecurity sector to improve co-ordination of gorse control activities and communicate the VGT's progress and achievements.
- Maintain VGT website to ensure it provides current information for best practice gorse control.

2022-23

- Implement the preferred mix of grants and extension on private land guided by an understanding of the public and private benefits of gorse control.
- Check in on how the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan is tracking.
- Produce the 2021-22 Annual Report.
- Meet with key senior Victorian Government personnel in the biosecurity sector to improve co-ordination of gorse control activities and communicate the VGT's progress and achievements.
- Maintain VGT website to ensure it provides current information for best practice gorse control.

2023-24


- Implement the preferred mix of grants and extension on private land guided by an understanding of the public and private benefits of gorse control.
- Check in on how the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan is tracking.
- Undertake a mid-term review of the 2021-26 VGCS.
- Produce the 2022-23 Annual Report.
- Meet with key senior Victorian Government personnel in the biosecurity sector to improve co-ordination of gorse control activities and communicate the VGT's progress and achievements.
- Maintain VGT website to ensure it provides current information for best practice gorse control.

2024-25

- Implement the preferred mix of grants and extension on private land guided by an understanding of the public and private benefits of gorse control.
- Check in on how the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan is tracking.
- Produce the 2023-24 Annual Report.
- Meet with key senior Victorian Government personnel in the biosecurity sector to improve co-ordination of gorse control activities and communicate the VGT's progress and achievements.
- Maintain VGT website to ensure it provides current information for best practice gorse control.

2025-26

- Implement the preferred mix of grants, extension and community engagement with private landowners.
- Review the 2021-26 Monitoring and Evaluation Plan against the five years of results.
- Produce the 2024-25 Annual Report.
- Meet with key senior Victorian Government personnel in the biosecurity sector to improve co-ordination of gorse control activities and communicate the VGT's progress and achievements.
- Maintain VGT website to ensure it provides current information for best practice gorse control.



Gorse seeds mainly fall around the plant, but pods can explosively eject seed up to 5m during hot dry weather. Most seed is in the top 2.5cm of soil but can be to 15cm deep. Seed will not establish below 8cm of burial.

5

APPENDIX

5.1

Key terms

Community Capacity Building

Increasing the community's ability to act in response to an issue through the improvement of knowledge, financial resources or technical skills.

Compliance

The meeting of a duty or duties as a land manager or member of the general public as outlined under the CALP Act, through voluntary or enforced action.

Corridors for spread of gorse

Linear areas, that are known high risk areas for the establishment and spread of gorse e.g. roadsides, rail reserves, streams and riparian areas.

Linear Reserves

Linear areas of reserved public land, primarily land reserved for roads and railways and land adjacent to streams.

Regionally Controlled Weed

Regionally Controlled Weeds are usually widespread and are considered important in a particular region by the CMA, Agriculture Victoria and the community. To prevent their spread continuing control measures are required. Land managers have the responsibility to take all reasonable steps to control and prevent the spread of these invasive plants on their land.

Regionally Prohibited Weed

Regionally Prohibited Weeds are not widely distributed in a region but are capable of spreading further, and it is reasonable to expect that they can be eradicated from a region. These invasive plants must be eradicated in the region.

Restricted Weed

This category includes plants that pose an unacceptable risk of spreading in this State or to other parts of Australia if they were to be sold or traded in Victoria and are a serious threat to another State or Territory of Australia. Trade in these invasive plants and their propagules, either as plants, seeds or contaminants in other materials is prohibited.

Stakeholders

Organisations, groups and individuals within the community with an interest in land management including landholders, government agencies, CMAs, community groups such as Landcare and Friends groups, and industry groups such as the Victorian Farmers Federation.

Weeds of National Significance

32 priority invasive plants that pose significant future threats to primary industries, land management, human or animal welfare, biodiversity and conservation values. See www.weeds.org.au

5.2

Further information

If you require advice about invasive plants or animals on your property, please contact the Agriculture Victoria Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

Identification and Control

https://www.vicgorsetaskforce.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/18284-VGT-Brochure_LR.pdf

Websites

Victorian Gorse Taskforce

www.vicgorsetaskforce.com.au

<https://www.facebook.com/VictorianGorseTaskforce>

https://www.instagram.com/victorian_gorse_taskforce/

Weeds Australia

www.weeds.org.au

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Completed_inquiries/2004-07/invasivespecies/report/index

Regional Catchment Strategies and Invasive Plants and Animals Strategies for each CMA region are available at:

Corangamite

www.ccma.vic.gov.au

East Gippsland

www.egcma.vic.gov.au

Glenelg Hopkins

www.ghcma.vic.gov.au

Goulburn Broken

www.gbcma.vic.gov.au

Mallee

www.malleecma.vic.gov.au

North Central

www.nccma.vic.gov.au

North East

www.necma.vic.gov.au

Port Phillip and Westernport

www.pppwcma.vic.gov.au

West Gippsland

www.wgcma.vic.gov.au

Wimmera

www.wcma.vic.gov.au

5.3

Abbreviations

CaLP Act

Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994

CMA

Catchment Management Authority

IPAPF

Victorian Invasive Plants and Animals Policy Framework

VGCS

Victorian Gorse Control Strategy

VGT

Victorian Gorse Taskforce

NRM

Natural Resource Management

WoNS

Weed of National Significance



Victorian Gorse Taskforce