



Victorian Gorse Taskforce
Progress Report



2017/18

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Designed by: Small Dog Design,
21 Dana Street, Ballarat Vic 3350
Tel 03 5333 7777

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Enquiries: VGT Executive Officer,
Department of Economic Development,
Jobs, Transport and Resources,
402-406 Mair Street, Ballarat, Victoria 3350

www.vicgorsetaskforce.com.au

Contents

Chairperson's Report	4
Background	6
On-Ground Gorse Control Projects 2017/18	8
'Large Grant' Projects	8
'Small Grant' Projects	12
Income and Expenses	20
Appendix – 2017/18 VGT Members	22



Chairperson's Report



It's coming up to 20 years since the Victorian Gorse Taskforce (VGT) was established in 1999.

In the lead up to our anniversary year, the VGT continued its integrated community-led approach to gorse control across local areas.

The 2017/18 year was particularly busy for the VGT and the communities we support.

The VGT distributed more than \$90,000 from our Community Grants Fund to 15 local projects tackling gorse over the last year. These projects supported efforts to control isolated gorse patches as well as larger initiatives tackling the weed across landscapes.

Three projects have been granted extensions to complete their control works by the end of 2018.

With funding support from the National Agriculture White Paper, the VGT was able to substantially progress its work in promoting and supporting gorse control in 2017/18.



Victorian Gorse Taskforce

- **Community Survey** – the VGT employed environmental consultancy RMCG from mid-2017 to engage local people to help build our understanding of how to best support them in gorse control. An online survey highlighted that gorse affects all types of land tenures and the key challenges in gorse control are time, cost and accessing the equipment needed. Focus groups in Hepburn Shire and Mitchell Shire identified that mulching gorse and herbicides have proved the most effective steps control steps, although landowners were keen to learn more about herbicide alternatives for ongoing control, including grazing, cultivation and grubbing. The survey and focus groups provided valuable information that is continuing to inform a review of the resources and support the VGT offers to community-led gorse control.
- **New VGT website** – we updated the VGT website in early 2018 to provide more information and resource links, including new videos highlighting gorse impacts of and the methods of control, as well as links to connect people with other information resources.
- **Best practice guide** – the VGT released an updated Best Practice Guide for managing gorse in May 2018. The guide was updated and provides short but comprehensive information for landowners tackling gorse. The guide is available in hard copy or from the VGT website.
- **Communications, Community Engagement and Extension Officer** – the VGT welcomed Heidi Snow in January 2018 as our first-ever Communications, Community Engagement and Extension Officer. Heidi has been busy organising the VGT's participation in field days, updating our resources, liaising with stakeholders and helping drive our pilot projects.
- **Extension projects** – the VGT launched its first extension project on the Bellarine Peninsula in June 2018. The project is providing landholders with property assessments and tailored advice on managing gorse. The VGT is delivering the project with support from the City of Greater Geelong, Bellarine Landcare Group and the Bellarine Bayside Foreshore Committee of Management.
- **Atlas of Living Australia** – the VGT is driving a community-led pilot project to map the extent and location of gorse in the Moyne and

Warrnambool local government areas using the free online national collaborative database of Australia's biodiversity, the Atlas of Living Australia. From June to November 2017, the VGT worked with landowners across the two regions to record the location and size of gorse infestations to provide a baseline for comparison in future years.

- **Community promotions** – a community service announcement to engage the community on gorse control was produced by MRL media for the VGT. The community announcement aired on the WIN television network in September and October 2017 to Ballarat, Bendigo and Gippsland. The VGT also promoted the importance of gorse control and the community support we offer across social media networks and at field days and other community events across the state in 2017/18.

Looking ahead to 2018/19, the VGT is planning another busy year.

We will continue to progress initiatives funded under the National Agricultural White Paper project.

Next year we also plan to update our current *Gorse Control Strategy 2014-19*.

We will communicate our activities through our new quarterly newsletter, *Gorse Talk*, which we launched in July 2018.

Thank you to the VGT committee and to the many workers, community volunteers and landowners for their ongoing commitment to helping control gorse in Victoria across this year.

A special thank you to Nicole Garfi and Paige McDonald, our executive officers, for their tireless work in keeping the VGT functioning efficiently.

Gorse control takes a long-term sustained effort and all your individual contributions are what drives and creates our success.

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).

Eradiation and Prevention Zone

The Eradiation 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.

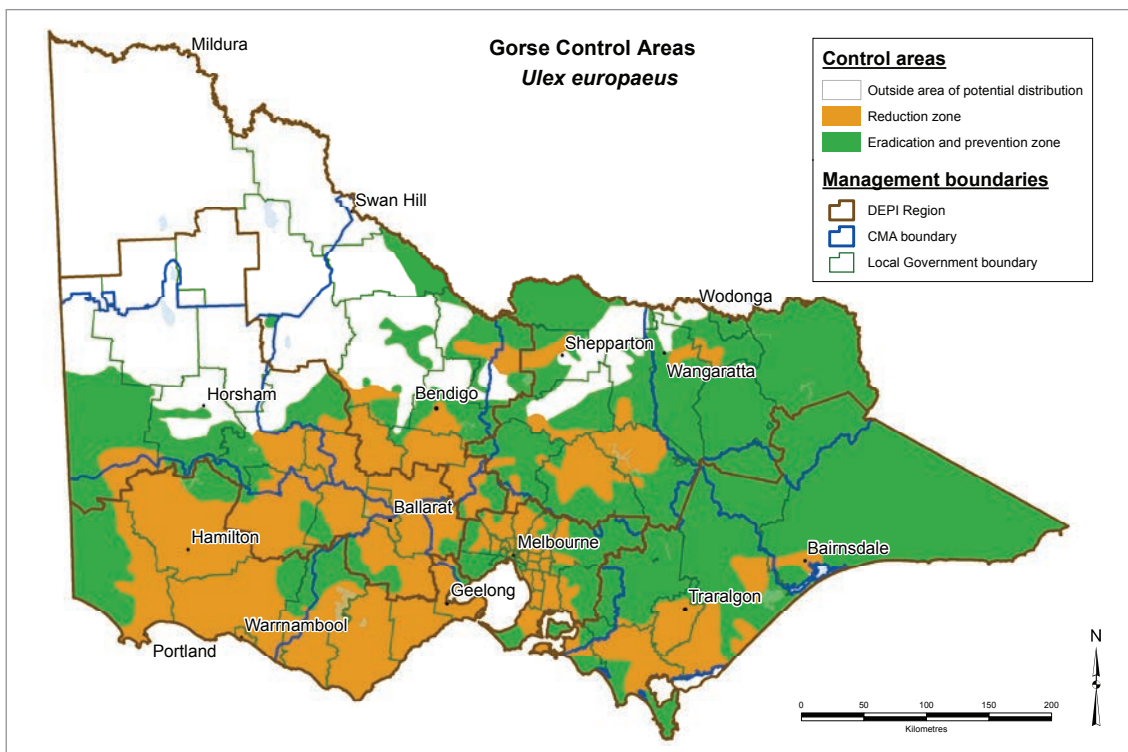


Figure 1: Victoria's gorse control zones. (DEPI, 2014)

On-Ground Gorse Control Projects 2017/18



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 Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR) compliance can be recommended so that the sustained action of the majority of landholders is supported. The five large grant projects that were supported by the VGT in 2017/18 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.

Maintain the Gain – reinvigorating gorse control on Phillip Island and surrounds

(Proponent: Bass Coast Landcare Network)

VGT contribution 2017/18	Other contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$13,000	–	11 / 130.288 ha

Nearest town: Phillip Island

A combined 130 acres of gorse was treated on Phillip Island in 2017/18 with support from the Bass Coast Landcare Network and VGT. Letters were sent to 80 landowners, with the 11 who responded receiving advice and subsidies to tackle their gorse. While dry conditions meant the initial spraying in April had little impact, follow up spraying in May was more effective. The Landcare

Network also used the VGT funding to create a demonstration site to showcase the process and effectiveness of the Ecoblade. Mapping of gorse identified other weeds for landowners and many have also now treated these. The Landcare Network also built new partnerships with community groups such as the YMCA and with non-participating private landowners and local businesses.

WAG Gorse Program 2017/18

(Project proponent: Ashbourne Landcare Group – WAG)

VGT contribution 2017/18	Other contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$13,600	\$42,000	23 / 27 ha

Nearest town: Woodend

The Ashbourne Landcare Group continued its long-term gorse control campaign in 2017/18, supporting 23 land owners to treat 27 hectares of gorse in the local region. VGT funding helped off-set the costs and also paid for a project officer. The Landcare Group estimates the \$13,700 investment of VGT funding generated \$42,000 of cash and in-kind investment from landowners in the Campaspe River region for gorse control.

Bellarine Peninsula Gorse Eradication and Landholder Incentives

(Project proponent: Bellarine Landcare Group)

VGT contribution 2017/18	Other contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$6,500	—	9 / 59.6 ha



Nearest town: Portarlington, St Leonards

The Bellarine Landcare Group continued to build on the achievements of previous gorse projects in 2017/18. Nine landowners received advice and subsidies to treat a combined area of almost 60 hectares of gorse, with a 10th landowner starting treatment of another 24 hectares. Smaller infestations were sprayed or painted and larger gorse patches removed using an excavator and mulcher. Infestations included an area covering 30 hectares of land used for cropping as well as smaller sites in difficult to access areas around dams and along fence lines. The Landcare Group hosted two well-attended rabbit / gorse field days and an information evening and promoted gorse control through its newsletter and social media. This generated inquiries from more landowners looking for advice and support in gorse control. A challenge for gorse control in the region is the number of absent landowners who do not understand the importance of controlling gorse or the impact of it spreading to neighbouring properties. The work of the VGT Extension Officer and its online resources proved helpful in encouraging these landowners.



On top of gorse ground actions

(Project proponent: Surf Coast and Inland Plains Network)

VGT contribution 2017/18	Other contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$1,050	–	0 / 0 ha

Nearest town: Moriac / Freshwater creek

The first steps to get landowners with properties near or along waterways in the Thompson Creek catchment involved in gorse control began in 2017/18. The Surf Coast and Inland Plains Network sent letters to 16 landowners and visited properties to assess the extent of infestations. Some properties have large gorse patches that

will cost up to \$30,000 for initial treatment while those with smaller infestations reported that support from the Surf Coast and Inland Plains Network and VGT would motivate them to treat their gorse. Some landowners expressed the belief there was no long-term benefit in treating gorse if neighbouring landowners did not also act.

Managing isolated areas of gorse in the central Woody Yaloak Catchment

(Project proponent: Woody Yaloak Catchment Group)

VGT contribution 2017/18	Other contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$3,010	–	12 / 5 ha

Nearest town: Rokewood, Cape Clear, Pittong

Eleven landholders in the central Woody Yaloak Catchment in western Victoria received a subsidy to cover half the costs of treating gorse on their properties in 2017/18. While the gorse patches were small and isolated, the landowners had not participated in previous large-scale gorse control efforts in the region and appreciated the advice and support of the Catchment Group and VGT.

Gorse control in the Moorabool – the re-emerging threat

(Proponent: Moorabool Catchment Landcare Group)

VGT contribution 2017/18	Other contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$9,599	–	14 / 48.7 ha

Nearest town: Ballan

Riparian zones and remnant forest areas were targeted for gorse control by the Moorabool Catchment Landcare Group with support from the VGT in 2017/18. Multiple landowners with shared boundaries made a collaborative effort to significantly reduce gorse at Mt Egerton and Morrisons. Working together they substantially reduced gorse along on their land and in riparian zones, including along the Moorabool River. Fourteen landowners in total signed up to voluntary gorse agreements in 2017/18, becoming eligible to receive subsidies to offset their herbicide costs. The Landcare Group has driven the treatment of more than 5,000 ha of gorse across the Moorabool Shire over the last decade with support from the VGT. It continues to build the awareness and interest of private and public land managers to join efforts to reduce gorse across the local landscape.

‘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 2017/18 the VGT funded projects up to \$5,000 (GST exclusive) to support community-led action.



Neighbours and Landcare working together to tackle gorse in a highly visible location

(Proponent: Barongarook Landcare Group)

VGT contribution 2017/18	Other contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$2,000	–	2 / 3 ha



Burning piles on east side of McKie property 8.06.18

Nearest town: Pirron Yallock

The Barongarook Landcare Group supported two adjoining landowners to treat approximately three hectares of gorse spreading across their properties in the Otway region. The gorse was cut, painted and burned and follow up spraying of shoots and seedlings will continue over the next three years. The landowners are also vegetating gaps between the treated sites.

Managing isolated areas of gorse in the Dales area of the Woody Yaloak Catchment

(Proponent: Woody Yaloak Catchment Group)

VGT contribution 2017/18	Other contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$4,953	–	9 / 7 ha

Nearest town: Scarsdale / Smythesdale

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Group supported eight landowners and the local cemetery trust in the Dales region of western Victoria to treat gorse in 2017/18 with VGT support. The gorse infestations were isolated and relatively small and added to a larger gorse control program in the Scarsdale / Smythesdale area. Five of the private landowners received a subsidy to cover half the costs of treating their gorse. One of the other private landowners planned to spray their gorse in Spring 2018. The remaining landowner decided to sell their property and the Catchment Group will approach the eventual purchaser to encourage them to treat the gorse.



Gorse control – Tylden area and adjacent paddocks 2017-18

(Proponent: Tylden Landcare Group)

VGT contribution 2017/18	Other contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$5,000	–	0 / 9 ha



Nearest town: Tylden

The Tylden Landcare Group has encouraged and supported landowners in central Victoria to treat their gorse over several years with funding from the VGT. Five landowners with properties along the Little Coliban River and its tributaries joined the effort in 2017/18 and undertook gorse control. They have retained their gorse control signs on fences to help maintain awareness and interest in controlling the weed.



Treated / non-treated sites west side of Little Coliban River



Milking Yard Creek, tributary along east side of Little Coliban River

Controlling gorse on private property in the Bamganie and Meredith Districts

(Proponent: Bamganie Meredith and District Landcare Group)

VGT contribution 2017/18	Other contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$5,000	—	5 / 5 ha

Nearest town: Meredith / Elaine / Bamganie

Eleven landowners treated gorse on their properties in the Meredith region in 2017/18 with support from the Bamganie Meredith and District Landcare Group and VGT. Five of the landowners completed their initial treatment works and will continue to treat re-emerging gorse over the next few years. The remaining six landowners began chemically treating their infestations and are expected to complete the work in 2018/19.



Gorse control in Yarram

(Proponent: Yarram Urban Landcare Group)

VGT contribution 2017/18	Other contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$1,771.62	—	3 / 6 ha



Nearest town: Yarram / Woodside

Letters offering support for gorse control were sent to 150 landowners in south east Gippsland by the Yarram Urban Landcare Group in 2017/18. While just three landowners signed voluntary agreements, another three treated their gorse without an agreement. The importance of controlling gorse and the support the Landcare Group could offer to treat gorse was also promoted at community events and in the local newspaper.



Wattle Hill Project

(Proponent: Southwest Environmental Alliance)

VGT contribution 2017/18	Other contributions	Voluntary management agreements signed with landholders / approx. hectares of control
\$2,000	\$14,000	2 / 13 ha

Nearest town: Portland

Two landowners with adjoining properties at Wattle Hill near Portland launched a new assault on gorse with support from the Southwest Environmental Alliance and VGT in 2017/18. The gorse had previously been removed mechanically several times but re-established itself along the Wattle Hill Creek that runs through the two properties. It covered the riparian zone and extended across 33 acres of grazing pasture up to two metres high. The VGT helped cover the costs for approximately 10 days of excavation and mulching work in a new control approach, with agronomists consulted about the most effective chemical treatment to keep the gorse at bay.

Income and Expenses



Summary of VGT income for 2017/18:

Source	Amount
Grants – DEDJTR	\$65,000.00
Refunds	\$483.81
Interest Received	\$1,903.20
TOTAL INCOME	\$67,387.01

Summary of VGT expenses for 2017/18:

Source	Amount
Project Subsidies	\$87,600.27
Research and Promotion	\$7,318.18
Administration and Other Expenses	\$10,755.19
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$105,673.64



Appendix



2017/18 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 / Paige McDonald	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
Matthew Menhennet	Landmate and Agricultural Manager – Prison Industries Corrections Victoria



