VICTORIAN GORSE TASKFORCE

GORSE TALK

ENEWS
JULY
2023
ISSUE 9

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Committee Update

By gorse it's cold outside! That's right the weather has well and truly turned as we step into Winter. It's unclear if this winter will be long and drawn out like last year, but we do know gorse is certainly happy and flowering during these colder months. We want landholders and land managers to know there is still time to prevent seeding in the warmer months if you control gorse now.

The VGT have been busy since our last newsletter; holding our AGM last December, saw three new members to our committee – David Miralles from DEECA, Justin Rowe from Glenlyon Upper Loddon LCG and Dale Tunstall from ENVU. The VGT are excited to work and collaborate with its new members.

Recently the Chairs of the four Victorian Community Pest Management Groups took a trip to Canberra to accept the Australian Biosecurity Award in the Community category, we are truly honoured and humbled for the recognition.

The VGT would also like to welcome Christina Boon, the VGT's new Communications and Community Engagement Officer, who is already proving her worth, as we are seeing her work spreading into communities. Christina is already showing her unwavering commitment and dedication to her role and the VGT cause.

We have a lot more in this edition of Gorse Talk, we hope you enjoy it. If your community has any gorse events or activities coming up, get in contact with the VGT, we will do our best to spread the word.

Victoria's four Community Pest Management Groups win Australian Biosecurity Award

The Australian Biosecurity Awards (ABA) recognise individuals, groups and organisations that have shown commitment to supporting and promoting Australian biosecurity and the systems that underpin it.

Agriculture Victoria nominated the Community Pest Management Groups (CPMGs) to receive an award under the community category for their role in the **Weeds and Rabbits Project**. The four CPMG Chairs recently received their award on behalf of their groups in Canberra.

The CPMGs include the Victorian Gorse Taskforce, the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce, the Victorian Rabbit Action Network and the Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party, who formed part of the Delivery Leadership Group, the project steering committee for the Weeds and Rabbit Project.

The project attracted 4.3 million dollars and was a collaborative partnership between Agriculture Victoria and the CPMGs. The project was a biosecurity initiative aimed at improving the way established pest animals and weeds are managed in Victoria. The collaborative project model placed community at the table to guide investment decision making, critical for supporting community-led action on weeds and rabbits.

This game-changing project delivered 223 workshops and events and engaged over 6,000 people during its lifespan. The project helped CPMG groups discover better pathways into community, to assist and build capacity, to provide direction and improved understanding of invasive species issues.

Following the project, outcomes observed included: more effective knowledge sharing and collaboration between stakeholders, community, government, and industry; reduced reliance on regulation and compliance and effective community led programs.

For further information on the Weeds and Rabbits Project visit https://weedsandrabbitsstory.com/

Meet Christina Boon, the VGT's new Communications and Community Engagement Officer

Hello everyone, I'd like to introduce myself, Christina Boon, as the new Communications and Community Engagement Officer for the Victorian Gorse Taskforce (VGT). I hope that in the coming months you will see my efforts through our gorse messages reaching far and wide and becoming more easily accessible.

Armed with a degree in Botany, a whole lot of customer service experience, tertiary education, training and a discord with noxious weeds, the time was right for me to work for this important cause. Which I have embraced with gusto.

I was born in the yodelling mountains of Switzerland then raised on a small sheep farm in the picturesque Victorian town of Daylesford in the Hepburn Shire, where I now reside. I have a passion for handmade goods, managing my lovely bees and taste testing honeys. With a naturalist Australian grandmother, and scientist grandfather I was instilled from a young age with a love of wildflowers, country, and a vehement response to noxious weeds.

My grandfather always said, "Never step over a weed!" stopping to deal with each one... a trait I am now known for.

One of the problems with gorse is you can't just say "Never step over a weed". As we know gorse is far too prickly for impromptu pulling out when you first see it (unless it is a seedling). Therefore, through my role with the VGT, I want to empower the community in their actions to reduce this weed by linking them to the wealth of gorse resources we have. Amongst other things, I will also engage a great deal with the dedicated managers of public and private land, to ensure they are supported in their efforts.

Keep up to date on all VGT activities by following our social media pages or subscribing to our mailing list. To get in contact with me, send an email to info@vicgorsetaskforce.com.au, I hope you will see me and all our important VGT messages popping up in your community.

And that's a wrap – Creswick gorse demonstration field day

The Victorian Gorse Taskforce (VGT) held a gorse control demonstration day in Creswick in collaboration with the Hepburn Shire Council.

We convened on a gorse affected parcel of crown land that was once a gravel quarry. Several local contractors were hired to demonstrate, speak, and answer questions. One who mulches, one who uses an 'Ecoblade' and another contractor that uses chemical application, with a deeply environmental and integrated approach. It was a well-organised, dynamic and incredibly positive day for the 31 attendees.

John Baulch demonstrating the Ecoblade

John Baulch from Regional Vic Farm Services was first up. John uses an 'Ecoblade', an attachment on his skid steer that slashes and smears a low dose of selective herbicide in one action. He claims an unusually high success rate and longer period between follow ups. John has been in the game for a long time, we found him to be incredibly practical and knowledgeable, while his machine was powerful and quick.

Next up was Darryl Jenkins from Jensen Farm services and Richard Chibnall from EME Contracting both based in the Ballarat region. They demonstrated and spoke of the techniques of mulching gorse then going back some months later to boom spray when the gorse was 40cm high and in active growth.

We learnt that a fixed tooth mulcher attachment quickly tore the gorse down to ground level. While a swinging tooth flail attachment processed the initially mulched gorse into fine sawdust.

They claimed this technique could kill up to 50% of gorse on its own if the mulched layer was sufficiently thick.

Fixed tooth Mulcher attachment

Ben and Steve from Southern Ecosystems Management discussing their recent chemical trials.

Swinging tooth flail attachment

We had Brian Bainbridge, a loved member of the VGT and the local council's Biodiversity Officer speak. He discussed different biocontrols and how they weaken gorse. He spoke about how certain herbicides can affect waterways and how soft skinned amphibians are vulnerable. Brian urged us to pay attention to the terrain, the ecology and for example, knowing what frogs are in your area and when they are active so you can plan around them when controlling gorse. Brian was passionate and insightful.

Finally, we had Ben and Steve from Southern Ecosystems Management based in Taradale share their knowledge. They have a strong environmental philosophy and certainly know their herbicides.

Ben and Steve took us over to their trial plots where they had tested different controls last year, showing and explaining the pros and cons of different methods and chemicals. It was eye opening to see the actions compared. Know your herbicide!

Ben and Steve from Southern Ecosystems Management discussing their recent chemical trials

Some crowd-pleasing lunch, coffees and chatting ensued, some giveaways were awarded, then everyone bounced off home ready to begin their gorse control plan. It was a well-organised, fun, educational and eye-opening event. Nicole Garfi, the VGT's Community Pest Management Officer from Agriculture Victoria organised it in conjunction with Brian Bainbridge from the Hepburn Shire Council, both ought to be congratulated. It armed participants with a deeper understanding of gorse and all the techniques of its control, resulting in overwhelmingly positive feedback from attendees.

The VGT are planning their next field day in Chewton this September; follow us on Facebook or Instagram to stay updated or send us an email at info@vicgorsetaskforce.com.au.

Spotlight on gorse in winter

Gorse in Victoria is likely to be flowering now and can appear to stay in flower for some time depending on your location. Hence the saying "when gorse is out of bloom, kissing in out of season".

Whilst this bright yellow flower in the middle of winter might be uplifting to those of its native Europe, here in Victoria it means a deluge of seeds are coming. However, don't lose hope, because gorse control can be done all year round and you can stop the seeding.

- **Don't know where to start? Head to the VGT website or email us at info@vicgorsetaskforce.com.au.**

Free dabbers to help landholders make a start

Small, isolated gorse plants can quickly become a huge infestation. Don't let it get away from you, act now. The VGT are offering 50 individuals an opportunity to order a free dabber chemical applicator.

Photo: Pat Gregurke

This tool is particularly useful for the cut and paint control method, perfect for small, isolated gorse bushes.

- **All you need to do is take a photo of your gorse and send it to info@vicgorsetaskforce.com.au. Dabbers are limited, get yours now, while they last.**

Spotlight on:
Ron Cosgrave VGT Chair

Ron Cosgrave has been the Chair of the VGT for the past three years, his key responsibility is to oversee the committee, and ensure the group is focused on implementing the VGT control strategy to better help Victorians manage gorse.

Ron also operates a small farming enterprise at Smeaton and is an active community member of Landcare. Ron's also been a member of the Community Liaison Group of the North Central Catchment Authority (NCCMA) for several years.

Ron, who is born and bred in country Victoria has a dedicated interest in natural resource management, with a strong passion towards water quality, river health and the fight against gorse. Ron's been fighting the good fight on the VGT committee for 16 years.

Let's learn a little more about Ron.

What made you want to join the VGT committee?

- It was my initial involvement with the NCCMA and Landcare that focused my attention on the gorse problem. I wanted to contribute to finding solutions, so I jumped on the VGT committee some 16 years ago.

What do you love most about being the Chair of the VGT?

- Helping people, I think the VGT are doing a good job at this. Also, being able to contribute to awareness and best practice management of this dreadful woody weed.

Why do you think gorse is so problematic for so many landholders?

- I think for some, identification can be an issue. Also, for many it's knowing how to manage it effectively and being prepared to tolerate and accept its existence for long periods of time even after control.

What is the best advice you can give someone with gorse?

- Persistence is your friend, gorse control is a long game, but not impossible. Choose integrated methods that work best and don't stop.

What do you think the VGT greatest achievement is?

- We are moving forward and thinking more outside the box, which is helping reach more communities. Our recent stand out projects are the Virtual Extension Officer website, our newly updated VGT website that fosters a great learning hub page, our social media platforms that are reaching more and more people each week with useful gorse information and having a dedicated Communications and Community Engagement Officer. All these combined have pushed the VGT and its cause much further and wider than ever before.

If you want to listen to music what music/artist do you play?

- Many might find this surprising, but I enjoy a mix of late great Tina Turner and Mariah Carey.

Who is going to win this year's AFL grand final?

- The best team in the league, Essendon.

Gorse Warrior story

Peter and Christine Forster

41-years of farm improvements sees a flurry of bird biodiversity.

Christine and I moved to a family farm south of Ararat in 1982 in the middle of a severe drought. We knew that post drought we had to better manage the farm to conserve soil and better protect our sheep; we had a vision for sustainable farming and a more biodiverse landscape.

Aerial image of the Peter and Christine's farm. Photo by Bill Homburg

Situated on the Victorian Volcanic Plains, the farm and its original vegetation was mostly native grasses and a few old redgums on Captains Creek. Years of farming had removed most of the native grasses, with overgrazing, drainage works, and rabbits triggering massive gully erosion. Captains Creek, which was once a discontinuous waterway, became a large actively eroding gully.

All these challenges were ahead of us, and the resident gorse infestation was one of the biggest.

Our repair work started with creating windbreaks for stock protection. Any tree was considered good as there were no local nurseries. Three kilometres of creek frontage was progressively fenced to exclude stock then revegetated, starting upstream. We had a kilometre of gorse approximately 40 metres wide to control at the downstream end. The gorse control took time, we sprayed the lot. A method we would not use today for that much gorse.

Providing a mid-story of plants has increased bird life for small and medium sized birds. Species such as hedge wattle provide safe refuge and nesting sites. It also provides habitat for ground dwelling reptiles and other species such as marsupial mice and swamp rats. When the creek has water the frog noise is almost deafening. Springtime also sees a flurry of new species come and go.

Black -shouldered Kite
Photo by Bill Homburg

Red-rumped Parrot
Photo by Bill Homburg

Species that were not on the farm in the lead up to 1982 that are now resident or regular visitors include eastern yellow robins, white-browed babblers, white winged choughs, at least eight honeyeater species, silver eyes, striated and yellow thornbills, rails, kookaburra's, bronze wing and crested pigeons, crimson and blue-winged parrots, grey shrike-thrushes, restless, brown and leaden flycatchers, crested shrike-tits, grey fantails and black-faced cuckoo shrikes.

White -winged Chough
Photo by Bill Homburg

Less common to very rare sightings include one spotted nightjar, one rufous fantail, golden-headed cisticolas, yellow-tufted honeyeaters, and a painted buttonquail.

When the creek is flowing, we have observed sacred kingfishers, yellow-billed spoonbills, egrets, herons, and night herons. Mixed species flocks of wood swallows are also likely to arrive in substantial numbers with a strong weather front in spring and sometimes stay on to nest along the creek. We have also enjoyed around ten different raptor species arrive too; some which are now resident.

In summary, all farms can be managed to dramatically improve native biodiversity values and carbon stores with simple management changes like fencing wetlands, appropriately managing stock to allow breeding events to occur, protecting old paddock trees (especially those with hollows), connecting remnant sections of vegetation with corridors of new vegetation, resting paddocks to allow grassbirds to breed, creating woodlots to sequester carbon and lower the water tables for dryland salinity benefits. Invasive species management also needs priority and planning, otherwise, you are wasting your time and effort.

Our gorse fight continues today, Christine and I walk the creek at least twice a year to stay on top of any new germination to prevent seeding.

It is true, we could have taken the easy road 41 years ago, because there was so much gorse and it looked too big to manage. Instead, we stuck to our goals, took our time, and got through it bit by bit.

Gorse was such a dominant feature of the creek, so we knew if we didn't change that, all the biodiversity we had hoped for would not be here for us to enjoy today.

Click here **to watch Gorse Warriors Peter and Christine's gorse journey.**

Commencing the 2023/24 Community Grants Program

On the 28 April 2023, the VGT opened the annual Community Grants Program for 2023/2024.

This round, we invited community groups to apply for up to $8,000, to assist private landholders in controlling their gorse. Grants close on 30 June 2023.

In the coming weeks, the VGT grants review panel will meet to assess the applications. We would like to thank

all the groups for their time and energy in applying, we wish you all the best of luck.

The VGT will announce successful applicants in August.

Stay tuned to find out if a group in your area was successful.

VGT talks chemicals on social media, be sure to follow

There is a lot to know about herbicide control before you put on that backpack sprayer and attack your gorse.

In the month of July, the VGT are speaking with chemical expert Dale Tunstall to provide landholders with essential information about getting the best results from your chemical application as well as important health and safety advice**. Do not miss this information!**

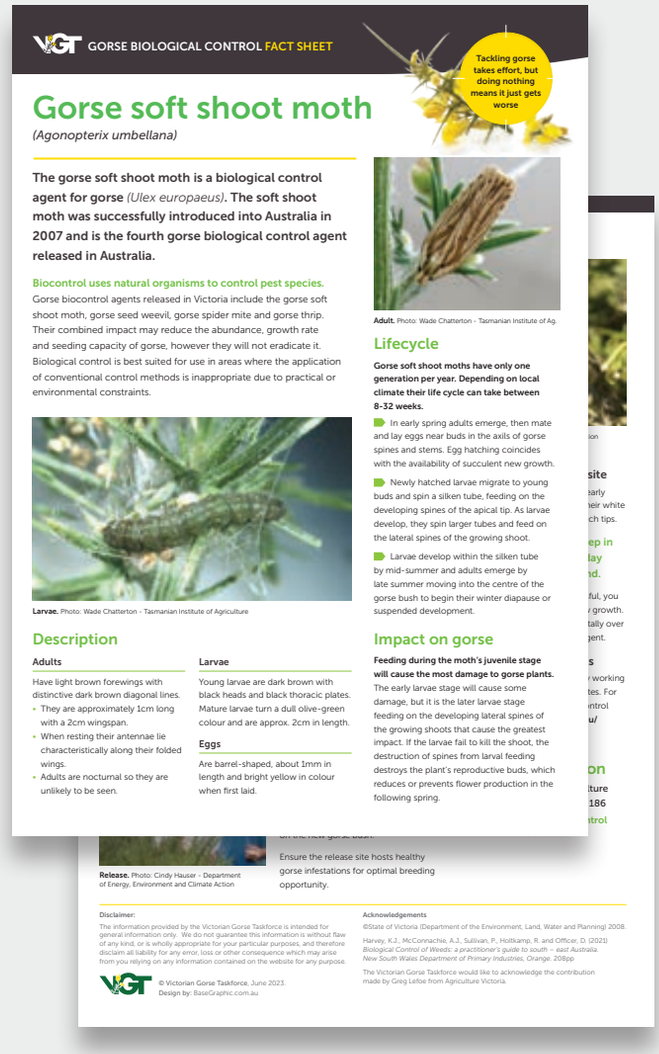
Follow VGT on Facebook and Instagram to stay up to date:

www.facebook.com/VictorianGorseTaskforce

www.instagram.com/victorian_gorse_taskforce/

VGT Resources

New gorse Biocontrol Factsheet available



GORSE BIOLOGICAL CONTROL FACT SHEET

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

Gorse soft shoot moth

(Agonopterix umbellana)

The gorse soft shoot moth is a biological control agent for gorse *(Ulex europaeus)*. The soft shoot moth was successfully introduced into Australia in 2007 and is the fourth gorse biological control agent released in Australia.

Biocontrol uses natural organisms to control pest species. Gorse biocontrol agents released in Victoria include the gorse soft shoot moth, gorse seed weevil, gorse spider mite and gorse thrip. Their combined impact may reduce the abundance, growth rate and seeding capacity of gorse, however they will not eradicate it. Biological control is best suited for use in areas where the application of conventional control methods is inappropriate due to practical or environmental constraints.

Larvae. Photo: Wade Chatterton - Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture

Adult. Photo: Wade Chatterton - Tasmanian Institute of Ag.

Description

Adults

Have light brown forewings with distinctive dark brown diagonal lines.

- They are approximately 1cm long with a 2cm wingspan.
- When resting their antennae lie characteristically along their folded wings.
- Adults are nocturnal so they are unlikely to be seen.

Larvae

Young larvae are dark brown with black heads and black thoracic plates. Mature larvae turn a dull olive-green colour and are approx. 2cm in length.

Eggs

Are barrel-shaped, about 1mm in length and bright yellow in colour when first laid.

Lifecycle

Gorse soft shoot moths have only one generation per year. Depending on local climate their life cycle can take between 8-32 weeks.

- In early spring adults emerge, then mate and lay eggs near buds in the axils of gorse spines and stems. Egg hatching coincides with the availability of succulent new growth.
- Newly hatched larvae migrate to young buds and spin a silken tube, feeding on the developing spines of the apical tip. As larvae develop, they spin larger tubes and feed on the lateral spines of the growing shoot.
- Larvae develop within the silken tube by mid-summer and adults emerge by late summer moving into the centre of the gorse bush to begin their winter diapause or suspended development.

Impact on gorse

Feeding during the moth's juvenile stage will cause the most damage to gorse plants. The early larvae stage will cause some damage, but it is the later larvae stage feeding on the developing lateral spines of the growing shoots that cause the greatest impact. If the larvae fail to kill the shoot, the destruction of spines from larval feeding destroys the plant's reproductive buds, which reduces or prevents flower production in the following spring.

Release. Photo: Cindy Hauser - Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action

Ensure the release site hosts healthy gorse infestations for optimal breeding opportunity.

Disclaimer:
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Design by: BaseGraphic.com.au

Acknowledgements
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Harvey, K.J., McConnachie, A.J., Sullivan, P., Holtkamp, R. and Officer, D. (2021) *Biological Control of Weeds: a practitioner's guide to south – east Australia. New South Wales Department of Primary Industries, Orange.* 208pp.

The Victorian Gorse Taskforce would like to acknowledge the contribution made by Greg Lefoe from Agriculture Victoria.

DOWNLOAD FACTSHEET

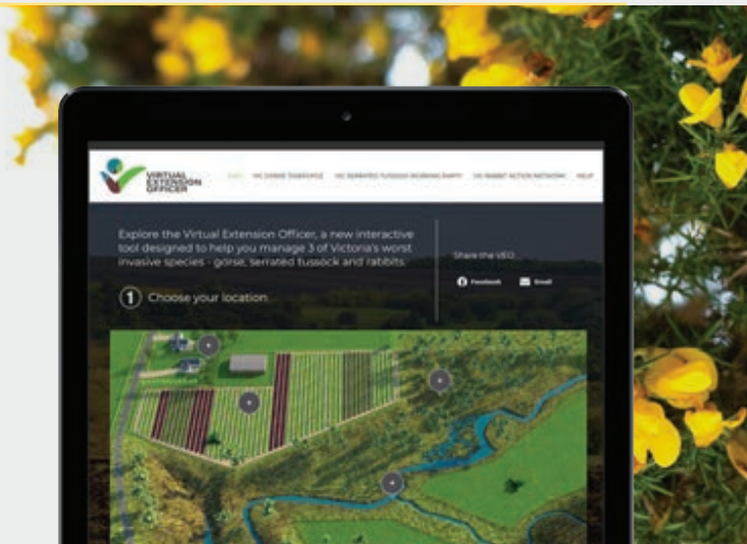
Have you ever considered biocontrol for your gorse?

Property owners can use biocontrol as an alternative control option for avoiding heavy machinery and chemicals. The most recent biocontrol agent to be released is the gorse soft shoot moth *(Agonopterix umbellana)* from Western Europe. Agriculture Victoria have released the agents across several sites in Victoria with hope their population numbers will expand in the coming years.

The VGT have put together a helpful fact sheet on the gorse soft shoot moth for those interested in learning more about it.

- Download your copy here. **Stay tuned for our next biocontrol fact sheet on the gorse spider mite.**

Have you seen the Virtual Extension Officer website?



The VEO is a free online resource for landholders effected by gorse,

serrated tussock and rabbits.

The VEO was developed to enable landholders battling one of these species, to replicate their individual situation online and gather tailored information in the one location, without leaving their home.

The VEO also interacts with the VGT, Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party and Victorian Rabbit Action Network websites and is compatible with most smart devices.

Check it out and share it with your network and community. Visit https://vicgorsetaskforce.com.au/learning-hub/

The VGT Learning Hub

GO TO VGT LEARNING HUB

Looking for gorse information? The Learning Hub page on the VGT website is a great place to start.

We have some great videos on gorse science, gorse impacts and control demonstrations. Plus, some great written resources and fact sheets to ensure you have all the information you need to tackle your gorse. We hope these resources assist you and your communities to effectively control gorse.

Check it out today and share it with your networks. Visit https://vicgorsetaskforce.com.au/learning-hub/

Other Community Pest Management Groups News

Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party

VSTWP develop new serrated tussock identification video

The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party (VSTWP) have added a new video covering the topic of identification to their growing YouTube channel, to engage and deliver information to land managers on the noxious weed serrated tussock (Nassella trichotoma) across Victoria.

The latest video focuses on how to identify serrated tussock from similar grasses such as Chilean Needle-Grass and native Poa and Stipa grasses. It aims to give landholders an insight into how to spot serrated tussock throughout the year, from a distance and from up close, and how to ensure identification is correct.

Chairperson of the VSTWP, Lance Jennison, said "I would encourage anyone who has not visited and liked our Facebook site or YouTube Channel to explore all the resources available and services our group can offer groups and individuals". "The YouTube channel will be another useful tool in our engagement tool kit and will allow landowners to stay updated with instant access to the latest videos, achievements and best practice management we can deliver".

Watch the VSTWP video here: https://youtu.be/jAjl6rTYW8I

Victorian Rabbit Action Network News

VRAN Bootcamp 2023 – Phillip Island

Do you need training on best practice rabbit management? Why not consider the VRAN training course?

The VRAN Leadership in Rabbit Control Course will be open to all Victorians, currently involved in the management of rabbits on private or public land.

This fun and interactive program is delivered over two and half days, with a mix of classroom and practical field-based training to boost technical skills and best practice knowledge.

Twenty places are available for the course and this year it will be held in Phillip Island in late October.

More information on how to apply for the course will be available from August, please visit our website for course updates: www.vran.com.au.

Victorian Blackberry Taskforce update

VBT to demonstrate effective blackberry control in Harcourt/Sedgewick.

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) and North Harcourt Sedgewick Landcare are hosting a blackberry control demonstration day around the Harcourt/Sedgewick area.

The day will showcase different blackberry control methods to give landholders the right advice and direction. Join in and learn what best practice control methods are available.

Demonstrations include: Chemical, physical and drone application
When: 24 September 2023
Where: TBC – follow the VBT's Facebook page to stay updated

For more information contact the Barton Robert's from the VBT on 0409 332 258 or email vbt@vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au

DEECA

Controlling gorse on public land through the Good Neighbour Program

Dead gorse at a recent Good Neighbour Program project.

The Good Neighbour Program is run by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) and Parks Victoria (PV). It targets weeds and rabbits on public land. The aim is to provide a coordinated and prioritised approach to treating invasive weeds and pest animals on public land where it adjoins private land.

Currently the program has 17 ongoing gorse projects across Victoria on both DEECA and Parks Victoria lands. This sees about 30% of the total program funding go to gorse control.

For more information about the Good Neighbour Program or to discuss potential project opportunities in your area, speak with your regional DEECA office or Good Neighbour Program coordinator.

For more information:
Visit www.deeca.vic.gov.au, call the Customer Service Centre on 136 186 or email, Mel Birleson mel.birleson@deeca.vic.gov.au or David Miralles David.Miralles@delwp.vic.gov.au

Follow VGT on Facebook and Instagram to stay up to date:

www.facebook.com/VictorianGorseTaskforce

www.instagram.com/victorian_gorse_taskforce/

Contact the VGT

Email: info@vicgorsetaskforce.com.au

For more information

Visit the Victorian Gorse Taskforce website or contact Agriculture Victoria's Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

www.vicgorsetaskforce.com.au

Contribute to Gorse Talk

Send your Gorse Talk contribution to **info@vicgorsetaskforce.com.au**

Victorian Gorse Taskforce

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