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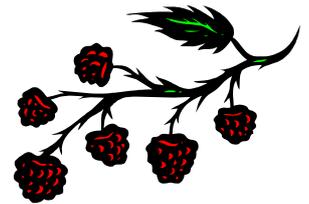


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National Blackberry Taskforce

The National Blackberry Taskforce (NBT) seek to guide the implementation of Actions from the *Weeds of National Significance (WONS): National Blackberry Strategic Plan (2001)* in a consistent and co-ordinated manner across the country. The NBT was first proposed in the *WONS National Blackberry Strategic Plan* and was convened in February 2003. Representatives from the Australian states and territories affected by weedy blackberries are ably joined by community and industry nominees.



The NBT Recently they hosted a National Blackberry Research Summit in Canberra (see page 2 for a report).

Mr Alex Arbuthnot AM is the Chair. He is a Victorian and represents the Victorian Catchment Management Council. Mr Arbuthnot is also an active dairy farmer, member of the Victorian Farmers' Federation, and is a community representative on many other bodies.

Staff from the following state agencies are currently serving on the NBT: ACT, Geoff Price (Environment ACT); NSW, Philip Blackmore (NSW Agriculture); SA, David Cooke (Animal and Plant Control Commission); Tas., Tim Rudman (Department of Primary Industries Water & Environment); WA, John Moore (Agriculture WA); currently we are awaiting a replacement for our recently retired Queensland representative, and we hope to have a Victorian officer soon. CSIRO are also partners, as are the Australian *Rubus* Growers Association. The WONS National Blackberry Co-ordinator is the taskforce's Executive Officer.

At a glance:

- The National Blackberry Taskforce is up and running.
- A fruitful National Blackberry Research Summit was recently held in Canberra.
- Blackberries can now be identified to species.

A new newsletter

Welcome to a new newsletter edited by the WONS National Blackberry Co-ordinator to keep you up-to-date with the WONS National Blackberry Program.

The plan is to issue this newsletter twice a year. It will be available on-line at the Weeds Australia website www.weeds.org.au; however, if you CAN'T access it this way (for example you can't get to a local library to use a computer) we will be printing a small number. If you NEED a hardcopy posted to you just ask the National Blackberry Co-ordinator (contact details on page 4).





National Blackberry Research Summit

"Nationally consistent and co-ordinated research will produce the best results for blackberry management and reduction nationwide."

In March 2004 the National Blackberry Taskforce (NBT) hosted a fruitful National Blackberry Research Summit in Canberra. Thirty-five participants from all over the country gathered to discuss the next decade of blackberry research for Australia. The participants included scientists, on-ground land managers (for both public and private lands), government officers, and industry representatives; in short, those with an interest in reducing the numbers of weedy blackberries across the country.

The Research Summit identified and prioritised eight major research projects with an emphasis on new biological control measures to harness the spreading scourge (see page 4, for the list of projects). These included a nationally co-ordinated release of an additional eight new strains of the blackberry rust (*Phragmidium violaceum*); investigation of additional biological control agents, including root-fungi and insects; and the undertaking of a feasibility study on the use of GM (genetic modification) in biological control measures.

Other key projects included: ecological studies on blackberry; cost effective management programs; further species identification; a national mapping program (mapping the individual species, not the aggregate); social and economic evaluation; and chemical research into new herbicides.

Key messages from the Summit that were identified by the NBT Chairman are:

- the strong recommendation to a national research approach to achieve cost effective outcomes to managing blackberry;
- Australia has at least twenty-three species of blackberry, so it is not one weed, but many weeds, with a need to develop management programs for each. "A blackberry isn't a blackberry."

- all Governments and the private sector must support the implementation of the *WONS National Blackberry Strategic Plan* and its Actions;

- any national program must involve the Australian *Rubus* Growers Association, a growing \$10 million berry industry (*Rubus* berries include blackberries, raspberries, etc);

and

- the NBT will develop a funding and action plan to achieve support for the new research projects identified by the Summit participants.

Left: National Blackberry Research Summit Participants





A Blackberry Isn't A Blackberry!

Botanists from Adelaide's State Herbarium of South Australia (Ms Robyn Barker and Dr Bill Barker), coupled with colleagues from the Co-operative Research Centre for Australian Weed Management (CRC) have recently developed a computer key to identify Australian blackberries thanks to funding from the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT).

"Weedy" blackberries in Australia come from Europe, North America, and Asia. Currently it is recognised that Australia has fifteen named and two unnamed European invaders, four or five introduced from North America, plus another couple from Asia. However, there are also a few native blackberry species in Australia too; being variously indigenous to New South Wales, South Australia or Victoria.

The new tool, an interactive LucID key, is based on the taxonomic work carried out by Dr David Symon, and DNA studies overseen by Dr Kathy Evans. The tool uses images of many features to help the user identify species from material that may, or may not, be flowering. Although the key, called "Blackberry", is not complete, it is at a stage that is sufficiently advanced to be used by on-ground managers in the field with only a little training.

At present our management programs aren't tailored to species-specific infestations, but for blackberries as a whole. Now that we can often identify blackberries to species level, there is a growing recognition that the different species may require different management methods. What works to control one species, may not help control another. Thus, it is hoped that over the next few years scientists and "blackberry experts" will be able to precisely identify their blackberries, and then document species-specific control programs they have successfully used. These will then be shared via the LucID key, and improve our "best" management practices for all species.

Introducing The National "Blackberry Buster"

Sarah Keel is the National Blackberry Co-ordinator. Based in Victoria, the National Co-ordinator is funded by the NHT to help Australian land managers co-ordinate their approaches to blackberry management, liaise with land managers to encourage consistency across the country, and to provide advice and direction on key WONS priorities.

Sarah also acts as the Executive Officer for the NBT, liaises with any other State/Territory blackberry taskforces, or encourages the formation of these to co-ordinate blackberry management across large regions, not just independent local actions. The National Co-ordinator may also assist in the creation of regional Blackberry management strategies.

As well as these roles, the National Blackberry Co-ordinator also assists with NHT-funded blackberry projects – enough to keep anyone out of trouble!

Australia has at least six native blackberry species.

Australia has at least twenty-three "weedy" blackberry species, probably more.



Above: Sarah Keel, National Blackberry Co-ordinator

weeds of national significance

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Thanks to all the
brilliant volunteers
working on blackberry
management across
Australia!

We're on the Web!

You can access this newsletter (as well as the *WONS National Blackberry Strategic Plan*, and information for all the other WONS) on the *Weeds Australia* website:

www.weeds.org.au

Research Directions as Prioritised by the National Blackberry Research Summit

The participants at the National Blackberry Research Summit in March 2004 identified and prioritised eight research projects that are vital to the National Blackberry Program for the coming decade. These are:

1. Release of additional rust strains expanded from limited releases in NSW and WA, to *en masse* national releases.
2. Know the species (further train in identification of blackberry species and introduce mapping of species, rather than mapping blackberry aggregate).
3. (a) Cost effective management across a range of land uses.
(b) Cost effective management across public land.
(c) Cost effective rehabilitation across land uses.
4. Ecological studies re the blackberry taxa.
5. Mapping of blackberry taxa.
6. New tool development
(a) Chemical studies (herbicide trials, techniques, selectivity).
(b) Filling the gaps for biological control agents.
7. Feasibility studies for new GM (GM blackberry, & GM biocontrol agents)
8. Early warning rapid response of blackberry species.

Project proposals are currently being prepared. These will soon be circulated to partners, both current and potential. *If you (or your organisation) would like to be involved in the future of the National Blackberry Program, please contact the National Blackberry Co-ordinator.*

"Blackberry bites:"

- Australian blackberry researcher visited France this year searching for "new" biological agents.
- Don't forget Weedbuster Week, 16 – 24 October, 2004.