

## **A Community Led Approach for the management of widespread pests in Victoria**

Shane Herbertson

Victorian Gorse Taskforce / Department of Primary Industries, 402 Mair Street, Ballarat VIC 3350  
(Shane.Herbertson@dpi.vic.gov.au)

**Summary** The Community Led Approach in the context of pest management can be defined as a cooperative governance process that is formed and applied to manage the impacts of pest species.

In Victoria the Victorian Gorse Taskforce, the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and the Serrated Tussock Working Party are actively advocating for and sponsoring projects that champion community led action to achieve the voluntary control of these widespread species. By funding project officers employed through local community groups the emphasis is on the education, awareness, and most importantly control of widespread weeds. These project officers provide appropriate extension and negotiate voluntary management agreements with land managers. Project targets and resources are guided by an 'Action Group' that consists of land manager representatives (e.g. private landholders, Landcare group, Crown Land and Municipality) that represent various land tenures that exist within the control area.

In the longer term regulatory compliance may be required for a small number of land managers that have not undertaken works as part of the program. However the compliance effort is reduced due to the majority of land managers participating voluntarily.

This approach has a proven record of success, providing greater leverage on government investment driven by community involvement and longer term sustainability generated through wider ownership of the pest management issues.

**Keywords** Community, widespread pest, compliance.

### INTRODUCTION

An ever-evolving problem that faces communities and government is the proliferation of already widespread pests across a landscape of changing land tenures and land management. With competing priorities, resources allocation to widely established weeds remains problematic for governments. This is where a Community Led Approach is a very useful tool to achieve high value for government investment and to maximise the impact and efficiencies of Government funding in an environment where funds are becoming increasingly difficult to access.

Community Pest Management Groups (CPMG's) have been formed to facilitate and advocate for control programs. In Victoria these groups have been successful in negotiating with government so that community priorities in pest management are implemented.

These groups have been facilitating the establishment of small, locally based project action groups or committees that guide the delivery of extension services to landholders for pest control. Project officers are engaged and guided by this group and the officer works to negotiate management agreements with landholders. Funding for these projects comes in through the established statewide CPMG's.

This community-led approach provides an important platform for the management of widely established pests. Landholders are able to take ownership and from a Government perspective the CPMG's and the suite of projects created through their operation are a valuable link to the community.

### DISCUSSION

For the purpose of this discussion the Victorian Gorse Taskforce (VGT) will be used as an example. During 2011/12 the VGT has been able to attract significant funds through State Government sources to support the establishment of 'Action Group' projects that facilitate the on-ground control of gorse (*Ulex europaeus*).

Due to demonstrated community based project success and advocating on behalf of the community, the taskforce was able to attract additional funding through State Government investment processes. This has allowed the taskforce to establish 6 new Community Action Group projects for the 2011/12 period. Each of these projects has the services of a part time Project Officer. These officers are either Landcare based or are contractors.

These project officers are guided by a project committee or 'action group' which is comprised of representatives of the various land tenures within the project area. With guidance from the action group it is anticipated that the project officers will be able to negotiate over 300 voluntary management agreements to control gorse within the project areas. These agreements serve to provide landholders with knowledge and the opportunity to control the pest species with

extension assistance from the project officer. The landholder may also be able to access financial control incentives as a part of the agreement. In general, if the measures detailed within these agreements are fulfilled the landholder would have met his/her legislative responsibility and also those expectations set by the local community.

The Victorian State Government has supported this approach and where the initial voluntary approach to control fails, the action group committee and the taskforce are able to request regulatory assistance through the Department of Primary Industries to assist with the generally small number of landholders that do not fulfill their obligations voluntarily under this program.