

The Holly Project: Strategy and vision statement

The problem

The Wombat Forest is an area identified by the Victorian government as high in biodiversity and a future National Park. English Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) is at the early stages of invasion in the Wombat Forest, primarily as a garden escapee. The natural elevation of the Wombat Forest keeps the area relatively cool and wet. Numerous gullies, creeks and rivers flowing both north and south provide favourable habitat for the spread of holly.

Holly trees can sucker and form layers resulting in large, inaccessible thickets. These thickets compete effectively with established native vegetation and eventually replace it. Holly thickets contain large volumes of fine fuel increasing the risk of intense fires. Holly berries are attractive to birds and therefore the invasive capability of the weed is high. Once established holly transforms bushland and is difficult and expensive to remove.

Nearby towns and settlements and many small landholdings and roadside reserves adjoining the Wombat Forest are currently host to holly infestations. Despite holly being recognised as posing an extremely high risk to the environment, it is not listed as a declared noxious weed as per the *Catchment and Land Protection (CaLP) Act 1994*. This has implications for access to funding as most Victorian government programs only address listed plants.

The Holly Project aims to assist land managers to identify and remove holly infestations in and around the Wombat Forest. Collaboration between local Landcare, residents' groups and public land managers is required. Recognition of holly's invasiveness through the CaLP Act is needed.

Our vision

To contain holly from spreading into and degrading the Wombat Forest and so build its resilience as a key biodiversity asset for Victoria.

Our strategy

In order to achieve our vision, the Holly Project working group will build broad community capacity to identify and manage the spread of holly. This will require a multi-stakeholder approach including:

- Informing and educating broadly across communities about the risks associated with the spread of holly
- Providing technical training and support using 'citizen science' to map infestations and 'best practice' guidance for treatment, control and disposal of holly
- Working with community groups and public land managers in and around the Wombat Forest to implement and coordinate broader weed control strategies
- Advocating with shire councils and state legislators to raise awareness and support for our aims, e.g. declaration of Holly as a noxious weed under the *Catchment and Land Protection (CaLP) Act 1994*
- Linking into existing plans/strategies (e.g. those of North Central CMA, Melbourne Water, Hepburn Shire Council and Moorabool Shire Council) and the Wombat National Park management plan (when created)
- Expanding working group membership to encompass wider geographical areas as the group's work progresses
- Co-ordinating working bees and procuring contractors to control mapped infestations