

MERRI CREEK



MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Merri Creek flows south from the Great Dividing Range near Wallan to join the Yarra River in Abbotsford, four kilometres north-east of Melbourne's CBD.

Merri Creek Management Committee Inc. (MCMC) is an environmental coordination and management agency formed in 1989 to achieve a shared vision for the waterway corridors of the Merri Creek Catchment. Its members include all municipalities in the catchment: Darebin, Hume, Moreland, Whittlesea, Yarra and Mitchell, plus the Friends of Merri Creek and the Wallan Environment Group.

Representatives from these groups form the Committee of Management that guides MCMC's activities.

MCMC's primary aim is to ensure the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, and the ecologically sensitive restoration, development and maintenance of the Merri Creek and tributaries, their corridors and associated ecological communities. It employs specialist and dedicated staff and its programs are funded by Council members, by state and federal grant programs, by competitively won tenders, by grants from philanthropic organisations and through sponsorship.

MCMC's mission

MCMC respects and honours the spirit of the land and its peoples, indigenous plants and animals, and works with the community to preserve, restore and promote the Merri Creek, its catchment and neighbouring region as a vital living system.

Wurundjeri acknowledgement

MCMC acknowledges the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the land of the Merri Merri. We pay our respects to the Elders past present and future.

Above photo: The speakers and significant others at Brunswick Library on 6 October for the launch of the exhibition: 'Merri Creek - from wasteland to parklands.' Left to right: Wurundjeri Elders, Auntie Georgina Nicholson and Uncle Dave Wandin; Luisa Macmillan, MCMC Manager; David Redfearn, President, Friends of Merri Creek; Rebecca Mayo, Exhibition Working Group member; Shane Maloney, author, guest speaker; Ann McGregor, MCMC President; Greg Bain, Acting General Manager Waterways and Land, Melbourne Water; Glenyys Romanes, Exhibition Working Group member; and Cr Meghan Hopper, Mayor of Moreland.



Annual Report

2014-2015

President's Report

First some statistics showing the range of Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) activities in 2014-15:

- Our staff undertook plantings, surveys, weed control and ecological burns at over 60 sites and hosted 39 hands-on community events and interpretative tours.
- We provided educational and engagement sessions to over 9,000 people.
- We achieved 42% of our income from external grants and other sources, adding to the key support we receive from our member Councils via service agreements (42%) and council contracts (16%).
- We initiated a proposal for a Greater Wallan-Merri State Park and will focus on its promotion in 2015-16.

Volunteers supported by MCMC staff produced a spectacular [photographic exhibition](#) celebrating the transformation of the Merri over the past 40 years. We are grateful for financial assistance from Melbourne Water Corporation, ClifRoy Community Bank and the Merri Creek Environment Fund. After a well-attended opening at Brunswick Library in October, the exhibition is touring public venues around the catchment for 2016 and beyond, assisted by member Councils.

Local residents as well as many visitors enjoy the bushland along the Merri every day. It is also a significant urban wildlife corridor: preliminary analysis of bird records along the Merri between Mahoneys Rd and St Georges Rd suggests that over 40 species have moved in since the early 1990s, benefiting from the re-establishment of woodland, grassland, shrubland and riparian vegetation.

Our good relationship has continued with the Traditional Owners of the Merri catchment through the Wurundjeri Tribe Council, bringing benefits to both parties. MCMC partnered with Wurundjeri Traditional Owners to burn native grassland at Bababi Djinanang in Fawkner and we were especially honoured to be contracted by the Wurundjeri Council for works at the Sunbury Rings, a significant ceremonial site in an adjacent catchment.

We were pleased to make another modest surplus of \$23,166, after tight financial management by staff. This will help rebuild our depleted reserves.

Donations to the second appeal for the [Merri Creek Environment Fund](#) totalled \$8,979. The Fund supported the *Planting up the Gap* project in Fawkner, and contributed to the photographic exhibition.

An organisational and business model review was undertaken by pro bono consultants through [Leadership Victoria](#), to assist MCMC to adapt to a changing operating environment and remain financially sustainable into the future.

MCMC's leadership and innovation in ecological restoration is demonstrated by our contribution to a new book on grassland management, [Land of sweeping plains](#).

Our skilled and committed staff are key to MCMC's achievements. Volunteers also play vital roles, sometimes in the background, such as the skilled archivists who completed the massive task of digitising and cataloguing 5,000 colour transparencies that record vital moments in the last 35 years of Merri Creek's history.

Ann McGregor, President



Planning and Coordination

MCMC receives funding from each of its member Councils to respond to issues affecting biodiversity, stream health, landscape, heritage and amenity along waterway corridors in the Merri catchment. This funding also supports our governance processes and our communication services.

A big focus again this year was the rapid urbanisation of the upper Merri catchment where structure planning is well underway. In the developed parts of the catchment, the key matters were sewer and shared path upgrades within the creek corridor and redevelopment of adjacent sites.

We made comments on: 12 planning permit applications, 6 planning scheme amendments and an addendum to the North Growth Corridor Plan. We appeared at one Panel Hearing and prepared for two more.

We were involved in: master-planning for Growling Grass Frog habitat, discussions around upgrades to sewage treatment plants to cope with additional growth, and a University of Melbourne [Merri Creek water quality study](#).

Merri Creek & Environs Strategy: Through a questionnaire, MCMC member organisations confirmed the value of the [Strategy](#) for providing cross-municipal strategic direction in the ongoing management and conservation of the Creek.

We publicised: 95 community events on our [calendar](#); sent out customised emails for 35 of these events to our extensive lists; and produced 4 issues of *Merri e-News*.

Our Committee of Management and the Finance Sub-Committee (S.C.) met quarterly; the Executive S.C. met 8 times; the Merri Creek & Environs Strategy Implementation S.C. reviewed value of the Strategy, and the Merri Creek Environment Fund S.C. held its second annual Appeal.

Parkland Management

Our Parkland Management staff restore, monitor and maintain over 60 indigenous vegetation sites along Merri Creek, its tributaries and adjoining catchments.

Many of our grants projects continued to focus on 'focal species': devising and assessing conservation actions that target particular species while also benefiting the broader ecosystem. Focal species included Large-flowered Geranium, Golden Sun Moth and Plains Yam Daisy, Sticky Boobialla, and Rock Correa.

In addition to sowing indigenous seed we planted 17,815 plants; 5% were trees, 8% shrubs and 87% ground-storey.

Our [Flora and Fauna report](#) outlines key sightings and discoveries for 2014-15.

Volunteer contribution

A key aspect of all our work is engaging community in restoration activities. Our Parkland staff hosted 39 community events including plantings, harvesting of seed, weed management, ecological surveys and burning grasslands with Wurundjeri Traditional Owners.

528 community members, students and corporate volunteers contributed 1490 hours to restoring and monitoring the Merri Creek environs (worth over \$44,700).

320 people attended planting events, 117

people helped with community weeding and 33 people participated in surveys for Golden Sun Moth and Yam Daisy.

Volunteers with our daily works team contributed 61 days of hands on work and staff from five corporate organisations gave 171 hours to restoration work.

52 people attended presentations, training workshops and other engagement events.

Funding

Our vegetation management, survey and engagement activities were funded from the following three areas:

Agreements with local government:

We worked on vegetation improvement, management and community engagement to the value of \$285,314 through on-going funding agreements with member councils Darebin, Hume, Moreland and Yarra.

External grants: We delivered \$308,666 of works funded by philanthropic, state and regional grants programs, including \$185,781 of grants received by the Friends of Merri Creek and Wurundjeri Council.



Photos: Top: World Environment Day 2015 planting near Edgars Creek confluence, Coburg.

Above right: Wurundjeri Elder, Uncle Dave Wandin addresses planters at Bababi Djinnang (Jukes Rd Grassland) Fawkner, in June 2015.

Right: Eco burn at Ngarri-djarrang (Central Creek Grassland), Reservoir in May 2015.

These grants increased the value of our council funded restoration outputs (via agreements and contracts) by 34%.

Of the 20 grant projects, 9 focused on riparian areas and 11 on grasslands, shrublands or woodlands. All projects used weed control to assist regeneration, 13 established areas of revegetation and 2 used ecological burning to restore habitat.

Contracts: We maintain various 'bushland' areas for local councils through contracts worth \$233,492 for sites along the Merri Creek in Moreland and at Ngarri-djarrang Native Grassland in Darebin.

Contracts for other agencies worth \$85,733 included: implementation of a development offset plan for a grassland site on the Merri in Craigieburn; rare plant translocations for the Victorian Department of Environment; ongoing restoration and weed management works at [Galada Tamboore](#) on Merri Creek for Melbourne Water; revegetation and weed control for APA Group to mitigate the impact of a new gas pipeline across the Merri in Beveridge; and student interpretative excursions for RMIT at Galada Tamboore.



Catchment Program

Our Catchment Program staff develop and deliver waterway and biodiversity community engagement programs.

We worked with: 9,353 people in 349 sessions, including schools' education, community events and training days.

These sessions were supported by \$124,795 from member councils Darebin, Moreland, Whittlesea and Yarra. External grants worth \$193,594, including \$27,193 of delivery for Friends of Merri Creek extended the range of activities.

Wurundjeri connections: Our connection with the Wurundjeri Tribe Council Elders and staff was reinforced during 8 mentoring workshops which focused on successful project experiences and worked on the development of grant opportunities.

Our acknowledgement of working on Wurundjeri Country extended into new programs and sites, especially with Campbellfield Heights, Brunswick North West and Thornbury Primary Schools, where Wurundjeri presence involved learning Woivurrung names for indigenous plants. At Thornbury Primary School Uncle Perry Wandin and his daughter Renee carved an installation of Bunjil.

Uncle Bill Nicholson and Wurundjeri women's dance group *Djirri Djirri* drew

everyone together at *Merri's Magical Morning* in Northcote. MCMC organised this event for Friends of Merri Creek and provided 8 other activities for the many people who attended.

Educational inspiration: We extended our educational leadership role by creating and presenting at the *Inspiring Women in Environmental Science* conference, when women scientists shared their experiences of environmental science careers with over 130 high school students from four schools in the catchment.

With an Education Week grant, we developed a special maths in nature program for outdoor classrooms beside Merri Creek.

Our educational focus also came alive in school grounds with over 700 children replacing weedy and concreted areas with 4,000 indigenous plants and with the construction of three frog bogs (ponds).

We completed: a rain tank audit and provided for recommendations to improve water efficiency for 10 schools in Whittlesea. Also for Whittlesea, we developed a new giant catchment map, focusing on the water cycle for use as an educational tool.

In-stream health

MCMC again hosted the *Merri Water-watch* program, for Merri Creek as well as the Moonee Ponds Creek and lower Yarra River. In addition to educational and engagement sessions, we supported eight volunteer groups to monitor 11 sites for water quality and biological health. Melbourne Water provided funding of \$13,488 to support monitors.

Results showed that the Merri's water quality is still poor. There were some higher results for ammonium over summer, but there were no major peaks in results. All collected water quality data is on the *Victorian Waterwatch* [database](#).



Photos:

Top: Djirri Djirri dancers at "Merri Magical Morning" in Merri Park Northcote in February 2015.

Above Left: Migrant Women's tour of Galada Tamboore, Campbellfield in May 2015.

Left: Whittlesea High School students help to construct their on-site frog bog in May 2015.

Financial Report

Summarised Balance Sheet as at 30th September 2015

	2015	2014
EQUITY:		
Retained Funds - Start	42,093	30,567
Transfer to/from Env. Fund Reserve	(159)	(7,455)
Add Surplus / (Deficit)	23,166	18,981
	65,100	42,093
Environment Fund Reserve Balance	39,166	39,007
Retained Funds - End	104,266	81,100
Represented By:		
Current Assets:	561,553	728,491
Fixed Assets:	100,329	78,447
TOTAL ASSETS:	661,882	806,938
Less:		
TOTAL LIABILITIES:	557,616	725,838
NET ASSETS:	104,266	81,100

Summarised Statement of Income & Expenditure for the twelve months to 30th September, 2015

	2015	2014
INCOME:		
Grants		
Municipalities	645,901	598,684
Other Government	253,530	127,929
Non Government	49,899	15,942
Contracts	560,526	538,335
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets	-	2,195
Sale of Publications	221	435
Environment Fund Donations	8,979	7,165
Interest & Sundry Income	13,682	13,971
Total Income:	1,532,738	1,304,656
LESS EXPENDITURE:		
Wages, Salaries & Oncosts	1,175,090	1,151,063
Consultants, Materials & Plant Hire	*206,514	46,523
Vehicle Running	24,912	22,742
Admin, Project & General	89,630	85,604
Depreciation & Leave Provisions	13,426	(20,257)
Total Expenditure:	1,509,572	1,285,675
NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):	23,166	18,981

* **Consultants, Materials & plant hire:** The 2015 figure includes a much larger than usual component for consultant and contractor fees. These arose through the delivery of specific, grant-funded projects.

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the year ended 30th September 2015. The full financial statements and the Auditor's report are on the MCMC website.

Auditor: MCMC's Auditor is Fred Gerardson, Registered Company Auditor, Colville Williams & Co. P/L, Lower Plenty.

Merri Creek Environment Fund: We gratefully acknowledge the 44 generous donors to the Merri Creek Environment Fund, including the Schudmak Family Foundation.

Member Representatives and staff 2014-2015

Committee of Management 2015:

(With number of meetings attended in brackets – max. 4)

City of Darebin:	Cr Vince Fontana (2), Cr Oliver Walsh (sub.) (1), Luke Sandham (3).
City of Hume:	Cr Drew Jessop (Vice President) (4), Damien Harrison (Secretary) (2), Hannah Nicholas (1).
City of Moreland:	Cr Lenka Thompson (2), Nathan Milesi (4).
City of Whittlesea:	Cr Stevan Kozmevski (1), John Nankervis (2), Ben Harries (sub.) (1).
City of Yarra:	Carrie Lindsay (0). (No Councillor rep. appointed.)
Shire of Mitchell	Cr Kevin Mulroney (2), Elyse Kelly (3).
Friends of Merri Creek:	Ann McGregor (President) (2), Allie Dawe, (Treasurer) (4), Nicole Lowe (Vice President) (4), Pascale Pitot (4), Nick Williams (3), Ann Sanson (2), Louise Wright (sub.) (1), John Parham (sub.) (1), Yasmin Kelsall (sub.) (1), Rebecca Mayo (sub.) (1).
Wallan Environment Group:	Rob Eldridge (3).

Sub-Committees in 2015:

The following Sub-Committees met during the year:

Executive Sub-Committee, Finance Sub-Committee, and the Merri Creek & Environs Strategy Implementation Sub-Committee. The Planning and Issues Sub-Committee is in abeyance and reports were issued as part of the quarterly Manager's Report.

MCMC Staff:

Manager:	Luisa Macmillan
Information Officer:	Ray Radford p/t
Administration Officer:	Monica Williamson p/t
Finance Officer:	Ruth Rankin p/t
IT Manager/Strategic Projects:	Tony Faithfull p/t
Cleaner (casual):	Akash Bhalla, Sidrah McCarthy.
Archivist (volunteer)	Leslie Fraser p/t

Catchment Program

Special Engagement Programs Coordinator:	Angela Foley
Waterwatch Coordinator:	Jane Bevelander p/t
Catchment & Waterwatch Officer	Julia Cirillo, Trevor Hausler p/t.

Parkland Management

Conservation Program Manager:	Katrina Roberg
Works Coordinator:	Dave Woods
Ecological Restoration Planner:	Brian Bainbridge
Ecological Technical Assistant:	Michael Longmore p/t
Team Leader:	Clayton Fenech, Megan Maroney.
Team Members:	Peter Barrow, Sarah Bates, Jim Brien, Tom Dell'Oro, Ben Hodgins, Michael Longmore.
Temporary Team Members:	Andrew Cosmi, Jason Hannon, Gemma Hocking, Alisha Murphy, Jonathan Wilson.



Merri Creek Management Committee

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