

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 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.

MCMC employs specialist and dedicated staff and its programs are funded by member Councils, State and Federal grant programs, competitively won tenders, grants from philanthropic organisations and public donations.

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 Woi-wurrung acknowledgement

MCMC acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung 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: Wurundjeri Corporation's *Narrap* Team Celebration at the Merri-Yarra Confluence in December 2018 as part of a three year partnership project with MCMC, funded by the City of Yarra.

Annual Report 2018-2019



President's Report

2019 marked 30 years since Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) was established. To celebrate this milestone, we invited current committee members, staff and many past office-bearers on an afternoon walking tour along Merri Creek in May 2019. We heard from people directly involved in the transformations that have occurred at Merri Park in Northcote, and Kirkdale Park and Phillips Reserve in Brunswick East. You can see how these sites looked in the 1980s [online](#).

MCMC's long history of ecological restoration work was recognised by the presentation of Melbourne Water's *Exceptional Contribution Award* in March 2019. Three recent projects along Merri Creek in the City of Hume received a special mention: *Aitken Creek's Living Pathways* in Craigieburn, *Merri Models* at Rushwood Drive Reserve, and *Loving Laffan* just south of Kalkallo.

Guided by Uncle Dave Wandin and the Wurundjeri Corporation's *Narrap Team*, MCMC staff participated in their first cool burn at Bababi Djinanang Grassland, Fawkner in mid-July 2019. Cool burns, or cultural burns, are a traditional Indigenous land management technique. Unlike our usual ecological burns, which are normally done in mid-autumn, cool burns follow heavy rains, when the soil is wet and green vegetation has re-sprouted. The cool fire moves slowly and burns a patchy mosaic; grassland species can then regenerate in the spaces opened up by the fire.

We farewelled two long serving staff members: Katrina Roberg, after 13 years as Ecological Restoration Program Manager; and Brian Bainbridge, after 21 years, most recently as Ecological Restoration Planner.

Several episodes of muddiness in the lower Merri after heavy rain in the upper catchment prompted investigations by MCMC. The source of the sediment was largely in the Kalkallo Creek sub-catchment, where rural land use and earthworks for urban development have exposed the highly erosive soils. Standard sediment control measures are inadequate for these soils. MCMC set up a working group to explore problem, which is likely to extend well beyond the sub-catchment, and to seek effective action.

Also in the upper catchment, MCMC continued to contribute to planning for the new and extensive Upper Merri Park and restoration of a significant portion of Herne Swamp, just south of Wallan.

We welcomed the purchase by Moreland City Council of Merri Creek land in Leonard St, Fawkner from the Victorian Government. MCMC, Friends of Merri Creek and the local community encouraged Council to purchase the 0.7 hectare site, previously acquired for the now-defunct freeway along the creek valley. It contains a precious remnant of the critically-endangered Victorian Volcanic Plains Grassland plant community.

Ann McGregor, President

Volunteering



1132 people

Environmental education



6192 participants

Events and classes



313 events

Delivery partners



85 organisations

Clients and funding bodies



30 organisations

Planning and Coordination

We receive funding from our member Councils to respond to issues, opportunities and threats affecting biodiversity, stream health, landscape, heritage and amenity along waterways in the Merri catchment. This funding, which totalled \$257,556 for the year, also supports our governance, communication services and assistance to community groups.

We continued to promote our vision for a functional ecological and open space network through the upper Merri catchment, the **Greater Wallan - Merri Park**. We met with officers charged with implementing key state government commitments towards this vision.

The risk of industrial fires to Merri Creek water quality and aquatic health unfortunately continued, with a number of fires during the year at warehouses and at a recycling centre. Prompt action by authorities minimised contamination of Merri waterways.

We met with the EPA to discuss erosion risks in the upper Merri, especially the sodic-dispersive soils exposed during construction. Because of the perceived lack of action at the state level on the issue, we established our own Sodic & Erosive Soils Working Group and planned a major workshop on the issue.

We commented on 13 planning permit applications for proposals on sites next to Merri Creek; on a development plan that threatened the potential to restore Herne Swamp in the upper catchment; and a rezoning application for sensitive land adjacent to conservation reserves in the middle Merri.

We participated in various workshops for the implementation of Melbourne Water's *Healthy Waterways Strategy* and brought a strong Merri Creek focus to these.

We supported the Nature Glenelg Trust's vision for the restoration of Herne Swamp and its potential as a centrepiece for the new Wallan park. We welcomed Yarra Valley Water's championing of a swamp restoration project at their own Wallan Sewage Treatment Plant site, part of the former Herne Swamp.

We provided specialist advice on rare species and on outbreaks of state prohibited weeds to relevant management agencies.

We developed 23 grant project proposals, 15 in partnership with 'Friends of' groups and schools; 17 of which were successful.

We continued work on the MCMC Strategy, thanks to a grant from The Myer Foundation, and **we adopted** our first IT Strategy, thanks to support from not-for-profit IT group, Connecting Up.

We publicised 117 community events on the Merri events **calendar**; sent out customised emails for 33 of these events; produced four issues of *Merri e-News*; established our **Instagram** page, and regularly contributed event items to the **Friends of Merri Creek Facebook** page and the Friends' newsletter.

Our Committee of Management and its sub-committees met frequently (see p.4); in addition to their regular monitoring and reporting functions, the MCMC Strategy and a Privacy Policy were adopted.

We established two new Working Groups that reflect the changing issues along the Merri: the Nature Play Working Group and the Sodic & Erosive Soils Working Group.

Our sixth Annual Appeal raised \$15,710 in donations to the **Merri Creek Environment Fund** for a nest box project. We also received \$4,441 from unsolicited donations.



Ecological Restoration

Our Ecological Restoration staff manage indigenous vegetation at 78 sites along the Merri Creek, its tributaries, in adjoining catchments, and some ecologically-significant locations well beyond the Merri catchment.

This year around 38% of our work focussed on shrublands and woodlands, 31% on wetlands and the banks of waterways, and 29% on grassland ecosystems. Around 62% of these works assisted the **regeneration of remnant vegetation**. **Reconstruction** of significantly degraded sites accounted for 32% of our works. Ecological consultancy, monitoring and community engagement made up the remaining 6% of works.

We planted nearly 7,000 plants. Of these, 81% were ground-storey, 4% were semi-aquatics, 12% were shrubs and 3% trees. This included creation of in the field Seed Production Areas (SPAs) for six plant species rare to the catchment. SPAs set up in the previous year yielded 179 grams of seed from four rare species. This was reintroduced by direct sowing into seven grassland sites.

Our **Flora and Fauna Report** outlines key sightings and discoveries for the year.

Volunteer Contribution

Involving community in hands-on activities is key to our work. 859 volunteers from the local community, Friends of Merri Creek members, students and corporate groups assisted with our ecological restoration projects. Volunteers contributed 2,629 hours of their time, 600 more hours than in the previous year. We hosted 48 events including

plantings, sowing seed, weed management, guided tours, training and ecological surveys. 18 of events these were in partnership with Friends of Merri Creek, nine with corporate groups and 13 with tertiary and senior secondary groups.

Of these 859 volunteers, 354 attended planting or direct seeding events (730 hrs), 458 helped with weed control (1,804 hrs), 19 participated in mapping and monitoring activities (95 hrs) and 28 participated in interpretive walks and bike rides.

Other volunteers worked 95 full days with our team, contributing 741 hours (equivalent to \$22,200). They gained invaluable hands-on restoration experience as they worked.

Funding

Total income for Ecological Restoration projects was \$925,800.

Agreements with member Councils:

Ongoing funding agreements with Darebin, Hume, Moreland and Yarra Councils funded \$305,200 of our vegetation management and associated community engagement work.

Grants: We delivered \$178,100 of project works funded by grants from state and local governments, Melbourne Water, Port Phillip & Westernport CMA, the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, the Hazel and Arthur Bruce Bequest, and donations to the **Merri Creek Environment Fund**. This total includes \$85,400 worth of delivery for grants received by the Friends of Merri Creek and Collingwood Children's Farm. MCMC took a lead role in developing the grant applications.

These grants, plus the \$79,000 value of volunteer contributions, added significant value to our council-funded ecological restoration and vegetation maintenance works.



Photos: Top: Celebrating MCMC's 30th Anniversary on the Merri Creek footbridge spanning Northcote and Brunswick East, that commemorates Merri Creek Coordinating Committee, May 2019.

Above left: Planting three rare plants (for seed) in MCMC's backyard, Brunswick East, July 2019.

Above centre: MCMC and the Wurundjeri Corporation's *Narrap* team (with Uncle Dave Wandin at centre) doing the first cool cultural burn, Bababi Djinanang grassland, Fawkner, July 2019.

Above right: City of Yarra's National Tree Day planting at Fairfield Park, July 2019.

Contracts: We maintained various Merri bushland and grassland areas in Brunswick, Fawkner and Reservoir under contract to local councils worth \$210,200. Contracts with other clients, worth \$232,200, included: continued management of a private vegetation offset at a grassland by Merri Creek in Craigieburn; control of serious weed infestations at grasslands in the Merri catchment at Wollert and Merriang, for the APA Group and private landholders; management of 22 ecologically diverse rail biosites across metropolitan Melbourne for Metro Trains, VicRoads and the Level Crossing Removal Project; and vegetation assessments and fauna surveys.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Collaboration

Our collaboration with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Traditional Owners continued to develop. In June, we participated in our first cultural cool burn at Bababi Djinanang grassland in Fawkner, guided by Uncle Dave Wandin and the Narrap Ranger Team. We also worked together with Narrap Rangers to restore Merri Creek salt-seep vegetation communities at Galada Tamboore in Campbellfield.



Catchment

Our Catchment Program staff connected with more than 6,100 people for eco-cultural waterway and biodiversity learning. We organised our own events, delivered many sessions to schools, and contributed to displays and activities at festivals and events organised by others. In total our staff delivered 265 separate events and sessions.

Funding

Total income for Catchment projects was \$209,991. Of this, 53% came from four member councils - Darebin, Moreland, Whittlesea and Yarra - through ongoing funding agreements; almost all the rest came from partnerships and grants, with 3% from fee-for-service delivery. We managed over 20 different projects.

Catchment Education Highlights

Our connection to the Merri Creek catchment as Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country grew with a partnership grant from the City of Yarra to work with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation on the important Merri-Yarra (Birraring) confluence. We also supported their new EPA - funded project that has a Merri-Birraring focus.

We ran guided walks around the Merri-Yarra confluence for students from Melbourne and RMIT Universities and Fitzroy High School, and for kids and carers from the East West Child Care Association, Fitzroy.

Our focus on the early years' sector has kept pace with increasing demand for programs in open space areas. We offered *A Little Nature Playtime* in four of our member council areas and led workshops for educators at the annual *Environmental Education in Early Childhood* conference at Swinburne University.

We also furthered our nature play philosophy of 'leaving no footprint' by working with early years centres and councils to ensure sustainable use of open space areas.

A grant to Moreland Primary School in Coburg enabled our involvement in a year-long innovative project - *Merri Merri Creekulum* - which extended our delivery of local nature and Indigenous perspectives.

We also supported the tenth *Murnong Gathering* at Coburg in November 2018.

Waterwatch

Our *Waterwatch* program, funded by Melbourne Water, the Cities of Darebin, Moreland, Whittlesea, Yarra and fee for service, supported ten volunteer groups to conduct regular monitoring of water quality at 15 sites in the Merri, Darebin, Moonee Ponds and Lower Yarra catchments, including Westgate Park and Trin Warren Wetlands in Parkville. Ten volunteers led these groups and a further 22 community members contributed regularly. The data collected by some of these groups can be viewed [in their annual water quality summaries](#)

We also held three water quality training sessions and two waterbug training events, for current and potential new volunteers.

Water quality monitoring results showed no improvement in the poor condition of Merri Creek and its tributaries. The lower, urbanised reaches were in worse condition than the more rural upper reaches, although erosion issues in the upper catchment contributed to very muddy flows after heavy rain.

We engaged 3,446 students, early years and other community members in 141 *Waterwatch education* sessions at a variety of creek-side locations, and in schools, early learning centres, local libraries, workshops and at festivals.

Our popular frog walks and talks continued with six events and 155 participants learning about local frog species and collecting data for Melbourne Water's *frog census*.

Our student intern from Melbourne University, Carol Han, helped to organise school and community events, reviewed our webpage and entered citizen science data.

Litter Project

The second year of a litter project for Friends of Merri Creek enabled us to support 27 litter clean up events along the lower Merri that 422 volunteers contributed to. Detailed analysis of the makeup of litter at some sites was made. We also held a stakeholder roundtable in November 2018, where we discussed how councils and agencies could effectively support community clean-ups and be part of a coordinated effort, especially after high rainfall events that bring copious amounts of litter to Merri Creek.



Photos: Top: World Wetlands Day Walk & Talk at Edwardes Lake Reservoir, February 2019.

Left - first: Woody Weed Whacking at Galada Tamboore Lalor, March 2019.

Left - second: Roxburgh Park S.C. students tour at Galada Tamboore, Campbellfield, May 2019.

Left - third: Thomastown Library Easter Holiday Program, April 2019.

Left - bottom: Celebrating 25 years of Waterwatch with SkinArt at Edgars Creek Epping, February 2019.

Right: Stakeholder roundtable on community responses to litter along Merri Creek, November 2018.



Financial Report

Summarised Balance Sheet as at 30th September 2019

	2019	2018
EQUITY:		
Retained Funds - Start	142,157	87,045
Transfer (to)/from Env. Fund Reserve	(6,273)	(4,837)
Add Surplus / (Deficit)	66,216	59,949
	202,100	142,157
Environment Fund Reserve Balance	74,341	68,068
Retained Funds - End	276,441	210,225
Represented By:		
Current Assets	922,523	774,725
Fixed Assets	78,440	93,866
TOTAL ASSETS	1,000,963	868,591
Less:		
TOTAL LIABILITIES	724,522	658,366
NET ASSETS	276,441	210,225

Summarised Statement of Income & Expenditure for the twelve months to 30th September, 2019

	2019	2018
INCOME:		
Grants:		
Municipalities	640,153	639,180
Other Government	104,928	69,828
Non Government	97,188	108,991
Contracts	*544,853	*525,474
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets	-	-
Sale of Publications	3,698	4,104
Environment Fund Donations	20,151	15,972
Interest & Sundry Income	9,193	10,435
Total Income:	1,420,164	1,373,984
LESS EXPENDITURE:		
Wages, Salaries & Oncosts	1,102,239	1,124,316
Consultants, Materials & Plant Hire	76,147	77,648
Vehicle Running	23,048	27,262
Admin, Project & General	128,381	96,877
Depreciation & Leave Provisions	24,133	(12,068)
Total Expenditure:	1,353,948	1,314,035
NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):	66,216	59,949

* Includes delivery of grants for community groups valued at \$113,871 in 2019 and \$70,000 in 2018. These were projects where MCMC played a lead role in designing and developing the grant applications and took responsibility for delivery and reporting.

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the year ended 30th September 2019. 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 86 generous donors to the Merri Creek Environment Fund, including the Schudmak Family Foundation.

Member Representatives and Staff 2018-2019

Committee of Management:

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

City of Darebin:	Cr Steph Amir (2) Luke Sandham (2) David Melli (Sub.) (1)
City of Hume:	Cr Jodi Jackson (3) Damien Harrison (Secretary) (4)
City of Moreland:	Cr Jess Dorney (1) Alli Coster (3) Vince Andreana (Sub.) (1)
City of Whittlesea:	Cr Stevan Kozmevski (0) Tim Connell (Vice-President) (2) Mark Williams (Sub.) (1)
City of Yarra:	Cr Bridget O'Brien (1) Craig Lupton (1)
Shire of Mitchell	Cr Rob Eldridge (1) Elyse Kelly (2) Heather Bradbury (Sub.) (1)
Friends of Merri Creek:	Ann McGregor (President) (4) Ann Sanson (Treasurer) (4) Nicole Lowe (Vice-President) (3) Pascale Pitot (3) Jane Miller (3) Lisa Lawrence (3) David Gifford (Sub.) (1) Thespina Marziano (Sub.) (1)
Wallan Environment Group:	Claudia James (4)

Sub-Committees:

The following Sub-Committees met during the year:

Executive Sub-Committee (5 times)

Finance Sub-Committee (4 times)

Merri Creek Environment Fund Sub-Committee (3 times)

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):	Claudia Marulanda, Diana Ramirez
Archivist (volunteer):	Leslie Fraser (p/t)
Cataloguer (volunteer):	Jane Miller (p/t)

Catchment Program:

Special Engagement Programs Coordinator:	Angela Foley (p/t)
Waterwatch Coordinator:	Julia Cirillo (p/t), Trevor Hausler (casual)
Program Assistants (volunteers):	Carol Han p/t, Silvie Tynan (p/t)

Ecological Restoration Program

Program Manager:	Katrina Roberg p/t (Until Jan. 19)
Program Coordinator:	Michael Longmore
Works Coordinator:	Sarah Boys
Planner:	Brian Bainbridge (p/t) (Until Dec. 18)
Team Leaders:	Megan Maroney (p/t), Chris Geary, Jessica Slade (p/t)
Team Members:	Tony Bracey, Pip Jones, Sophie Lavence, Dominic McKenzie, Cameron Walls, Charlotte Wood
Temporary Team Member:	Charles Fist, Christos Kourtessis
Team Volunteer:	Angela Viney (p/t)



Merri Creek Management Committee

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