

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 emerging.

Above photo: MCMC led Whittlesea locals on a Nature Discovery event at Granite Hills, Mernda in April 2021.

Annual Report

2020-2021



President's Report

This has been another productive and successful year for us, despite the ongoing pandemic and associated lockdowns. After the rapid adjustments last year, we were already familiar with online meetings, webinars and for many of us, working-from-home. Again, the Merri parklands proved their worth to nearby residents as a place of respite, outdoor exercise, and connection with nature.

Recognition of the importance of our work in protecting, managing and restoring the ecological health of this shared community asset was reflected in an almost doubling in donors to the Merri Creek Environment Fund annual appeal. Many donations included sincere messages of appreciation.

The Ecological Restoration Team was able to continue their work in the field. They did even more planting than usual, in the enforced absence of volunteers at community events both at MCMC-maintained sites and in the City of Darebin, where the Team assisted Council staff in a major indigenous planting initiative that had been planned to utilise community volunteers.

MCMC was extraordinarily successful in winning contracts and grants: an 89% success rate from 50 applications worth \$1.3 million.

We organised a number of webinars covering topics ranging from Top Spots for Frogging, to Living Bequests, Plirnding (picking up litter while birding), training for Waterwatch monitors, and 45 years of

restoring Merri Creek. Recordings can be viewed from the MCMC website.

Congratulations to our Special Engagement Programs Coordinator, Angela Foley, who graduated with a Doctor of Philosophy in Education. Her thesis, titled *The art of place-making on Wurundjeri Country today*, is an intercultural study that reflects on how we are connected to Country in contemporary ways, including in urban places.

In the upper Merri catchment, MCMC continued to advocate for good environmental outcomes in planning for new suburbs as well as the Upper Merri Creek Parklands and Wallan Regional Park. MCMC has been funded through the State Government's Suburban Parks Program to deliver the Upper Merri Creek Regional Parklands Signage Project. This will involve the design of signage templates to be used by the various parkland managers in the future Regional Parklands, as well as the manufacture and installation of a number of wayfinding and interpretative signs.

We also received Victorian Government funding to employ an Upper Merri Landcare Facilitator (one day/week for three years), and welcome Chris Cobern to the position.

As always, we are grateful to MCMC's dedicated staff, and for the support of our member organisations.

Ann McGregor, President

Volunteering



679 volunteers*
*includes repeat volunteers

Environmental education



4228 participants

Events and classes



165 events

Delivery partners



72 organisations

Clients and funding bodies



25 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, of \$0.27 million for the year, also supports our governance, communication services and assistance to community groups.

We were delighted that our vision for the [Greater Wallan - Merri Park](#) became a State Government commitment and that we were able to join the Suburban Parks Program's Partnership Group for the development of the Upper Merri Creek Regional Parklands.

Our hopes for an impressive ecological and open space network through the upper Merri catchment have been dented somewhat by recent decisions for new precincts where park planning has not been given a high profile. Provision for quarrying infrastructure at Shenstone Park has thwarted prospects for an east-west link from Merri Creek to the Grassy Eucalypt Woodland Reserve.

The high risk of urban development on the widespread sodic soils in the upper Merri catchment continued to be a major focus. MCMC followed up on its 2019 sodic soils workshop with another workshop that looked at the new requirement for sodic & dispersive soils management plans and the sorely needed guidance material for these.

We commented on planning permit applications and/or had pre-application meetings for 13 re-development proposals on sites next to Merri Creek, and supported a resident's VCAT enforcement action.

We submitted on 4 planning scheme amendments and appeared at hearings for 2 of these, for new suburbs in the growth corridor.

We also submitted on an EPBC referral for redevelopment of a Growing Grass Frog quarry hole near the Merri and provided feedback to Melbourne Water on an upper Merri waterways assessment.

We participated in workshops for the [Grassy Eucalypt Woodland Reserve](#), Biodiversity Sensitive Urban Design for the Hazelwynde development, and Moreland's Merri Visioning project. We sat on the advisory group for Whittlesea Community Farm and provided specialist advice on indigenous restoration at this and other sites.

We provided input to Moreland Council's vision for improving the [Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands](#).

We developed 10 grant project proposals, 1 with Friends of Merri Creek – all successful.

We became a [partner organisation to the Port Phillip & Westernport Regional Catchment Strategy](#), and provided two prospectus projects for the RCS.

We publicised 95 community events on the Merri events [calendar](#); sent out customised emails for 25 of these events, including 13 webinars; produced 4 issues of [Merri e-News](#); posted regularly to our [Instagram](#) page, which now has over 2,200 followers; and regularly contributed event items to the [Friends of Merri Creek Facebook](#). We were also delighted to contribute to a [Mumong Yam Daisy video and podcast](#), and to appear on an episode of [Gardening Australia](#).

Eleven fabulous volunteers helped catalogue our nationally significant images, starting with 7000 digitised slides available on a searchable online portal.



Ecological Restoration

Our Ecological Restoration Program manages indigenous vegetation at 79 sites along Merri Creek, its tributaries, adjoining catchments, and some ecologically significant locations well beyond the Merri catchment.

This year, around 43% of our works focused on grassland ecosystems, 29% on shrublands and woodlands, and 25% on wetlands and the banks of waterways. Around 61% of these works assisted the regeneration of remnant vegetation while reconstruction of significantly degraded sites accounted for 34% of our works. Ecological consultancy, monitoring and community engagement made up the remaining 5% of works.

We planted around 29,000 plants, 58% of which were ground-storey, 32% were aquatics and semi-aquatics, 8% were shrubs and 1% were trees. This included creating in-situ seed orchards for three plant species rare to the catchment, adding to the seed orchards for 12 species established in previous years. A total of 5.1kg of seed was collected from 48 species (including from seed orchards) for sowing throughout the catchment.

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. Despite the frequent disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were fortunate to squeeze in quite a few events between lockdowns. This financial year, we hosted 26 community events including weed workshops, weed mapping, planting days, fauna surveys and guided tours. 679 volunteers from the local community, Friends of Merri Creek members, students and corporate groups assisted with our ecological restoration projects. All up, volunteers contributed 2,410 hours of their time, equivalent to \$84,000 of work.

Of the 679 volunteers, 251 attended weed removal events (1078 hours), 164 attended planting events (644 hours), 95 helped monitor nest boxes (127 hours) and 18 helped map weed infestations (90 hours). Volunteers who joined our team outside of specific events worked with us for 60 days, contributing 471 hours (equivalent to \$16,500 of work) and gaining hands-on restoration experience.

Wurundjeri collaboration

Our collaboration with Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Traditional Owners continued to develop this year. We worked closely with the Narrap Ranger Team to continue restoration of the grassland recently purchased by Moreland City Council at Leonard St, Fawkner, and provided advice to the Narrap Team on the ecological values of Galada Tamboore to aid in the design of Narrap projects.

Funding

The total income for Ecological Restoration projects was \$1,127,500.

Agreements with member Councils: Ongoing funding agreements with Darebin, Hume, Moreland and Yarra Councils funded \$332,900 of our vegetation management and community engagement work.

Grants: We delivered \$171,700 of works funded by grants from federal, state and local governments, Melbourne Water, and donations to our own [Merri Creek Environment Fund](#). Approximately \$100,000 of these grants were received by Friends of Merri Creek, from grant applications developed by MCMC.

These grants, plus the \$84,000 worth of volunteer contributions, added significant value to our council-funded restoration and vegetation maintenance works.

Contracts: We maintained bushland and grassland areas in Brunswick, Fawkner and Reservoir through contracts with local councils worth \$229,500. Contracts with other clients worth \$393,400 included: management of a vegetation offset at a grassland in Craigieburn; reinstatement of wetland vegetation in Mickleham removed as part of a



Photos: Top: Ecological Burn at Bababi Djinanang Fawkner with Moreland City Council.
Above: Grassland Candles *Stackhousia subterranea* at Laffan Reserve, Craigieburn North.

sewer upgrade; control of serious weeds at grasslands in Wollert and Merriang for the APA Group and private landholders; restoration, management and monitoring of 21 ecologically diverse rail biosites throughout metropolitan Melbourne for *Metro Trains* and *VicRoads*; and fauna surveys for the *Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning*.



Catchment

Our Catchment Program engaged with 4,228 people for eco-cultural waterway and biodiversity learning in our *Waterwatch* and *Catchment Education* activities. In total, 138 events/sessions were held; three quarters of these were with education groups and students and early years learners represented around half of all the people we engaged with.

Funding

Total income for Catchment projects was \$0.207 million. Of this, 63% was from ongoing funding agreements with four of our member councils, Darebin, Moreland, Whittlesea and Yarra; the rest was from a partnership with Melbourne Water (11%), council grants (8%), and a number of fee-for-service activities.

Catchment Education

We worked across the early years, primary, secondary, and tertiary education sectors, delivering face to face activities, and went online during Covid restrictions.

We supported a number of events for the general community such as the *Nature Discovery Walk* at Granite Hills and *Catchment Cultural Connections* in Kingsbury.

Webinar highlights included *Children's stories about local birds*, *Wild Chat: Rewilding & Living Bequests in Darebin*, and *Stepping out: Leadership beyond kindergartens*.

We joined the annual *Vic. Archaeological Colloquium* at La Trobe University to share how our non-Indigenous educational work

respectfully represents Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country, at times in collaboration with Traditional Owners.

Waterwatch

Our *Waterwatch* program, funded by Melbourne Water, the Cities of Darebin, Moreland, Moonee Valley, Whittlesea and Yarra, supported eight volunteer groups to conduct regular monitoring of water quality at 13 sites in the Merri, Darebin, Moonee Ponds and Lower Yarra catchments, including Westgate Park. These groups are volunteer led; 28 community members contributed regularly. Their water quality data can be viewed in each group's [annual WQ summaries](#).

Due to COVID restrictions, less water quality data was collected this year, nevertheless it showed no improvement in the poor condition of Merri Creek and its tributaries. The lower, urbanised reaches were generally in worse condition than the upper reaches and carried high amounts of litter. Disturbance to highly erosive soils in the mid to upper Merri catchment contributed to very [muddy flows](#) after heavy rain.

There were many keen people wanting to volunteer with *Waterwatch* and during the year we trained 70 new volunteers.

We engaged 2,698 students, early years and other community members in 87 [Waterwatch education](#) sessions. Some were at creek-side locations, and in schools, kindergartens, local libraries and workshops at festivals; however most were online because of Covid-19 restrictions. We teamed up with Melbourne Water and Yarra Libraries to offer free zoom sessions to Primary and Secondary Schools. We offered *Frogs online!* and *Platypus online!* sessions with fun quizzes, facts and things to do within your 5kms.

We ran a number of webinars and online training sessions and used recordings of these to keep our [digital resources](#) growing.

Rapid Response to Litter project lives on - even through lockdown

Thanks to additional funding from the Cities of Darebin and Moreland, and support from MCMC member councils, Whittlesea and Yarra, we were able to continue our community collection of litter from the Merri's waterways.

Since 2018, the results of 95 surveys have been added to the [Litter Watch Victoria](#) data base. Over 200 kgs and 24,000 pieces of litter, much of this plastics (22,000 pieces), has been removed from the waterways of the Merri..

Photos: Top right: Telstra staff picked up 20 kgs of litter and provided useful citizen science data at Hall Reserve Clifton Hill, in December 2020. MCMC provided safety training, location and a litter kit.

Top Left : The Friends of Merri Creek 'bequest site' managed by MCMC at Oldis Gardens Northcote.

Middle Left: Children from Fitzroy North Primary School at Merri Creek.

Bottom Left: Bougainville's Skink *Lerista bougainvilli* at Beveridge Recreation Reserve.

Financial Report

Summarised Balance Sheet as at 30th September 2021

	2021	2020
EQUITY:		
Retained Funds - Start	388,911	202,100
Transfer (to)/from Env. Fund Reserve	(23,322)	(2,832)
Add Surplus / (Deficit)	62,097	189,643
	427,686	388,911
Environment Fund Reserve Balance	100,495	77,173
Retained Funds - End	528,181	466,084
Represented By:		
Current Assets	1,464,947	1,141,917
Fixed Assets	103,505	115,957
TOTAL ASSETS	1,568,452	1,257,874
Less:		
TOTAL LIABILITIES	1,040,271	791,790
NET ASSETS	528,181	466,084

Summarised Statement of Income & Expenditure for the twelve months to 30th September, 2021

	2021	2020
INCOME:		
Grants:		
Municipalities	711,349	747,939
Other Government	59,579	65,023
Non Government	75,246	48,449
Contracts	764,574	*714,135
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets	-	-
Sale of Publications	1,804	7,402
Environment Fund Donations	39,619	28,224
Interest & Sundry Income	15,486	#94,854
Total Income:	1,667,657	1,706,028
LESS EXPENDITURE:		
Wages, Salaries & Oncosts	1,286,225	1,213,705
Consultants, Materials & Plant Hire	126,107	90,242
Vehicle Running	29,732	27,966
Admin, Project & General	119,563	120,582
Depreciation & Leave Provisions	43,933	63,892
Total Expenditure:	1,605,560	1,516,386
NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):	62,097	189,643

*Includes delivery of grants for community groups valued at \$101,926 in 2021 and \$111,376 in 2020. These were projects where MCMC played a lead role in designing and developing the grant applications and took responsibility for delivery and reporting.

#Includes Federal Govt's Covid-19 cash flow stimulus to Not For Profits.

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the year ended 30th September 2021. The full statements 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 155 generous donors to the Merri Creek Environment Fund including Elspeth Chambers, Jane Douglas, Margaret & Richard Lloyd, Pamela McLure, Joan Monti and Adi Tudor.

Member Representatives and Staff 2020-2021

Committee of Management:

(With number of meetings attended in brackets – max: 4. All were held either wholly or partly on-line).

City of Darebin:	Cr Tom Hannan (3) Cr Gaetano Greco (1) (Guest) Luke Sandham (3)
City of Hume:	Cr Jodi Jackson (3) Damien Harrison (Secretary) (4)
City of Moreland:	Cr Mark Riley (2) Alli Coster (1) Mark Corea (1)
City of Whittlesea:	(No Councillor rep. appointed) Tim Connell (Vice-President) (3)
City of Yarra:	Cr Bridgid O'Brien (3) Craig Lupton (3)
Mitchell Shire Council	Cr Rob Eldridge (4) Elyse Kelly (4)
Friends of Merri Creek:	Ann McGregor (President) (4) Ann Sanson (Treasurer) (4) Nicole Lowe (Vice-President) (4) Pascale Pitot (4) Jane Miller (1) Lisa Lawrence (4)
Wallan Environment Group:	Claudia James (3) John Robinson (Sub.) (1)

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 (2 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):	Diana Ramirez

Catchment Program:

Engagement Coordinator:	Angela Foley (p/t)
Waterwatch Coordinator:	Julia Cirillo (p/t),
Waterwatch Education Officer	Trevor Hausler (casual)
Upper Merri Landcare Facilitator:	Chris Cobern (p/t)
Program Volunteer Assistants:	Elliot Alder, Alycia Crofton, Aditi Nayak

Ecological Restoration Program

Program Manager	Michael Longmore
Program Coordinator:	Sarah Boys, Chris Geary
Program Officer:	Charlotte Wood
Team Leaders:	Sophie Lavence, Megan Maroney (p/t), Jessica Slade (p/t)
Team Members:	Tony Bracey, Chrissi Charles (p/t), Hannah Glasson (p/t), Dom McKenzie, Cameron Walls, Nico Wayland (p/t)
Temporary Team Member:	Alice Bendeich (p/t), Nathan Edis, Tess Huntley, Angela Viney (p/t)
Team Volunteers & Interns:	Catia Cardamone, Marcus Cook, Mish Edstein, Odin Enberg, Tamsin Erratt-Gibbs, Lucy Henshaw, Patrick Hook, Ksenia Korolija, Daniel Monge, Jode Moorthy, Gemma Purnell, Diana Shrimpton, Finn Walsh, Zita Wu.

Dr Stephen Rowley provided specialist planning advice, Yasmin Kelsall coordinated our Growling Grass Frog masterplan project, Peter Batchelor supported our webinars and development of our digital resources, and Infoxchange provided cloud computing support.



Merri Creek Management Committee

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