

MERRI CREEK



MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Merri Creek flows south from the Great Dividing Range near Wallan, to join the Yarra River in Abbotsford, four kilometers 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 of these member 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 staff and its programs are funded by Council members, by state and federal grant programs, by competitively won tenders, and by grants from philanthropic organisations.

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 this land and we pay our respects to the Elders past present and future.

Above photo © MCMC: Wurundjeri Elder, Auntie Alice Kolasa, sampled Merri Creek at Galada Tamboore for the first time in May 2013.



Annual Report

2012-2013

President's Report 2012-13

Connecting people with nature and learning more about the native species of our catchment are important roles of the Merri Creek Management Committee. MCMC is hosting volunteer monitoring programs for the threatened Plains Yam Daisy and Golden Sun Moth, which will extend over four years.

Wildfires in the catchment highlighted the need for coordinated fire management planning on Melbourne's outskirts. Two fires burnt remnant bushland on Old Sydney Road, Wallan in January 2013. Then in February a grassfire that started near Donnybrook burnt more than 2,000 hectares including both sides of the Hume Freeway and caused traffic chaos as residents and workers in outer suburbs tried to evacuate. It was halted at Cooper Street, Epping.

However, fire is a vital process to maintain diversity and MCMC implements an annual program of burning, followed by rigorous weed control in some of the few remaining patches of native grassland that once covered most of the land north and west of Melbourne. After planned burns by MCMC's Parkland Management Team and a wet winter, wildflowers flowered abundantly in the native grasslands along Merri Creek.

This year, Wurundjeri Elders and the Wurundjeri Narrap team worked alongside MCMC in a number of land management activities, including ecological burns along the Merri Creek. In May, MCMC staff were honoured to help burn grassy areas for the Wurundjeri Council outside the Merri catchment at

Willam-ee-moor-ing, the Mount William Axe Quarry site near Lancefield, one of the most significant Indigenous cultural sites in Australia.

Urban expansion across the middle and upper Merri catchment threatens our waterways and sites of high conservation value. MCMC is greatly disappointed by the final Biodiversity Conservation Strategy for Melbourne's vast new growth areas. Corridors for Growling Grass Frog along many parts of the Merri are significantly narrower than ecologists recommend, and ancient River Red Gums and other native vegetation have been left unprotected. Our efforts will continue through strategic and local planning processes to improve conservation outcomes.

On the administrative side, there's been a major overhaul of MCMC's project management and information system, with a special thanks to Catherine Tinel who volunteered her considerable skills for one day a week all year. We expect the new system will be more efficient and produce more accurate and timely reports.

The Committee reluctantly farewelled both our Vice-Presidents this year. Paul Prentice is continuing in his various roles with Friends of Merri Creek and Fiona McKinnon resigned from Moreland Council. Another longstanding and valued Committee member, Cr Drew Jessop from Hume, was appointed Vice-President.

**Ann McGregor,
President**

Planning and Coordination

(17% of MCMC Income)

Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) receives annual funding from each of our member Councils to work on issues affecting biodiversity, stream health, landscape, heritage and amenity along waterway corridors in the Merri catchment. Our biggest focus this year was again on the impacts of the massive expansion of Melbourne's Urban Growth Boundary into the upper Merri catchment.

We made comments on: 14 planning permit applications, 3 planning scheme amendments, 1 Precinct Structure Plan, 1 EPBC referral, 2 Melbourne Water Development Services Schemes.

We made submissions to: State Government's 'Melbourne's Water Future, Biodiversity Conservation Strategy for Melbourne's Growth Areas, Mitchell Shire Open Space Strategy, Yarra Environment Strategy.

Productions: Urban Growth [Addendum to the Merri Creek & Environs Strategy](#), Major contribution to two forthcoming grassland books which draw heavily on Merri Creek examples.

Stakeholder liaisons: We liaised with six major stakeholder organisations, with Melbourne Water's River Health works being the most significant of these.

Parkland Management

(70% of MCMC Income)

The Parkland Management staff undertakes restoration, revegetation and maintenance at over 60 sites in the environs of Merri Creek, its tributaries and adjoining catchments. We also do ecological surveys. A key component of both is working in partnership with community.

This year we planted 10,775 plants: 67.7% ground-storey, 9.2% trees, 21.3% shrubs and 1.8% semi aquatic.

The [2013 Flora and Fauna report](#) outlines key sightings and discoveries from the year.

Service Agreements and direct funding

MCMC delivered site development, management and community engagement works through agreements with Darebin Hume, Moreland and Yarra City Councils.



Volunteers and MCMC staff after a community planting at Galada Tamboore in June 2013.

Regional, State and Federal grants:

- 9 projects focusing on waterway vegetation across 7 sites from Northcote to Beveridge.
- 8 substantial projects focusing on grasslands and stony knolls across 12 sites from Fawkner to Wallan.
- A new [Information Note](#) outlines the history, values and restoration of Ngarri-djarrang (Central Creek) Grassland in Reservoir.

Contracts:

- MCMC maintains remnant and revegetated areas through ongoing council maintenance contracts including sites along the creek in Moreland and Ngarri-djarrang grassland in Darebin.
- Contracts with other agencies includes: Dept of Environment & Primary Industries (DEPI) for ecological surveys, burns and restoration; Melbourne Water for maintenance work at Galada Tamboore; and SP AusNet for habitat offsets for clearance works.

Parkland Management hosted:

- 51 community events including weed management and monitoring, harvesting of seed, planting, and cultural activities.
- Over 1,500 hours was contributed to restoring, monitoring or learning about the Merri Creek environs by 505 community, student and corporate volunteers (worth over \$47,000).
- 195 people attended planting events, 288 people attended weeding activities and 69 people attended ecological monitoring events.
- Staff groups from four organisations volunteered 441 hours of restoration work.

This year saw a significant increase in ecological monitoring work supported by our new Ecological Technical Assistant position. DEPI employed us to survey *Carex tasmanica* (Curly Sedge) and *Cullen tenax* (Tough scurf pea), at Galgi Ngarrk in Epping and *Dianella amoena* at Bababi Marning in Campbellfield. Our three-year *Caring For Our Country* project saw



Ash Firebrace and Dave Wandin of the Wurundjeri Narrap Team conducting an eco-burn with MCMC staff at Ngarri-djarrang (Central Creek Grasslands).

the [completion of several monitoring projects](#): restoring grassland diversity through [disturbance trials](#), engaging traditional owners in [grassland digging](#), assessing measures to [protect plantings from wallaby grazing](#), and working with tertiary [students and aerial photography to map vegetation](#). We've also continued monitoring the relationship between Golden Sun Moth density and grassland habitat features, and assessing the lifecycle of the last substantial *Microseris scapigera* (Plains Yam daisy) population in the Merri Catchment.

See [further data](#) on Parkland Management delivery.



MCMC staff monitor the Plains Yam Daisy population in grasslands at Kalkallo.

Catchment Program

(13% of MCMC Income)

The Catchment Program worked with 8,375 people this year in over 380 educational and engagement opportunities offered through seven different programs.

The *Learning Grounds* program, funded by the Cities of Darebin and Whittlesea supported 931 students and teachers from 12 schools to plan [indigenous gardens](#). *Catchment Education* funding from the Cities of Whittlesea, Darebin, Moreland and Yarra enabled us to deliver 68 biodiversity and waterways sessions to 1,371 students and community members.

In its fifth year, *Storming for Cleaner Water*, was delivered for Whittlesea City Council to 329 people, mostly students, in 19 sessions, in conjunction with Darebin Creek Management Committee.

We worked with the Wurundjeri community throughout the year, including a co-presentation with Wurundjeri Elder, Dave Wandin at the Melbourne metropolitan *Biodiversity Planning Network Forum*.



After Edgars Creek in Thomastown was identified as a pollution hotspot, MCMC focused on the creek's water quality with the community.

With funds from Whittlesea City Council, we responded to a report which identified Edgars Creek in Thomastown as a pollution hotspot, by leading a team into Thomastown's small industrial workplaces to focus on potential pollution impacts on creeks.

MCMC again hosted *Waterwatch* for the Merri and Moonee Ponds Creeks and the lower Yarra River. It is part of the Greater Melbourne *Healthy Waterways Waterwatch* program funded by Melbourne Water and the municipalities of Darebin, Melbourne, Mitchell, Moonee Valley, Moreland, Whittlesea and Yarra. This year *Waterwatch* held 160 educational sessions at 23 schools, reaching 2,920 students and attended 25 other activities (such as festivals), reaching 1,276 participants.

As well as regular quality control procedures (where volunteers' water testing abilities are checked), we ran an Agreed Level Taxonomy training program,

where monitors improved the scientific validity of their surveys by learning to use a new key for identifying waterbugs to at least family level.

In-stream health

MCMC *Waterwatch* supports 22 volunteers monitoring 12 sites in the Merri and Moonee catchments for water quality and biological health. After 2012's very wet winter, when turbidity was high (particularly in the tributaries of the Merri Creek in Craigieburn and Wallan), the dry spring and summer saw a dramatic reduction in turbidity levels. Phosphate levels continued to be high all year.

Macroinvertebrate assessments show continued poor stream health due to significant stormwater pollution typical of urban waterways with high proportions of impervious surfaces. Water quality data is on the [Victorian Waterwatch database](#).



There was a great turn out of people from all walks of life for National Threatened Species Day on 7 September 2013. Working with Parks Victoria and Birdlife Australia, MCMC delivered a tour around the South Morang wetlands, focusing on endangered birds and frogs.

Financial Report

Summarised Balance Sheet as at 30th September 2013

	2013	2012
EQUITY:		
Retained Funds - Start	87,482	193,723
Transfer to/from Env. Fund Reserve	(2,194)	(29,358)
Add Surplus / (Deficit)	(54,721)	(76,883)
	30,567	87,482
Environment Fund Reserve Balance	31,552	29,358
Retained Funds - End	62,119	116,840
Represented By:		
Current Assets:	513,721	547,653
Fixed Assets:	117,601	132,138
TOTAL ASSETS:	631,322	679,791
Less:		
TOTAL LIABILITIES:	569,203	562,951
NET ASSETS:	62,119	116,840

Summarised Statement of Income & Expenditure For the twelve months ended 30th September, 2013

	2013	2012
INCOME:		
Grants		
Municipalities	556,127	598,230
Other Government	135,440	106,453
Non Government	162,750	166,397
Contracts	476,304	409,187
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets	-	-
Sale of Publications	884	2,027
Environment Fund Donations	1,828	5,150
Interest & Sundry Income	22,660	28,574
Total Income:	1,355,993	1,316,018
LESS EXPENDITURE:		
Wages, Salaries & Oncosts	1,213,404	1,165,353
Materials & Plant Hire	51,629	56,288
Vehicle Running	20,771	25,244
Admin, Project & General	79,370	105,628
Depreciation & Leave Provisions	45,540	40,388
Total Expenditure:	1,410,714	1,392,901
NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):	(54,721)	(76,883)

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the year ended 30th September 2013. The full financial statements and the Auditor's report are on the MCMC website.

Treasurer's Note: Unfortunately almost half of this year's deficit is due to a superannuation defined benefits liability. The other half represents unfunded expenditure to implement MCMC's new Information Management System and incomplete cost recovery for some multi-year contractual and grant commitments.

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

Member Representatives and staff 2012–2013

Committee of Management 2013:

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

City of Darebin:	Cr Bo Li (1), Alison Breach (1), Nadia Combe (sub.) (1).
City of Hume:	Cr Drew Jessop (Vice President) (3), Damien Harrison (Secretary) (4).
City of Moreland:	Cr Jo Connellan (1), Cr Sue Bolton (1), Fiona McKinnon (Vice President) (2), Vince Andreana (sub.) (1), Clare Johnston (sub.) (1).
City of Whittlesea:	Cr Stevan Kozmevski (2), Rebecca Passlow (2).
City of Yarra:	Carrie Lindsay (o). (No Councillor rep. appointed.)
Shire of Mitchell	Cr Kevin Mulroney (o).
Friends of Merri Creek:	Ann McGregor (President) (4), Allie Dawe, (Treasurer) (3), Paul Prentice (2), Nicole Lowe (3), Pascale Pitot (3), Nick Williams (1), Louise Wright (2). Ann Sanson (sub.) (1),
Wallan Environment Group:	Rob Eldridge (2), John Robinson (sub.) (1), Claudia James (sub.) (1).

Sub-Committees in 2013:

The following Sub-Committees also met during the year: Executive Sub-Committee, Finance Sub-Committee, and the Merri Creek & Environs Strategy Implementation Sub-Committee; while reports were issued in lieu of Planning & Issues Sub-Committee meetings.

MCMC Staff:

Manager:	Luisa Macmillan
Admin/Information Officer:	Ray Radford
Administration Officer:	Monica Williamson
Finance Officer:	Ruth Rankin
IT Manager/Strategic Projects:	Tony Faithfull, Adrian Richardson (temp.)
Cleaner:	Suzannah Carroll, Emily Jordan.

Catchment Program

Waterwatch Coordinator:	Jane Bevelander, Trevor Hausler.
Catchment Program Officer:	Angela Foley

Parkland Management

Conservation Program Manager:	Katrina Roberg
Team Coordinator:	Ben North
Ecological Restoration Planner:	Brian Bainbridge
Ecological Technical Assistant:	Michael Longmore (part-time)
Team Leaders:	Megan Maroney, Dave Woods.
Team Members:	Jim Brien, Michael Day, Aaron Eulenstein, Malcolm Hauser, Emily Jordan, Michael Longmore, Amy O'Dell.

Temporary Team Members:	Tom Dell'Oro, Clayton Fenech, Jason Hannon, Deb Hatton, Ben Hodgins, Kyvelie Tsolakis.
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Planning Consultant

Michael Kirsch

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MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

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