

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.

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 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: Some of the 200 or so people at the Merri Magical Gum Morning at Merri Park Northcote in March 2017



Annual Report

2016-2017

President's Report

This year we have successfully continued our roles in ecological restoration and conservation land management, with on-ground work at over 60 sites. Our advocacy to protect waterway values in the Merri catchment involved provision of specialist advice; liaison with agencies, local and State government and landholders; and engagement in statutory and strategic planning processes. We trained and involved young people and adults in water quality and ecological monitoring. And we provided opportunities for thousands of people to learn about nature in our catchment and join in waterway restoration.

Through the year we have been working with consultant Russell Fisher to develop an organisational strategy to guide Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) for the next five years. Russell undertook extensive interviews with member groups and stakeholder organisations and facilitated staff workshops. The process has stimulated creative thinking about roles, opportunities, initiatives and partnerships. We aim to have a final document by mid-2018. The Myer Foundation generously provided financial support for this project.

MCMC's applied ecological research has included 13 years of Golden Sun Moth surveys. Lessons learnt from this work were posted in the March bulletin of *Merri eNews*. An innovation this year have been counts of pollinator insects including Blue-banded Bees, important for the endangered Matted Flax Lily *Dianella amoena*. We were pleased to host a visit by State Environment Minister, Lily D'Ambrosio, to the site of the Blue-banded Bee project in Fawkner, where she announced community volunteer grants including one to Friends of Merri Creek (FoMC).

The amount of time spent defending our Creek corridor from overdevelopment on adjacent properties highlights the urgent need for mandatory height and setback controls, similar to those introduced along the Yarra River.

We joined local residents and FoMC in opposing the proposed sale for development of VicRoads land adjoining the Merri in Fawkner. This land should become a permanent part of the Merri parklands.

With the continuing shortage of State and Federal environmental grants, MCMC staff maintained their imaginative and professional approach to sourcing revenue. They are to be congratulated on a remarkable 88% success rate with grant applications to funding bodies (14 of 16 proposals were accepted). The variety of projects and funding sources is illustrated in this annual report. The staff have put in a great effort to bring in a surplus this year, which assists in rebuilding reserves and future-proofing the organisation. More information on this is provided in the Treasurer's Report.

We gratefully acknowledge the continuing fundamental financial and other forms of support from MCMC's member Councils, and our strong relationships with member community groups, FoMC and Wallan Environment Group.

Of course, our dedicated and knowledgeable staff are key to MCMC's achievements and effectiveness and I would like to thank them for another 12 months of productive work.

Ann McGregor, President

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 also supports our governance and communication services. For the year it totalled \$243,600.

With most of the upper Merri catchment now in the Urban Growth Boundary and subject to rapid urbanisation, we continued to promote our vision for a functional ecological and open space network through the upper catchment: the **Greater Wallan - Merri Park**.

In the older urbanised southern part of the catchment, sewer renewal within the creek corridor and the re-development of older urban subdivision sites along the creek for higher-density residential and commercial development, were again the key focus.

We were disappointed yet again that the biggest immediate impact on our waterways came from **fires at industrial sites**, two of which had significant effects on fish life.

We made comments on 25 planning permit applications and on a number of concept/development plans; and appeared at one VCAT hearing and one Panel Hearing.

We were involved in discussions: on an upgrade to the Wallan sewage treatment plant to cope with additional growth; and on Master-planning for Growing Grass Frogs on the Conservation Areas along Merri Creek.

We contributed specialist information on the location of rare species to relevant management agencies; and developed numerous project proposals to funding bodies with a 95% success rate!

Merri Creek & Environs Strategy Despite the Strategy's acknowledged value, a lack of resources has impeded progress on the development of an update. Melbourne Water's 'refresh' of their Healthy Waterways Strategy provided an impetus to prepare Merri-specific perspectives that will contribute to both strategies.

We publicised 108 community events on the Merri events **calendar**; sent out customised emails and flyers for 46 of these events; and produced four issues of **Merri e-News**, utilising user-friendly upgrades to our website – thanks to The Myer Foundation.

We digitised and catalogued many of the precious images in our nationally significant image collection, thanks to our volunteer archivist and two other volunteers with professional cataloguing expertise.

Our Committee of Management and its sub-committees met frequently (see p.4), and in addition to our regular functions, we renewed some key MCMC policies.

The Merri Creek Exhibition was successfully shown at seven different locations and continues to attract interest.

Our 4th Annual Appeal raised just over \$11,000 for the **Merri Creek Environment Fund**; the Fund also received a \$20,000 donation from the Merriang District Landcare Group upon its dissolution.



Ecological Restoration

Our Ecological Restoration Program staff manage and monitor over 60 indigenous vegetation sites along Merri Creek, its tributaries and adjoining catchments.

Around 44% of our works focussed on shrublands and woodlands, 33% on wetlands and the banks of waterways, and 20% on grasslands. More than half of this was supporting the regeneration of remnant vegetation. **Reconstruction** of degraded sites, primarily maintenance of the lower Merri's revegetation, accounted for 36% of our works. Ecological monitoring and community engagement made up the remaining 8%.

We planted nearly 18,000 plants, 90% of which were ground-storey, 7% were shrub and 3% were trees. This included 210 *Dianella amoena* grown from remnant plants selected to ensure genetic diversity of plantings. We planted wildflowers to accompany the Dianellas as a part of a focus on pollination processes along the creek. We continued our strong focus on direct sowing using over 11 kg of indigenous grass seed.

Our **Flora and Fauna report** outlines key sightings and discoveries for 2016-17.

Volunteer contribution

Involving community in hands-on activities is key to our work. We hosted 19 community events including plantings, sowing seed, weed management, training and ecological surveys. Almost all were funded by grants (3 funded by contracts); 12 of these events were partnerships with Friends of Merri Creek.

332 volunteers learned about restoration

through contributing 1,235 hours at community events (equivalent to over \$37,000 of work). Of these volunteers, 147 attended planting/direct seeding events (465 hrs), 67 helped with weeding (396 hrs) and 36 surveyed Golden Sun Moth and insect pollinators (85 hrs).

Individual week-day volunteers worked with our crew for 56 days, contributing 400 hours (equivalent to \$12,000 worth of work) and gaining restoration skills as they worked.

121 participants from groups including Vic. Indigenous Nurseries Cooperative, Melbourne Polytechnic, Green Army, Ford Australia and CERES contributed 459 hours at 12 events.

Wurundjeri Collaboration

We continued our collaboration with Wurundjeri Traditional Owners, contracting their Narrap Team to burn native grasslands with us in Fawkner and Craigieburn.

Funding

Total income for our ecological restoration was \$767,960. This is similar to 2016, though significantly less than 2014-15, due to the cessation of large projects funded by State and Federal grants programs ended.

Agreements with member Councils:

Ongoing funding agreements with Darebin, Hume, Moreland and Yarra Councils funded \$305,600 of our vegetation improvement and community engagement work.

Photos: Above: "Buzz Planting" near Moomba Park Fawkner for the Friends of Merri Creek's Blue-banded Bee in June 2017.

Below left: Hardenbergia flowers at Say G'day Reserve, Heathcote Junction August 2017.

Below right: Removing Gorse at Laffan Reserve, Craigieburn in April 2017.



External grants: We delivered \$144,160 (down by 25%) of works funded by philanthropic, state and regional grants programs. This included \$48,660 for delivery of grants received by Friends of Merri Creek and Collingwood Children's Farm.

These grants, and volunteer contributions, added 36% to the value of our Council funded-restoration and vegetation maintenance.

Contracts: We maintained various 'bushland' areas for local councils through contracts worth \$200,600. Key locations were Merri Creek sites in Moreland and Ngarri-djarrang Grassland in Darebin.

Contracts with other clients, worth \$117,600, included continued offset works on a Merri Creek grassland in Craigieburn; restoration and management of biosites for Metro Trains; revegetation and weed control to mitigate the impact of a new gas pipeline in Heathcote Junction; and weed control of a serious infestations at a grassland in Wollert.

Unfortunately Melbourne Water employed new contractors to take care of the spectacular **Galada Tamboore** in Campbellfield after 26 years of restoration effort by MCMC.



Catchment

Our Catchment Program staff develop and deliver waterway and biodiversity engagement projects. This year we reached 5,300 people in 230 educational and engagement sessions. Three-quarters of these sessions were with education providers, ranging from pre-school to tertiary level organisations.

- Hosting well-attended waterbug, frog and wetland events for the general community at various locations in the catchment.

We also helped support three friends groups, and seven *Waterwatch* monitoring groups. This included helping MECCARG with their 8th *Murnong Gathering* by Merri Creek in Coburg and their inaugural networking event, *Murnong Encounters* about Plains Yam Daisy.

Funding

Total income for delivery of our Catchment projects was \$177,000. Ongoing funding from four of our member councils - Darebin, Moreland, Whittlesea and Yarra - contributed 62% of this. Partnership and grant funding, added value to council funding and brought benefits to local communities.

In-stream health

Our *Waterwatch* program, funded by Melbourne Water and the four Councils mentioned above supported volunteer monitoring of waterway health at 13 sites across the Merri, Moonee Ponds and Darebin Creek catchments, and the lower Yarra.

Our *Waterwatch Report* summarises the key findings. Overall, monitoring results showed no improvement in the poor water quality of Merri Creek and its tributaries. The lower, urbanised reaches are in worse condition than the more rural upper reaches. This reflects the impact of urban stormwater runoff from hard urban surfaces, both its poor water quality and its role in the creation of 'flashy' flows.

On a positive note, we saw an increase in the number of *Waterwatch* volunteers and the uptake of Melbourne Water's new citizen science project, **Frog Census**. In 2017, MCMC extensively promoted the census and 70 citizen reports on frog presence in the Merri were made using the app. Most of these came from urban areas, which greatly increases our understanding of frog distribution.

Photos:

Top: Young families enjoy Nature Play at Hall Reserve, Clifton Hill in March 2017

Left - top: Wild Pollinator Count near Moomba Park, Fawkner in November 2016

Left - middle: Collecting bugs during a Waterbug Census Workshop on Merri Creek, Clifton Hill in April 2017

Left - bottom: Melbourne Polytechnic students at Waterwatch training at Epping in September 2017

Middle column: Artwork depicting waterbugs by Brunswick North West Primary School students made with indigenous grass collected from their school garden, Yakai Barrington in May 2017



Financial Report

Summarised Balance Sheet as at 30th September 2017

	2017	2016
EQUITY:		
Retained Funds - Start	63,215	65,100
Transfer to/from Env. Fund Reserve	(24,035)	(469)
Add Surplus / (Deficit)	47,865	(1,416)
	87,045	63,215
Environment Fund Reserve Balance	63,231	39,196
Retained Funds - End	150,276	102,411
Represented By:		
Current Assets:	751,389	664,207
Fixed Assets:	56,057	67,431
TOTAL ASSETS:	807,446	731,638
Less:		
TOTAL LIABILITIES:	657,170	629,227
NET ASSETS:	150,276	102,411

Summarised Statement of Income & Expenditure for the twelve months to 30th September, 2017

	2017	2016
INCOME:		
Grants		
Municipalities	655,444	630,679
Other Government	81,456	89,296
Non Government	99,732	80,224
Contracts	*390,133	*430,640
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets	-	6,769
Sale of Publications	552	341
Environment Fund Donations	34,466	13,426
Interest & Sundry Income	10,751	9,123
Total Income:	1,272,534	1,260,498
LESS EXPENDITURE:		
Wages, Salaries & Oncosts	1,012,284	1,045,378
Consultants, Materials & Plant Hire	74,257	71,110
Vehicle Running	17,705	21,996
Admin, Project & General	83,423	84,888
Depreciation & Leave Provisions	37,000	38,542
Total Expenditure:	1,224,669	1,261,914
NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):	47,865	(1,416)

* Includes delivery of grants for community groups to the value of \$58,400 in 2017 and \$133,470 in 2016, for those projects where MCMC designed the project and developed the grant application.

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the year ended 30th September 2017. 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 54 generous donors to the Merri Creek Environment Fund including the Schudmack Family Foundation, L. Bradburn, P. Gleeson, I. Patrick, T. Smith, R. & D. Shiel.

Member Representatives and staff 2016-2017

Committee of Management 2017:

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

City of Darebin:	Cr Susan Rennie (2) Cr Trent McCarthy (1) Luke Sandham (3)
City of Hume:	Cr Jodi Jackson (3) Damien Harrison (Secretary) (2)
City of Moreland:	Cr Natalie Abboud (3) Nathan Milesi (3)
City of Whittlesea:	Cr Stevan Kozmevski (2) Kristen Jackson (4)
City of Yarra:	Justin Hanrahan (2). No Councillor rep. appointed.
Shire of Mitchell	Cr Rob Eldridge (1) Elyse Kelly (3)
Friends of Merri Creek:	Ann McGregor (President) (3) Ann Sanson (Treasurer) (2) Nicole Lowe (Vice President) (4) Pascale Pitot (4) Jane Miller (4) Laziza Hawkins (<i>Sub.</i>) (1) Suzi Shaw (<i>Sub.</i>) (1)
Wallan Environment Group:	Claudia James (3)

Sub-Committees in 2017:

The following Sub-Committees met during the year:

Executive Sub-Committee (7 times)
Finance Sub-Committee (4 times)
Merri Creek & Environs Strategy Implementation Sub-Committee (1 time)
Merri Creek Environment Fund Sub-Committee (4 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):	Catalina Perez
Archivist (volunteer)	Leslie Fraser p/t

Catchment Program:

Special Engagement Programs Coordinator:	Angela Foley
Waterwatch Coordinator:	Julia Cirillo p/t, Jane Bevelander p/t, Trevor Hausler (casual)

Ecological Restoration Program

Program Manager:	Katrina Roberg p/t
Works Coordinator:	Jonathan Wilson
Ecological Restoration Planner:	Brian Bainbridge p/t
Ecological Technical Assistant:	Michael Longmore
Team Leader:	Megan Maroney p/t.
Team Members:	Jim Brien p/t, Sarah Bates, Sarah Boys, Chris Geary p/t, Jessica Slade p/t.
Temporary Team Members:	Sarah Jones, Oskar Liebert, Nicola Aylward.



Merri Creek Management Committee

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