

Planning for weed control

Merri Creek Management Committee

July 2002

Merri Creek flows from the foothills of the Great Dividing Range near Wallan, north of Melbourne, to meet the Yarra River at Dights falls in Clifton Hill. It crosses farming land, native grasslands of national significance, and urban land. It is a habitat corridor of regional significance, and provides important open space for people in the urban reach of the creek.

Merri Creek Management Committee was formed in 1989 to conserve, restore and enhance Merri Creek. MCMC has a fulltime Parkland Management team that carries out restoration and revegetation of sites within the Merri Creek Parklands. MCMC also works with local communities, local government, other government agencies and Friends groups to promote the conservation of Merri Creek.

The Parkland Management Team's works focus on protecting and restoring existing remnant vegetation and expanding habitat and landscape values through revegetation. Much of this work involves weed control – through herbicide application, weed suppression, weed removal, and reestablishment and maintenance of a healthy indigenous vegetation cover.

Planning and programming of works is undertaken annually, but the program is flexible and can respond to weed "emergencies".

Prioritisation of works is based on both site priorities and weed priorities.

Sites are prioritised based on environmental values primarily, but also on landscape, aesthetic values and community expectations. Sites with remnant vegetation are highest priority, revegetation sites near remnant sites are next highest priority, revegetation sites are third priority.

Weeds are prioritised based on national, state, catchment and sub-catchment strategies, and at the finest level of detail, on site management plans.

The annual works program needs to be flexible enough to allow for responding to new and emerging weeds that may be found for the first time at a site. Given the role that creeks and flowing water play in weed spread, as well as Merri Creek's proximity to major roads (including interstate roads such as Hume Highway), roads and vehicles also being excellent weed vectors, MCMC has discovered a number of weed species not previously recorded for this area, or even for Victoria. The works program must be able to respond to these unpleasant discoveries.

All Parkland Management Team members have an essential role in annual works planning, and in identifying and responding to weed 'emergencies', given their on-ground knowledge of the sites, their weed floras and the many other factors that contribute to effective weed management at any site.

Providing the community with information about weeds is challenging and is approached from several different aspects. Gardening with indigenous plants is promoted. Information about the special environment of the creek is provided. MCMC organises handweeding days with local residents where only one or two or three weed species are targeted. MCMC produces displays for community planting days.

However this is an area where we need to do a lot more. Most fundamental is the need to change people's view that the 'environment' exists only beyond the edges of the city and not within the city, or our gardens. We need to describe and share our vision of Merri Creek as a vital living stream, even in the urban area, and that everyone lives in a catchment.

Table 1 Weed management planning – Prioritisation process

		<i>notes</i>
prioritise sites	1. existing sites	remnants, reveg sites
	2. extend existing sites	buffers around remnants, expand reveg areas
	3. new sites	near existing site, conservation value (flora, fauna, cultural, community)
prioritise weeds	refer to existing strategies	federal, state, regional (Port Phillip and Westernport), catchment (Yarra), sub-catchment (Merri), site management plan
	existing weeds	grassy weeds stipoids, phalaris, paspalum, couch, kikuya others – Yorkshire fog, Rice Millet, Ehrharta spp, annuals woody & broadleaf weeds ash, willows, elm, poplar boxthorn, gorse, hawthorn, briar rose, blackberry fennel revegetation weeds (cues of care) Brassicaceae spp
	new and emerging weeds	eg Nassella charruana, Squirting Cucumber, Euphorbia

Merri Creek

- Riparian communities
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- Escarpment communities
- Western Basalt Plains Native Grasslands
- Habitat corridor
- Open space, passive recreation

Weed management

- Protect and enhance biodiversity and conservation values
- Annual planning
- Prioritization by sites and by weeds

Prioritising sites

- Remnant sites
- Revegetation sites
- Adjacent areas

Prioritising weeds

- National, State, Regional, Catchment strategies
- Detailed site management plans
- Weed ecology
- Site surveys

Merri Creek weeds

- Grassy weeds
 - Stipoid weeds
 - Couch
 - Paspalum
 - Phalaris
- Woody & broadleaf weeds
 - Boxthorn, Gorse, Hawthorn
 - Blackberry
 - Ash, Willow
 - Fennel, Blue Periwinkle, Oxalis
- Sleeper weeds
 - Lambs-tail & Cruel Vines
 - Fountain Grass
- new & emerging weeds:
 - Alligator weed
 - Oxalis glabra
- Revegetation weeds '*Cues of care*'
 - Brassicaceae spp
 - Thistles, Mallows

Integrated weed management

- Part of broader program of planting, seeding, mulching
- Other tools: ecological burning, GPS mapping

Staff training

- Access to reference materials
- enviroweeds email discussion group
- Team discussions

Community information

- Garden escapes
- 'Nature in the city'
- Community hand-weeding activities

Conclusion – planning for weed control

- Strategic planning to maximise limited resources
- What's there and why is it there?
- Information and techniques exchange
- Community involvement and education