

MERRI CREEK



MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE

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 Friends of Wallan Creek. 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 and dedicated staff and its programs are funded by Council members, by state and federal grant programs, by competitively won tenders, by grants from philanthropic organisations and through sponsorship.

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.

MCMC prizewinner

MCMC was awarded the 2002 Thiess Services National Riverprize for excellence in waterway management.

Above: Galada Tamboore Merri Creek Gorge photo by David Tatnall as shown at the exhibition at Synergy Gallery, Northcote in August

Annual Report

2008-2009

President's Report

Many events this year helped me to appreciate the importance and success of the work of the Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC). Recently, my wife and I participated in a Merri bird survey where we were inspired by seeing that beautiful birdlife is returning to the creek in ever increasing numbers and variety.

Highlights of the past year included David Tatnall's photographic exhibition of Galada Tamboore, commissioned to celebrate MCMC's 20th anniversary. This spectacular exhibition attracted 500 visitors, many of them unfamiliar with Merri Creek.

It has been pleasing to see some progress on the establishment of Marran Baba (the new Merri Creek Parklands) with Parks Victoria completing the master plan for the first section of the park at Galada Tamboore.

This year also saw the production of a number of important publications. *Merri Creek & Environs Strategy 2009-2014* provides a wealth of information about the Merri waterways, highlighting issues and setting objectives, targets and actions to achieve healthy streams, wildlife habitats and open space. I also recently attended the launch of *Seeding the Future*, a DVD directed and presented by Judy Allan with production support from MCMC. This DVD provides unique guidance on the collection and storage of seeds from native vegetation.

In addition detailed full colour information notes have been produced for five sites along the creek. These information notes are available through the MCMC website and provide a valuable education resource for creek users.

MCMC continued to have success in attracting external funding. For each dollar contributed by Councils (not including contracts), an additional 70 cents was gained from grants (including grants to Friends of Merri Creek). If the volunteer contribution to MCMC is added (at \$30/hr) this rises to 94c for each Council dollar, a clear demonstration of the value of MCMC.

We continue to face challenges in our attempts to preserve Merri Creek habitats and the neighbouring grasslands. Development that will result from the State Government's proposed extension to the Urban Growth Boundary poses a significant threat. MCMC has proposed an Upper Merri Biodiversity Network to protect and link important flora and fauna areas and has made substantial submissions to government about this.

My thanks to all the MCMC staff, committee members, members of the Friends of Merri Creek and Friends of Wallan Creek, and council staff whose work during the year has helped us to achieve our many successes.

Trevor Hausler, President

Parkland Management

– restoration and revegetation

Management of Native Grasslands, escarpments and creekside ecological habitats

This year Merri Creek Management Committee's (MCMC) Parkland Management Team continued to restore vegetation at more than 100 sites along the Merri, Edgars, Aitken and Central Creeks from Clifton Hill to Wallan. MCMC focuses on maximising the ecological resilience of sites and augmenting the Merri habitat corridor while enhancing amenity. Management plans were also prepared for a number of sites.

Secure recurrent funding from MCMC's member Councils is used to attract grants from other sources to enable the strengthening and expansion of many sites. Grants are gained directly by MCMC and by Friends groups. MCMC designs site-appropriate self-sustaining plantings to restore local ecology, but all plantings and remnant vegetation require some ongoing management.

In total 33,270 indigenous plants were planted to create habitat linkages or to buffer important vegetation from weeds or disturbance. Of these 90% were ground-storey species reflecting this year's focus on restoring endangered grasslands.

Frequent sightings of Echidnas, Swamp Wallabies and several bird species suggest that maturing revegetation is offering quality habitat.

Major projects

This year was an extremely busy year, boosted by a number of major grants. Total income was \$120,000 more than 2007-08. As a consequence the on-ground works team expanded to 15 and a fifth vehicle was purchased to enable works to be completed.

Regeneration of the Merri's endangered grassland, escarpment shrubland and riparian areas was enhanced through two grants totalling \$181,236 from the Australian Government's *Caring for our Country* program. Weed control, ecological burns and/or buffer plantings were funded at 16 sites. Habitat quality assessments were used to shape management recommendations for ten of these sites.

Restoration of Hall Reserve (Clifton Hill), Merri Park Wetlands (Northcote), Moomba Park (Fawkner), Galada Tamboore (Campbellfield), and Rushwood Reserve (Craigieburn) was supplemented with funds from the alternative sentencing provision of the Environment Protection Act. Detailed, colour information notes were also produced for each of these sites.

Widening and realignment of the shared trail near Rushall Station in Fitzroy North provided an opportunity to extend the Creekline Grassy Woodland between the creek and the trail. This revegetation was established through City of Yarra contracts and *Caring for Our Country* funding. The



Planting by Melbourne Uni and RMIT students at Galada Tamboore in September.



Grey Kangaroos at Bababi Djinanang (Jukes Road Grassland).



MCMC staff conduct an Ecological burn at Bababi Djinanang, (Jukes Road Grassland) in May.

contract work included supervising the planting of 2,500 plants by Department of Justice Correctional Services teams. The planting allows sightlines to be maintained while creating ground storey habitat in this narrow reach of the Merri.

MCMC won competitive tenders to be included on the panel of contractors for provision of land management services to the Cities of Hume and Darebin. Our contracts with Darebin increased considerably with substantial projects undertaken at Northcote Gorge, at the Department of Housing flats at Holmes St, Northcote, additional management just north of Ngarri-djarrang (Central Creek Grassland), and woody weed control north of Kendall St in Preston. Contract work with Hume Council also increased and included ecological burns and weed control works at Amberfield, Rushwood and Frog Court Reserves in Craigieburn and John Laffan Reserve in Kalkallo.

MCMC was contracted by the City of Whittlesea to commence works on the Merri, north of Cooper St. A new population of Golden Sun Moths was discovered by MCMC staff at this site, which is between Galgi Ngarrk (Craigieburn Grasslands) and Bababi Marning (Cooper St Grasslands).

MCMC commenced a project to monitor the relationship between vegetation quality and Golden Sun Moth populations at Bababi Marning (Cooper St Grassland). Parks Victoria funded the first year of this project through a grant to the Friends of Merri Creek.

The Merri and Edgars Creeks Confluence Area Restoration Group and the Friends of Edgars Creek secured and extended their sites with MCMC support in gaining funds and undertaking works.

Community Involvement in restoration and revegetation

MCMC's relationship with community groups was maintained by hosting 68 parkland management related community events. In addition to planting days these events included weed workshops, Fawkner safaris, Native Grassland tours, seed harvesting days and Golden Sun Moth surveys.

Weed workshops were provided for the Friends of Edgars Creek and Readings Bookstore Staff and aimed to build enthusiasm and skill for activities that sustain community plantings.

About 110 corporate volunteers contributed 552 hours over 12 events including volunteer teams from Yarra Valley Water, ANZ Bank, Department of Human Services and Price Waterhouse Coopers. Tree Project assisted with many of these events. Volunteers from our Landcare sponsor, Spicers Paper, participated in planting activities at the Imaroo St escarpment in Fawkner.

Eleven educational institutions (primary and secondary schools, TAFEs and Universities) were supported by the Parkland Team. Notably, the NMIT Land Conservation and Restoration class contributed 148 hours to the revegetation project at Robinson Reserve, Preston, funded by Landcare Australia and SP AusNet.

In return, MCMC supported the students' study by demonstrating the design and implementation of this site's revegetation.

The Parkland Management Team also supervised and trained 14 new staff, 14 education classes, 14 work experience volunteers and at least 1,080 volunteers. Volunteers contributed 3,817 hours to the restoration of the Merri Corridor with this contribution valued at \$114,510 (using the Australian Government recommended rate of \$30/hour).

Of course, the overall social and ecological benefits of volunteers' work for the creek and its community are incalculable!



Spraying herbicide on Artichoke thistle at Grassy Woodlands in Epping North.

Catchment Program – environmental education and stream health

Merri Creek Management Committee's (MCMC) Catchment Program provides biodiversity and waterway activities that engage the community. This year over 9,450 people participated in 336 sessions including *Waterwatch* activities. Venues ranged from industrial workplaces, café forecourts, classrooms, community festivals and shopping precincts to grasslands, wetlands, and waterways.

Key organisations sought partnerships with MCMC to develop and deliver new community engagement projects including Parks Victoria (*The View from Galada*), Environment Protection Authority (*Heidelberg West Industrial Behaviour Change*), VicUrban (*Go Wild at Aurora*) and Darebin Council (*Say 'no' to Plastic Bags*).

MCMC provided community engagement training for three workplace stormwater projects in Somerton, Campbellfield and West Heidelberg. Live freshwater macroinvertebrates and maps were taken into over 130 workplaces to emphasise the proximity, vulnerability and liveliness of local waterways.

Two projects raised community awareness of Galada Tamboore in Campbellfield and Thomastown, *Nearby Nature* (funded by the alternative sentencing provision of the Environment Protection Act) and *The View from Galada*, (by Parks Victoria as part of its master planning for the Galada area). Following information sessions that attracted 400 people, 164 people were guided on 14 walks. Surveys showed that the guided walks increased participant's appreciation of Merri Creek and their recognition of the need to protect the 'wild and natural' qualities of the parkland.

MCMC assisted VicUrban to create an environmental expo for residents of the new suburb of Aurora in North Epping. The expo encouraged understanding of the geology, biodiversity and cultural values of the area and reinforced the importance of VicUrban's environmental care with water sensitive urban design, frog wetlands and conservation areas.

Seeding the Future - a community training DVD showing how to collect indigenous seed - was completed. MCMC provided Judy Allen with two years of project management support. Production was funded by Melbourne Water, the Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association and the Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Cooperative.

MCMC's catchment education (excluding *Waterwatch* – see below) is

supported by annual funding from the Cities of Darebin, Whittlesea and Yarra which enables delivery of activities in these municipalities. In addition, Darebin and Whittlesea annually fund *Learning Grounds*, a specific project to assist school communities in the planning of indigenous gardens in their school grounds. Funding for other projects is sourced from a range of grants and contracts.

Evaluation of schools' programs

MCMC's environmental education activities were comprehensively assessed by student intern, Emily Freund. Emily evaluated 14 different activities based on 119 survey responses. Key results highlighted the value of engaging the senses, hearing (for example, listening for frog calls), smell (crushed eucalyptus leaves), taste (sweet lerp) and touch (rough volcanic rock) in addition to visual engagement, and the importance of innovative approaches for observing local flora and fauna (e.g., botanic art, bug role play). Surveys showed that MCMC's hands-on activities are highly appreciated.

Waterwatch

MCMC continues to host a *Waterwatch* program for the Merri and Moonee Ponds Creeks and the lower Yarra River. It is part of *Waterwatch* Melbourne and is supported by Melbourne Water and the municipalities of Darebin, Hume, Melbourne, Mitchell, Moonee Valley, Moreland, Whittlesea and Yarra.

During the year 5,150 students from 62 pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions were involved in water quality monitoring, biological assessments of aquatic life, drain stenciling, frog call activity and freshwater habitat surveys. A highlight was the *Creek Crusaders* schools program which MCMC delivered on behalf of the Moonee Ponds Creek Coordination Committee. This waterway program consisted of seven hands-on, in-depth sessions for each school and was funded by the alternative sentencing provision of the Environment Protection Act.

Waterwatch presentations and activities at 59 festivals,

community days and training events reached a further 2,170 people.

Waterwatch continued to work with corporate and industry groups, holiday programs, council staff and conservation volunteers. Eight community groups were supported to do regular monitoring of 13 sites across the Merri and Moonee Ponds and lower Yarra catchments.

In-stream health

For the last two years MCMC has monitored six sites in the Merri catchment for water quality and biological health. This year's results have continued to show that Merri Creek has poor in-stream health, particularly in its lower reaches. SIGNAL scores (the diversity and abundance of macroinvertebrate animals) were low and levels of phosphate were high. Urban stormwater runoff is the primary cause of these degraded conditions. In-stream conditions were generally better around Craigieburn and further north. Testing done by our community monitors confirmed this assessment.

The very low flow and warm conditions during summer, combined with excessive aquatic plant growth, led to obvious stress in Merri Creek with more than ten dead carp recorded in a Brunswick/Northcote reach. The EPA attributed the deaths to inadequate oxygen. In total eight pollution incidents were reported through MCMC to the EPA, most relating to unacceptable discharges from stormwater drains to the creek.

MCMC inspired diverse audiences to take action to improve local waterways in a range of settings including Galada Tamboore below.



Planning and coordination – open space and conservation

Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) works closely with government agencies and the community advising on issues affecting biodiversity, stream health, landscape and amenity along waterway corridors in the Merri catchment. MCMC receives funding from member Councils to do this.

The biggest challenge this year has been to respond to the state government's draft designation of most of the upper Merri catchment as a new urban growth area. MCMC submissions to the Urban Growth Boundary Review and the Australian Government's Strategic Impact Assessment highlighted the need to better protect biodiversity and the waterways. In particular, MCMC's *Upper Merri Biodiversity Network Plan* brought together information on existing reserves, existing and proposed habitat corridors, areas of important remnant vegetation and swamps to highlight areas needing protection.

MCMC also:

- commented on three planning scheme amendments;
- participated in a successful panel hearing in Mitchell;
- responded to 27 planning permit applications;
- presented to two VCAT reviews;
- advised on a number of plans prior to formal application;
- commented on draft Conservation Management Plans for two sites; and
- advised on potential 'offset' sites for Golden Sun Moth habitat and volcanic plains grassland.

A significant achievement was the *Merri Creek and Environs Strategy 2009-2014*. The Strategy gives direction to managers of waterways corridors of the Merri catchment - this advice is vital given the growth pressures on the upper Merri. One of the highest priority actions - planning for fire management in the Merri corridor has already begun.

We continued to liaise with Melbourne Water on its major improvement projects in urban and rural reaches of the Merri.

Upper reaches of Merri Creek – Wallan to Donnybrook

Although the upper part of the Merri catchment is still predominantly rural, rapid growth in Wallan is focusing attention on local tributaries of the Merri. MCMC supported the Friends of Wallan Creek and provided advice to Mitchell Shire on managing remnant



Eastern Great Egret in CERES dam, Brunswick.

wetland vegetation in Spring Reserve (Beveridge) and on biodiversity and geodiversity assets of the upper Merri; plus we completed a Strategic Plan for Taylors Creek (Wallan).

MCMC also worked with the Merriang Landcare Group to protect significant remnant vegetation and key fauna habitat on private land. MCMC undertook on-ground works for private landholders, prepared a vegetation management plan for the Beveridge - Wallan Rail Reserve, and undertook site visits and proposed native vegetation offset options for the Donnybrook rail passing lane.

Middle reaches of Merri Creek – Kalkallo to Western Ring Road

The middle reaches of the Merri catchment contain a mix of established and new residential and industrial/business areas, as well as rural and extractive industry zones.

MCMC participated in a Yarra Valley Water study about flow requirements of the Growling Grass Frog population downstream from the Craigieburn Sewage Treatment Plant. It was good to see restoration of habitat for these frogs with water being pumped into a quarry just south of O'Herns Road.

MCMC sought action on dumped rubbish at a number of sites including Bababi Marning (Cooper St Grasslands). We provided detailed information on the biodiversity values of the Galada Tamboore area for Parks Victoria's master plan for the area and made specific comment on proposed trail access and visitor infrastructure.

Lower reaches of Merri Creek – Western Ring Road to Clifton Hill

The lower Merri catchment is urbanised and the creek corridor provides a ribbon of habitat and recreational access. The redevelopment of infrastructure and plans for improved habitat and community amenity are a continuing focus for MCMC in the Merri's lower reaches.

MCMC participated in site inspections and provided detailed information on remnant vegetation for Moreland Council's feasibility study for wetland sites along the Merri corridor.

We gave advice to Melbourne Water on pipe replacement works along the creek including at Bakers/McMahons Roads (Coburg) and at Holden Street (North Fitzroy) – the latter includes an associated pedestrian/bike bridge. We were also consulted by Yarra Valley Water on the relining of the sewer through Fawcner and North Coburg.

Plans for the upgrade and realignment of the Merri Shared Trail and associated new bridges generated opportunities for MCMC to comment on the location and significance of indigenous vegetation at Moreland Road, Blyth Street, and the Rushall – Queens Parade realignment.

We also advised SP AusNet on managing vegetation underneath the high voltage transmission lines along the creek corridor and provided comment to the Department of Transport on managing the Clifton Hill Rail Project site.

Financial Report

Summarised Balance Sheet as at 30th September 2009

	2009	2008
EQUITY:		
Retained Funds – Start	282,131	289,547
Add Surplus/(Deficit)	(38,503)	(7,416)
Retained Funds - End	\$243,628	\$282,131
Represented By:		
Current Assets:	817,786	868,291
Fixed Assets:	177,701	119,766
TOTAL ASSETS:	995,487	988,057
Less:		
TOTAL LIABILITIES:	751,859	705,926
NET ASSETS:	\$243,628	\$282,131

Summarised Statement of Income & Expenditure For the twelve months ended 30th September, 2009

	2009	2008
INCOME:		
Grants		
Municipalities	526,849	459,473
Other Government	243,433	168,147
Non Government	35,447	66,066
Contracts	586,464	535,091
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets	1,387	-
Sale of Publications	837	922
Environment Fund Donations	250	11,150
Interest & Sundry Income	50,330	42,854
Total Income:	1,444,997	1,283,703
LESS EXPENDITURE:		
Wages, Salaries & Oncosts	1,222,515	1,029,993
Materials & Plant Hire	79,364	90,362
Vehicle Running	18,665	17,428
Admin, Project & General	118,530	128,739
Environment Fund Disbursements	-	-
Depreciation & Leave	44,426	24,597
Total Expenditure:	1,483,500	1,291,119
NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):	(\$38,503)	(\$7,416)

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the year ended 30th September 2009. The full financial statements and the Auditor's report are on the MCMC website at www.mcmc.org.au or copies are available from the MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick.

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

Member Representatives and staff 2008–2009

Committee of Management:

City of Darebin:	Cr Trent McCarthy, Allan Wicks, James Booth (<i>sub.</i>)
City of Hume:	Cr Drew Jessop, Elizabeth Donoghue, Damien Harrison (<i>sub.</i>), Nick Walker
City of Moreland:	Cr Andrea Sharam, Cr Lambros Tapinos, Cr Toby Archer (<i>sub.</i>), David Dunstan, Sam Niedra
City of Whittlesea:	Cr Stevan Kozmevski, David Turnbull (<i>Vice President 1</i>)
City of Yarra:	Cr Sam Gaylard, Carrie Lindsay
Shire of Mitchell:	Cr Trevor Tobias
Friends of Merri Creek:	Trevor Hausler (<i>President</i>), Ann McGregor (<i>Secretary</i>), Allie Dawe, (<i>Treasurer</i>), Paul Prentice (<i>Vice President 2</i>), Ruth Shiel, Louise Grgat, Harold Mackrell (<i>sub.</i>) David Redfearn (<i>sub.</i>)
Friends of Wallan Creek:	Rob Eldridge

Sub-Committees:

The following Sub-Committees also met during the year: Executive Sub-Committee, Finance Sub-Committee, Merri Creek & Environs Strategy Implementation Sub-Committee; and the Planning & Issues Sub-Committee.

MCMC Staff:

Manager:	Luisa Macmillan
Admin./Information Officer:	Ray Radford
Administration Officer:	Monica Williamson
Finance Officer:	Ruth Rankin
IT Manager/Strategic Projects:	Tony Faithfull

Catchment Program Team:

Manager/Waterwatch Coordinator:	Greg Woodward
Environmental Education Officer:	Jane Bevelander
Catchment Program Officer:	Angela Foley
Catchment Program Officer:	Dimi Bouzalas (<i>until Dec. 2008</i>)

Parkland Management Team:

Conservation Program Manager:	Katrina Roberg
Coordinator:	Megan Jericho
Senior Technical Officer:	Brian Bainbridge
Team Leader:	Alex Davern
Team Members:	Dave Crawford, Rohen Davis, Aaron Eulenstein, Ben North, Maryann Weatherill.
Temporary Team Members:	Libby Abbott, Tom Bergamin, Carmel D'Arcy, Luke Dragonetti, Lachlan Fisher, Martin Forster, Danielle Guilfoyle, Brodie Hill, Stephnie Howells, John Loschiavo, Sue Miller, Geoff Neal, Martin Roberts, Phoebe Smith, Kim Ure, Dan Walmsley, Marinda Wilkinson.
Planning Consultant:	Michael Kirsch



Merri Creek Management Committee

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