

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 Wallan Environment Group (previously called 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.

(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.)

Above: MCMC staff take Melbourne University students on a tour of Galada Tamboore in Campbellfield/Thomastown.

Annual Report

2009-2010



President's Report

It is exciting news to hear of the recent sighting of a platypus in the Merri Creek near my home. The presence of such an iconic species shows there is hope for improvement in degraded urban waterways. However, the sighting of one creature does not show that the job is done, only that we must redouble our efforts, so that one day, platypus are a common sight and no longer news worthy.

Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) has been recognised in a number of ways this year. Our photo collection was assessed as being nationally significance and the National Library of Australia awarded a grant to assess the preservation needs of this collection. MCMC was also awarded a *Compassionate Employer Recognition Award* for its support when a staff member suffered a serious personal loss.

A highlight of the year was MCMC's creation of a "virtual" tour of Galada Tamboore, on the Merri in Campbellfield/Thomastown, allowing people to "soar" over the site using *Google Earth*. The tour is complemented by MCMC's in-depth Information Note about this area.

Another highlight was MCMC member group, Friends of Merri Creek, winning the Port Phillip and Westernport Landcare Award for Community Group Caring for Public Land. This award is a great recognition of the ongoing work of the many people in this urban based group.

MCMC has continued to establish strategic revegetation areas and maintain over 100 remnant and revegetation sites along Merri Creek. And in a move a little beyond our catchment boundary, this

year and next includes creekside restoration for the Kinglake Landcare Group as part of our support for post-bushfire restoration.

Another first for MCMC was an evening of song, organised by the Rogues Choir to celebrate and raise funds for Merri Creek. MCMC is grateful to the five contributing choirs, the raffle donors and the fun-loving audience.

As always we face significant challenges. The breaking of the drought has brought periods of intense rainfall. Starting in early January, this rain has turned Merri Creek an uncharacteristic muddy brown colour. The mud derives from the headwaters where tributaries drain erosion prone areas. Inadequate erosion control at a number of development sites has been identified.

The State Government decision to extend the Urban Growth Boundary northward along the Merri Creek catchment, and the ongoing development of Wallan, pose further challenges for the waterways and biodiversity of the catchment. Without proper controls and protection, these developments will cause deterioration. MCMC has made a number of submissions to this process, emphasising the need to establish an interconnected biodiversity network to protect and link waterways and significant habitat areas.

Finally, a personal thanks to all the MCMC staff, directors and volunteers for another year of hard work at protecting and re-habilitating the Merri and its environs.

Trevor Hausler, President, Nov. 2010

Parkland Management

– *restoration and revegetation*

Merri Creek Management Committee's (MCMC) Parkland Management Team continued restoration and revegetation at over 100 sites in the environs of the Merri Creek, its tributaries and adjoining catchments and the preparation of management plans for specific remnant sites. 'Restoration' involves protecting and improving the condition of remnant vegetation, while 'revegetation' refers to replanting that strives to emulate the key elements of remnant vegetation.

Management of Native Grasslands, escarpments and creekside ecological habitats

Most native vegetation in the Merri Creek catchment has been cleared but what remains is highly significant and is listed as the highest priority for conservation under the Victorian Native Vegetation Plan. The network of remnant vegetation and revegetation sites provides a habitat 'corridor' for movement of fauna and flora. MCMC works to restore resilience and ecosystem function to this 'corridor' and to integrate the corridor management efforts of other agencies.

Sites planted up to 20 years ago are maturing and their habitat value is improving, especially for sites receiving ongoing care and development. The EPBC listed Swift Parrot was reported in Clifton Hill, one of several sightings of signifi-

cant wildlife using revegetation sites.

Our on-ground management of remnant vegetation was mostly focused on Native Grasslands from Wallan in the headwaters to Fawkner in the middle suburbs, including areas around the upper Edgars Creek in Wollert/Epping North.

Our revegetation activities involved planting 8,475 plants and sowing five sites with indigenous ground story seeds, to provide buffers from weeds and disturbance. Most of the plantings were ground-storey species (86%). In addition, we cared for a large number of sites, especially controlling the prolific weed growth following rainstorms in late 2009 and early 2010.

Seasonal variation also affects fauna. After discovering endangered Golden Sun Moths in 2003 and surveying populations each year since, MCMC's surveys were thrown into confusion in 2009-10 by wet and windy weather. While frustrating, this is adding vital knowledge on variation in the moth's emergence patterns.

MCMC's expert knowledge of flora and fauna was used to assist the *Grevillea* Study Group of the Australian Plant Society to inspect *Grevillea* populations in the Merri catchment. This is likely to result in the populations of *Grevillea rosmarinifolia* near Melbourne being recognised as a new species with a very restricted distribution.



Volunteers cut Gorse on the significant railway reserve in Beveridge-Wallan.



MCMC staff at an ecological burn in the Aurora estate Epping.

Major projects

Works at Kalkallo Common Grassland, funded through DSE Bush Guardians Crown Land Grants and Hume City Council contracts enabled us to complete a site management plan and to control Gorse and Chilean Needle-grass infestations. The high conservation values of this grassland have become more evident during the year including its population of Plains Yam Daisy that is being monitored by MCMC.

At Galada Tamboore in Campbellfield recent riparian plantings established well due to rains and extensive maintenance works this year. Customised tours of the Native Grasslands east of the gorge were delivered to 'Friends of' groups and ecological management professionals. Batchelor of Environmental Science students attended four tours west of the creek, integrated into their first year curriculum. Interpretation materials were translated into four languages, a site information note was produced, and a virtual tour of Galada Tamboore's significant features made available on the MCMC website. The majority of this work was funded through the alternative sentencing provision of the Environment Protection Act and a Melbourne Water Community Grant to the Friends of Merri Creek.

A major contract was undertaken for VicUrban to implement the first year of a conservation management plan for 38 hectares of Native Grassland and Grassy Redgum Woodland reserves at the new suburb of Aurora along the Edgars Creek in North Epping. Our skilled staff added value to the contract by finding a rare Western Golden Tip (a kind of shrubby pea) and additional specimens of the

nationally endangered Matted Flax Lily.

MCMC developed a vegetation management plan for Beveridge Recreation Reserve for Mitchell Shire Council. This reserve contains a wetland; once part of the very much larger Inverloch swamp. Less than four percent of wetland area remains in the Merri Catchment. While surveying the site, staff were excited to find a Swamp Tigertail Dragonfly, which has seldom been reported near Melbourne.

Community involvement in restoration and revegetation

This year there was a greater focus on building resilience at existing sites rather than expanding and establishing new

sites. This was because we received more income from contracts and less from grants. It meant we held fewer community plantings than in previous years. Even so, we held 27 community events including harvesting of seed, planting, mulching, hand weeding, woody weed control, tours and biodiversity surveys. MCMC's relationship with local communities, as well as corporate and educational institutions, was maintained with 312 volunteers including 17 students and 88 corporate volunteers contributing 836 volunteer hours.

Plantings are still the most popular community activity; however weed management workshops at Merri Park Wetland in Northcote proved more popular this year, with 53 attendees contributing 162 hours during five events through the year. This indicates the potential to engage more community in the ever important, and complex task of caring for established sites.

Price Waterhouse Coopers volunteers helped with re-introducing Plains Yam Daisy plants into Ngarri-djarrang (Central Creek) Grassland Reservoir and with initial monitoring of these plants.

Although MCMC itself hosted fewer community events Friends of Merri Creek, Merri and Edgars Creek Confluence Area Restoration Group, Friends of Edgars Creek, and Wallan Environment Group held regular events through the year. MCMC continues to support their enthusiastic efforts through maintenance of some sites, advocacy and provision of expert advice.



Kookaburras at Tate Reserve Coburg.

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 13,331 people participated in 418 sessions including *Waterwatch* activities. New partnerships were developed with the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council, Melbourne Museum's Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre, and the Gunung-Willam-Balluk Learning Centre.

The *Learning Grounds* program, funded annually by the Cities of Darebin and Whittlesea, supports schools with the development of new indigenous gardens. This year it involved 1,038 students, parents and staff with biodiversity education activities, professional development and support for funding applications, as well as planting over 1,300 indigenous plants at schools.

The Cities of Darebin, Whittlesea and Yarra support the *Catchment Education* program by providing annual funding to enable us to work with students and community groups in these municipalities.

New learning techniques to implement research about age-appropriate environmental education and student-directed learning were explored and successfully delivered in two projects.

The *Catchment Clues* project was funded by the Myer Foundation. An innovative program guided middle school students from two Reservoir schools to create a biodiversity clues course for each other to discover at Edwardes Lake, Reservoir, and at Galada Tamboore, Campbellfield. Students later swapped locations and used student-made 'clues' to lead their exploration, resulting in students being highly engaged and connected to these local environs.

In the second project, *Creek Crusaders*, funded by the alternative sentencing provision of the Environment Protection Act, three age-appropriate teacher's manuals about waterway ecosystems were created and made web available for schools. 309 students and teachers were guided by MCMC to complete the series of in class and outdoors sessions to build their appreciation of the complexities of a catchment. The aim is for the teachers involved to now use these resources and knowledge gained to roll out the program on their own.

MCMC received funding for two new Indigenous related projects, *Indigenous*, *Indigenous* (through the Council of



Students of St Gabriel's Primary School, Reservoir celebrate their discovery of biodiversity at Edwardes Lake Park, Reservoir.

Australian Museum Director's International Year of Biodiversity grants) and *Together by the Merri* (funded by The Ian Potter Foundation) for furthering connection with Indigenous cultural heritage.

MCMC provided a specialist overview to 54 EPA staff at the *EPA on the Yarra* Seminar about engaging workers in industrial workplaces to protect waterways. We also continued reporting pollution events to the EPA and responding to community pollution alerts.

Waterwatch

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

During the year 7,297 students from 63 pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions were involved in 296 sessions covering water quality monitoring, biological assessment of aquatic life, frog call activity and freshwater habitat surveys. MCMC's *Waterwatch* Coordinator now has a frog licence and live frogs are taken to schools and events, a great way to engage senses.

Waterwatch presentations and activities at 33 festivals, community days and training events reached a further 1,805 people. *Waterwatch* continued to work with a variety of groups including corporate, holiday programs, council staff and conservation volunteers. Nine community groups, totaling 21

participants were supported to do regular monitoring of 29 sites across the Merri and Moonee Ponds and lower Yarra catchments, including four new community monitoring groups.

The City of Whittlesea continued to fund *Storming for Cleaner Water* an education program which focuses on the impacts of stormwater pollution, complementing *Waterwatch* sessions.

In-stream health

For the last three years MCMC has monitored six sites along the Merri catchment for water quality and biological health. This year's results show that Merri Creek continues to have poor in-stream health, particularly in its lower reaches. SIGNAL scores (the diversity and abundance of macroinvertebrate animals) were low and phosphate levels high. Urban stormwater runoff is the primary cause of these degraded conditions. In-stream conditions are generally better in peri-urban areas and further north.

A major concern this year was the high turbidity (muddiness). After each rain event the turbidity persisted for days to weeks, meaning the creek was highly turbid for a large part of the year, making it difficult for aquatic fauna to feed and breathe and for aquatic plants to photosynthesize. High flow rates also bring increased nutrients and other pollutants from urban areas and act as a direct stress on aquatic life. However, the increased water has been positive for wetlands, providing a rich habitat for frogs and birds, and may also have encouraged a juvenile platypus to explore the potential of Merri Creek.

Planning and coordination – open space and conservation

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

During the year the state government approved the expansion of Melbourne's Urban Growth Boundary (UGB), setting in place significant land use change in the upper Merri. The area of the catchment now within urban growth areas has increased from 50% to 85%. Prior to the decision, MCMC provided submissions to the Legislative Council inquiry into UGB expansion and attended briefing sessions with state and commonwealth departments about biodiversity planning for new growth areas. More recently, MCMC prepared a submission for the Growth Area Framework Plan for the upper Merri, highlighting the need to protect biodiversity and waterways and provide recreational amenity within an extended Merri Creek park network.

In existing urban areas MCMC commented on 29 planning permit applications, two VCAT reviews and one planning scheme amendment. MCMC also gave advice on a number of pre-application plans and submitted comments to planning reviews.

Implementation of MCMC's *Merri Creek and Environs Strategy 2009-2014*, which gives direction to managers of waterways corridors of the Merri catchment, proceeded more slowly than hoped because of resourcing constraints. One of the highest priority actions — planning for fire management in the Merri

corridor — has begun, but MCMC has had no success in identifying a lead agency or funding for this important work.

We continued to liaise with Melbourne Water on its major vegetation improvement projects in urban and rural reaches of the Merri and to have representation on Melbourne Water's Waterways Advisory Committee.

A new and welcome initiative this year was developing connections with the traditional owners of the Merri, the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council.

Tertiary institutions featured strongly. MCMC helped in the development of final semester group projects on Merri Creek for B. Env. students at the University of Melbourne and also spoke with RMIT Architecture students interested in the expansion of public open spaces near creeks.

Upper reaches of Merri Creek – Wallan to Donnybrook

Although the upper part of the Merri catchment is still predominantly rural, rapid growth is occurring around Wallan and a major concern this year has been the inadequacy of erosion controls at development sites. MCMC participated in a Mitchell Shire Council meeting to discuss a controversial proposal by Melbourne Water to locate a stormwater treatment wetland in the Wallan Community Park. MCMC also undertook critical stakeholder liaison for the management of remnant vegetation at Beveridge Recreation Reserve, the Beveridge -Wallan Rail Reserve, and Kalkallo Common Grassland and the adjacent Donnybrook Cemetery.

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.

At Galada Tamboore, MCMC provided information on vegetation offsets associated with path construction.

MCMC expressed its concern about the slow progress of the implementation of the Marran Baba (Merri Creek) Park between Ring Rd and Craigieburn and the lack of an active public land acquisition process to achieve a continuous habitat and recreational corridor.

MCMC was also involved in discussions about achieving a future shared path and creek frontage reserve at three privately owned sites in Somerton.

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

The lower Merri catchment is highly urbanised and the creek corridor provides a critical ribbon for habitat and recreation. The redevelopment of infrastructure located in the creek corridor and plans for improved habitat and community amenity are a continuing focus for MCMC.

Yarra Valley Water's major new sewer works are nearing completion and MCMC has been involved in discussions about the future of the shaft sites and landscaping needs.

We advised Melbourne Water on a range of projects including the scoping of capital works revegetation projects along Edgars and Central Creeks; revegetation works for Moomba Park Fawcner and the Merri/Merlynston confluence in Coburg.

For the upgrade of sections of the Merri Shared Trail in Brunswick East, MCMC commented on proposed alignments, temporary detours, areas of indigenous vegetation and opportunities for revegetation at a number of locations. We welcomed the opening of a major new pedestrian/bicycle bridge crossing across the Merri between Northcote and North Fitzroy and new high level bridge crossings in Fawcner.

MCMC objected to the proposed upgrade of Brunswick Electricity Supply Terminal adjacent to Merri Creek and supported a move to put the high voltage transmission lines underground. MCMC continues to advise SP AusNet on managing vegetation underneath these lines.



MCMC staff and some members of Friends of Merri Creek receive a 'Welcome to Country' smoking ceremony from Wurundjeri Elder, Uncle Ringo Terrick, beside Merri Creek in Northcote.

Financial Report

Summarised Balance Sheet as at 30th September 2010

	2010	2009
EQUITY:		
Retained Funds – Start	243,628	282,131
Add Surplus / (Deficit)	(81,981)	(38,503)
Retained Funds – End	\$161,647	\$243,628
Represented By:		
Current Assets:	589,756	817,786
Fixed Assets:	187,996	177,701
TOTAL ASSETS:	777,752	995,487
Less:		
TOTAL LIABILITIES:	616,105	751,859
NET ASSETS:	\$161,647	\$243,628

Summarised Statement of Income & Expenditure
For the twelve months ended 30th September, 2010

	2010	2009
INCOME:		
Grants		
Municipalities	575,665	526,849
Other Government	67,132	243,433
Non Government	73,818	35,447
Contracts	511,650	586,464
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets	617	1,387
Sale of Publications	963	837
Environment Fund Donations	600	250
Interest & Sundry Income	30,895	50,330
Total Income:	1,261,340	1,444,997
LESS EXPENDITURE:		
Wages, Salaries & Oncosts	1,138,639	1,222,515
Materials & Plant Hire	36,735	79,364
Vehicle Running	19,971	18,665
Admin, Project & General	117,581	118,530
Environment Fund Disbursements	-	-
Depreciation & Leave Provisions	30,395	44,426
Total Expenditure:	1,343,321	1,483,500
NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):	(81,981)	(\$38,503)

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the year ended 30th September 2010. 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.

Treasurer's Note: Most of MCMC's deficit this year was incurred because of the need to support staff in new roles and to undertake a review and consolidation of the Parkland Management Program after the resignation of two long serving key staff. It is not expected that these unfunded costs will recur. A smaller part of the deficit was due to the change in Long Service Leave Provisions introduced in MCMC's new EBA and to MCMC's committed expenditure to a bushfire recovery project. The latter project will continue in 2011.

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

Member Representatives and staff 2009–2010

Committee of Management 2010:

City of Darebin:	Cr Trent McCarthy, Allan Wicks (<i>Vice President 1</i>), Flynn Hart (<i>sub.</i>).
City of Hume:	Cr Drew Jessop, Damien Harrison, Nick Walker.
City of Moreland:	Cr Lambros Tapinos, Sam Niedra.
City of Whittlesea:	Cr Stevan Kozmevski, David Turnbull.
City of Yarra:	Cr Sam Gaylard, Carrie Lindsay.
Shire of Mitchell	Cr Trevor Tobias, Elyse Kelly.
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, Christabel McCarthy, Nicole Lowe, David Redfearn (<i>sub.</i>).
Wallan Environment Group:	Rob Eldridge, John Robinson (<i>sub.</i>).

Sub-Committees in 2010:

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

Waterwatch Coordinator:	Jane Bevelander
Catchment Program Officer:	Angela Foley

Parkland Management Team

Conservation Program Manager:	Katrina Roberg
Team Coordinator:	Megan Jericho, Ben North.
Ecological Restoration Planner:	Brian Bainbridge
Team Leaders:	Dave Crawford, Alex Davern, Maryann Weatherill, Dave Woods.

Team Members:	Jim Brien, Rohen Davis, Aaron Eulenstein, Meg Gasson, Michael Longmore, Amy O'Dell, Will Parker.
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Temporary Team Members:	Amanda Christie, Hadley Cole, Carmel D'Arcy, Chris Dench, Elise Dewar, Luke Dragonetti, Arthur McManus.
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Trainee Team Member:	Clinton Hallissey
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Planning Consultant

Michael Kirsch

MERRI CREEK



MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE

Merri Creek Management Committee

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