

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.

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.

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.

(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.)

Above: Wurundjeri Elder, Uncle Frank (Apples) Wandin joined MCMC staff and started the ecological burn of Bababi Djinanang Native Grassland at Jukes Rd Fawkner on 17 March 2011.



President's Report

This year I am encouraged by two sightings of a platypus in the Merri Creek close to my house. This is exciting news and provides hope that our important regeneration work will lead to significant improvements in the habitat values of the creek valley. The wetter conditions this year have also seen the re-establishment of ephemeral wetlands and the re-emergence of wetland plants such as the Narrow-leaved Nardoo and the Austral Pillwort. Unusual species of amphibians such as the Peron's Tree Frog and Growling Grass Frog have also turned up at new locations.

The increased rainfall has also had a negative impact on the water quality due to increased turbidity (muddiness) and nutrient loads caused by erosion in rural areas and run-off from new housing developments.

In 2011 Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) has increased its already strong involvement with the Wurundjeri people with new projects (such as *Together by the Merri* funded by the Ian Potter Foundation and *Indigenous, Indigenous* funded by the International Year of Biodiversity), helping to improve the connections between Aboriginal people and natural areas in the Merri catchment, while increasing community awareness of their cultural heritage. MCMC staff has participated in Wurundjeri cultural awareness training and MCMC acknowledges the Wurundjeri people as the traditional custodians of the land at our meetings.

Funding from Darebin City Council allowed the implementation of the monitoring strategy for Ngarri-djarrang (Central Creek) Grassland Reserve in

Reservoir, which includes tracking the reintroduction of the rarest kind of Murnong, the Plains Yam Daisy. This plant once provided a staple food for the Wurundjeri people until sheep grazing, rabbits and loss of Aboriginal land management practices led to it becoming a threatened species. MCMC is also monitoring a remnant population of Murnong at Kalkallo Common, assisted by the Victorian National Parks Association *Nature Watch* program.

Under a *Caring for Our Country* grant, MCMC trialled the use of aerial photos to map infestations of Gorse and Chilean Needlegress by comparing aerial photos with on the ground surveys. We found that photos can be used to detect either weed species when it reaches about 20% cover, which has the potential to increase the efficiency of eradication works on these two weeds.

Many challenges still remain to the improvement of the creek environment. Primary amongst these is the Northern Growth Corridor Plan which looms to dramatically change the landscape of the upper Merri. This development plan threatens some of the few remaining habitats of endangered species such as the Growling Grass Frog and the Golden Sun Moth, along with others that share their ever shrinking homes. Further development along the creek will also lead to more deterioration in the water quality, like we've seen after this year's rains.

Lastly I want to congratulate and thank all the MCMC staff, volunteers and committee members for another fantastic year.

Trevor Hausler, President, Nov. 2011

Parkland Management

– restoration and revegetation

The Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) Parkland Management Team undertakes vegetation restoration and revegetation works at over 100 sites in the environs of the Merri Creek, its tributaries and adjoining catchments. The team also prepares management plans for specific remnant sites. 'Restoration' describes the range of work needed to protect and improve the conditions of remnant native grasslands, grassy woodlands, escarpments, wetlands and creeksides. 'Revegetation' is replanted vegetation that attempts to emulate the vegetation structure and ecological processes of remnant vegetation.

Management of Native Grasslands, escarpments and creekside ecological habitats

The network of indigenous vegetation sites in the Merri catchment provides a habitat corridor for movement of fauna and flora. These vegetation types are listed as highly significant. MCMC works to restore resilience and function of the corridor network through managing specific remnant and revegetation sites and supporting the integration of other agencies' management.

This year MCMC took advantage of good growing conditions to utilise direct seeding of primarily grassy species at nine sites. We ordered and organised the planting of 21,390 plants in the 2011

Autumn/Winter planting season. Of these, 2.5% were trees, 6.5% were shrubs, 82% were ground storey and 9% were semi aquatic species.

Clustered Wallaby Grass (*Austrodanthonia racemosa*), Weeping Grass (*Microlaena stipoides*) and Common Tussock Grass (*Poa labillardieri*) accounted for over half of the total plants. The first two small grasses are hardy colonising plants which helped to make up the diverse mix of ground species used to provide cover for existing sites and adjoining shared trails. The larger Tussock Grass creates attractive swathes of tussock grassland beside the creek.

The increased rainfall of previous years has continued, resulting in persistence of ephemeral wetlands in the Merri environs and re-emergence of wetland plants and animals. Favourable growing conditions led to a high success rate for the 2011 planting, direct seeding and vegetation regeneration techniques. However, weeds have also increased and the weather often limited our ability to spray.

Several rarely seen ephemeral wetland plants were found including Beaglehole's Bladderwort, at Kalkallo Common. Birds including shy Buff Banded Rails were seen at several locations, and a Latham's Snipe was seen at Bababi Marning (Cooper St Grassland). Frogs have made a great resurgence along the Merri Creek, taking advantage of the temporary wetlands.



A Parkland Management Team Member removes gorse from a high quality area of Kalkallo Common South in August 2011.



Members of Fitzroy Football Club and others at a community planting near Rushall Station North Fitzroy in August 2011.

Major projects

Works to reinforce the values of Grasslands continued this year, along with more planting to protect and rejuvenate existing sites.

Over \$232,000 (24%) of Parkland Management works went to implementing 20 projects that MCMC and Friends of Merri Creek gained from State, Federal, and Landcare grants. Nearly \$250,000 (25%) of works were funded by Darebin, Hume, Moreland and Yarra Councils, while over \$500,000 (51%) of works were contracted by local government and other agencies, including Theiss/Melbourne Water, SP AusNet and Parks Victoria.

Grasslands and Grassy Woodlands along the Merri Creek from Merriang to Fawcner received grant funds from three key sources. Two Australian Government *Caring for Our Country* grants, including a three year project, supported the burning of Grasslands with Wurundjeri people, and restoration of 43 hectares of critically endangered vegetation across six sites. Intensive monitoring of this project measures outcomes through mapping and data collection.

A *Bush Guardians* grant from DSE extended works at Kalkallo to include the Stony Knoll site south of the Cemetery. The site was assessed for vegetation quality and the most threatening weeds were addressed. Species of note found at this new site include Slender Tick-trefoil (*Desmodium varians*), Grasslands Candles (*Stackhousia subterranea*), critically endangered Matted Flax Lily (*Dianella amoena*) and the only known population in Merri Creek catchment of Pussy Tails (*Ptilotus spathulatus*).

While grants are used to address specific threats, regular maintenance of Ngarri-djarrang and Bababi Djinanang Grasslands continued through funding

from Darebin and Moreland Councils respectively.

Restoration of waterway vegetation was supported by Melbourne Water and Landcare grants, new contracts from Hume and Darebin, as well as regular contract and direct Council funding.

MCMC undertook four Melbourne Water grant funded projects at six sites: in Fitzroy, Brunswick, Reservoir and Campbellfield, restoring a total of 11 hectares of creek frontage. At a reserve near Rushall Station in North Fitzroy a long run of revegetation works was continued. This year, Melbourne Water, SP AusNet/Landcare and Friends of Merri Creek funded the revegetation of many of the previously unmanaged gaps between Queens Parade and Rushall Station, strengthening this narrow habitat corridor. We also supported other

Friends groups to implement Melbourne Water grant projects in Coburg.

SP AusNet contracted MCMC to replace some of the habitat and amenity values that were lost by the removal of over 20 native trees with 950 appropriate plantings.

MCMC worked with Darebin and Hume Councils to commence major revegetation projects at Edwardes Lake in Reservoir, as part of the *Circling the Lake* project, and on the Merri Creek escarpment adjoining the former Bolinda Rd Landfill in Campbellfield.

Community involvement in restoration and revegetation

The Parkland Team hosted 27 community events including harvesting of seed, planting, hand weeding, woody weed control and student surveying/mapping activities. Over 1,200 hours was contributed to restoring, monitoring or learning about the Merri Creek environs by 454 community, student and corporate volunteers.

Community and corporate plantings were again the most attended events with 321 attendees. However weeding and monitoring activities increased in popularity with 79 and 21 attendees respectively. Students participated in monitoring projects and assessed over 400 plots that were compared with aerial photos to improve management efficiency, and document weed control. Corporate groups from four organisations contributed 355 enthusiastic hours of planting, weeding and jute laying.



A community planting at the footbridge, Broadhurst Ave Reservoir in September 2011.

Catchment Program

– Environmental education, community engagement and stream health

Merri Creek Management Committee's (MCMC) Catchment Program worked with 3,132 people this year in over 130 educational and engagement opportunities offered through six different programs (not including *Waterwatch*).

A level of research is maintained to ensure that our programs are evolving, relevant and designed for age-and cultural-appropriateness. In 2010-11 we participated in initiatives such as RMIT's *Catchment and Land Management Program Advisory Committee*, attended the *Managing Country Together Gathering* hosted by Melbourne Water and Landcare, as well as Victorian National Parks Association's statewide *Community Engagement Workshop*.

The *Learning Grounds* program is funded annually by the Cities of Darebin and Whittlesea for schools planning to develop indigenous gardens. This year 349 students and teachers from nine schools received support for funding submissions, plant lists, site advice and biodiversity education activities.

The Cities of Darebin, Whittlesea and Yarra contribute to a *Catchment Education* program which supports schools and community groups through a range of biodiversity and waterway education and engagement. Over 80 interactions including meetings and education sessions highlighted indigenous flora and fauna and included guided walks in the Merri Creek catchment as well as discussion about stormwater pollution and litter prevention. Additional projects were undertaken through separate funding including LandCare/Spicers for activities in Fawkner, Mitchell Shire and Hume City Councils, Banksia Gardens Community Centre in Broadmeadows and Lake Park Kindergarten in Coburg.

Circling the Lake is a two year project funded by Darebin City Council. MCMC provides its environmental education schools program, working with 576 people this year. The highlight was a special event in Edwardes Lake Park in Reservoir featuring a Welcome to Country from Wurundjeri Elder, Colin Hunter, where over 100 students worked through five different activities to learn about the special natural features of the Merri Creek catchment and the ways it is affected by pollution.

Indigenous, Indigenous (funded by the Council of Australian Museum Directors) and *Together by the Merri* (funded by The

Ian Potter Foundation) were completed this year. These projects provided engagement and education opportunities for 491 people and led to the development of a 'Vimeo' for MCMC's website, which shows how the people involved connected indigenous flora and fauna with Indigenous cultural heritage, through digging, painting, printing, twining and visiting special places in the Merri Creek catchment.

Waterwatch

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

The *Merri and Moonee Ponds Waterwatch* program reached 6,545 participants in 329 sessions over the last year, including our large schools programs and activities at festivals, community days and training events. *Waterwatch* worked with a variety of groups undertaking water quality monitoring, macro invertebrate surveys, biodiversity talks, guided walks and activities covering indigenous fauna, stormwater, and more.

Merri and Moonee Ponds Waterwatch led RMIT Conservation and Land Management students in a long-term monitoring program producing high standard reports and data interpretation. *Waterwatch* led several popular events, including the National Threatened Species Day tour and an evening frog

survey at Edwardes Lake, plus tours and activities for multicultural groups, including Vietnamese, Bhutanese and Turkish groups. We also worked with the corporate group CSL to engage them with the wetlands behind their factory, in Parkville.

One of the most exciting changes to the *Waterwatch* program was the launch of the Victorian Database Online. Water quality information collected within the Merri and Moonee Ponds and lower Yarra catchments is now available, with data from 6,200 other Victorian sites, through the new online *Waterwatch* Victoria Data Management System. This has significantly migrated 19 years of state-wide data into one online publically accessible system.

In-stream health

MCMC continues to monitor six sites quarterly, in the Merri catchment for water quality and biological health, in addition to the 16 volunteers monitoring 18 sites monthly. This year's sampling found phosphate levels to be very high, peaking in January 2011 at levels 10 times those taken at the same time the previous year. This is thought to be due to phosphate attached to large amounts of sediment entering the waterway via erosion, caused by large rain events. These high turbidity results indicate a probable detrimental impact on the ecosystem.

Macroinvertebrate assessments continue to show stream health is poor, an indication of probable severe pollution, most likely caused by stormwater runoff with industrial areas likely to be the biggest problem.



A MCMC guided walk to learn about indigenous flora and fauna at Hume City Council's Spring Planting Day on 16 September 2011 at Yuroke Creek in Broadmeadows.

Planning and coordination – open space and conservation

Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) receives funding from its member Councils to work on issues affecting biodiversity, stream health, landscape, heritage and amenity along waterway corridors in the Merri catchment.

After the expansion of Melbourne's Urban Growth Boundary (UGB), MCMC made a submission on the draft Growth Area Framework Plan for the Northern Area (upper Merri); and followed this with written and verbal submissions to the Logical Inclusions Review (which was set up to consider incorporation of additional parcels of land into the UGB). Our submissions highlighted the need to protect biodiversity and waterways and provide recreational amenity within an extended Merri Creek park network.

MCMC also participated in workshops to consider the new Western grassland reserve, west of Werribee, and a grassy eucalypt woodland reserve near Whittlesea. Both reserves are part of the State Government's commitment to the Commonwealth to protect endangered species and communities in view of the destruction that the expanded UGB will cause.

In existing urban areas MCMC commented on 23 planning permit applications, appeared with success at a VCAT review, and made minor comments on one planning scheme amendment. MCMC also gave advice on a number of pre-application plans and submitted comments to planning reviews. Comments were also made on two referrals under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

Implementation of MCMC's *Merri Creek and Environs Strategy 2009-2014* proceeded more slowly than hoped because of resourcing constraints. We continued our liaison with Melbourne Water and had representation on Melbourne Water's Waterways Advisory Committee.

A welcome new area for consideration has been two stormwater harvesting proposals from Yarra Valley Water, one for the Merrifield development in Kalkallo and the other in Coburg.

We continued last year's initiative to develop connections with the Traditional Owners of the Merri, the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council. This included participating in visits with Wurundjeri people to culturally significant sites on Merri Creek and supporting the

development of the Wurundjeri Narrap Team (land management). All MCMC staff attended a Wurundjeri Cultural awareness training day conducted by the Wurundjeri Council.

MCMC assisted Geomatics and Land Management students from University of Melbourne with their final semester group projects on the Merri. We also collaborated with RMIT Architecture in the presentation of their *Tree Sprawl* exhibition at CERES and contributed to a book of the same name.

Upper reaches of Merri Creek – Wallan to Donnybrook

Although the upper part of the Merri catchment is still predominantly rural, rapid growth is occurring, especially around Wallan which is outside the UGB. The Logical Inclusions Review included a proposal to bring Wallan into the UGB, an approach generally supported by MCMC with the exception of the flood-prone Hernes Swamp area.

MCMC undertook critical stakeholder liaison on the management of remnant vegetation at 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.

Advice on revegetation planning and design for the former Bolinda Rd tip interface to Merri Creek was provided. The rehabilitation of this area is a crucial step in linking the Galada Tamboore path to the Merri Shared Trail to the south.

Otherwise MCMC was disappointed on the lack of progress in implementation of the Marran Baba (Merri Creek) Park between the Ring Rd and Craigieburn.

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 an ongoing focus for MCMC.



While monitoring grassland at Ngarrri-djarrang, MCMC staff found Grassland Copper Butterflies which haven't been seen there since 1999. Although the species is vulnerable in Victoria, it can persist near suburbia given appropriate ecological management of remnant grassland vegetation.

Unfortunately a residential site adjacent to Merri Creek was confirmed to be contaminated with mercury and hydrocarbons. MCMC continues to be concerned about the potential remobilisation of contaminants from unstable areas of fill into the creek.

The future use and landscaping of former shaft sites of the Northern Sewerage Project was a focus. MCMC opposed Yarra Valley Water's proposal to retain a very large shed on their site in Coburg and raised concerns about landscaping at De Chene Reserve.

MCMC attended a number of community information sessions for the proposed upgrade of Brunswick Electricity Supply Terminal adjacent to Merri Creek and met on site to discuss details of landscaping, but remained dissatisfied with the efficacy of the proposed plantings.

MCMC continued to provide advice to SP AusNet on managing vegetation in easements below high voltage lines and above the underground cable.

Financial Report

Summarised Balance Sheet as at 30th September 2011

	2011	2010
EQUITY:		
Retained Funds - Start	161,647	243,628
Add Surplus / (Deficit)	32,076	(81,981)
Retained Funds - End	193,723	\$161,647
Represented By:		
Current Assets:	551,835	589,756
Fixed Assets:	152,466	187,996
TOTAL ASSETS:	704,301	777,752
Less:		
TOTAL LIABILITIES:	510,578	616,105
NET ASSETS:	193,723	\$161,647

Summarised Statement of Income & Expenditure For the twelve months ended 30th September, 2011

	2011	2010
INCOME:		
Grants		
Municipalities	540,460	575,665
Other Government	158,179	67,132
Non Government	56,370	73,818
Contracts	611,089	511,650
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets	4,228	617
Sale of Publications	741	963
Environment Fund Donations	1,777	600
Interest & Sundry Income	39,278	30,895
Total Income:	1,412,122	1,261,340
LESS EXPENDITURE:		
Wages, Salaries & Oncosts	1,173,596	1,138,639
Materials & Plant Hire	61,940	36,735
Vehicle Running	20,137	19,971
Admin, Project & General	92,852	117,581
Environment Fund Disbursements	-	-
Depreciation & Leave Provisions	31,521	30,395
Total Expenditure:	1,380,046	1,343,321
NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):	32,076	(81,981)

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the year ended 30th September 2011. 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: The modest surplus is a pleasing turn around from the deficit of the previous year. It is due to very tight budgeting and no longer having a number of unfunded costs that arose in 2010.

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

Member Representatives and staff 2010–2011

Committee of Management 2011:

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

City of Darebin:	Cr Trent McCarthy (0), Cr Tim Laurence (0), Allan Wicks (<i>sub.</i>) (3).
City of Hume:	Cr Drew Jessop (4), Damien Harrison (3).
City of Moreland:	Cr Lambros Tapinos (1), Cr Anthony Helou (1), Cr Jo Connellan (<i>sub.</i>) (2), Lori Arthur (<i>Vice-President</i>) (4).
City of Whittlesea:	Cr Stevan Kozmevski (1), Felicity Ayres (2).
City of Yarra:	Cr Sam Gaylard (1), Carrie Lindsay (2).
Shire of Mitchell:	Elyse Kelly (1).
Friends of Merri Creek:	Trevor Hausler (<i>President</i>) (3), Ann McGregor (<i>Secretary</i>) (4), Allie Dawe, (<i>Treasurer</i>) (4), Paul Prentice (<i>Vice-President</i>) (4), Nicole Lowe (3), Ruth Shiel (2), Sandy Simpson (1), David Redfearn (<i>sub.</i>) (1).
Wallan Environment Group:	Rob Eldridge (3).

Sub-Committees in 2011:

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
Cleaner:	Christine Pesak

Catchment Program Team

Waterwatch Coordinator:	Jane Bevelander
Catchment Program Officer:	Angela Foley

Parkland Management Team

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

Team Members:	Jim Brien, Aaron Eulenstein, Meg Gasson, Emily Jordan, Michael Longmore, Amy O'Dell, Will Parker.
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Temporary Team Members:	Elise Dewar, Clayton Fenech, Arthur McManus.
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Trainee Team Member:	Clinton Hallissey
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Planning Consultant	Michael Kirsch
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