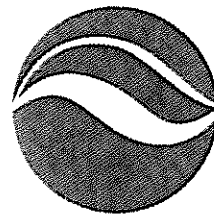


**MERRI CREEK**

**CONCEPT PLAN**

**CUSTOMER RESEARCH: SURVEY OF LOCAL RESIDENTS**



**MELBOURNE**  
*Parks & Waterways*



## FOREWORD

This report is the result of research undertaken for the preparation of the Merri Creek Concept Plan. It has been researched and produced by independent consultants and as such the conclusions and recommendations arrived at are not in any way binding upon Melbourne Parks and Waterways, the Merri Creek Management Committee or other agencies. The report provides a detailed base of both knowledge and expert opinion not only for the development of the Concept Plan but also for ongoing decision making and public information purposes.

The Merri Creek Concept Plan is a visionary document which provides the direction for development of the linear parkland along the Creek as an open space haven accessible to all the community.

The Concept Plan was prepared as part of the Parks and Waterway Program (formerly the Open Space 2000 Program) with Melbourne Parks and Waterways as lead agency, in conjunction with the Merri Creek Management Committee. The Consultant's studies were managed by a series of working groups with agency and community representation, reporting to an overall Concept Plan Reference Committee. The Reference Committee comprised representatives of Melbourne Water, the Merri Creek Management Committee, the municipalities of Whittlesea, Broadmeadows, Preston, Coburg, Brunswick, Northcote, Fitzroy, Collingwood and the Friends of Merri Creek and other community interests.

Merri Creek rises in the foothills of the Great Dividing Range some 60km north of Melbourne at Wallan and flows south to its junction with the Yarra River at Dights Falls. The catchment is rural in the north with the small townships of Wallan, Beveridge and Kalkallo located near the creek. Further south is the larger town of Craigburn and the expanding northern suburbs of Melbourne. The land use surrounding Merri Creek changes along its course from pastoral to industrial and urban. The issues affecting the creek reflect this changing pattern of land use. Merri Creek and its immediate surrounds are an important resource with natural values and opportunities for recreation for the surrounding community.

The Concept Plan covers the Creek and its immediate environs from the Yarra River to the northern boundary of Whittlesea. It sets out an agreed strategic framework for actions and development along the Creek, which is acceptable to all organisations responsible for the management of the Creek, and realistically expresses the community wishes.

The implementation of the Concept Plan will ensure that resources are used in an effective and co-ordinated manner. The vision for Merri Creek requires long term commitment and planning by all land owners and land managers along the Creek and within the catchment and by community organisations.



**REPORT ON  
SURVEY OF LOCAL RESIDENTS**

**FOR THE  
MERRI CREEK CONCEPT PLAN**

**FEBRUARY 1993**

**prepared by**

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Cover Photograph by David Tatnall

**for**

**Melbourne Parks & Waterways**



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A survey of 587 randomly selected residents living within half a kilometre from the Merri Creek along its length from the Yarra River to Barry Road in Broadmeadows was undertaken to ascertain the communities views on the creek and surrounding parkland.

The survey findings indicate that the use of the creek is more heavily concentrated in areas close to Melbourne where facilities have been developed or the creek has been upgraded. The creek areas with the most use are those which provide quality park areas or specific recreation activities. The survey found that 52% of residents who live close to the creek visit the creek or adjacent parklands.

Most people get to the creek on foot, taking only a short time to get to their destination. When people get to the creek area they are visiting the most popular recreation activities are walking, relaxing, socialising, cycling, walking their dogs and picnicking. The creek provides a setting for informal recreation activities.

The most heavily used facilities are walking and bicycle paths, footbridges and seating areas. Playground and barbecue areas are also well used. When people visit the creek they most often go with their families and friends.

The concerns people have about the creek relate predominantly to those environmental problems which are most visible. This includes litter, the quality of the water, rubbish dumping and weeds. Some of the less visible, though still significant problems have not been identified by the community.

Many people (66%) would like to see additional facilities created along the creek. The facilities they would like include toilets, more picnic areas, more walking paths, more trees and bushland and linking of bicycle paths. Of the 27% of people who do not identify a need for additional facilities most like the creek the way it is, think facilities would detract from the creek or more facilities would cause environmental damage.

The features of the creek that more survey respondents are satisfied with include keeping conservation areas, the surface of paths, replacing plants and trees with native vegetation and having sports grounds along the creek. There are high levels of dissatisfaction with water quality, litter, clearance of rubbish, works undertaken to keep the water clean and the general standard of maintenance of the creek.

The creek features which are most important to people include the creek itself, trees, wildlife, bushland and walking tracks and trails. These features provide an environment where people state the most important leisure benefits of their visits to the creek to be feeling safe and secure, escaping daily social pressures, resting and relaxing and exercise and physical fitness.

The data from this survey provides information which the managers of the creek can focus or refocus maintenance and development programs. It provides a valuable insight into community views of the creek and previously unknown information on how the creek is used by people who live close to it.

Further detailed investigation of the data will continue to reveal important factors which can have a strong influence on management and maintenance programs. One of the most important findings from the data is how important the natural environment of the creek is as a recreation resource for local residents. The balance between the role of the creek as a recreation resource and as an area for conservation will need to be addressed by management agencies.

## INTRODUCTION

As part of the development of the Merri Creek Concept Plan, research into the use of Merri Creek and surrounding parkland areas was undertaken by Melbourne Water through a survey of residents living in close proximity to the creek. The survey was designed to collect information from the most likely users of the Merri Creek considered to be those people living within easy access and who are likely to be aware of the range of facilities and environments it provides. The Study area for the survey comprised the length of the creek from its confluence with the Yarra River though to Barry Road in the City of Whittlesea and City of Broadmeadows some 30 kilometres to the north. An area of approximately .5 kilometres from the creek was established as the study area and from which randomly selected households were selected and posted a questionnaire in November 1992. A total of 3,250 questionnaires were distributed.

The survey was designed to provide information on the recreational use and environmental issues surrounding the creek. Local residents to the resource were expected to have valuable opinions on these issues. A total of 25 questions were asked and the question format was designed to fit in with the Customer Research Project currently being undertaken for the range of parks managed by Melbourne Water across the Metropolitan area.

The diverse cultural and demographic characteristics of the areas surrounding the length of the creek created the need for multi-lingual access to the survey. A telephone interpreter service was established to assist anybody with language difficulties to complete the form. Information on access to the interpreter service was provided in six languages on an attached information sheet to the survey.

## PEOPLE RESPONDING TO THE SURVEY

A total of 587 useable surveys were returned providing a response rate of 18%. This is a fairly low response rate and was expected given the diversity of the community to which the surveys were distributed. However, the sample size provides is large enough to expect reliable data. Eight municipalities cover the study area and returns were received from people in each of these municipalities. Table 1 presents the break down of returns by municipality, showing that the highest return rate was from Northcote and the lowest Whittlesea. The high return from Northcote is not unexpected given the municipality has a larger area of the municipality bordering the creek in the study area than the other suburbs. Generally, the response was greater from the inner suburbs of Collingwood, Fitzroy, Northcote, Brunswick and Coburg than from the more northern suburbs of Preston, Broadmeadows and Whittlesea.

**Table 1**  
**Questionnaire Returns by Municipality**

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>%</b>
Fitzroy	9
Preston	10
Northcote	23
Coburg	16
Broadmeadows	15
Whittlesea	3
Brunswick	9
Collingwood	8
No Answer	6

This spread of returns reflects the relative ease of access and level of development along the creek in areas closer to Melbourne where a greater range of resources are provided. It should be noted that only a small area of the City of Whittlesea was included in the survey.

### **Age Structure of Respondents**

A high proportion of people responding to the survey (68%) fall in the age range of 20 to 49 years of age. Only a very small proportion of respondents were aged 10 to 19 and smaller percentages aged over 60. The breakdown for age group is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Age Group of Survey Respondents**

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Survey</b>	<b>MSD</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
10 - 19	4	19.6
20 - 29	19	19.9
30 - 39	33	18.6
40 - 49	16	13.8
50 - 59	10	11.0
60 - 69	15	16.8
No Answer	3	

### **Sex**

Respondents were split evenly between males and females with 48% of the sample coming from each of that heading. Four percent of people did not respond to the question.

## Cultural Background

The survey was successful in gaining responses from people from a range of cultural backgrounds. Table 3 presents the data showing that 57% of respondents were of Australian cultural background followed by a very high 16% from Italian cultural background. The other important cultural identities are English, Irish and Scottish 6% and people from other European cultures 5%. Compared to the representation of people from other cultural backgrounds in the Melbourne Statistical Division the survey was successful in gaining a very high level of input from people of cultures other than Australian.

**Table 3**  
**Cultural Background of Survey Respondents**

Culture	Survey %	MSD %	Culture	Survey %	MSD %
Australian	57	70.1	Yugoslav	1	1.8
English, Irish. & Scottish	6	6.5	Croatian	1	u/k
Greek	4	2.3	Turkish	1	u/k
Italian	16	3.4	Other European	5	5.7
Central or Latin American	1	u/k	Other Asian	1	1
Vietnamese	0	1.0	Other American	1	.3
Macedonian	2	u/k	Other	3	6.6
Serbian	0	u/k	no answer	2	-

## Education Level

A high proportion of respondents are well educated with tertiary degrees (53%) indicating a higher percentage than would be found in the general population. Table 4 presents the data on the highest level of education attained by respondents.

**Table 4**  
**Education Level of Survey Respondents**

Education Level	Survey %
Completed primary school	7
Completed secondary school	21
Completed tertiary education	30
Completed some secondary school	12
Completed some tertiary education	10
Completed higher qualification	13
Other	3
no answer	5

## Household Structure

The household structure of people responding to the survey is made up predominantly of 'couples' (25%) and 'two adults with children' (33%). The other reasonably high groups are single person households (13%) and households of more than two adults (13%). The data on household type is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**  
**Household Structure of Survey Respondents**

Household Type	Survey	MSD
	%	%
Single person only	13	-
Single adult with children	4	4.6
Couple only	25	28.5
Two adults and children	33	35.9
More than two adults	13	11.9
More than two adults and children	4	10.4
Other	4	8.4
No answer	4	-

## Summary

The survey was successful in gaining a cross section of respondents from the different age, sex, cultural and educational groups within the communities living along the Merri Creek. The data can be considered fairly reliable given the size of the sample and the range and distribution of respondents across these demographic factors.

Throughout this report any differences in results across any of these demographic factors will be indicated to assist in understanding the nature of users of the Merri Creek and its environs and the attitudes and views expressed by people living within close proximity to this important waterway.

## USE OF THE CREEK AND ITS ENVIRONS

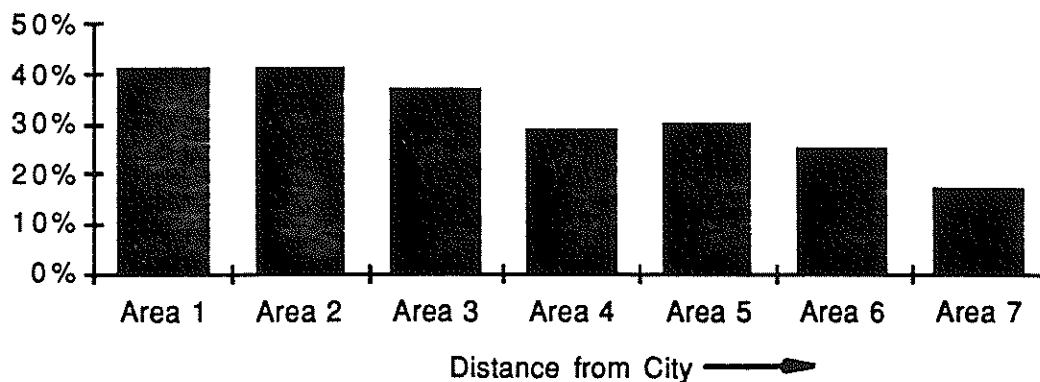
A list of 19 reserves or open space areas along the length of the Merri Creek study area were listed, asking people to indicate whether they had used these areas or not. The results are presented in Table 6 and indicate that the most frequently visited parks or open space areas are Yarra Bend Park and Coburg Lake with a very high 52% of respondents indicating that they make use of these areas. Other parks which were well used include Edwardes Lake Park, Merri Park, Northcote Golf Course and Northcote Park Football Ground.

**Table 6**  
**Open Space and Park Areas Visited by Survey Respondents**

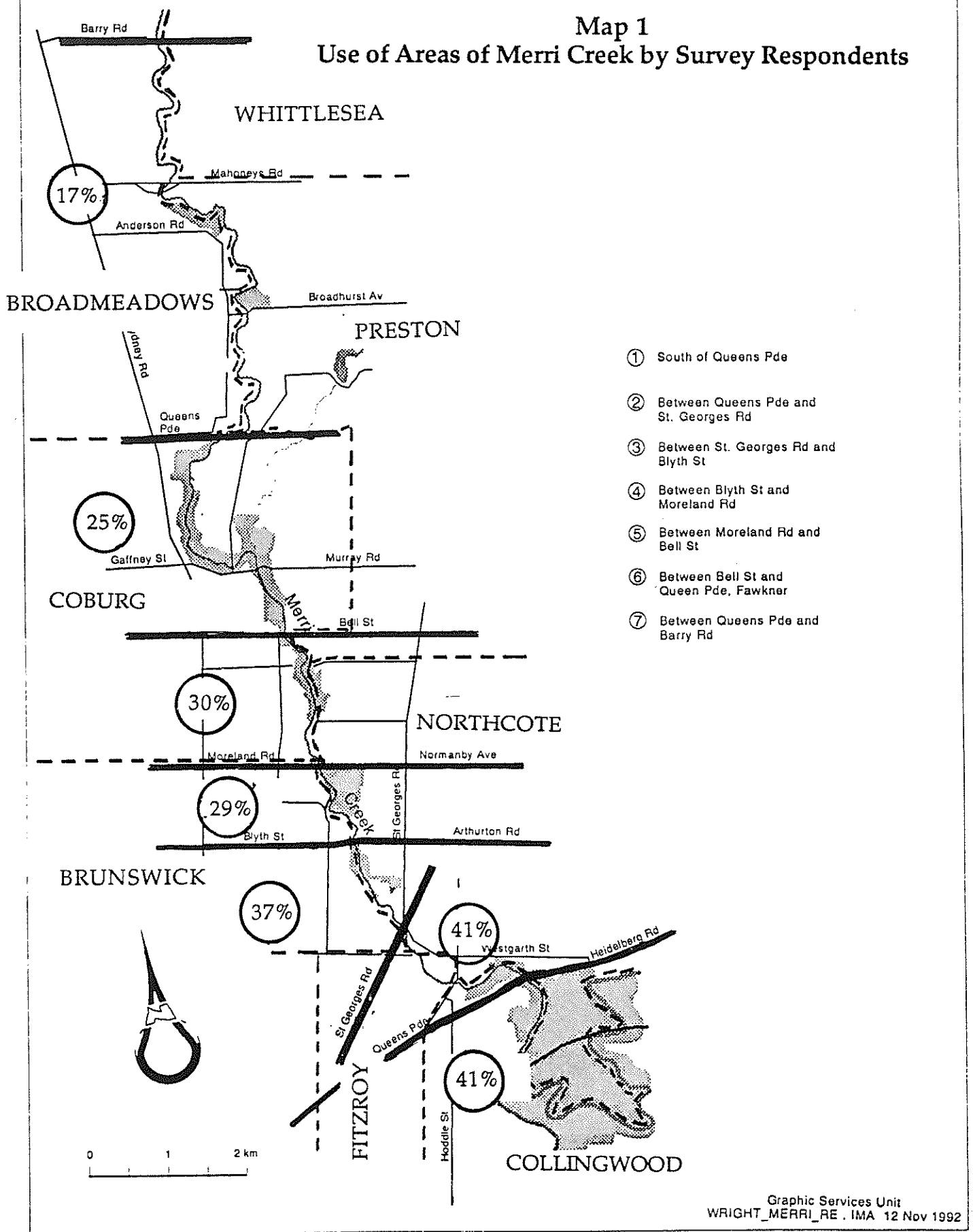
Open Space Area	% Visited	% Male	% Female	% Have not Visited	% Don't Know
Yarra Bend Park	52	53	54	23	25
Coburg Lake	52	53	52	28	20
Edwardes Lake Park	41	45	39	29	30
Merri Park (Winifred St & Sumner Ave)	31	30	33	33	36
Northcote Golf Course	23	30	18	44	33
Northcote Park Football Ground	22	22	22	43	35
De Chene Reserve	21	25	17	38	41
Quarries Park (Ramsden Street)	20	15	26	39	42
Oldis Gardens	18	16	20	39	43
C.E.R.E.S. Environment Centre	18	13	24	44	37
Knott Reserve	15	12	19	40	45
Hall Reserve	14	13	16	39	47
Moomba Park Reserve	14	16	13	40	45
Strettle St Capp and Robinson Reserves	12	13	12	45	43
Tate Reserve	11	13	11	44	45
Jackson Reserve & golf driving range	11	13	8	49	41
B.T.Connor Reserve	10	13	8	42	47
Linear Park	8	7	9	43	49
Parker Reserve	8	12	5	45	47

If we look (see Map 1 and Figure 1) at the general areas of the creek that are used by respondents we can see that the most heavily used areas are those closer to the central city area in the municipalities of Collingwood, Fitzroy, Northcote and Brunswick. Use of areas of the creek decreases significantly with distance from the City. Again this probably indicates the issues of access and level of development of access points and creek facilities and opportunities to use the creek, diminishing with distance from the City.

**Figure 1**  
**Percentage of Respondents Using Designated Areas**



# Map 1 Use of Areas of Merri Creek by Survey Respondents



Graphic Services Unit  
WRIGHT\_MERRI\_RE . IMA 12 Nov 1992

In looking at the use of these areas of the Merri Creek in the inner urban municipalities, it appears that people are travelling to visit sites along the creek in Fitzroy, Collingwood and Northcote as the sample has only relatively small percentages of people responding to the questionnaire live in Fitzroy and Collingwood. The popularity of some of these parks is obviously proving an attraction for people to travel some distance to them.

People were asked to indicate why they haven't used any park areas with the most important reason being 'the creek is too polluted', that people 'don't feel safe going to the creek and its environments', people 'don't have time' and the creek area is said to be 'too hazardous'. The data for this question is presented in Table 7.

**Table 7  
Reasons for Respondents Not Visiting Merri Creek**

Reason For Not Visiting	%
the creek does not interest me at all	5
I did not know about the creek	7
the creek area is too hazardous	11
I don't feel safe to go there	15
the creek is too polluted	17
the creek is too difficult to get to	4
I don't have any time	12
don't know/no answer	61

If we look in more detail at the demographic features of the data we can see that more 10-29 year olds are 'not interested in the creek', that the 'creek is too polluted' and they 'don't have time' to go there. A higher proportion of people in the 50+ age group see the creek as being 'too hazardous', they 'don't feel safe' or its 'too polluted'. A higher proportion of 30-39 year olds were unsure about why they hadn't used any areas along the creek.

## ACCESS TO THE CREEK

It is clear that most people (93%) have relatively easy access to the creek. This is further supported by the data which shows that 56% of people usually take less than 5 minutes to get to the creek, 27% between 5 and 10 minutes and 11% more than 10 minutes from to get to the creek. This data is influenced by the fact that the study area was within close proximity of the Merri Creek where people can find easy access points to the resource and its open space areas, an obvious encouragement for people to use it.

Ten percent of 10-19 year olds state that they do not have easy access to the creek which could indicate a problem of transport or reflect the issue of access to an area that is seen to be moderately hazardous and possibly dangerous for young people.

Most people walk to the creek (76%) with car transport much less popular (22%). A surprisingly high 19% of people state that they cycle to the creek. This figure indicates a strong link between the creek and cycling opportunities. This figure is not significantly inflated by young people representing only a small proportion of the overall sample of users.

The fact that most people walk to the creek has influenced the response to the question of whether people find there is adequate car parking when they visit with 26% stating 'yes', 16% stating 'no' and a very high 58% stating that they 'didn't know' or not responding to the question. So it seems very clear that the Merri Creek is used extensively by people who live close to it. Most people walk there and can get to the creek fairly easily and are using a range of different park environments along the creek including formal parks and gardens, trails and less formal open space areas.

## RECREATION ACTIVITIES PURSUED AT THE CREEK

The linear nature of the creek walking encourages which is the most popular activity pursued along the creek with 80% of respondents stating they walked along the creek on their visits to it. This figure corresponds well with other recreation research undertaken at Melbourne Water parks, where walking is the most popular activity within parkland settings.

Table 8 presents data on the recreation activities undertaken by people visiting the creek and its parklands. Following the very popular activity of walking is 'sitting around and relaxing' (44%), 'socialising with family and friends' (38%), cycling (38%), walking the dog (32%), picnicking (27%) and supervising children's play (24%). It is clear from these figures that the creek and parkland areas provide an informal setting for people to pursue casual activities which are unstructured and can be undertaken at the times people choose.

**Table 8  
Recreation Activities Undertaken on Visits to Merri Creek  
and Surrounding Open Space Areas**

Activity	%	Activity	%
walking	80	informal sports	9
sitting around relaxing	44	attending special event	9
socialising with family / friends	38	courting/romancing	8
cycling	38	painting/drawing	4
walking the dog	32	fishing	4
picnicking	27	education activities/programs	4
supervising childrens play	24	formal sports	3
jogging	20	other	3
studying birds, plants or animals	18	swimming/paddling	2
playing	13	using model boats, cars, planes etc.	2
relaxing/reading/sunbathing	10	canoeing	2
photography	10	horse-riding	1
golf	9	orienteering/rogaining	1

Some activities have very low participation rates along the creek including formal sports, swimming and fishing. It is interesting that 9% of respondents stated that they play golf at the creek which is fairly high and 10% are interested in photography indicating that the creek provides an interesting environment for some creative activity.

In looking at the specific facilities used by visitors to the creek it is clear that the activities they undertake determine the nature of the facilities they are. For example, 80% use bicycle tracks or walking paths, reflecting the very high proportion of people walking and cycling along the creek. Foot bridges are well used with 68% of people crossing the creek where those crossings are provided, seating areas are also very important (51%) indicating that the support facilities and spaces where people can sit down relax, take a breather from walking or cycling are important components of walking tracks and trails and open space environments. Playgrounds are used by a smaller percentage of people but still fairly high at 36%. Picnic and BBQ areas are used by 29% of people visiting the creek and 28% of people make use of toilets. This use of toilets is fairly high considering that most people live only a short distance from the creek and again indicates the importance of support facilities for peoples use and comfort when using open space areas. Sports grounds were used by 17% of people.

The creek is a very popular spot for family activities and activities with families and friends with 52% of people stating that they usually visit the creek with their family, 40% with their friends and 31% with family and friends. The environment encourages socialising but it also is an important venue for people to visit alone, with 46% of respondents indicating that they usually go to the creek by themselves. The seclusion of certain areas and the opportunity to walk enhance the attraction of the creek for people to visit alone.

Overall the creek and its environs are being used for a range of different activities, predominantly concentrating on those which are unstructured and informal and where people visit the park either alone or with their family to walk, to cycle, to walk their dog using the tracks and trails provided, the creek crossings and the other support facilities. However, the most important feature of the creek and the parklands its linear nature where people can walk, enjoy the scenery, enjoy the environment, relax and appreciate the resource that is readily accessible to them.

## **IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR THE CREEK**

With the aim of trying to identify the communities perception of issues and problems along the Merri Creek people were asked to rank certain features of the creek on a rating scale of significance from 'a significant problem in need for immediate attention' through to 'not a problem at all'. A list of 21 features was

provided to respondents and the results indicate some very clear issues for the management of the creek and surrounding areas.

Table 9 and Table 10 present the environmental issues considered to be quite significant problems by the community. They include those which are the most obvious and easy to recognise with the more subtle environmental problems not being identified as such significant problems by the community. For example the combined data for 'significant' and 'moderate' problems (presented in Table 10) indicates that the community is most concerned about the presence of litter along the creek followed by the poor quality of water and water pollution, and by rubbish dumping and the weed problem. Each of these four problems are quite visible and are regularly presented in the media as environmental issues. This is not to say that the issues are not extremely important along Merri Creek. They obviously are and need to be addressed.

**Table 9**  
**Ranking of Perceived Severity of Issues Along Merri Creek**

	a significant problem in need of immediate attention	a moderate problem needing attention soon	could be a problem if nothing is done	not a problem at all	don't know
1. litter along the creek	56	20	13	2	9
2. flooding	12	15	20	23	30
3. poor water flow	10	10	19	22	38
4. water quality/pollution	52	17	11	2	17
5. weeds	33	20	21	7	19
6. too much undergrowth	20	15	20	17	27
7. fire hazard of undergrowth	13	10	23	18	35
8. vermin (rats etc)	14	9	19	14	44
9. snakes	13	9	18	21	40
10. too many trees	2	1	4	68	25
11. too few trees	15	14	17	25	29
12. suitability of tracks for bicycle usage	12	15	14	31	28
13. personal safety when using area	18	14	21	24	24
14. views of factories	10	12	15	36	27
15. views of houses	3	6	10	55	26
16. views of commercial buildings	7	9	14	42	28
17. too many willow trees	5	4	10	51	29
18. rubbish dumping	43	21	18	4	14
19. motorbikes/trailbikes	27	11	20	15	27
20. dogs	12	8	15	42	23
21. not enough natural areas	16	14	14	27	29
22. Other	1	2	3	4	5

Personal safety has a high rating as a problem with 32% of people indicating that it is a 'significant' or 'moderate' problem for the area. The suitability of tracks for bicycle usage is a problem for 27% of people. The views from housing, factories

and commercial buildings are not seen as significant problems by most people. Dogs along the creek are not seen to be significant problem compared with the major litter and pollution issues.

The issue which must be addressed is the ranking of 'problems' and a decision must be made as to what is considered an un-acceptable rating of a 'problem' and therefore requires immediate attention. This is a decision which must be made by the committee at an early stage.

**Table 10**  
**Combined Significant and Moderate Problem Ranking**  
**of Issues Along Merri Creek**

Issue	Combined Ranking	Issue	Combined Ranking
litter along the creek	76	fire hazard of undergrowth	23
water quality/pollution	69	vermin (rats etc)	23
rubbish dumping	64	snakes	22
weeds	53	views of factories	22
motorbikes/trailbikes	38	poor water flow	20
too much undergrowth	35	dogs	20
personal safety when using area	32	views of commercial buildings	16
not enough natural areas	30	views of houses	9
too few trees	29	too many willow trees	9
flooding	27	too many trees	3
suitability of tracks for bicycle usage	27		

## CREEK FACILITIES

A number of questions were asked of people in relation to the facilities provided along the creek and its adjacent open space areas to determine the need for any additional facilities. Sixty six percent of people indicate they believe there is a need for additional facilities or recreational opportunities to be created along the Merri Creek with only 27% stating that they didn't believe there was a need. Of those people who did not see a need for additional facilities, the main reason was that they 'like the creek the way it is' (59%), 'more facilities would detract from the atmosphere of the creek' (47%), 'more facilities could cause environmental damage' (45%), 'more facilities would attract too many visitors to the creek, (23%) and 22% stated other reasons.

The additional facilities people would like to see developed are those that would enhance the existing recreation opportunities of the creek and surrounding areas. There is far more of an emphasis on facilities which cater for recreation than on conservation developments (see Table 11). The desired additional facilities and features include 'better access to toilets', 'more picnic areas', 'more walking paths', 'more trees and bushland areas', the 'linking of bicycle paths', the

'provision of BBQ's', 'separate walking and cycling paths' and 'better and more playgrounds and children's opportunities'. People are seeking support facilities to make their visit to the creek more comfortable and to enhance their recreation experience and the activities they undertake with their families and friends whilst visiting Merri Creek

**Table 11  
Desired Additional Facilities Along Merri Creek**

Facilities	%
better access to toilets	54
picnic areas	53
more walking paths	53
more trees and bushland areas	53
linking of bicycle paths	52
barbecues	51
separate walking and cycle paths	49
better or more playgrounds and childrens opportunities	47
opportunities to view wildlife	43
more areas set aside for conservation	42
improvement in the quality of existing facilities	37
other	37
more or better information	36
education/ conservation/ nature study programs	32
somewhere to hire bikes	32
areas for informal sport	26
guided walks	23
formal sports facilities	8

Some important issues from this list are the need for the linking of bicycle paths which has been a problem identified by managers of Merri Creek for some time and the fairly high percentage of people wanting to see separate walking and cycling paths provided. It is interesting to note that formal sports facilities are not seen to be a high priority need along the creek. This reflects the generally low level of active sports participation in the community and supports the expressed views that the creek and surrounding areas is used predominantly for passive recreation activities. It is worth noting that 26% of respondents would like to see areas for informal sport developed along the creek. These areas could include ball games areas, the placement of basketball rings and keys and other 'kick around' areas which can be used informally.

There are a few interesting issues that could be pursued by Melbourne Water, the Merri Creek Committee and the agencies involved in management such as bike hire opportunities, education conservation and nature study programs, the provision of more and better information and more areas set aside for conservation and to view wildlife.

Bicycle hire could be actively encouraged through granting of a concession for a commercial vendor to hire bikes at a selected point along the creek. Programs could be developed by Councils or the Merri Creek Committee to be offered at various times throughout the year which could be supplemented by handout material on the environment of the creek. Provision of information which identifies areas where wildlife can be easily viewed may assist some people to

experience these opportunities however, there could be negative impacts on the safety of wildlife from this information being widely known throughout the community.

The interest in these areas is quite strong and there may be opportunities that can be taken to enhance peoples experience of the creek through the better provision of areas and information to satisfy these interests and needs.

## IMPORTANT FEATURES OF MERRI CREEK AND ITS ENVIRONS

A range of features were listed for people to rank their satisfaction on a scale from 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied'. This information provides a guide to the community's level of satisfaction with features along the creek and in the open space adjacent to it. The data is presented in Tables 12 and 13 and it can be seen that there is quite a high level of dissatisfaction with a number of features along the creek and a relatively low level of people being 'very satisfied' with these features. Table 12 presents the complete data with Table 13 presenting combined ranking data for satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

**Table 12**  
**Satisfaction with Important Features of Merri Creek**  
**and Surrounding Open Space**

	very satisfied	satisfied	neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	dis- satisfied	very dissatisfied	don't know
length of grass	6	30	27	16	10	11
information about the creek	3	12	23	33	9	20
surface of tracks and paths	8	34	19	17	7	14
network of tracks and paths	5	31	19	21	4	19
control of litter	2	9	13	34	31	10
general standard of maintenance of creek and its banks	3	20	23	27	17	11
signposting along creek	3	25	24	24	6	19
helpfulness of signs	2	24	29	20	5	20
behaviour of other users	4	34	28	11	5	18
quality of water	1	5	14	34	31	15
clearance of rubbish	1	10	15	36	26	13
works undertaken to keep the water clean	2	7	15	24	21	31
having dogs in the area	10	25	28	14	9	14
feeling safe	4	26	24	20	12	14
replacing plants and trees with native vegetation	10	31	26	9	5	19
keeping some areas as conservation areas	16	34	21	8	4	16
having sports grounds along the creek	10	31	29	7	8	16

Table 13 presents the combined 'satisfied' and 'dissatisfied' data and presents it in order of satisfaction. The 'mean ranking' column provides a figure which enables comparison of satisfaction levels across all features. The mean ranking

score has been achieved through assignment of values ranging from 5 to 1 and totalling and averaging the figure.

The community is most satisfied with the conservation and replanting initiatives which have been implemented. It is surprising to see the reasonably high level of satisfaction with the surface of tracks and paths along the creek given that the surfaces are so variable and have been an issue for some time. The results could reflect the very local usage of the tracks where people fail to experience the changes in track surface over the length of the paths. Just over one third of respondents are satisfied with the network of paths but this figure must be balanced against the relatively high dissatisfaction level with the path network (26%).

Although there is little desire to see additional sports facilities developed along the creek the community indicates it is quite satisfied with the facilities that already exist indicating the need for the balance between active, passive and conservation areas.

The creek as a significant recreation resource should not be ignored given the information now known about the activities people participate in and their reasons for visiting Merri Creek analysed earlier in this report.

**Table 13**  
**Combined Data for Total Satisfied and Total Dissatisfied**  
**with Creek Features**

Features	Total satisfied %	Total dis- satisfied %	Mean ranking
keeping some areas as conservation areas	51	12	3.61
surface of tracks and paths	42	24	3.22
replacing plants and trees with native vegetation	41	15	3.38
having sports grounds along the creek	40	15	3.33
behaviour of other users	37	16	3.25
network of tracks and paths	36	26	3.13
length of grass	36	26	3.08
having dogs in the area	35	23	3.14
feeling safe	30	33	2.88
signposting along creek	28	29	2.95
helpfulness of signs	26	25	2.97
general standard of maintenance of creek and its banks	22	43	2.61
information about the creek	15	42	2.59
clearance of rubbish	11	61	2.14
control of litter	11	65	2.08
works undertaken to keep the water clean	9	45	2.2
quality of water	6	65	1.95

If we look at the other features of the creek people are dissatisfied with it can be seen there is high a high level of dissatisfaction with the quality of water, the control of litter, the clearance of rubbish, works undertaken to keep the water clean, information about the creek and a general standard of maintenance of the creek and its banks. This data strongly supports the previous concerns, discussed in this report about litter, water quality, rubbish dumping and weeds, again reflecting the community's concern about the clearly visible environmental issues along the creek.

It is also again worth noting the high level of dissatisfaction with 'feeling safe' along the creek with 33% of people being 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' with safety indicating a need to address this issue. Women have higher levels of dissatisfaction on safety along the creek with 43% having combined dissatisfied rating compared with 23% for males. The issue of personal safety in other public open space areas has been raised through recent research undertaken for Melbourne Parks and Waterways reflecting the need for safety issues to be a significant aspect of planning and development of open space areas.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CREEK FEATURES AND LEISURE BENEFITS

In the development of the Merri Creek Concept Plan it is important that an understanding be developed of the importance of the creek to the enjoyment people derive from it. For this reason a number of questions were asked which relate to the importance of creek features to peoples enjoyment of the creek and the importance of different experiences when people visit the creek and surrounding open space areas. The results of this data are presented in Tables 14, 15, 16 and 17.

**Table 14**  
**Importance of Park Features to Enjoyment of Merri Creek**  
**and Surrounding Open Space**

	very important	important	not very important	not at all important	Don't Know
	%	%	%	%	%
the creek	66	25	4	0	5
trees	64	29	1	1	6
wildlife (including birds)	59	29	6	0	6
bushland	52	33	6	1	7
walking tracks & trails	52	36	5	1	7
nature/conservation areas	47	37	5	1	10
appearance/vistas	45	39	6	1	10
bicycle/walking tracks	43	40	8	1	8
plenty of space	39	43	10	1	7
other water features	36	37	11	1	14
lawn areas	35	36	19	3	7
bike tracks	29	35	22	5	9

Table 14 continued	very		not very	not at all	Don't
	important	important	important	important	Know
	%	%	%	%	%
scenic vistas	29	47	11	2	10
not crowded	28	40	20	3	10
barbecue/picnic areas	24	36	24	8	8
sports grounds and reserves	12	33	29	17	10
ball games areas	11	30	34	16	9
golf courses	7	11	24	46	13

The important features listed in priority order in Table 15 are the combined 'very important' and 'important' figures and combined 'not very important' and 'not at all important' figures. The most important features are those which create the pleasant environment of the creek including the trees, the creek itself, wildlife, bushland, walking tracks and trails, nature conservation areas, appearance, vistas, the bicycle and walking tracks and plenty of space. It is all those things that create the special environment that is provided at and along the creek and within the parkland areas adjacent to the Merri Creek. These combined ratings are very high and the community is really placing a very high value on these features as contributing to their enjoyment of visits to the Merri Creek.

**Table 15**  
**Combined Important and Un-important Ranking of Features**  
**Important to Enjoyment of Merri Creek**  
**and Surrounding Open Space**

	Total	Total	Mean
	'Important'	'Unimportant'	
	%	%	
trees	92	1	3.66
the creek	91	4	3.65
wildlife (including birds)	88	6	3.56
bushland	85	7	3.48
walking tracks & trails	87	6	3.48
nature/conservation areas	84	6	3.45
appearance/vistas	84	7	3.41
bicycle/walking tracks	83	9	3.35
plenty of space	81	11	3.29
other water features	74	12	3.26
scenic vistas	76	13	3.15
lawn areas	71	22	3.1
not crowded	67	23	3.01
bike tracks	64	27	2.97
barbecue/picnic areas	60	32	2.83
sports grounds and reserves	44	45	2.44
ball games areas	41	50	2.39
golf courses	18	69	1.76

Table 15 also presents the unimportant features of the creek. These are the formal areas that are far less important to people's enjoyment of Merri Creek including golf course, ball game areas, sports grounds and BBQ picnic. In general,

people's enjoyment is enhanced more strongly by the natural features of the creek and the surrounding parkland areas rather than those structures that are built or created within that area. This has implications for the overall development of the creek and I think it is a strong statement by the community to say that natural features are those features that should be further enhanced conserved and protected whilst the other features are of less importance and are not seen as critical to the enjoyment of a visit to the Merri Creek.

**Table 16**  
**Importance of Leisure Experiences to Enjoyment of Merri Creek and Surrounding Open Space**

	very important	important	not very important	not at all important	Don't know/no answer
	%	%	%	%	%
being on your own	18	24	31	15	12
doing something with the family	37	36	11	7	9
being with friends	30	46	11	3	10
doing something creative e.g. painting, photography	8	19	38	24	12
learning about nature and enjoying scenery	27	46	14	5	8
recalling and enjoying past experiences	15	34	30	11	10
thinking about personal values	20	37	24	9	11
exercise and physical fitness	36	43	11	2	8
resting and relaxing	39	45	6	1	8
escaping daily social pressures	43	40	7	2	9
feeling safe and secure	50	31	8	2	9
escaping family	9	13	29	36	13

When we look at the leisure benefit that people derive from visiting the creek we can see those that are important to visitors include 'resting and relaxing', 'escaping daily social pressures', 'feeling safe and secure' and 'exercise and physical fitness'. Also important are 'being with friends', 'doing something with the family' and 'learning about nature and enjoying scenery'. When people are visiting Merri Creek they value the atmosphere the area provides in terms of getting away from it all and providing a pleasant, relaxing environment and a place that encourages and enhances experiences with their family and friends.

If we look at the features that are considered unimportant we can see that it is the opposite. The least important experience is 'escaping the family' followed by, 'doing something creative', 'being on your own', 'recalling past experiences' and 'thinking about personal values'.

