

MERRI CREEK



MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

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.

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 from these 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.

MCMC employs specialist and dedicated staff and its programs are funded by member Councils, State and Federal grant programs, competitively won tenders, grants from philanthropic organisations and public donations.

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 the land of the Merri Merri. We pay our respects to the Elders past present and future.

Above photo: A crowd enjoys the closing event of the multi-year "Summer Loving" project at Merri Park Northcote in February 2016. MCMC helped deliver this Friends of Merri Creek grant-funded project with support from Darebin Council.

Annual Report

2015-2016



President's Report

This year has seen steady progress in Merri Creek Management Committee's (MCMC) key roles of ecological restoration and ongoing care of indigenous vegetation; environmental monitoring; advocacy for protection of the waterway corridors; and community education and engagement with creek corridor issues.

We keenly felt the wind-up of substantial multi-year State and Federal grants and the lack of any replacements. This represented a drop of around \$200,000 in revenue. We were forced to cut costs and work hard to seek alternative revenue. Half our income came from member Councils via service agreements, 14% from Council contracts, and 36% from external grants, contracts for non-Council clients and other sources.

We are grateful to the Myer Foundation's Sustainability and Environment Capacity Building Stream for a two year grant which will enable us to prepare an organisational strategy, implement several priority initiatives and update operational systems for more effective delivery of services.

MCMC staff designed the specialised ecological project that formed the basis of the very successful **Blue-banded Bee crowdfunding campaign** run by the Friends of Merri Creek. The project will establish pollination 'stepping stones' between endangered Matted Flax-lily populations.

In other ecologically important work, MCMC identified significant aspects of the Plains Yam Daisy lifecycle and techniques for its restoration. This plant occurs at a very small number of remnant sites.

The **Merri Creek Environment Fund** received almost \$13,500 in donations this year, a 50% increase on the previous year. The Fund supported community plantings and weed control at two revegetation sites.

MCMC helped develop the *National Standards for Ecological Restoration*. At the launch of the Standards we used photos from our digitised slide collection to show how we have applied the six principles in the Standards over 30 years of restoration on the Merri.

The proposal for a Greater Wallan-Merri State Park was promoted by Wallan Environment Group, MCMC, and Friends of Merri Creek through Councils, Members of Parliament, and an article in the Victorian National Parks Association magazine *Parkwatch* (June 2016, p18).

We continued our collaboration with the Wurundjeri Council, including the new *Merri Yarra Biik* project, supported by the City of Yarra, which explored and celebrated Wurundjeri connections with the Merri-Yarra confluence. MCMC's ongoing work with the Wurundjeri Narrap Team on ecological burning was showcased at Moreland Council's 2016 Reconciliation Week celebrations at Bababi Djinanang Native Grassland in Fawkner.

The colourful exhibition, *Merri Creek - from wasteland to parklands*, which celebrates the transformation of the Merri over the past 40 years, completed a tour of the Merri catchment. The exhibition was displayed at 12 public libraries, at CERES in East Brunswick, at Epping Plaza, at Melbourne Water and at the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning. Most locations featured a launch and personalised tour of the exhibition by leading Friends of Merri Creek members.

Last but not least, we undertook the major task of revising MCMC's Rules to accord with recent legislative changes.

Ann McGregor, President

Planning and Coordination

We receive funding from each of our member Councils to respond to issues affecting biodiversity, stream health, landscape, heritage and amenity along waterway corridors in the Merri catchment. This funding, of \$227,600 also supports our governance and communication services.

Yet again, a big focus for the year was the rapid urbanisation of the upper Merri catchment, its impacts and opportunities. In the southern developed parts of the catchment, the key matters were upgrades to the sewer and the shared path, and redevelopment of sites alongside the creek.

The biggest impact on Merri Creek came from water run-off from a fire at an illegal dump site in Somerton. A slug of de-oxygenated black water killed fish along an eight kilometre stretch. These impacts were mitigated by Melbourne Water pumping out the black water and adding in fresh water.

An extensive frontage to Merri Creek in Reservoir, owned by the Education Department (formerly Lakeside Secondary College) became the focus for advocacy by community groups and MCMC in order to secure the site's future as public land.

We made comments on: 18 planning permit applications and two planning scheme amendments, and appeared at three Panel Hearings for precinct structure plans in the Merri urban growth corridor. We were disappointed to see some designated conservation areas reduced in size.

We were involved in: discussions on upgrades to sewage treatment plants to cope with additional growth (Wallan & Craigieburn) and issues of emergency releases of treated sewage to Merri Creek; and a major clay quarry proposal for part of the former Hernes Swamp area east of Wallan on the Merri floodplain.

We contributed: specialist information on the location of rare species to relevant management agencies; and provided key ecological information and developed project proposals to funding bodies.

Merri Creek & Environs Strategy
Despite the Strategy's acknowledged value, we were unable to make progress on a revised version due to lack of resources.

We publicised: 86 community events on our [calendar](#); sent out customised emails and flyers for 25 of these events; and produced five issues of *Merri e-News*.

Our Committee of Management and its sub-committees met frequently (see p.4). In addition to our regular governance, coordination, and information sharing functions, we also renewed key MCMC policies and made progress on developing a new vision and strategic direction for MCMC. This work will continue in 2017.



Parkland Management

Our Parkland Management staff manage and monitor over 60 indigenous vegetation sites along Merri Creek, its tributaries and adjoining catchments.

We planted 18,117 plants, 94% of which were ground-storey flora. Direct sowing was a strong focus this year with 20 kg of indigenous grass seed being used.

Around 40% of our works focussed on shrublands and woodlands, 33% on wetlands and the banks of waterways, and 25% on grasslands. Ecological rehabilitation of degraded sites made up 66% of our work, while work towards full ecological restoration made up over 25%. Ecological monitoring and community engagement made up the rest.

Our [Flora and Fauna report](#) outlines key sightings and discoveries for 2015-16.

Volunteer contribution

Involving community in hands-on activities is key to our work. Our staff hosted 22 volunteer events including plantings, harvesting of seed, weed management and ecological surveys. Almost all were funded by grants; nine of the ten general community events were held with the Friends of Merri Creek.

539 community, student and corporate volunteers contributed 1,119 hours to restoring and monitoring the Merri Creek environs (equivalent to \$33,567). Of these

volunteers, 170 attended planting events, 86 helped with weeding and 11 surveyed Golden Sun Moth and Plains Yam Daisy.

Individual week-day volunteers worked with our crew for 200 hours, and staff from Ford Australia gave 60 hours. 129 skilled participants from groups including [Vic. Indigenous Nurseries Cooperative](#), Melbourne Polytechnic, Green Army, and [Vic. National Parks Association](#) contributed another 297 hours at seven targeted events.

149 people attended six other events: presentations and training workshops.

Wurundjeri Collaboration

We continued our collaboration with Wurundjeri Traditional Owners through burning native grasslands, commissioning two Welcome to Country ceremonies, and supporting the vegetation management of their Sunbury Rings site. Funding from three different grant sources enabled this.

Funding

Total income for our vegetation management was \$756,800, around \$150,000 less than 2014-15, primarily because large multi-year projects funded by State and Federal grants programs ended.

Agreements with member Councils

We worked on vegetation improvement, management and community engagement to the value of \$280,000 through ongoing funding agreements with Darebin, Hume, Moreland and Yarra Councils.

Photo: *Above:* Eco-burn with the Wurundjeri Council's Narrap team at Bababi Djinanang (Jukes Rd) Grassland, Fawkner in April 2016.



Photo: *Right:* Interpretative 'walk and talk' at Galada Tamboore, Thomastown on National Threatened Species Day, September 2016.

External grants: We delivered \$193,600 of works funded by philanthropic, State and regional grants programs, including \$112,900 for contracted delivery of grants received by the Friends of Merri Creek.

All these grants added to the value of our member Council funded restoration and vegetation maintenance by 44%.

Contracts: We maintained various 'bushland' areas for local councils through contracts worth \$170,300. Key locations were Merri Creek sites in Moreland and Ngarrri-djarrang Grassland in Darebin.

Contracts with other clients, worth \$112,900, included implementation of a development offset plan for a privately owned grassland site on the Merri in Craigieburn; restoration and management of biosites for Metro Trains and VLine; ongoing restoration and weed management works at [Galada Tamboore](#) on Merri Creek for Melbourne Water; revegetation and weed control for APA Group to mitigate the impact of a new gas pipeline in Heathcote Junction; and student interpretative excursions for RMIT at Galada Tamboore.



Catchment Program

Our Catchment Program staff develop and deliver waterway and biodiversity education and engagement projects. This year 4,700 people were reached in 287 sessions.

Key funding of \$124,000 was provided by Darebin, Moreland, Whittlesea and Yarra Councils. An additional \$110,400 was gained from grants and Melbourne Water's partnership funding for *Waterwatch*.

Important outcomes included a significant project with Wurundjeri Tribe Council Elders at the Merri Yarra confluence area (see President's Report p.1). A large State-funded water project with Brunswick North West Primary School was concluded and the school's new indigenous garden *Yakai Barring* launched at a large school event.

We supported Queens Lodge Residential Care in Lalor in the redevelopment and transformation of a denuded open space area into lively indigenous gardens.

In *Community & Philanthropy Partnerships Week* we convened a ground breaking Round Table gathering for key MCMC stakeholders and partners, including Wurundjeri Elders, to celebrate 17 years of achievement fostered by nine projects funded by philanthropic grants.

We hosted a special workshop with a bush kinder education specialist for 30 early childhood educators from the City of Whittlesea and conducted three *Nature Play* sessions that connected 67 families to nature in bush reserves in Yarra and Whittlesea.

The final event of the two year *Summer Loving* project in Merri Park Northcote was a great success with 120 people attending. A Wurundjeri Welcome to Country and Wurundjeri dancers were an integral part.

A grant from the Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust for the *Inspiring young women to reach for science project* supported 50 female Year 9 –11 students from four schools in seven workplace visits to meet women scientists.

We ran frog census events and a *Frogs on wheels* bike tour and continued our collaboration with the Darebin Creek Management Committee to deliver the *Storming for Cleaner Water* education program for the City of Whittlesea.

We produced a [short film](#) capturing the many ways we, and the community, celebrate Merri Creek and its biodiversity.

In-stream health

Our *Waterwatch* program supported seven volunteer groups in regular monitoring of water quality at 11 sites in the Merri, Darebin and Lower Yarra catchments and provided three training sessions. Water quality investigations undertaken by school students were presented at a specialist forum at the University of Melbourne.

Monitoring results showed no improvement in the Merri's overall poor condition. Lower, urbanised reaches were in worse condition than the more rural upper reaches, reflecting the impact of stormwater runoff from hard urban surfaces. Edwardes Lake in Reservoir maintained a poor result, as did Edgars Creek in Coburg. In the lower Merri salinity and pH levels increased in the drier summer months. All our water quality data can be viewed on the *Victorian Waterwatch* [database](#).



Photos: *Top:* Participants in the 'Merri Yarra Biik' project at the confluence of Merri Creek and the Yarra River, September 2016.

Above Left - top: Monitoring of Golden Sun Moth habitat at Bababi Marning Grassland, Campbellfield, in November 2015.

Above Left - middle: Swamp Billy Buttons flourish at Beveridge Wallan Rail Reserve.

Left: Pascoe Vale Girls Secondary College students after cycling to monitor Merri Creek water quality in Fawkner, June 2016.

Financial Report

Summarised Balance Sheet as at 30th September 2016

	2016	2015
EQUITY:		
Retained Funds - Start	65,100	42,093
Transfer to/from Env. Fund Reserve	(469)	(159)
Add Surplus / (Deficit)	(1,416)	23,166
	63,215	65,100
Environment Fund Reserve Balance	39,196	39,166
Retained Funds - End	102,411	104,266
Represented By:		
Current Assets:	664,207	561,553
Fixed Assets:	67,431	100,329
TOTAL ASSETS:	731,638	661,882
Less:		
TOTAL LIABILITIES:	629,227	557,616
NET ASSETS:	102,411	104,266

Summarised Statement of Income & Expenditure for the twelve months to 30th September, 2016

	2016	2015
INCOME:		
Grants		
Municipalities	630,679	645,901
Other Government	89,296	253,530
Non Government	80,224	49,899
Contracts	*430,640	560,526
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets	6,769	-
Sale of Publications	341	221
Environment Fund Donations	13,426	8,979
Interest & Sundry Income	9,123	13,682
Total Income:	1,260,498	1,532,738
LESS EXPENDITURE:		
Wages, Salaries & Oncosts	1,045,378	1,175,090
Consultants, Materials & Plant Hire	71,110	**206,514
Vehicle Running	21,996	24,912
Admin, Project & General	84,888	89,630
Depreciation & Leave Provisions	38,542	13,426
Total Expenditure:	1,261,914	1,509,572
NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):	(1,416)	23,166

* Includes delivery of grants for community groups to the value of \$133,470, where MCMC designed the project and developed the grant application.

**Consultants, Materials & Plant Hire: The 2015 figure includes a much larger than usual component for consultant and contractor fees. These arose through the delivery of specific, grant-funded projects.

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the year ended 30th September 2016. The full financial statements and the Auditor's report are on the MCMC website.

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

Merri Creek Environment Fund: We gratefully acknowledge the 54 generous donors to the Merri Creek Environment Fund.

Member Representatives and staff 2015-2016

Committee of Management 2016:

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

City of Darebin:	Cr Vince Fontana (2), Luke Sandham (3).
City of Hume:	Cr Drew Jessop (Vice President) (4), Damien Harrison (Secretary) (4).
City of Moreland:	Cr Lenka Thompson (0), Nathan Milesi (2).
City of Whittlesea:	Cr Stevan Kozmevski (3), Kristen Jackson (3).
City of Yarra:	Carrie Lindsay (0). No Councillor rep. appointed.
Shire of Mitchell	Cr Kevin Mulroney (2), Elyse Kelly (2).
Friends of Merri Creek:	Ann McGregor (President) (4), Ann Sanson (Treasurer) (3), Nicole Lowe (Vice President) (3), Pascale Pitot (4), Jane Farmer (3), Jane Miller (2), Allie Dawe, (1)*,
Wallan Environment Group:	Rob Eldridge (4), Claudia James (1)

* We very much appreciate the sterling long-term service of Allie Dawe, who stepped down in February 2016 after 17 years on the Committee, including 13 years as Treasurer.

Sub-Committees in 2016:

The following Sub-Committees met during the year:

Executive Sub-Committee (11 times),
Finance Sub-Committee (4 times),
Merri Creek & Environs Strategy Implementation Sub-Committee (1 time),
Merri Creek Environment Fund Sub-Committee (5 times).

MCMC Staff:

Manager:	Luisa Macmillan
Information Officer:	Ray Radford p/t
Administration Officer:	Monica Williamson p/t
Finance Officer:	Ruth Rankin p/t
IT Manager/Strategic Projects:	Tony Faithfull p/t
Cleaner (casual):	Sonia Sierra, Catalina Perez.
Archivist (volunteer)	Leslie Fraser p/t

Catchment Program:

Special Engagement Programs Coordinator:	Angela Foley
Waterwatch Coordinator:	Jane Bevelander p/t, Julia Cirillo p/t

Parkland Management:

Conservation Program Manager:	Katrina Roberg
Works Coordinator:	Dave Woods, Jonathan Wilson
Ecological Restoration Planner:	Brian Bainbridge
Ecological Technical Assistant:	Michael Longmore p/t
Team Leader:	Clayton Fenech, Megan Maroney.
Team Members:	Sarah Bates, Jim Brien, Michael Longmore.
Temporary Team Members:	Sarah Boys, Simon Despoja, Chris Geary, Jessica Slade.



Merri Creek Management Committee

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