



# Annual Report

2001-2002

# Merri Creek Management Committee

Merri Creek Management Committee Inc. is an integrated environmental management agency formed in 1989 to achieve the shared vision of the various stakeholders in the Merri Creek Catchment. It is an incorporated association whose members are the Darebin, Hume, Moreland, Whittlesea and Yarra City Councils and Friends of Merri Creek. Representatives of these member groups form a Committee of Management which guides MCMC's activities.

MCMC's primary aim is to ensure the preservation, restoration, environmental protection and ecologically sensitive development and maintenance of the Merri Creek and adjoining catchment areas, with a long-term aim of securing a major regional park ("the Merri Creek Parklands") with significant recreation and conservation values. MCMC's Statement of Purposes elaborates on this primary aim with a series of specific purposes.

Funding for MCMC's programs comes from direct support from its local and state government members, from state and federal grant programs, and from competitively won tenders.

MCMC employs specialist staff dedicated to the restoration and promotion of the Creek. Their work includes:

- co-ordinating the policies, works and activities of member groups,
- carrying out revegetation and remnant vegetation restoration works at more than 80 sites between Craigieburn and the Yarra River,
- providing environmental planning advice to member councils and developers,
- involving the community in managing the Creek and its parklands, and educating the community about environmental issues,
- seeking funds and grants to support Merri Creek programs,
- negotiating with government on key issues.

The revitalization of the Merri Creek has become an inspiration for other degraded urban waterways in Melbourne, with similar organisations being set up on neighbouring waterways.



Merri Creek. Cooper St Grassland Reserve, Campbellfield.

## 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.*

Mail and street address:

2 Lee St, East Brunswick,  
Victoria Australia 3057.

Telephone (03) 9380 8199

Fax (03) 9380 6989

Email address: [admin@mcmc.org.au](mailto:admin@mcmc.org.au)

Website: [www.mcmc.org.au](http://www.mcmc.org.au)

Incorporated Association Number:  
A0018144A

## Shared vision for Merri Creek Corridor

*To achieve a healthy living stream flowing through an attractive environment which provides habitat for native animals and is valued by the community as a peaceful, passive open space haven. To protect the natural and cultural features of the Merri Creek corridor through sensitive management which will provide a lasting benefit for the community.*

(From the Merri Creek and Environs Strategy)



# President's Report

I was out pottering in the garden this evening when a flock of Kookaburras landed in a nearby tree and started a chorus of their raucous laughter. As I looked around, the whole scene reminded me of what we are all working for. Trees swayed in the evening breeze, birds swept around overhead (many trying to chase the kookaburras away) and the creek bubbled along in the background. It's been another busy year at MCMC but the rewards are enormous.

It is also worth noting that, during a time of severe drought, the Merri Creek is acting as a refuge for many species of birds normally only found further north. The remnant vegetation preserved along the creek and the restored areas are providing a haven for creatures suffering from drought and habitat loss.

Many exciting projects have begun or been continued this year. The ongoing review of MCMC's objectives and purposes is nearing completion. It has been an exhausting process but will hopefully leave us better able to face the challenges of the future. There are three exciting new projects I would like to briefly mention.

"Community Streams", jointly funded by the Victorian Stormwater Action Program and MCMC's five member councils, aims to train local leaders to help spread the conservation message, particularly care of local waterways, in the neighbourhood.

"Making Waves" aims to make the knowledge and experience MCMC has developed over many years available to other groups trying to achieve similar outcomes but needing guidance on how and where to start.

"Putting Down Roots" is developing an ESL textbook based around the Merri Creek, helping to develop both language skills and environmental awareness in ethnic communities.

We have also resolved the issue of the Central Creek Grasslands with the creation of a nine hectare Reserve that will protect the more valuable parts of the grasslands while allowing urban development on its fringes.

Thanks go to all the MCMC staff, Friends and Committee members for all their hard work and dedication. There are three people I would particularly like to mention. Luisa Macmillan has taken over from Tony Faithful as manager. Tony did an excellent job over many years and became an institution at MCMC. Luisa has succeeded admirably in filling Tony's shoes and is starting to put her own mark on the organization. Fortunately we haven't lost Tony completely and he is still making a valuable contribution. Thirdly David Redfearn is retiring as a member of the committee. He has been a member of the committee since the very early days and spent nine years as President and the past three years as Treasurer. His effort over many years has been much appreciated and I am sure everyone will join me in wishing David all the best for the future.

Lastly this report wouldn't be complete without acknowledgement of MCMC's winning of the National Riverprize, an achievement that recognises the fantastic job that everyone has done.



Trevor Hausler, President

# Manager's Report

The news that MCMC had won the National Riverprize, an award sponsored by Thiess Services for excellence in waterway management and presented at the annual Riverfestival held in Brisbane, came as a fitting end to a year of dedicated work by all those associated with the ongoing endeavour to preserve and restore the Merri Creek corridor. It was a particularly important recognition for all those who have worked voluntarily over the years to achieve a vision of an ecologically healthy Merri Creek.

Particular appreciation is due to Tony Faithfull, MCMC's long standing manager who resigned in March 2002 after years of outstanding work on behalf of Merri Creek. The committed professionalism of MCMC staff is vital to the organisation, as is the dedication and support of Committee members. Special thanks are owed to the office bearers and other members of the executive who conscientiously met every month. Thanks also to the member Councils for their annual funding which enabled the core functions of MCMC to continue and with which additional funding for special projects could be sought. In this regard, MCMC had healthily diverse sources of funding including grants from each level of government, contracts with both municipal and private organisations, projects funded from philanthropic organisations and some industry sponsorship.

A number of staff changes occurred in 2002: Edward Tsyrlin filled in as Waterwatch Officer whilst Jessica Miller was away on maternity leave; Nicole Edema took on the position of Finance Officer after the resignation of Kath McPherson; Rob Julian worked as an ESL Education Officer and De Grebner commenced as the Coordinator for a Victorian Stormwater Action Program project.

An essential part of MCMC's work is the strengthening of ties with the local community. MCMC's staff continued their outstanding work with Friends groups, local residents, local schools and neighbourhood houses, and other community groups. Staff and Committee members who have been with MCMC over the years bring untold value to the organisation, enabling a strengthening of community ties that could not otherwise occur.

A number of important projects commenced this year and will continue into the next financial year. Of enormous potential is the initiative for a new Merri Creek Park north of the Ring Road. The project highlights the importance of the middle reaches of the creek and brings into focus serious issues relating to adjacent industrial landuses and their effect on recreational, landscape, habitat and water quality values.



Luisa Macmillan, Manager

# Parkland Management Team

## Habitat management

MCMC's Parkland Management Team restores and maintains more than 80 sites along Merri Creek and its tributaries Central, Edgars and Merlynston Creeks, from Clifton Hill to Craigieburn. In addition, MCMC maintained under contract 15 sites on Moonee Ponds Creek and one site on Yarra River. Sites vary widely in size: some sites are large parkland areas that include a number of smaller management areas, while other sites are small pockets of remnant vegetation or revegetation.

Site management works are directed to restoring and making visible our local indigenous waterway landscapes and our sense of place. MCMC strives to understand and work within the conditions of our local ecology, in partnership with and involving local communities in the restoration of Merri Creek's habitat and landscape.

Restoration and maintenance works focus on an integrated management approach that links weed control and planting activities, aiming to establish competitive populations of self-regenerating communities.

Works are prioritised around existing sites, sites carrying remnant vegetation, and sites with local community interest and enthusiasm for their restoration.

## Planting and seeding

MCMC's planting program aims to establish competitive indigenous cover in areas where weeds have been controlled, to buffer remnant populations, to expand significant species populations and to restore and enhance Merri Creek's habitat values.

Between the cooler months of April to September, a total of 17,036 plants were planted at 36 sites. Of these, 7% were tree species, 15% shrub species, 73% understorey species, including grasses, wildflowers and groundcovers, and 5% were aquatic species. This is a significant reduction in numbers planted compared with more than 38,000 planted last year. The reduction is partly due to reduced grants funding from Parks Victoria Agency Grants Program, but more importantly, in recognition of the impacts of drought, and the difficulty of establishing plants in some of the more exposed, harsher sites during these extremely dry conditions.

Direct seeding occurred at five sites along Merri Creek: at Galada Tamboore escarpment where it is very steep and difficult to plant and where planting could accelerate erosion, a number of native grass and shrub species were seeded. *Themeda triandra* (Kangaroo Grass) was direct seeded at several grassland and grassy woodland sites (Jukes Rd Grassland, Emma St Grassland, Central Creek Grassland and Moomba Park) to replace controlled weedy stipoid grasses.

## Ecological burning

MCMC's Parkland Team carried out ecological management burns of 2.7 hectares in area at four sites to manage grassland sites and assist with followup weed control. Larger areas were scheduled to be burnt, but were burnt by wildfires beforehand. Grasslands require regular ecological burns to open up spaces between the grass tussocks for wildflowers, and to maintain the health and vigour of *Themeda triandra*. The burns also stimulate the regeneration of both indigenous and exotic species, from seed stored within the soil and from resprouting rootstock. Weed management following a burn is therefore vital.

## Significant Fauna

MCMC has been keeping records of fauna sightings for seven years. Over the last year there have been 397 entries to MCMC's fauna database. Of these, 35 significant sightings were submitted to the Atlas of Victorian Wildlife (maintained by Department of Natural Resources and Environment). Sightings are collected by Parkland Team members and by local community and park users who phone or email MCMC with their sightings.

Several of these records are of species that were not recorded in the last major fauna survey of Merri Creek, undertaken in 1992-3 (24 species), and 20 species have been seen in new areas compared with the more limited distribution recorded in the 1992-3 survey.

MCMC Staff members, Megan Jericho and Judy Bush, at harvest of Kangaroo Grass in January 2002.



Many of the sightings demonstrate the importance of the revegetation in providing refuge areas for migratory and nomadic species. In particular, the deepening drought has led to several species arriving in the Merri Creek valley and adjacent waterways. See pages 6–7 of this report for details of some of the most interesting records.

### Significant flora

There are many significant plants and ecological communities found along Merri Creek, in the native grassland, escarpment shrubland and creekside environments. MCMC continues to record observations of unusual plant species, made in the course of our site works and activities, and submits unusual or significant records to the National Herbarium of Victoria and the Victorian Flora Database. During 2001–2, most of these observations were of new weed records (see Weed Management, below), but a new indigenous species was also recorded: *Cheilanthes distans*, (Bristly Cloak Fern), which was identified near Curly Sedge Creek Craigieburn. This species is uncommon in the Melbourne area, being more commonly found in arid inland Australia.

### Weed management, mapping and monitoring

Weeds are a major environmental problem threatening Australia's biodiversity and habitat values. A large number of weeds are found within Merri Creek's habitat corridor, several of which are priority weeds targeted for control. These include one State Prohibited weed (isolated outbreaks of Alligator Weed that Department of Natural Resources and Environment are responsible for controlling), at least two regionally prohibited weeds and at least 20 regionally controlled weeds, as well as a number of other serious environmental weeds. MCMC aims to use an integrated weed management approach, controlling priority weeds within our managed sites, using

herbicides, weed suppression mulches and replacing weeds with competitive indigenous plants. Species selection and planting designs are tailored to individual site conditions to facilitate follow-up weed control. In addition, MCMC notifies other responsible agencies of significant weed outbreaks, maps weed fronts at significant sites, monitors areas where weed populations are being eradicated and identifies and records weed species not previously recorded in this area.

New outbreaks of the highly threatening emerging stipoid weed *\*Nassella charruana* were identified within the path of the Craigieburn Bypass at Thomastown. Vicroads were notified and MCMC assisted them in locating and identifying the outbreak for eradication.

### Community involvement Community planting days and other activities

MCMC's Parkland Management Team undertook 45 community activities in partnership with Friends of Merri Creek, Friends of Quarries Clifton Hill and other community groups and local residents. Activities included walks and talks, assisting member councils

with community festivals, creek restoration projects (planting, weedmat removal, handweeding), project planning and funding applications. Community input to the restoration of Merri Creek (at activities organised by MCMC) totalled 2114 hours, equivalent to \$42,280 of in-kind contributions (based on the Federal Government's suggested rate of \$20 per hour).

### Student placements and projects

Students from secondary schools (including Sophia Mundi Steiner School, Northcote High School, Princes Hill Secondary College, Moreland City College and Mercy Diocesan Catholic College) and tertiary institutions (including Kangan, Epping and Parkville TAFEs, Deakin, RMIT and Melbourne universities) worked alongside MCMC's Parkland Team staff to contribute to Merri Creek's restoration works. In addition 12 students undertook research projects related to Merri Creek as part of their studies, with assistance from MCMC's Parkland Team. In all, students contributed 1471 hours of unpaid work, equivalent to \$29,420 of in-kind contributions.



Birdwatching at Galada Tamboore, Campbellfield.



# Catchment Team



Merri Creek. Downstream of St Georges Road, North Fitzroy.

## Learning Grounds

Previously named *Sustainable Schools and Communities* the *Learning Grounds* project enables school communities to plan indigenous gardens for their school grounds. In 2001 MCMC visited eleven schools across the Cities of Moreland and Darebin. MCMC met with school representatives, prepared site assessments and planting recommendations for each school. Visits were supported by materials prepared by MCMC that outlined funding strategies and learning opportunities so that students could contribute to and understand the changes around them.

## Putting Down Roots

In *Putting Down Roots* five groups with non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) explored the

Merri Creek environment and learnt about Wurundjeri culture. Later, in eight workshops, participants told stories about where they came from and discussed how to understand and care for their new local environment. Their stories were blended with information and images about Merri Creek's environmental attributes and recreational opportunities as well as tips for householders (such as how to reduce impacts on nearby waterways through careful disposal of waste). The final product is a practical language learning resource for courses in English as a second language (ESL) and for those with non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB).

## Autumn Planting Festival

Moreland's Autumn Planting Festival 2002 was held on 11th May at Glenroy's Kingsford Smith Ulm Reserve which overlooks Moonee Ponds Creek. John Lane was contracted to assist with pre-festival liaison with community groups and to be the Master of Ceremonies on festival day.

About 200 people attended the festival including local line dancing group *Silver Spurs*, the 1st Oak Park Scouts, Circolo Pensionati Italiani Di Moreland and Moreland's Elderly Chinese Social Support Group. Activities on the day included planting and Waterwatch, creek walks and talks, a barbeque and musical performances from participants.

## Automotive, Construction & Demolition Industries Program (ACDIP)

A highlight of ACDIP was an event held in November 2001 at Edwardes Lake Hotel in Reservoir to thank automotive workers for their participation in the *Catching On* project funded by Darebin City Council and the Victorian Stormwater Action Program (VSAP). *Catching On* enabled more than three visits to 22 small auto workshops in the City of Darebin to raise awareness about local waterways. About 35 people attended the project's final evening which featured a large display with information about appropriate workshop practices and community efforts for local waterways. On the night an anti-pollution technical specialist from ACQUA International (Aust) P/L demonstrated a mobile oil and water separator.

ACDIP is a base from which to develop relationships with other organisations that broadens the delivery of MCMC's projects. For example, the Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce (VACC) displayed MCMC's *Cleaner Workshops, Cleaner Environment* brochure at the International Melbourne Motor Show in March 2002 and then profiled *Catching On* in their monthly journal. Yarra Valley Water provided excellent information about trade waste and trade waste licensing for MCMC's workshops visits. Also, in developing a cleaner production oriented submission for the third round of VSAP grants, various

organisations were consulted widely, especially with Kangan Batman TAFE and the Cities of Maribyrnong and Kingston.

Continued funding for ACDIP from the City of Yarra allowed further development of the automotive program during 2002.

## Making Waves

Funded by the Myer Foundation, *Making Waves* aims to create a model for other groups by documenting the process taken by MCMC in proceeding from an idea to action. MCMC's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are being reviewed as well as the strategic direction that MCMC took to balance these. The broad concept of *Making Waves* is to draw out elements which have contributed to MCMC's success and encourage replication elsewhere in the community. This may be through the creation of new groups or through improvement of small groups already operating in other catchments.

The *Making Waves* model of MCMC will not be a prescriptive recipe for success but will contain practical, "how to" generic style materials that may be further customised to suit the differing needs of diverse localities and communities. *Making Waves* is scheduled for completion in mid 2003.

MCMC's Waterwatch Officer Jessica Miller in Water Week October 2001 showing a tray of macroinvertebrates to Governor John Landy and marathon swimmer Tammy van Wisse.



The "Catching On" project brought auto workers together at Edwardes Lake Hotel in November 2001.

## Community Streams

*Community Streams* is a community based project being conducted across the whole Merri Creek catchment. The project is a joint initiative of MCMC and its five member municipalities. Their contributions to the project have been matched with funding from the Victorian Stormwater Action Program (VSAP) which is a State Government funding initiative. *Community Streams* aims to strengthen the sense of community, prevent stormwater pollution at source by understanding the impacts daily actions can have on our waterways. It brings people together and motivates actions that reduce impacts on waterways. These actions include composting and using public transport or bicycles.

The project initially attracts people who may go further to Stage 2 Training and become volunteer team leaders who run their own "eco-team" and recruit from their street, club, shopping precinct, community group, unit block, church or workplace – whoever they identify as the people and project they want to work with.

*Community Streams* will be completed by the end of September 2003.

## Melbourne Waterwatch

MCMC's investigations of aquatic life continued in the Merri and Moonee Ponds Creeks and the Yarra River. MCMC Waterwatch officers worked with 25 schools (sometimes several times), three libraries, two tertiary institutions, three Friends groups, five community

groups and also visited 22 auto workshops, many community festivals, and several training days. Many people discovered the diversity of aquatic life such as dragonflies, yabbies, shrimps and freshwater mussels in the Merri and Moonee Ponds Creeks. This year a number of groups used estuarine monitoring equipment to test the Yarra River estuary and Westgate Lakes (under the Westgate Bridge) for various water quality parameters.

Partnerships with schools and community groups have been maintained this year with an increasing number of schools continuing to incorporate Waterwatch into their curriculum. Waterwatch enabled students to undertake scientific studies of their local waterways including habitat assessments, chemical testing and macro-invertebrate sampling.

A highlight for 2002 was a trip down the Yarra River on the MV Burnley for a group of Year 11 environmental science students from Melbourne Grammar. Thanks to Parks Victoria for use of their boat. The boat trip gave students the opportunity to measure estuarine water quality at a number of sites down the river to Victoria Harbour. The students measured turbidity, temperature, salinity and depth – they picked up the halocline (or change in salinity) at different depths in the river and detected the increase in salinity as they headed downstream.

Waterwatch received continuing support through the Federal Government's Natural Heritage Trust, MCMC's member councils and Melbourne Water.



# Merri Creek's Significant Flora, Fauna and

Merri Creek is a habitat corridor of regional – state significance. It provides habitat to a diversity of indigenous flora and fauna species, and threatened ecological communities. It provides a significant contribution to the region's conservation values.

MCMC maintains a record of fauna sightings. Sightings are submitted by MCMC staff and local community members and bird-watchers. During 2001–2, 397 interesting records of fauna sightings were made, based on individual species located at particular sites. Of these, 35 records, which represented rarer and more unusual sightings, were submitted to Department of Natural Resources and Environment's Atlas of Victorian Wildlife.

Many of the sightings demonstrate the importance of the revegetation in providing refuge areas for migratory and nomadic species. The severity of the current drought has forced several species of inland birds to seek refuge along Merri Creek, far from their usual haunts. Some birds have adopted remnant vegetation, while excitingly, a few woodland birds have found refuge in revegetated areas. The unusual appearance in our suburbs of these birds indicates the severity of drought conditions, and degree of destruction of their regular habitats, but also the extremely important role that our revegetation efforts are playing in providing habitat and refuge for a growing number of birds and other fauna.

- **Swift Parrots.** This is an endangered parrot which breeds in Tasmania and migrates to Victoria to feed on blossoming Eucalypts in winter. Up to five were seen in planted eucalypts in a revegetation area at Union Street escarpment, Moonee Ponds Creek, West Brunswick, over several weeks in July. The observations were relayed to the Threatened Species Network. Swift Parrots are regarded as endangered in Victoria and vulnerable Australia wide. (see main image ①)
- **Spotted Harrier,** Galada Tamboore, Thomastown, August 2002. A single bird was seen hunting in the area that is proposed for the Craigieburn Bypass. This typically inland species apparently visits the Epping area during drought years and has been recorded as nesting in farmland to the north in such years. It is regionally significant.





# Communities



- **Black-eared Cuckoo**, Jukes Road area, Fawkner, September 2002. This may be an appearance of another species of 'drought refugee'. A single bird was seen in weedy scrub immediately outside the fenced native grassland. It was not recorded in the Merri Creek fauna survey of 1993 and is a very rare visitor to the Melbourne area. (see main image ②)
- **Great Egrets** were seen at several locations during the year including Coburg Lake, Coburg, December 2001, Merri Creek at Bell Street, Coburg, January 2002, Strettle Lagoon, Preston, March 2002. Great Egrets are regarded as endangered in Victoria.
- **Olive-backed Oriole** was observed over several days making territorial songs at Tate Reserve, East Coburg in September 2002.

This species had not been recorded at any sites



- along the Merri Creek in the 1993 fauna survey. The bird is migratory and this individual was heard mimicking several Australian inland bird species such as Cockatiels and White-browed Wood-swallows. The tree canopies within revegetation areas along the creek provide suitable habitat for this species.
- **Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos** were seen along Merri Creek. At Hall Reserve, Clifton Hill in February 2002 a pair was seen feeding on wood-boring grubs in wattles planted in the late 1980s. In September 2002, about 40 birds were seen flying over the Alphington Wetland beside Yarra River.
- **Southern Brown Tree-frogs** have colonised the newly created wetlands at Hall Reserve, Clifton Hill by December 2001, 18 months after the wetlands' construction.
- **Latham's Snipe** Cooper Street Grassland, Campbellfield, November 2001. A single specimen of this JAMBA listed species (an international agreement on migratory birds) was seen close to where this species has also been observed in previous years.



- Latham's Snipe relies on finding a series of drying wetlands throughout the summer and this part of the Cooper St Grassland is a regular haunt.
- **Blue-winged Parrot** Galada Tamboore, Thomastown, October 2001. A single bird was seen in native grassland in the path of the proposed Craigieburn bypass. This parrot breeds in Tasmania and migrates into Victoria in winter. This area may form part of a migration route as Blue-wings have been seen in earlier years in farmland to the north and parkland to the south of this site. This species was not recorded in the 1993 Merri Creek Fauna survey.
- **Buff-banded Rail** Emma Street, Fawkner, September 2002. A single bird was seen in an overgrown drain leading down to the Merri Creek. This species is very secretive and is therefore often difficult to spot. This sighting extends the area from a more limited distribution along Merri Creek recorded in the 1993 fauna survey.
- Two **Baillon's Crake** and a single **Australian Spotted Crake** were seen occupying a small constructed wetland at Whittlesea Public Gardens, Lalor in October 2001. Neither of these species were recorded in the 1993 fauna survey. The Baillon's Crake was recorded again in September 2002. Baillon's Crake are regarded as vulnerable in Victoria.

# Management and Planning

## Planning

The open space of the Merri Creek corridor and the immediately adjoining private properties are covered by an Environmental Significance Overlay within municipal planning schemes for much of the urban and industrial areas of the creek. As a result, MCMC has the opportunity to review and comment on planning permit applications for many of the developments abutting the creek corridor. These include urban consolidation in inner areas and urban and industrial expansion in the middle stretches of the Creek. MCMC aims to ensure consistency with the Merri Creek Development Guidelines (see below). MCMC made comments on 34 planning applications, referred by member Councils. Growing recognition of the Merri Creek corridor's habitat and recreational value highlights the ongoing need for good planning responses. MCMC also made formal comment on 12 strategic planning matters. The Planning and Issues Sub-Committee met twice to discuss planning and management issues.

## Merri Creek Development Guidelines

The Merri Creek Development Guidelines were prepared by MCMC in 1999 in order to assist councils and developers to plan appropriately for the Merri Creek corridor. This year MCMC commenced a review of the Guidelines with the objective of furthering their effectiveness, useability and degree of implementation.

## Merri Creek and Environs Strategy

The Merri Creek and Environs Strategy (MC&ES), completed in 1998, provides the strategic plan for all works related to management of the Merri Creek's corridor. It provides direction for MCMC, local councils, Melbourne Water and the community in regard to actions and priorities. The Strategy is monitored by MCMC's MC&ES Implementation Subcommittee. In 2002 the Sub-Committee met three times and completed reviews of those parts of the Strategy relating to Recreation, Trails and Access, Public Safety, Community Involvement and Education and Aboriginal Heritage.

## Craigieburn Bypass

The Craigieburn Bypass Environs Coordination Group (CBECG) was formed by the Minister for Planning subsequent to the determination of the freeway alignment between Craigieburn and the Western Ring Road. The Group, of which MCMC is a member, met monthly to review environmental management programs for the freeway and monitor their implementation. MCMC's concerns were focused on the development of the Project Environmental Protection Strategy, flora and fauna, water quality, weed control and landscaping. MCMC liaised closely with VicRoads and its consultants over weed issues, particularly on the MCMC identified outbreak of a highly threatening emerging weed, *Nassella charruana* (Silver-lobed Needle Grass) (see p. 3). MCMC urged the use of locally indigenous species to complement the landscape through which the Bypass travels. Whilst VicRoads agreed to this request in relation to plantings for wetlands, MCMC was disappointed that VicRoads remained committed to the use of a number of non-local species on parts of the freeway verges.

The CBECG also reviewed progress on the development of a new linear park along Merri Creek (see below).

Although MCMC participated in the CBECG, MCMC does not endorse the freeway project, nor does it accept that the major environmental impacts of the project can be ameliorated to a level where they are acceptable.

## Merri Creek Park

The concept of a park along the Merri Creek north of Mahoneys Road was first proposed over 70 years ago. More recently the Friends of Merri Creek and the Victorian National Parks Association proposed a State Park stretching from the Western Ring Road north to Wallan, a proposal endorsed by MCMC in August 2000. In June 2002 Parks Victoria convened the first meeting of the Merri Creek Park Working Group, a group formed to assist with the planning for a new recreational and conservation park along the Merri Corridor. Melbourne's open space strategy, *Linking People and*

*Spaces*, 2002, identified the need for such a park as did the panel report and ministerial decision on the Craigieburn Bypass. MCMC participated in Working Group meetings, providing detailed information on sites along Merri Creek and urging that the vision for the park extend beyond the area between the Ring Road and Craigieburn Road, to link areas of high conservation value to the north.

## Proposed closure of Craigieburn Sewage Treatment Plant

The Northern Suburbs Sewerage Strategy Community Consultation Committee, first convened by Yarra Valley Water (YVW) in 2000, continued to meet to discuss the proposed decommissioning of the Craigieburn Sewage Treatment Plant (STP). MCMC has had a particular interest in this proposal because the STP currently discharges effluent into Merri Creek. Although the effluent is recognised as a major source of nutrients to the Creek, the loss of flow associated with plant closure could possibly have detrimental instream effects. The sewage effluent serves to dilute heavy metals and other toxicants entering the Creek via drains in the Campbellfield and Somerton areas. In April 2000, Environment Australia determined that the proposed closure was a controlled action under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*, because of the presence of the Growling Grass Frog (*Litoria raniformis*), a federally listed threatened species. YVW has been required to undertake further studies of the frogs' habitat requirements and to identify mitigating actions.

## Gas Pipeline – Growling Grass Frog Study

As a result of pressure and dissatisfaction over its handling of the Somerton Gas Pipeline, the State Government agreed to a set of Growling Grass Frog Protection Initiatives late in 2001. Included in these initiatives was a specific study of the status, movement patterns, habitat and conservation of the Growling Grass Frog. MCMC participated in the steering committee for this project. The field





*Merri Creek at Galada Tamboore, Campbellfield.*

work, by Peter Robertson of Wildlife Profiles and Michael Scroggie of NRE, was undertaken during spring and summer and an interim report of the findings presented in late August. Growling Grass Frogs were found at a total of 41 sites within the Merri Creek corridor, including a number of tributaries. Further field work is needed to determine which areas provide successful breeding habitat and to identify the crucial characteristics of such habitat.

### **Central Creek development**

After several years of uncertainty regarding the future of the Central Creek Grasslands in Reservoir, resolution has been achieved, with 9 hectares of the 15-hectare site to be reserved as a Crown land reserve. The

remaining six hectares will be developed by Urban and Regional Land Corporation as a residential area. As part of the development process, a number of rare plants growing outside the reserve boundary were translocated into the reserved area. MCMC provided input and advice to URLC in the development of landscape designs and the construction environmental management plan.

### **Willow removal by Melbourne Water**

Melbourne Water continued its program of willow removal, focusing on two sections of Merri Creek: in the Northcote Golf Course vicinity on both sides of the creek, and downstream of Blyth St on the west bank of the creek. These works were

the first stage of a six year program, with further willow removal scheduled downstream from these sites. MCMC supports the removal of Basket Willows as the trees are serious environmental weeds that impact on habitat values and water quality. However, MCMC staff received a number of complaints from members of the public concerned about the large areas treated and the delay in revegetation, with the denuded areas not being scheduled for replanting until mid 2003.

### **Stormwater Management Plans**

MCMC had input into the development of Stormwater Management Plans for Whittlesea City Council and Mitchell Shire Council.

### **Communicating with the community**

An integral part of MCMC's operations is communicating information about its activities and environmental issues to the community. This occurs in a number of ways: through distribution of the Merri News newsletter; answering queries from students and the public; displays at municipal festivals; community events and MCMC activities; a regularly updated display board on the front fence of the MCMC office; publicity in local newspapers; and ongoing close liaison with community groups, particularly the Friends of Merri Creek and the Friends of the Quarries Clifton Hill.

# Treasurer's Report

MCMC made a surplus of \$24,308 in 2001–2002 on an accrual basis. This surplus is primarily made up of the \$25,000 received by MCMC as winners of the 2002 National Thiess Services Riverprize. MCMC's turnover for the year was \$860,578, slightly down on the previous year.

MCMC's Finance Subcommittee met quarterly to consider financial reports prepared on a quarterly basis including balance sheet, income and expenditure and budget statement, list of cheques, receivables and payables reports, and a cash flow projection, and to discuss financial controls and policy. Minutes of the meetings were referred to the Committee of Management, along with copies of the balance sheet and income, expenditure and budget statement. Thanks to members of the Finance Subcommittee, and particularly to Kath McPherson, our former Finance Officer (Kath resigned in July), Nicole Edema, our current Finance Officer, Tony Faithfull, our former Manager (Tony resigned in April), Luisa Macmillan, our current Manager, and Judy Schrever who continued as MCMC's accountant.

MCMC pays no income tax, payroll tax, capital gains tax or land tax, and as it does not give benefits to staff above the minimum eligible amount, pays no Fringe Benefits tax. PAYG tax and GST are collected and accounted for through our MYOB accounting software, and reconciled prior to payment to the Tax Office.

Staff provided cash flow reports including projections to me, and cash flow has been managed well.

A statement showing actual income and expenditure for the year, annual budget, and the previous year's actuals, divided into departments is attached.

The balance sheet shows that at the end of the year MCMC had net assets of \$278,523. One major asset was purchased during the year, a new car for management.

Appropriate salary and superannuation payments and long service and annual leave provisions have been made, consistent with MCMC's Enterprise Bargaining Agreement.

The significant and uncoded input of volunteers to MCMC projects should be acknowledged. One major example is the 2000 hours of volunteer time that went into ParksVic funded community activities. Costing this volunteer time at \$15/hr leads to a total of \$30,000, a substantial addition to the total funding for these projects of \$110,632.



David Redfearn  
Honourary Treasurer

## Merri Creek Management Committee Inc Income, expenditure & budget statement Budget October 2001 through September 2002

	Actual Annual Budget 2001-2002	Approved Annual Budget 2001-2002 (20/8/02)	Actual 2000-2001
<b>OPERATIONAL INCOME</b>			
All income	\$69	\$0	
<b>Total OPERATIONAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$69</b>	<b>\$0</b>	
<b>OPERATIONAL EXPENSES</b>			
Levied from other projects	(\$120,060)	(\$129,082)	(\$91,066)
Salaries	\$55,316	\$57,104	\$31,185
Salary on-costs	\$6,996	\$8,962	\$5,311
Interdepartmental chargeouts	\$286		
General Expenses	\$3,564	\$3,140	\$2,289
Operational Expenses	\$48,244	\$51,532	\$53,276
Vehicle running costs	\$24	\$0	\$28
other expenses	\$2,874	\$10,800	\$0
provisions	\$2,825	\$1,614	(\$1,085)
<b>Total OPERATIONAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$69</b>	<b>\$4,070</b>	<b>(\$62)</b>
<b>OPERATIONAL SURPLUS (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>(\$4,070)</b>	<b>\$62</b>
<b>MANAGEMENT INCOME</b>			
Municipalities	\$105,000	\$105,000	\$115,600
State & Federal Govt	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$0
Contracts	\$870	\$870	\$0
Other Income*	\$41,132	\$9,979	\$12,254
<b>Total MANAGEMENT INCOME</b>	<b>\$151,002</b>	<b>\$119,849</b>	<b>\$127,854</b>
<b>MANAGEMENT EXPENSES</b>			
Salaries	\$88,617	\$82,307	\$107,557
Salaries On-Costs	\$12,698	\$13,159	\$14,985
Interdepartmental chargeouts	(\$12,500)	(\$13,956)	(\$15,200)
General expenses	\$11,574	\$4,354	\$2,730
Operational Expenses	\$17,665	\$19,195	\$12,400
Grant Expenses		\$200	\$2,500
Vehicle running costs	\$1,876	\$1,840	\$1,743
Other expenses	\$3,419	\$11,219	\$16,582
Provisions	\$3,878	\$1,074	(\$3,183)
<b>Total MANAGEMENT EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$127,227</b>	<b>\$119,392</b>	<b>\$140,114</b>
<b>MANAGEMENT SURPLUS (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>\$23,775</b>	<b>\$457</b>	<b>(\$12,260)</b>
<b>PARKLAND MGMT INCOME</b>			
Municipalities	\$198,000	\$198,000	\$165,925
State Government	\$110,632	\$110,631	\$213,975
Federal Government	\$15,787	\$15,786	\$0
Contracts	\$210,305	\$212,288	\$315,251
Other	\$5,132	\$818	\$5,338
<b>Total PARKLAND MGMT INCOME</b>	<b>\$539,856</b>	<b>\$537,523</b>	<b>\$700,489</b>
<b>PARKLAND MGMT EXPENSES</b>			
Salaries	\$308,160	\$295,448	\$417,872
Salary On-costs	\$39,807	\$44,253	\$50,116
Interdepartmental chargeouts	\$14,259	\$17,062	\$17,323
General expenses	\$15,997	\$13,709	\$16,005
Operational Expenses	\$78,635	\$84,977	\$69,249
Project costs	\$62,070	\$52,660	\$90,139
Vehicles	\$4,960	\$10,015	\$10,251
Other expenses	\$0	\$0	\$0
Provisions	\$18,731	\$15,146	\$17,767
<b>Total PARKLAND MGMT EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$542,619</b>	<b>\$533,291</b>	<b>\$688,723</b>
<b>PM SURPLUS (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>(\$2,763)</b>	<b>\$4,232</b>	<b>\$11,767</b>
<b>CATCHMENT MGMT INCOME</b>			
Municipalities	\$89,685	\$109,165	\$63,716
State Government	\$17,188	\$34,824	\$24,970
Federal Government	\$13,300	\$13,300	\$14,800
Contracts	\$10,007	\$10,045	\$19,506
Schools & non-govt	\$27,936	\$35,340	\$17,580
Other income	\$2,500	\$500	\$995
<b>Total CATCHMENT MGMT INCOME</b>	<b>\$160,616</b>	<b>\$203,174</b>	<b>\$141,567</b>
<b>CATCHMENT MGMT EXPENSES</b>			
Salaries	\$112,212	\$116,362	\$102,173
Salaries Oncosts	\$13,358	\$16,186	\$11,958
Interdepartmental chargeouts	(\$1,759)	(\$1,127)	(\$2,123)
General Expenses	\$7,132	\$7,136	\$1,220
Operational Expenses	\$23,762	\$31,520	\$15,054
Project expenses	\$1,861	\$13,412	\$20,271
Provisions	\$7,067	\$1,300	\$2,219
<b>Total CATCHMENT MGMT EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$163,633</b>	<b>\$184,789</b>	<b>\$150,772</b>
<b>CATCHMENT MT SURPLUS(DEFICIT)</b>	<b>(\$3,017)</b>	<b>\$18,385</b>	<b>(\$9,205)</b>
<b>Operating Profit (Deficit)</b>	<b>\$17,995</b>	<b>\$19,004</b>	<b>(\$9,637)</b>
<b>OTHER INCOME</b>			
Sales of Publications	\$8,480	\$8,218	\$399
Merri Creek Environment Fund	\$554	\$1,657	\$7,832
Other	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>Total OTHER INCOME</b>	<b>\$9,034</b>	<b>\$9,875</b>	<b>\$8,231</b>
<b>OTHER EXPENSES</b>			
Cost of Publications	\$2,694	\$13,334	\$1,515
Merri Creek Environment Fund	\$0	\$2,027	\$5,098
Other expenses	\$27		\$0
<b>Total Other Expenses</b>	<b>\$2,721</b>	<b>\$15,361</b>	<b>\$6,613</b>
<b>TOTAL OTHER SURPLUS (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>\$6,313</b>	<b>(\$5,486)</b>	<b>\$1,618</b>
<b>MCMC NET SURPLUS (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>\$24,308</b>	<b>\$13,518</b>	<b>(\$8,019)</b>

\* Includes RiverPrize (\$25,000), Visionstream (\$5,000), and interest



# Finances

## SUMMARISED BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30TH SEPTEMBER 2002

	2002	2001
<b>EQUITY:</b>		
Retained Funds – Start	254,215	262,235
Add Surplus / (Deficit)	24,308	(8,020)
Retained Funds. End	\$278,523	\$254,215
<b>Represented By:</b>		
Current Assets:	355,484	369,056
Fixed Assets:	70,297	97,774
<b>TOTAL ASSETS:</b>	<b>425,781</b>	<b>466,830</b>
<b>Less:</b>		
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES:</b>	<b>147,258</b>	<b>212,615</b>
<b>NET ASSETS:</b>	<b>\$278,523</b>	<b>\$254,215</b>

## SUMMARISED STATEMENT OF INCOME & EXPENDITURE FOR THE TWELVE MONTHS ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2002

	2002	2001
<b>INCOME:</b>		
Grants		
Municipalities	392,685	345,241
Other Government	160,907	253,745
Non Government	28,755	22,680
Contracts	220,365	334,758
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets	5,092	—
Sale of Publications	8,547	399
Environment Fund Donations	460	7,832
Interest & Sundry Income	43,767	13,486
Total Income:	<b>860,578</b>	<b>978,141</b>
<b>LESS EXPENDITURE:</b>		
Wages, Salaries & Oncosts	651,033	741,157
Materials & Plant Hire	67,595	121,250
Vehicle Running	12,370	12,689
Admin, Project & General	86,639	84,850
Environment Fund Disbursements	—	5,098
Depreciation & Leave	18,633	21,117
Total Expenditure:	<b>836,270</b>	<b>986,161</b>
<b>NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):</b>	<b>\$24,308</b>	<b>(\$8,020)</b>

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the year ended 30th September 2002. The full financial statements and the Auditor's report are on the MCMC website at [www.mcmc.org.au](http://www.mcmc.org.au) or copies are available from the MCMC office, 2 Lee Street, East Brunswick.

# Funding

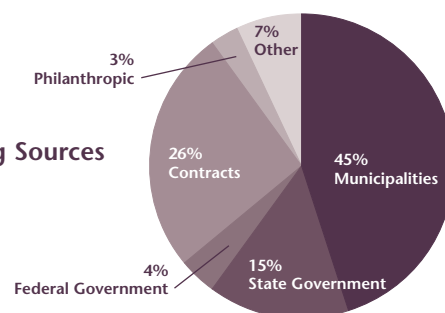
## FUNDING AND SPONSORSHIP

MCMC's key sources of funding are indicated in the financial reports, and in detail in the pie chart and table below.

Direct grants to MCMC from its member Councils provided 87% of funding for MCMC's Management and Coordination functions, 37% of funding for Parklands Management, and 56% of funding for the Catchment Program. *Direct grants from municipalities provided 45% of MCMC's total income.*

The State Government via Parks Victoria grants provided 20% of the Parkland Team's funding, and 11% of the Catchment Program's funding. There was no state government support for Management and Coordination functions. *The State Government provided 15% of MCMC's total income.*

## MCMC Funding Sources 2001–02



The Federal Government supported MCMC administration through a \$4000 grant from Environment Australia, through NHT Bushcare (3% of Parklands income), and NHT Waterwatch (8% of Catchment Program income). *The Federal Government provided 4% of MCMC's total income.*

Contracts supplied 39% of Parklands Management income. *Contracts supplied 26% of MCMC's total income.* Philanthropic organisations provided 17% of the Catchment Program's income. *Philanthropics provided 4% of MCMC's total income.*

## Major Funding Sources

Type of Funding	Source	Amount
<b>Direct grants</b>		
From member Councils	Darebin City Council	\$125,570
	Hume City Council	\$ 66,200
	Moreland City Council	\$104,474
	Whittlesea City Council	\$ 26,632
	Yarra City Council	\$ 62,893
From other local government	Melbourne C.C. & Moonee Valley C.C.	\$ 6,914
From State Government	Parks Victoria	\$127,820
From Federal Government	Environment Australia	\$ 4,000
	NHT (Bushcare & Waterwatch)	\$ 29,086
Philanthropic Trust	Ian Potter Foundation	\$ 14,000
	The Ross Trust	\$ 6,490
	Myer Foundation	\$ 7,447
Other non-government	Citipower	\$ 818
<b>Contracts</b>	Moreland C.C.	\$163,390
	Yarra C.C.	\$ 13,711
	Citywide Service Solution	\$ 33,193
	Other	\$ 10,071
<b>Other</b>		
Riverprize	Thiess Services	\$ 25,000
Other	Visionstream	\$ 5,000

Ford Australia Broadmeadows continued to sponsor MCMC's educational activities by providing a Ford vehicle to enable the program to take equipment and staff to schools and other community activities. Kodak Australasia continued to support MCMC's activities through provision of a Kodak DX 3500 digital camera.



# Member Representatives & Staff

The following people attended at least one of the meetings below from October 2001 to September 2002:

## Committee of Management: (four meetings + AGM = five held).

City of Darebin:	Cr Vince Fontana, Allan Wicks
City of Hume:	Cr Drew Jessop, Mohammad Afzal, Matt Ruchel
City of Moreland:	Cr Rosemary Kerr, Alistair Phillips, Cr Fraser Brindley, Karin Hartog
City of Whittlesea:	Cr Stevan Kozmevsky ( <i>Vice President</i> ), David Turnbull
City of Yarra:	Cr Robyn Williams, Cr Gurm Sekhon, Silvana Predebon
Friends of Merri Ck:	Trevor Hausler ( <i>President</i> ), Ann McGregor ( <i>Secretary</i> ), David Redfearn ( <i>Treasurer</i> ), Max Sargent, Allie Dawe, Alan Brennan, Harold Mackrell (sub.) Paul Prentice (sub.) Clair Dougherty (sub.)

## Executive Sub-Committee: (12 meetings held)

Trevor Hausler (*President*); Cr Stevan Kozmevsky (*Vice President*);  
Ann McGregor (*Secretary*); David Redfearn (*Treasurer*)

## Merri Creek & Environs Strategy Implementation Sub-Committee: (three meetings held)

City of Darebin:	Adam Shalekoff ( <i>Chair</i> )
City of Hume:	Karen Wilson, Rebecca Brown
City of Moreland:	Karin Hartog, Geraldine Earle
City of Whittlesea:	Felicity Ayres
City of Yarra:	Silvana Predebon, Craig McGrath
Friends of Merri Ck:	Alan Brennan, Allie Dawe, Clair Dougherty, Harold Mackrell, Paul Prentice, Ann McGregor

## Planning & Issues Sub-Committee: (two meetings held)

City of Darebin:	Sandra Wade
City of Hume:	Matt Ruchel
City of Moreland:	Liz Nairn, Gary Dew
City of Whittlesea:	Chris De Silva
City of Yarra:	Silvana Predebon
Friends of Merri Ck:	Ann McGregor ( <i>Chair</i> ), Allie Dawe, David Redfearn, Harold Mackrell, Paul Prentice

## Finance Sub-Committee: (four meetings held)

David Redfearn, Treasurer (*Chair*); Judy Schrever, MCMC's Accountant;  
Allie Dawe

## Merri Creek Environment Fund Sub-Committee:

(Did not meet in 2001–02)

Members were: David Redfearn, Treasurer (*Chair*); Alex Smart,  
Esteemed person (local environmentalist for many years);  
Glenyys Romanes, Esteemed person (State Member of Parliament)



Some MCMC Staff members with Glenn McCrea, Riverprize Brisbane (far right).

## Staff from October 2001 to September 2002

### Management

Manager:	Tony Faithfull, Luisa Macmillan
Conservation Coordinator:	Judy Bush
Administration Officer:	Ray Radford
Finance Officer:	Kathleen McPherson, Nicole Edema
Project Officer (casual):	Tony Faithfull
Cleaner:	Anne Byrnes, Tiziana Tosti-Guerra

### Catchment Program Team

Catchment Coordinator:	Simon Fell
Waterwatch Coordinator:	Jessica Miller, Edward Tsyrlin
Catchment Program:	Angela Foley
ESL Education Officer:	Rob Julian
VSAP Coordinator:	De Grebner

### Parkland Management Team

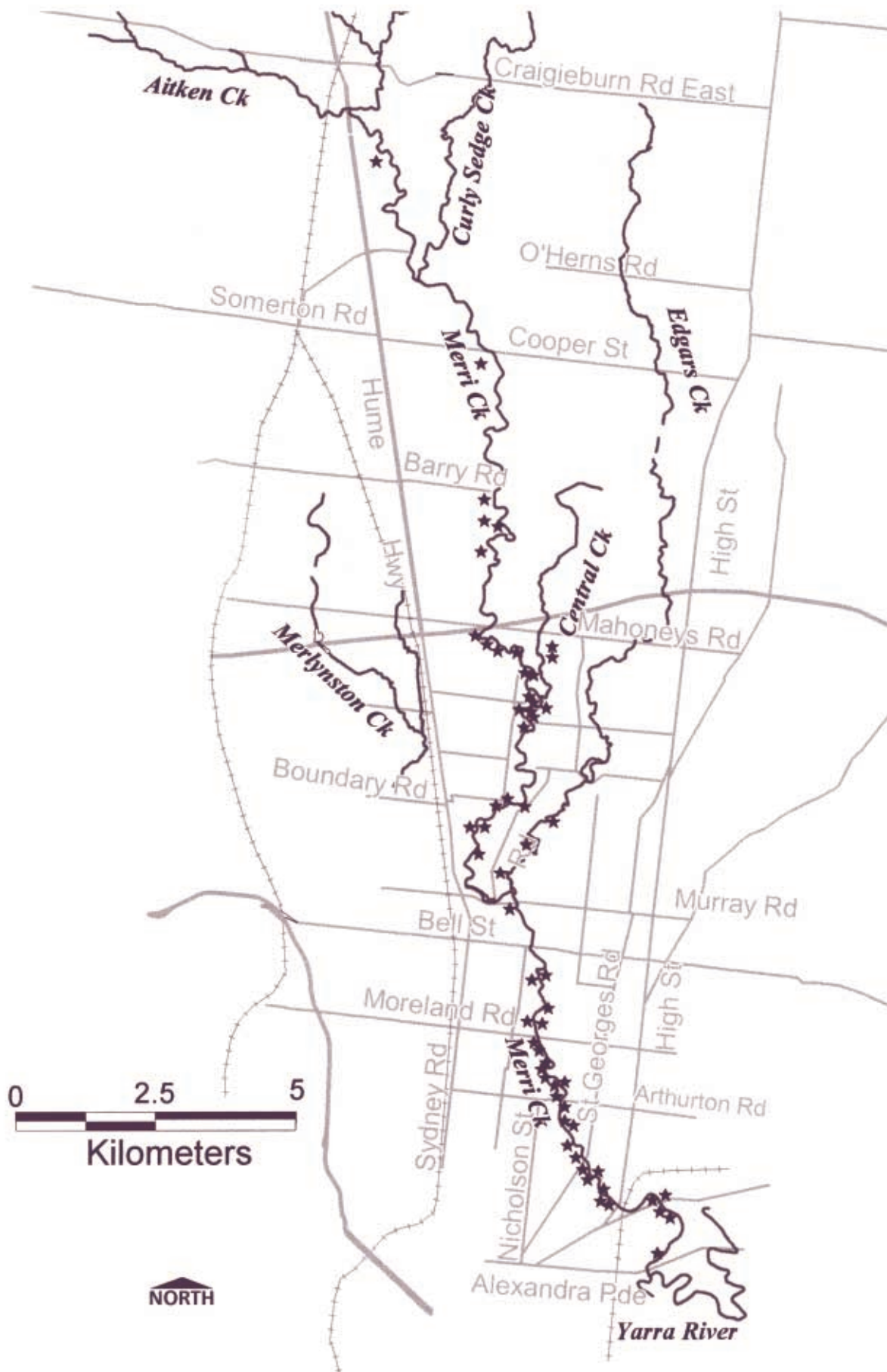
Coordinator:	Barb Miles
Technical Officer:	Brian Bainbridge
Team Leader:	Nicole Drever
Team Members:	Sal Collyer, Chrissie Cowcher, Megan Jericho, Deb Lawson, Emma Stevens, Georgia Leunig (on maternity leave)
Casual Team members:	Mellela Elton, Meredith Elton, Jess Hard, David Cull

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# Site Management

Sites managed by MCMC's Parkland Management Team (Shown by a star)





Moreland City Council



City of Whittlesea



2 Lee Street,  
East Brunswick 3057  
Phone: (03) 9380 8199  
Fax: (03) 9380 6989  
Email address:  
[admin@mcmc.org.au](mailto:admin@mcmc.org.au)  
Website:  
[www.mcmc.org.au](http://www.mcmc.org.au)  
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