



Annual Report 1999-2000

MERRI CREEK



MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE

Merri Creek Management Committee

Merri Creek Management Committee

Stakeholders working together to achieve their shared vision for the Merri Creek.

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, Friends of Merri Creek and Melbourne Water. Representatives of these member groups form a Committee of Management which guides MCMC's activities.

MCMC aims 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.

The revitalisation of the Creek has become an inspiration for other degraded urban waterways in Melbourne.

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

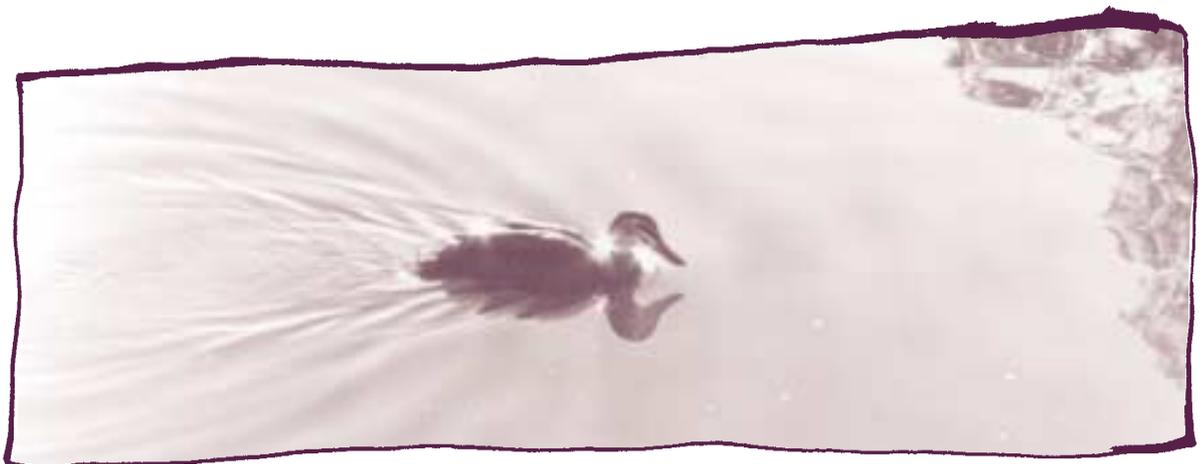
MCMC employs specialist staff who are dedicated to the restoration and promotion of the Creek.

Their work includes:

- coordinating 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.

MCMC's Vision

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.



Photographs by Brian Bainbridge, Chrissie Cowcher, Tony Faithfull, Matt Macdonald, Barb Miles, Nigel Philpott, Chris Smyth, David Tatnall.
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Mail and street address: 2 Lee St East Brunswick 3057.

Email address: admin@mcmc.comcen.com.au

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This annual report is arranged according to the specific objectives in MCMC's Statement of Purposes to provide the opportunity to compare achievements directly against objectives.

President's Report

It gives me great pleasure to present my first report as President after so many years of excellent work by David Redfearn. Firstly I would like to thank him for his dedication to the work of the MCMC and for his help and advice to me over the past year.

As a resident of, and daily bicycle commuter along, the Creek I have been able to observe first hand the changes wrought by many years of hard work by the MCMC staff, Friends of Merri Creek, other organisations and individuals. Each year I see more areas planted out with indigenous trees and grasses, trees already planted thriving in the rich black clay and more species of birds and animals returning to the revived habitats.

1999–2000 has been another successful year for the MCMC and many activities beneficial to the creek have occurred. There are a few that I would like to draw your attention to.

330 hectares of the Craigieburn Grasslands have been declared a reserve to be managed by Parks Victoria. This will help protect one of the last remaining areas of the Western Basalt Plains Grassland Ecosystem that once spread from Melbourne across the western half of Victoria. The City of Whittlesea is also pursuing the purchase of a section south of O'Herns Rd that will add to this invaluable asset. MCMC has had input to decisions as to how the reserve should be managed through the Merri Plains Grassy Ecosystem Reference Group.

Four of the councils bordering the creek have started work on their Stormwater Management Plans. Stormwater is a major source of pollution in the Merri, development and implementation of these plans will help reduce litter, sediments and road runoff and continue the process of educating the public about activities that have a detrimental effect on the Creek.

Darebin City Council, Department of Finance and the Urban Land Corporation have signed an agreement that will protect the most environmentally significant parts of the Central Creek Grasslands while allowing the ULC to develop the remainder for housing. A final decision has not been made on the boundaries, but MCMC is providing advice. Discussions on who will manage the protected section are still ongoing with MCMC being identified as a key player.

Reading over past reports I have noticed that the F2 freeway proposal is an issue that has haunted us for

many years. This year the threat continues. Earlier in the year the Advisory Committee brought down a judgement that would lead to the proposed road cutting through part of the threatened grasslands at Craigieburn and seriously damaging Curly Sedge Creek (one of the last strongholds of the endangered Curly Sedge). This led to public outrage and drew hundreds of people to a meeting at Coburg Town Hall on 5 September to discuss an alternative vision for the Merri Creek and for transport in the northern sector of Melbourne. MCMC and the Friends are still working on making the process a more collaborative one, which includes terms of reference allowing for the canvassing of a package of measures including improvements to the Hume Highway with significant improvements to public transport. I would like to thank Max Sargent, Linda Parlane, Tony Faithfull and the many others for the many hours of work that they have put in to fighting this issue.

As always the Parkland Management Team has continued its marvelous work ably assisted by the Friends. Two exciting projects that I would like to mention here are the wetlands that have been created at Hall Reserve, Clifton Hill and Merri Park, Northcote. Along with the work the team has done in improving the Creek habitat goes the efforts of the Education Team who help improve the communities' understanding of environmental issues, and the work of all the other staff in supporting the organisation.

Lastly I would like to thank the other members of the executive, David Redfearn (who since giving up the President's position has filled the long-vacant Treasurer's seat), Robyn Williams, Max Sargent and Ann McGregor as well as all the directors who give their time and knowledge to supporting the organization and the Merri Creek.

Many challenges still lie ahead of us. A century and a half of abuse and neglect is not repaired quickly but we have made great strides over the past ten years. I am confident that, with the team, structure and community support we have developed, we will continue to see our local creek environment flourish in the future.

Trevor Hausler
President



Manager's Report

Managers's Report

1999–2000 was a very demanding and exciting year. It was the biggest year ever for MCMC's Parkland Management Team, with a works budget of over \$840,000, 30% more than the previous year. Exciting projects included the development of two wetlands, the creation of butterfly habitat, and projects to restore native grasslands

The Parkland Management Team, the Team's Coordinator Barb Miles and the Conservation Manager Judy Bush are to be congratulated on completing the huge works program and maintaining a high level of attention to quality. The team had so much work it had to turn down the opportunity to bid for a number of very attractive jobs. The Team handled very effectively Barb's absence for three months on long service leave and Technical Officer Brian Bainbridge and Team Leader Nicole Drever took on extra duties to help Judy fill the gap. All are very relieved to have Barb back though.

Thanks to the other Parkland Management Team Members Phil Bush, Sal Collyer, Chrissie Cowcher, Megan Jericho, Deb Lawson, Georgia Leunig, Matt MacDonald, and Emma Stevens and to the Casuals Aaron Beutel, Michael Bourke, Tim Brown, Francesca Carta, Mellela Elton, Dion Howell, Carla Hutchison, Karen Moore, Jacqui O'Shea, Claire O'Sullivan, Bronwen Price, Josh Puglisi, Ray Radford, and Jayne Zaygar who helped enormously in our busy periods.

In addition to her role in overseeing the Parkland Management program, the Conservation Manager confronted a bewildering array of conservation issues and handled them with a reliable competence, filling in for me when I took holidays.

Implementation of the GST was a significant challenge for the last quarter of our financial year, and our Finance Officer Kath McPherson handled the challenge with flair, fitting it in with her normal duties.

Processing and recording 487 inwards correspondence and 254 outwards correspondence items, writing minutes, circulating agendas, convening Committee and Subcommittee meetings, filling information requests, filing and generally keeping the office running, our Administrative Officer Ray Radford did an heroic job in his three days per week.

The year saw major changes in the Education Program with a completely new staff. Chris Smyth took on the Education Program Manager's position with determination and revitalised the program. Education Officer Maree Pollard left to take a position in local government, to be replaced by Nigel Philpott who has done a fantastic job in involving school and community

groups in learning about the Creek through a range of activities but perhaps most notably through the WaterWatch Program where he was ably assisted by Warren Davies, Paul Evans and Rob Dabal. Performers Donna De Palma, Craig Woolridge and Maria Romnios did a number of performances at festivals and for school groups during the year. John Lane assisted with organisation of the Autumn Planting Festival for the City of Moreland.

MCMC's 10th Anniversary was officially in March 1999. However the Anniversary was celebrated during December at CERES. In October and November 1999 Angela Foley was appointed to organise ways for MCMC to mark this celebration. As a result, MCMC was a major participant in the Darebin Festival and Kingfisher Festival. There was also a major party held at CERES in December where certificates of appreciation were awarded in a formal ceremony to those whose dedicated efforts have helped MCMC in its determination to restore Merri Creek.

Angela also worked on the Automotive, Construction and Demolition Industries Project, aiming to bring together the large number of players involved in improving the performance of these industries in protecting the environment, and to create a new level of commitment to protecting the Merri Creek. She has done a marvelous job considering the challenge.

During the year MCMC adopted a new logo and corporate image for the organisation. This followed an exhaustive process of considering a range of design ideas mainly developed by our Graphic Designer Anna Benlow, who left soon after the start of the year to pursue a career in Darwin.

The year saw MCMC develop its first Enterprise Bargaining Agreement, a major step for a small organisation which required open dialogue and persistence, but which was negotiated with good will from all parties. Thanks to the Shopsteward Emma Stevens, the MEU organiser Igor Gratten, and to the other members of the working party.

A big thankyou goes to the members of the Committee of Management and its subcommittees, especially to the members of the Executive Committee who make several evenings a month of their own time available to direct the organisation year after year.

Thankyou to all who contributed to the organisation's fantastic achievements during the year.

Tony Faithfull,
Manager

Merri Creek and Environs Strategy

The Merri Creek Concept Plan, now known as the Merri Creek and Environs Strategy was published in 1999. MCMC's Merri Creek and Environs Strategy Implementation Subcommittee continued to play an important role in ensuring the Strategy does not sit on the shelf, and is implemented. High priority actions for which MCMC was identified as a coordinating agency were worked through at meetings of the Subcommittee, and first steps for implementation identified. A database system has been set up to track progress on each action.

Planning Schemes

Of the 5 member councils, Moreland was the last to have its new scheme adopted on 4 May 2000. MCMC's input to scheme amendments were minimal compared with previous years input to review of planning schemes. Amendments to which MCMC had input included one to provide for a municipal pound north of Cooper Street approximately 170m east of the Merri Creek, and Amendment C12 to provide for Whittlesea's proposed Epping North Growth Area. This development is of some concern given the unresolved issues of its servicing – providing for adequate sewerage is challenging, and the traffic it would generate is one of the justifications given for building the F2 freeway.

The Merri Creek Environmental Significance Overlay was successfully implemented in the 5 Councils' Planning Schemes, and the planning guidelines adopted by MCMC in August 1999 have provided a useful guide for Council and developers as to what is appropriate along the Creek. It is envisaged that the Guidelines will be reviewed in early 2000 to incorporate what we have learned over the last year.

Merri Creek State Park

Friends of Merri Creek and the Victorian National Parks Association together reviewed earlier park proposals north of the Ring Road, including the Merri Creek Grassland Park, and considered recent flora and fauna survey work. They have proposed the creation of a park – the Merri State Park, which would include the major grassland and redgum woodland areas and the existing or proposed links along the waterways in the Merri Creek catchment. The proposal was adopted by MCMC and promoted through the F2 freeway hearing process. Not all of the proposed park areas need to be purchased, however sympathetic management by private landowners would be necessary.

To develop and monitor a Merri Creek Concept Plan, and to monitor planning controls and activities. To continue to develop the Merri Creek parklands as a linear park with an emphasis on consolidation and expansion of public open space, flora and fauna reserves and public ownership of natural assets and limiting inappropriate intrusions into, and uses of, the Merri Creek parklands.

Central Creek Grassland

Urban Land Corporation is proposing a residential development on approximately 40% of the Central Creek Grassland Reservoir, predominantly on the weedy north east sector of the grassland area. MCMC liaised with the Urban Land Corporation in their design of the subdivision. Our aim is to have a development that is very sympathetic to the adjacent grassland values, and an education process which makes clear the value of the grasslands to new residents. ULC will arrange for chainmesh fencing during construction, to be replaced when construction is complete with cable fencing, will prepare and distribute to new residents a grassland education kit and is keen that the grassland reserve area is maintained in a healthy state with management input from MCMC.

In the meantime, MCMC continued to work with land owners and managers to ensure site works within the grasslands were not destructive of grassland values. For example, MCMC worked with Darebin City Council, Melbourne Water and VicRoads to coordinate slashing in the area for fire control purposes only, and to ensure that only the minimal boundary areas rather than the entire grassland were slashed for fire control.

A number of properties abutting the grasslands on the north east corner have been affected by flooding from an adjacent spoon drain running through the grasslands. MCMC and NRE organised a meeting with VicRoads, Darebin and Whittlesea City Councils, Melbourne Water and several local residents to develop a solution to the problem that would prevent houses being flooded and protect grassland and habitat values. After various different solutions were proposed, some of which would have had significant impacts on the grasslands, ULC carried out flood protection works, clearing a small section of the drain and building a small levy bank next to houses. MCMC liaised closely with ULC and their contractors to ensure minimal impacts on the adjacent grassland.

Catchment Planning

Catchment Planning

To maintain an interest and comment when requested on land use planning issues in the catchment of the Merri Creek.

Hume Freeway

After the Advisory Committee hearings in May 1999, there was a long lull while we waited for their recommendations to be released. We eventually learnt that the Department of Infrastructure had concluded that option five recommended by the Advisory Committee was too expensive, and that the Department had formed an interdepartmental working group that developed three more route options for the Merri Creek Valley. The Advisory Committee's report and the DOI working party report were released in July 2000 for comment by September, with another Advisory Committee hearing to follow. Terms of reference for the Advisory Committee were provided only weeks before the close of submissions on 15 September. The terms of reference set for the Committee made it clear that again it would not properly evaluate an alternative to a freeway, and the hearings, now complete, have confirmed this. This repeated failure to address our concerns for a solution that involves integrated transport options means that our ongoing attention to this issue is needed.



Common Froglet

Ring Road

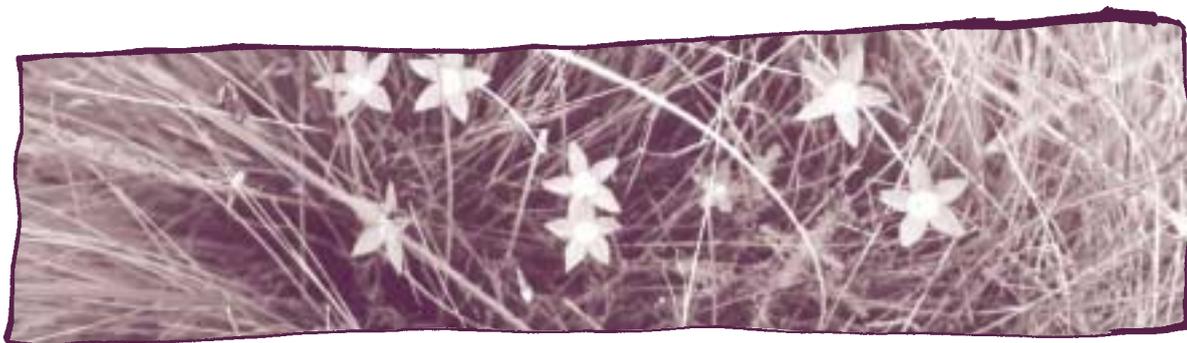
The Western Ring Road was opened in August 1999. MCMC was represented on the Working Party that met throughout construction of the road. Environmental standards throughout the construction process were mostly adequate, with only a small number of relatively minor pollution incidents identified. However since the opening of the road, very little work has been carried out on maintaining landscaping works, and in some areas landscaping that MCMC understood would be implemented has never been completed. Additionally, a number of the pollution and silt management devices including sediment control fencing beside the creek and gabbion baskets in the creek that were installed during the construction phase have still not been removed. MCMC has raised these concerns with Melbourne Water, who are pursuing the issues.

Powerline clearance

MCMC continued to meet with powerline and transmission line management companies to monitor tree pruning and vegetation clearance needs under lines. There are a number of different lines both crossing the creek and travelling along the creek. These lines have a direct visual impact and also affect what can be planted in the vicinity. In some cases original vegetation, including old trees that predate the lines, are affected by vegetation clearance requirements. MCMC has been working with the powerline management companies to minimise the damage to vegetation, and where necessary replant with more appropriate species.

Stormwater management plans

Four catchment councils undertook the preparation of Stormwater Management Plans during the year, with Darebin City Council being the only one completed. MCMC had significant input to all four plans. The process of development of the plans recommended by Melbourne Water is in its infancy. It currently requires no community consultation beyond optional involvement in a series of three workshops to analyse the risks and brainstorm strategies. No stage is included for circulation of a draft report, although Councils have thankfully seen the appropriateness of doing so. Drafts prepared by a number of the consultants have required substantial re-working. One of the main problems is the lack of performance indicators that are specific and measurable. MCMC has emphasised this need, as well as the need for action by Councils to educate their communities about the ways they pollute waterways.



Yellowish Bluebell
at Craigieburn
Grasslands

Automotive, Construction and Demolition Project

The Automotive, Construction and Demolition Project (ACDIP) continued to develop in 1999 with stakeholder discussions, establishment of an ACDIP Steering Committee and employment of Angela Foley as Education Officer beginning January 2000. ACDIP's goals are:

- To use targeted educational initiatives to improve environmental awareness and work practices in the automotive and construction/demolition industries, to improve the environmental quality of the Merri Creek catchment.
- To develop appropriate enforcement and regulation protocols for adoption by councils for catchment-wide consistency.

A scoping report was produced in March 2000 that outlined goals and recommendations for the next six months including:

- Undertake catchment consistent policy research towards the development of a single Merri Catchment policy,
- Liaise and develop relevant networks for the Merri Creek catchment and its member councils,
- Explore educational opportunities especially with Kangan Batman TAFE
- Draft an ACIDI Local Government Response to Industry manual.
- Explore funding opportunities
- Investigate relevant legislation and opportunities to support lobbyists seeking improved legislation.

All of these recommendations are on track.

Cooper St duplication and new bridge
VicRoads' plans to duplicate Cooper Street Campbellfield and Epping continue, with a planning scheme amendment advertised and hearings to be held in November 2000. The duplication plan will require an additional bridge across Merri Creek north of the existing Cooper Street bridge. MCMC has met with VicRoads to seek a bridge design that will as much as possible provide for faunal movement.

Planning applications

During the year MCMC made 34 comments on planning applications. One particular application at 48 Harrison Street which the Committee considered to be excessively bulky next to the Creek Parklands was pursued through VCAT, and the bulk reduced marginally as a result. An important message was sent to developers however that the attractions of the Creek have been hard won and will not be given away for developers to reap the profits at the cost of other parkland users without a fight.

Comments on strategies

During the year MCMC made 22 comments on strategic documents including stormwater management plans, a heritage study, a fire prevention plan, a local conservation strategy, electric line clearance regulations, business site improvement plans, a dogs code, issues papers, a trails strategy, a greenhouse action plan, an integrated transport plan, a rural review and environmental strategy and policy.

Dogs on and off lead

Moreland's Dog Off Lead Working Party was convened to resolve the growing controversy over the widespread use of parkland for off-lead exercising of dogs. MCMC participated in the working party and made submissions on the issue. The position MCMC put was that dogs should not be allowed at all in the water of the Creek for their own safety and the safety of wildlife, dogs should not be allowed off-lead on the Creek banks or within 10 metres of the Merri Path, or in the municipality generally, with the exception of a series of well-fenced reserves specifically identified as off-lead. It was a surprise how reluctant some proponents of dogs off-lead were to recognise and respect the rights of other users and potential users of the parkland. The working party developed a draft code of conduct and a map of off-lead areas that are to be released for public comment.

To act as a major body for policy development and to ensure the environmentally sensitive maintenance and development of the Merri Creek Parklands, taking full and proper account of recreational and conservation values. To establish and regenerate indigenous vegetation and to restore the landscape of the Merri Creek and adjoining lands. To employ and direct a dedicated works crew.

Remnant Vegetation Management

Land adjoining Merri Creek originally supported about 14 different plant community types. Riparian shrubland, escarpment shrubland, Western Basalt Plains Grasslands and grassy woodlands were some of the dominant types. Miraculously these plant communities, along with some of the valley landscapes and escarpments have survived as small pockets of remnant vegetation. The pockets have provided refuges for fauna now moving into adjacent revegetated areas. Previously unrecorded species are still being discovered at some sites.

MCMC's Parkland Management Team undertook remnant vegetation management at around 20 remnant vegetation sites in the Merri Creek catchment, and five in the Moonee Ponds Creek catchment under contract. Works included weed control, rare plant reintroduction and 11 vegetation management burns. Ecological burning in grasslands aids weed control, germination of wildflowers, and rejuvenation of perennial grasses.

Parkland Management Staff Training

MCMC organised delivery of two specialised training courses for MCMC parkland staff and other council bushland teams. Parkland Management staff completed the accredited Weed Identification and Control Herbicide Licence Course. Bushland staff from Cities of Hume and Melton also attended the course. Parkland staff successfully completed nationally accredited training in Wildfire Behaviour, Personal Protection and Wildfire Suppression. Staff from Cities of Darebin and Brimbank also attended the course.

A number of staff attended training days organised by Greening Australia Victoria, including the Grassland Ecology Course and Wetland Ecology Course.

Two Parkland staff attended a Train Track Safety Awareness Course to enable them to carry out work along a railway embankment.

Planting and revegetation

The Parkland Management Team planted 56,100 indigenous plants this year. This is the highest number planted in a year since the formation of MCMC. Of these 2% were over-storey (trees), 4% mid-storey (shrubs), 89% ground storey (grasses and wildflowers) and 5% semi-aquatics. They were planted at 40 sites on Merri Creek and five on Moonee Ponds Creek.

Plants were purchased from indigenous nurseries including Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Cooperative, Keelbundoora Nursery and Western Plains Nursery. Only plants grown from seed or cutting material collected from Merri Creek or the nearest appropriate source is used.

Kangaroo Grass seed was collected from Cooper St Native Grassland Campbellfield and spread to fill bare ground where weeds have been removed at native grassland sites.

Monitoring significant flora

A number of populations of significant species were discovered this year at various sites along Merri Creek.

- Yam Daisy (*Microseris* 'Species 1') was found at Cooper Street grassland. This species is considered to be rare in Victoria.
- Large-flowered Crane's-bill (*Geranium* 'Species 1'), was found growing at a site MCMC has been restoring in Glenroy. The species was last collected in 1903 from Broadmeadows and had been considered extinct.
- New records for Central Creek Grasslands included Small Vanilla Lily (*Arthropodium minus*), Nodding Chocolate Lily (*A. fimbriatum*, a recently recognised species) and Hairy Panic (*Panicum effusum*) as well as a greatly increased number of patches of Beautiful Flax Lily (*Dianella amoena*). Small Vanilla Lily was found at Bartrop Street escarpment Reservoir and at B.T. Connor Reserve escarpment Reservoir. A population of Common Maidenhair (*Adiantum athiopicum*) was found at Jukes Road Grassland. A population of locally significant Spear-grass (*Austrostipa oligostachya*) was found on vacant land in the Reservoir area and seed was collected for propagation to secure areas.
- New populations of Tall Sedge (*Carex appressa*) were found at Galada Tamboore Campbellfield and at Jukes Road Fawkner. This is a useful species for revegetation projects.
- A large, rapidly growing fern at Moomba Park escarpment Fawkner was recently identified as Downy Ground Fern (*Hypolepis glandulifera*). It is more typical of rainforest to the east of Melbourne but its spores are tiny and could have drifted on wind currents to lodge in the sheltered crevice.

Fauna monitoring

MCMC has been keeping fauna records for five years. The records show the fauna returning to and living around Merri Creek. MCMC believes that more than 29 species of birds have returned to or expanded their range in Merri Creek over the past 20 years, making use of maturing planted trees and restored and replanted native grass swards. Species include Great Egret, Pacific Heron, Buff-banded Rail, Red-rumped Parrot, Eastern Rosella, Musk Lorikeet, Horsefield Bronze-Cuckoo, Barn Owl, Sacred Kingfisher, Rufous Songlark, Flame Robin, Golden Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Grey Fantail, Spotted Pardalote, Grey Butcherbird, Tawny Frogmouth, Brown Thornbill, Eastern Spinebill and Golden-headed Cisticola. At least nine new species have been recorded since the last official fauna survey carried out in 1992, including Common Bronze-wing Pigeon, Bellbird, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, Rainbow Lorikeet, Pallid Cuckoo, Laughing Kookaburra and Azure Kingfisher.

Some of the interesting fauna seen along the creek over the last year include:

- Japanese Snipe flushed from Cooper Street Grasslands in January. These birds are listed under International Conventions for conservation of migratory birds.
- Crested Shrike-tits in maturing revegetation in Brunswick East and Coburg/Preston. This species was not recorded in the 1992 Fauna study of Merri Creek.
- Sacred Kingfishers at several locations along the Creek, one in a Canary Island Palm, providing a nesting site in the absence of mature gum-tree hollows.
- Southern Grass Skinks in remnant grasses on Moonee Ponds Creek in Pascoe Vale in May.
- Little Whip snakes at Central Creek Grassland, Jukes Rd Grassland and Cooper Street Grasslands in June.
- An Eastern Grey Kangaroo flushed from near Jukes Rd Grassland in June. This is probably the same animal seen several times at Central Creek Grasslands since mid 1999.
- Eastern Spinebills at several sites in Coburg and Brunswick, always in close association with planted Rock Correas. The maturation of these plantings has contributed to the return of this species to urban parts of the creek.
- A Little Eagle flying over Merri Park Wetland Northcote.
- A pair of Tawny Frogmouths nesting beside the Creek in Coburg in August. It is probably the same pair that raised young in this tree last year. A late night observation confirmed that this species is hunting in maturing revegetation sites.



Hall Reserve
Community Planting Day

- Long-necked Tortoise hatchlings at Coburg Lake. Suitable nesting sites can be used for decades.
- Spotted Marsh Frog heard in Merri Park wetland in September, only three months after planting was completed.
- A Rufous Songlark feeding and singing territorially in revegetation in East Brunswick, this species is typically a bird of rural and woodland environments.
- Blue-winged parrots, typically birds of rural paddocks, at Moomba Park Fawkner.

Stipoid weeds

The American stipoid (Spear-grass-like) grasses are some of Australia's worst and most widespread weeds, including Serrated Tussock and Chilean Needle Grass. In Merri Creek Catchment there are two new stipoid weeds, Silver Needle Grass (**N. charruana*) and Broad-kernal Espartillo (**Acantherum caudatum*), still in relatively low numbers in the early stages of their invasion of the region. The most effective control of such weeds is prevention of their establishment and spread.

MCMC was contracted by Department of Natural Resources and Environment's Emerging Weed Program to control plants germinating after last year's initial control of Silver Needle Grass in Epping. Germination flushes from soil stored seed-bank are to be expected for up to 20 years.

Broad-kernal Espartillo is a serious weed in NSW and central Victoria. It is currently present in the Merri Creek catchment as a relatively small infestation in Coburg North/Reservoir, eradication requiring a coordinated approach as the infestation straddles the boundary between Moreland and Darebin. MCMC is drafting a strategy for control and on-going surveillance. Tania Bonicci, an RMIT Environmental Science honours student, is researching the response of this species to herbicides and visited the Merri Creek infestations.

Weed monitoring and control

MCMC continued to monitor populations of new and emerging weeds as well as control priority weeds along the creek. Willow (**Salix spp*), Chilean Needle Grass (**Nassella neesiana*), Serrated Tussock (**N. trichotoma*), Blackberry (**Rubus sp. aff. armeniacus*) and Gorse (**Ulex europeaus*) are some of the 20 weeds listed as Weeds of National Significance, and are present in large numbers within Merri Creek. Control is a major challenge, requiring cooperative efforts of MCMC, local councils, Melbourne Water and private land owners.

- Various treatments for control of the new weed Finger-leaf Oxalis (**Oxalis glabra*) at Rushwood Drive Craigieburn were trialed. Results indicated some treatments were significantly more effective than others. A control strategy for the weed was prepared and distributed to NRE and Hume City Council. Another species of Oxalis (**O. obtusa*) was confirmed as being extensively naturalised in the Craigieburn and Reservoir area. The Herbarium of Victoria has had very little indication of the extent of this weed.
- Serrated Tussock infested areas in Galada Tamboore were mapped and treated in early spring. The information will be used to monitor effectiveness of the treatments.
- An area infested with Squirting Cucumber (**Echallium elaterium*) in North Coburg was mapped and will be re-surveyed in 2001 to check effectiveness of intensive control measures.
- New infestations of Harlequin Flower (**Sparaxis bulbifera*) at Cooper Street Grassland Campbellfield were identified and mapped. The maps will be used to check effectiveness of control measures and allow us to find the infestations again in the grassland.



Vic 2000–2001 grants

Three projects were submitted to Parks Victoria Agency Grants Program for funding in 2000–1.

Restoring Merri Creek's Native Grasslands – celebrating social and ecological diversity. \$91,910 sought to continue restoration of native grasslands at four sites in Campbellfield, Fawkner and Reservoir by re-establishing rare species and wildflower nurseries in areas where weeds have been eradicated, and fostering communities' understanding and interest in their local native grasslands.

The aquatic environment – restoring Merri Creek's wetland and riparian habitats. \$98,978 sought to continue restoration of wetland and riparian habitat within Merri Creek Parklands at four sites in Campbellfield, Coburg North, Northcote and Clifton Hill by re-establishing aquatic flora. Community participation and involvement will strengthen custodianship of the creek.

Lava, lichens and lizards – Merri Creek's escarpments \$71,951 sought to continue restoration of the basalt escarpments of Merri Creek's wildlife corridor that provide unique habitat as well as linking creeksides and grasslands plains. Works will focus on four sites in Campbellfield, Fawkner, Reservoir and North Fitzroy. The project will expand opportunities for community involvement and participation.

The success of these applications had not yet been notified at the time of writing this report.

Parks Victoria 1999–2000 grants

MCMC received funding for three projects from Parks Victoria Agency Grants program:

- **“Re-establishing Rare Species – Restoring Western Basalt Plains Grassland of the Merri Catchment.”**

Re-establishment of rare wildflower species in areas where selected priority weeds have been eradicated, as part of the restoration of the Western Basalt Plains Grasslands of the Merri Catchment. Works totalling \$74,100 were funded at three grassland sites: Cooper Street Grassland Campbellfield, Jukes Road Grassland Fawkner and Central Creek Grassland Reservoir.

Several species of regional and state significance were planted at the grassland sites. Species included Basalt Daisy (*Brachyscome basaltica*), Narrow-leaf Plantain (*Plantago gaudichaudii*), Western Golden Tip (*Goodia medicaginea*), Water Starwort (*Callitriche brachycarpa*), Australian Buttercup (*Ranunculus lappaceus*), Reed Bent-grass (*Deyeuxia quadriseta*), Pale Everlasting (*Helichrysum rutidolepis*) and Plump Spear-grass (*Austrostipa aristoglumis*). A total of 6,300 indigenous grasses and wildflowers were planted as part of the project.

Following ecological burns, there were new sightings of the following rare or significant species: Five Minute Grass (*Tripogon loliiformis*) at Cooper Street Grassland; Small Vanilla Lily (*Arthropodium minus*), Early Nancy (*Wurmbea dioica*) and Tussock Grass (*Poa clelandii*) at Central Creek Grassland; and Golden Weather-glass (*Hypoxis hygrometrica* var *hygrometrica*) at Jukes Rd Grassland.

This project is an important element in the conservation, restoration and promotion of these unique grassland communities. Housing surrounds Central Creek and Jukes Rd Grasslands; residents observe the changes occurring within their grasslands and develop an appreciation of their importance. Fences and interpretative signs funded from previous Parks Victoria Grants improved protection of the grasslands from accidental damage and are indicating that these areas are important and are being actively managed and restored.

- **“Sun and Shade; Returning Butterflies and Ferns to the Merri.”** Creation of butterfly-friendly habitats and increased populations of ferns along Merri Creek to enhance the conservation of significant species within the habitat linkages of the northern tributaries of the Yarra. Works totalling \$62,500 were funded at five sites: Galada Tamboore Campbellfield, Moomba Park Fawkner and Reservoir, Parker Reserve Coburg North

and Tate Reserve Coburg. A total of 9,570 indigenous grasses, wildflowers and ferns were planted as part of this project. The works expanded and increased the habitat values of the Merri Creek wildlife corridor.

Populations of remnant ferns and shade loving species were discovered and protected at Galada Tamboore Campbellfield, Moomba Park Fawkner and Parker Reserve Coburg North.

The use of butterflies as “ambassadors” for the project caught the attention and interest of many community members. Many people’s view of native grasses was changed and expanded when the grasses were described as “butterfly food”. This expanded people’s understanding of the interlocking ecology of natural systems and wildlife corridors.

- **“Restoring wetland communities to the Merri Creek.”**

Recreation of two wetland habitats adjacent to Merri Creek to provide refuges for significant flora and fauna, and to facilitate community participation and education in wetland habitats, their ecology and management. Works totalling \$116,600 were funded at two sites: Merri Park Northcote and Hall Reserve Clifton Hill.

Design and construction of the wetlands were a cooperative effort. Darebin and Yarra City Councils provided local stormwater drainage plans. Department of Natural Resources and Environment and Department of Health provided information on ways to minimise mosquito populations. Melbourne Water provided detailed design and construction plans for both wetlands. Darebin and Yarra City Councils and Melbourne Water provided additional funds for earthworks for wetland construction.

Both wetland systems divert stormwater through the wetland ponds before the water enters the Creek. The wetland systems allow partial treatment of the stormwater and provide habitat to a range of plants and animals not living in the running water of the creek system.

A total of 10,000 aquatic and semi-aquatic species, grasses and wildflowers were planted in and around both wetland systems, including propagation and planting of restricted species such as Sedge (*Carex bichenoviana*) and Firewheel Groundsel (*Senecio linearifolius*).

The project was an important contribution to the ongoing restoration of Merri Creek’s environment by creating wetland habitats that are now rare throughout Merri Creek and across Australia. The project was also extremely successful in providing a focus for community involvement and energy.

Resource Management

Resource Management

To seek efficient and effective maintenance and development of the Merri Creek and adjoining lands in optimizing the use and value of scarce resources, and to seek additional funding from external sources for these purposes.

Efficiency

During the year MCMC developed and adopted its first Enterprise Bargaining Agreement. The document was developed by a working party of staff and Executive members after an initial workshop of staff identified a range of areas where improvements could be made. It builds on the Local Government Interim Award and refines some areas of the award. Adoption of the EBA is in recognition of existing high levels of staff and organisational efficiency, and of commitment to future improvements. Part of the EBA required the development of five key performance indicators. They are:

- Improve clarity for staff in terms of entitlements, policies, etc. Possible actions include updating the Staff Handbook
- Improve levels of workplace safety.
- Improve levels of staff performance. Possible actions include developing a scoring of completed actions from staffs' annual staff reviews, preparing action plans for new staff, and holding a staff review and planning day.
- Improve satisfaction of people participating in events, of member groups, of the broader public and of funding agencies. Possible actions include developing an evaluation survey to seek feedback from clients and community members following community events or completion of contracts and projects.
- Reduce electricity and gas use. Possible actions include investigating installation of solar panels at the office.

These Key Performance Indicators were developed during the year and will be reported on in future annual reports.

There are few accepted standards for measuring efficiency in the revegetation sector. MCMC's competitiveness in winning contracts is however a measure of MCMC's efficiency. Charge-out rates are calculated quarterly and applied to parkland management contract and grant-based works. Hourly charges cover the costs of MCMC equipment, herbicides, payroll and accounting costs, rent, services, salary and oncosts, and a proportion of staff time spent in the office and depot. Materials used on-site and equipment hired for specific jobs are charged separately. The fact that the

Parkland Management Team's contract income has continued to grow demonstrates that the charge-out rates are competitive for the quality of services provided. A number of invitations to tender have been turned down during the year because the amount of work involved exceeded our capacity to undertake it. This unfortunately included exciting projects such as work at the Craigieburn Grasslands for Parks Victoria.

Effectiveness

The real-estate agents maxim that there are three things which are important in buying a house – location, location and location, suggests that if people are prepared to pay more for living near the Merri Creek than they were 11 years ago, then MCMC has been effective in improving the recreational values of the Creek. It is common to see proximity to Merri Creek used as a selling point in the economically worded real-estate ads in the local papers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that people are prepared to pay tens of thousands of dollars extra to live close to the Creek (at least in Brunswick and Northcote). A statistically robust study of the impact of proximity to Merri Creek on property prices awaits future resourcing.

Usage of the Merri Creek Parklands is also a measure of its recreational attractiveness, and hence MCMC's effectiveness. Unfortunately no systematic usage counts have been undertaken to date. Casual observation however suggests that the path is very popular. Conflict between user groups now requires careful management. Dog walkers value the parkland along the Creek so much they are prepared to campaign vehemently for the "right" to walk their dogs there off-lead, in opposition to cyclist groups and parents with small children, and indeed to some other dog owners who also want to use the Merri Creek Parklands.



Igor Gratten (MEU),
Emma Stevens
(Shopsteward) and Tony
Faithfull (Manager) at
the 10th anniversary
celebrations



Radar Beetle at Jukes Road Grasslands

Another measure of MCMC's success is whether the habitat being re-created is actually attracting back native wildlife. Birds are a good indicator because of their visibility and because they have been long studied. An exact repeat of the 1993 fauna study would give an objective measure of how many birds have returned to the Merri since then. This remains to be done, however as discussed above it is clear that there are at least 29 bird species which have returned to the Merri Creek or expanded their range since MCMC started.

A repeat of the 1991 water quality study would provide an objective measure of the changes in water quality since then. Changes in macro-invertebrate and benthic (bottom dwelling) diatom diversity are thought to be less subject to fluctuation due to weather or seasonal factors than measuring the water quality directly. MCMC's Waterwatch program is building up a database of macro-invertebrate survey results but at this stage we do not have sufficient data.

The external review of MCMC planned for 2000 – 2001 may involve undertaking follow-up studies such as those above to give an objective measure of MCMC's effectiveness.

Fund seeking

The Parkland Management team's budget of more than \$840,000 represented its biggest budget in its 10 year history and by far its most challenging and rewarding. MCMC was successful with all three applications to Parks Victoria Grant Program, a total of \$253,200 additional funding for the restoration of Merri Creek. Their success demonstrates both the quality of their applications and the quality of their work.

Parkland Management team funding sources were:

- Local councils grant funding 21%
- Parks Victoria grants 25%
- Melbourne water grants 1%
- other grants 1%
- Contracts 52%

Parkland Management contract clients included Moreland, Darebin and Yarra City Councils, Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water and Friends of Merri Creek.

Other applications for funding made included: Centenary of Federation, Environment Australia, Local History Grants Program, and the Mullum Trust.

Sponsors

Again this year Ford Broadmeadows kindly



sponsored a station wagon for transporting the Education Team to schools and community groups all over the Merri Creek catchment and sometimes the wider region. Ford's recognition of the importance of MCMC's program makes it easier to take the program to more schools and community groups than we otherwise would be able to afford. We hope that Ford will continue to support MCMC's program in future.

New tax system

MCMC elected to handle its GST on a cash basis monthly. Our PAYG tax would be payable monthly anyway, and until it was clear what the impact of the GST would be on our operations it seemed safer to work on a monthly basis. MCMC has used MYOB software for several years now, and we had only minor hiccups in the preparation of our first three business activity statements. Compliance has however required considerable extra expenditure on accounting advice. A routine process for preparation of the statements is almost bedded down.

Regional Approach

Regional Approach

To promote and conduct programs and activities to achieve integrated catchment and parkland management, community education, resource sharing and information exchange on a regional basis involving key stakeholders – municipal councils, State Government agencies, community groups and landholders. To assist other organisations to achieve sustainable environmental development of the Merri Creek and adjacent catchments, and the wider metropolitan area.

Integrated catchment management

All residents, industries, agencies and visitors to the catchment have a role in the catchment and have potential to impact on the creek. When all understand the connection between stormwater and the Creek and their impacts on stormwater, respect the Merri Creek and change their behaviour to minimise their impacts, the Creek will be well protected. MCMC's WaterWatch program, Autumn Planting Festival, Learning about your Local Waterways Program, Creek Talk Program, and the Automotive, Construction and Demolition Industries Project all contribute in this way to increasing awareness and understanding of integrated catchment management. These programs and projects are described elsewhere in this report.

Member Councils' preparation of stormwater management plans will strengthen their commitment to integrated catchment management, and MCMC congratulates the four councils who have so far undertaken preparation of plans.

Resource sharing

This resource sharing objective was largely fulfilled by MCMC's contracting activities, particularly for our member groups. The types of contracts involved maintenance of revegetated sites, restoration of remnant vegetation sites, revegetation, survey and advice on management of native vegetation, assistance with preparation of maps and input to interpretive signage programs.

MCMC again acted as Melbourne WaterWatch coordinator for both Merri and Moonee Ponds Creeks, with funding from Councils and the National Heritage Trust via Melbourne Water.

MCMC staff assisted member groups with activities outside the Merri Creek Catchment, such as the City Improvement Program run by the City of Hume.

Information exchange

MCMC facilitates or participates in a range of groups for which a major role is information exchange. In 1999–2000 they included MCMC's subcommittees: the Vegetation Restoration Subcommittee, the Merri Creek and Environs Strategy Implementation Subcommittee, and the Planning and Issues Subcommittee. They also included the Merri Plains Grassy Ecosystem Reference Group, the Grassland Communications Network, the Whittlesea Local Conservation Strategy Review, the CERES Environment Park Advisory Committee, the Galada Tamboore Working Party, Moreland Dog Off-lead Working Party, Moreland's Greening Moreland Forum, Darebin's Integrated Transport Strategy Reference Group, Merri Parade Bridge working party, Edwardes Lake Park Advisory Committee, Yarra Valley Water's Northern Sewage Strategy Consultative Committee, EcoRecycle Victoria's Litter Education Advisory Committee, and the Waste-wise Schools Advisory Committee. MCMC staff also met regularly with Melbourne Water Yarra Region Operations staff.

MCMC has provided information on wetland construction to a number of groups from as far afield as Albury, Wangaratta and Merricks – Coolart catchment.

Whittlesea Local Conservation Strategy Review

MCMC participated in the "Waterways" working party meetings, one of the four working parties that reviewed the Local Conservation Strategy. The revised Strategy has now been launched.

CERES Environment Park Advisory Committee

MCMC continued to be represented on the CERES Environment Park Advisory Committee. Over the year significant improvements were implemented along the CERES boundary next to Merri Creek. Two sections of the steep bank were earthworked and revegetated with indigenous plants. The earthworks provided stable and manageable banks above the Merri path and established safe clearance under the 220kV transmission lines. Most fill generated was relocated to the north west part of CERES to create a level site for a new site centre and office. There is now only one section of the bank remaining to be earthworked and revegetated.

MCMC provided CERES with advice on planting and weed control for the project, and discussed ideas for future MCMC / CERES joint projects on parklands around the Merri Creek frontage.

Galada Tamboore Working Party

Galada Tamboore is an area now recognised to be of state significance, spanning the Creek between Thomastown and Campbellfield. The area boasts an escarpment of equal geological significance to Organ Pipes National Park, rare and threatened grassland and wildflower species, native birds, reptiles and mammals (including Kangaroos and Swamp Wallabies both sighted in the area) and Aboriginal archaeological values. The wide valley is a stunning part of the Merri Creek landscape and environment.

The Galada Tamboore Working Party, with active membership from Melbourne Water, City of Hume, Friends of Merri Creek and Merri Creek Management Committee continues to meet regularly. The group oversees works at this wonderful site, prioritises management actions and shares information about techniques, recent discoveries at the site, and successes and failures. Highlights of the year include significant progress in preventing illegal vehicle access, seed collection and propagation of a number of rare species, weed mapping, control of priority weeds, and commencement of the development of a fire management plan for the area.

Merri Plains Grassy Ecosystem Reference Group

The group met every 2–3 months during the year and provided an important forum for information exchange and discussion of the management of Merri Creek's native grasslands. Meetings were attended by staff from local councils, Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Parks Victoria, Merri Creek Management Committee, environment groups including Trust for Nature, and tertiary institutions including the Albion Resource Centre for Grasslands based at Victoria University of Technology. There has been some interest in using the group as a model for establishment of other regional grassland groups in western Melbourne.

Grassland Communications Network

The Grasslands Communication Network was formed in 1999 and continues to meet regularly. Since the first meetings the membership of the group has been broadened to include DNRE, Parks Victoria, Greening Australia Victoria, MCMC, research institutions, zoos and conservation groups. The group provides a wonderful forum for swapping ideas about education and interpretation of native grasslands, for sharing resources and for joint projects such as organising walks and talks in grasslands and producing the Grasslands Community Activities Calendar.



Pollution Spills

Nine pollution spills were reported to MCMC during the year from Fawkner (3), Brunswick (2), North Coburg, Northcote, Thornbury and Whittlesea. Several reports were from MCMC staff on noticing strong smells or visual indications of pollution in the creek. MCMC records any pollution report and promptly directs the complaint to the EPA Pollution Watch hotline on 9695 2777.

Kane Travis (Melbourne Water), Brian Bainbridge (MCMC) and Jo Ferguson (Hume City Council) at Galada Tamboore – Photo Melbourne Water

Vegetation Restoration Subcommittee

The Vegetation Restoration Subcommittee, with membership from environment planners, bushland team coordinators and technical officers from MCMC member agencies, continued to meet regularly. An informal review of the subcommittee was carried out, focussing on the roles of the subcommittee that were perceived to be important and of ongoing relevance. The frequency and timing of meetings was also reviewed. Important roles of the subcommittee were identified:

- discussion and implementation of actions from the Merri Creek and Environs Strategy referred to the Subcommittee
- pooling resources, ideas and funding sources
- discussing technical issues including new and emerging weeds, techniques, endangered species management
- presentations and workshops on specific topics (for example rabbit control workshop, grassland tour and stipoid grass identification).

The subcommittee now meets three times per year.

Community Participation

Community Participation

To enhance management of the Merri Creek parklands by continued direct community participation and to promote greater community awareness of, interest in, and use of, the Merri Creek parklands as a valuable and scarce community resource. Consistent with the aims of the Association, to support the Friends of Merri Creek.

Student work/training

MCMC's Parkland Management Team provided secondary and tertiary students with revegetation work experience to fulfil course requirements. Students worked alongside staff for a total of 60 days, one student travelling from South Australia to complete a five-day placement.

MCMC Parkland Management Team also provided opportunities for on-ground training for classes as part of lecture courses or training modules. Students from various natural resource management courses learnt about grassland ecology, species identification, wetland design and species selection while assisting parkland staff with planting and weed control tasks at a number of sites. Many students continue to be involved in ongoing monitoring activities and preparing management plans. MCMC hosted a Green Corps team who worked with MCMC Parkland staff planting at the Parks Victoria funded wetlands at Merri Park Northcote and Hall Reserve Clifton Hill.

Community Information

MCMC provided information displays, leaflets and posters, to at least seven festivals, forums and community events.

A noticeboard has been installed on the MCMC's front fence at 2 Lee Street East Brunswick and is updated monthly to inform passers-by about current events on Merri Creek.

MCMC produced the first two editions of our quarterly newsletter "Merri News", the first edition funded by a Parks Victoria Grant. The regular quarterly newsletter for local residents and creek visitors includes articles about MCMC projects and community activities. It is distributed to local council customer service centres, local libraries, community centres and to school students.

Other printed information included a brochure on the Radar beetle, which lives in Merri Creek grasslands. The

brochure, designed to interest and appeal to young people, featured a cartoon of the life cycle of the Radar Beetle. A free postcard titled "Go Wild in the Suburbs – what's living in your backyard" encouraging the use of indigenous plants in home gardening, was circulated to a range of sites in the northern suburbs of Melbourne including cafes, cinemas, shopping centres and libraries. Two wetland information bulletins were prepared and distributed to local residents and schools.

Two signs highlighting the function and ecology of wetlands were produced and will be installed permanently at each of the new wetland sites.

MCMC printed t-shirts with a photo of a caterpillar and the caption "Moths and Butterflies of Merri Creek".

MCMC staff made presentations to the following groups:

- the Brunswick Gas Association Annual General Meeting
- the Darebin Life Activities Club
- ALP's Environment and Transport Policy Committees
- City of Hume Cultural Sites Tour
- Selwyn Neighbourhood House Craigieburn Gardening Club
- Workshop session at the Community Weeds Forum organised by Greening Australia Victoria.
- Training for Golf Course managers on conserving remnant vegetation and habitat, organised by Greening Australia Victoria, held at Northern Golf Course Glenroy.
- Slide presentation on Merri Creek's habitat as part of a talk celebrating World Habitat Day organised by Moreland City Council.
- Wildflower walk through Central Creek Grasslands in Spring for local residents and members of Friends of Merri Creek.
- A tour for local community members to an Eltham wetland to look at wetland design, planting and signage to assist planning the new Northcote and Clifton Hill wetlands.
- Moreland City College, with funding from Moreland City Council, will establish a butterfly planting in the school grounds. MCMC staff provided assistance with planning this and other school planting projects.
- The Field and Game Shooters and Clay Target Shooters clubs contacted Merriang District Landcare Group and MCMC to seek assistance with an application to Natural Heritage Trust for funding to revegetate the boundaries of the property. The clubs' shooting range is at O'Herns Rd Epping, east of Craigieburn Grasslands.

Publicity

Articles appearing in local or metropolitan newspapers included 15 articles on various MCMC activities, 11 articles about the F2 freeway, 11 articles about wildlife, seven articles about litter clean-ups and dumping, four articles about Allan Thomson and his long involvement with Merri Creek, three articles on grasslands and Galada Tamboore, three articles on MCMC involvement in festivals and six articles on various other Merri Creek issues.

The Merri Creek Coalition gained much media space for its campaign against the F2 Freeway, many of the articles including comments from MCMC's Manager.

MCMC responded to a Herald Sun article which advocated use of environmental weeds in gardening, leading to a follow-up Herald Sun article focussing on environmental weeds.

Two highlights of the year were MCMC's City Pride Award by Keep Australia Beautiful for outstanding concern and action towards preserving the environment; and Darebin Citizen of the Year, Australia Day 2000 awarded to David Redfearn, MCMC President for the past 10 years, mainly for his work on the MCMC Committee.

Friends of Quarries Clifton Hill

This new group was set up by the community during the year with its major focus on the parklands along Merri Creek in Clifton Hill, including a number of old quarry sites. The group was heavily involved in development of the new wetlands at Hall Reserve, and will be a valuable ally in protecting and enhancing the Creek environment.

Friends of Merri Creek

MCMC continues to work closely with Friends of Merri Creek members, who make a major contribution to restoration of the Creek. MCMC and Friends work together on planting days, community festivals and on campaigning to protect the Creek from the F2 Freeway. Friends also represent community views at MCMC meetings and have input to various strategies and policies. MCMC again acknowledges their enormous contribution with thanks.

Waste Reduction Display

MCMC worked with illustrator Jo Waite and sculptor Ian Sinclair to transform a 240 litre rubbish bin into a waste-wise masterpiece. This Eco-recycle funded waste reduction display will be touring a shopping centre near you.

Autumn Planting Festival

City of Moreland's Autumn Planting Festival was organised by MCMC's Angela Foley and John Lane and officially opened by City of Moreland Councillor, Stella Kariofyllidis. Over 200 people from the ESL and NESB community crowded under the cover of an enormous marquee during sleeting May weather and very low temperatures. They enjoyed a shared multicultural feast, Waterwatch and other activities and managed to plant 1,600 indigenous plants (mainly grasses) with members. Moreland City Council and Parks Victoria Grants Program funded the festival.

Darebin Festival 1999

MCMC staff, executive members, friends, family and other interested people joined in the annual Darebin Festival parade in High Street Northcote. This event gave MCMC an opportunity to celebrate its 10th anniversary through the development of the "Creek Carriers" theme. On the day, we were at the front of the parade, adorned with curly sedge hats, carrying flags, shakers and an enormous symbolic Merri Creek comprising three 30 metre lengths of hand painted fabric. It was a fabulous celebration. This "creek" is now a resource for future MCMC events.

Kingfisher Festival 1999

MCMC invited many people to join them again the following week as "Creek Carriers" for the annual CERES Kingfisher Festival. This was another opportunity to proudly broadcast our pride in MCMC's work over ten years in restoring Merri Creek. About 60 people joined "Creek Carriers" to weave through the large Festival crowds.

Interpretive signage at Jukes Road Grassland funded by Parks Victoria





Isik College students at Waterwatch

Melbourne Waterwatch

MCMC Waterwatch Officers worked with 37 schools (over 3,500 students), three friends groups and at six community festivals and activity days.

Partnerships between schools have been established and maintained with many schools incorporating water-quality sampling as an integral part of their school curriculum. Waterwatch has enabled students to undertake scientific studies of their local waterways, including habitat assessments, chemical testing and macro-invertebrate sampling. The results have been very encouraging with an array of macro-invertebrate species found in Merri and Moonee Ponds Creeks.

Ben North from Friends of the Quarries Clifton Hill, will be undertaking water-quality monitoring in Hall Reserve Clifton Hill and John Lawson took on coordination of Friends of Merri Creek's Streamteam. Lorella Colombara and the Friends of Shanklands took on water-quality monitoring in Shanklands Wetlands Meadow Heights on Yuroke Creek.

Living in a Catchment Education Kit – Streets and Streams

"Streets and Streams, an environmental education kit for schools", was published this year with funding from Parks Victoria Grants Program. The education kit promotes active understanding and involvement in protection and restoration of the environment and encourages its exploration. The kit is the second in a series, with the first "Stream Life" produced in 1998.

School helping Clean Up Australia

Clean Up Australia Day

MCMC organised participation of over 1,000 students from 11 schools in Clean-up Australia Day (four times more than the previous year). Local students appreciate the significance of the environment and are taking action to protect it.

Community activities and planting days

MCMC's Parkland Management Team and Friends of Merri Creek organised seven Community Planting Days. Parks Victoria funded projects also provided wonderful opportunities for community involvement in a range of projects, with almost 2000 volunteer hours contributed.

Merri Creek's native grasslands at Central Creek Reservoir and Jukes Rd Fawkner, both within suburban Melbourne, provide excellent opportunities for community involvement. Local residents were invited to wildflower walks, vegetation management burns and planting days.

Friends members and staff and volunteers from Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Cooperative assisted MCMC in collecting seed and propagating material of rare and significant plants from various remnant vegetation sites.

The Butterflies and Ferns project captured the imagination of many local residents who attended community activities. Community planting days held on Sundays were attended by members of Friends of Merri Creek and local residents. MCMC held a number of planting days on weekdays for specific community groups. More than 80 members of the Lebanese and Turkish Women's Groups attended a planting day and BBQ lunch at Tate Reserve Coburg. As the day was scheduled during the school holidays, many of the women brought their children as well. The highly successful day finished with singing, drumming and dancing in the park.

Other community groups including the 7th Brunswick Guides and Brownies, and the Fawkner and Glenroy Youth Groups attended after-school planting activities and a BBQ "afternoon tea".

There has been a high level of interest and enthusiasm from local community and Friends members in the Wetlands Creation project. MCMC held site information and planning meetings for local residents. More than 50 local residents and members of the newly formed



Friends of Quarries Clifton Hill attended a rainy community planting day at Hall Reserve, while close to 200 people came to the sunny planting day at Merri Park.

Local community members continue to be involved in the management of the wetlands by attending community weeding and plant identification days at the wetlands. MCMC has prepared a Weed Identification kit to help community members with plant identification.

Sixteen schools were involved in an intensive environmental education program as part of Parks Victoria funded projects. Students participated in planting and guided walks interpreting the natural environment and the importance of habitat.

MCMC assisted Greening Hume with planting and interpretative activities with 180 primary school students as part of City of Hume's "Improve Our City Day".

MCMC provided assistance to FOMC with their applications for Parks Victoria Community Grants.

Learning about your local waterways – a program for English Language Classes

A new MCMC education project, Creek Talk, celebrated the connection between the richness of local cultural life and the diversity of indigenous wildlife in our local waterways by hosting Community Waste Free Picnics. Participants were introduced to local environmental issues through a series of workshops that included displays, slides, plant clippings, bush tucker tastings and an environmental touch-table. Moreland City Council funded a program for more than 120 Moreland residents from various cultural backgrounds including Arabic, Chinese, Turkish, Greek, and African, culminating in a picnic at Coburg Lake sharing culinary delights from their home country in an environmentally friendly way. Whittlesea City Council, with support from Parks Victoria, funded a program for Whittlesea new migrants culminating in a waste free picnic at Hawkstowe Park, South Morang. For many new migrants this was their first visit to an Australian bush setting. Guided by Parks Victoria Rangers, students spotted kangaroos, kookaburras, galahs and other Australian fauna.

Moreland Flora & Fauna program

Seven schools participated in "Flora and Fauna walk and talk for Moreland schools" program funded by City of Moreland. Between March and June MCMC delivered 27 workshops in Merri and Moonee Ponds Creek catchments. Program activities included interpretive walks, talks, slide shows, environmental games, bush tucker tastings, touch table activities and Waterwatch.



Islamic Womens Group planting at Tate Reserve

Northcote High School students learning about Wurunderi culture at Hall Reserve

Merri Creek Environment Fund

Merri Creek Environment Fund

To set up a gift fund to be known as the Merri Creek Environment Fund to support MCMC's primary purpose.

MCMC successfully had the Merri Creek Environment Fund approved for tax deductibility status through listing on Environment Australia's Register of Environmental Organisations. Tax deductible gift recipient status had to be separately applied for, and has been approved also, so the fund is now able to receive donations and providing the donations are over \$2, the donor can claim the donations as a tax deduction.

MCMC's Merri Creek Environment Fund Subcommittee met several times to oversee this process and is developing a fundraising strategy.

Burchardia umbellata
Cooper Street
Grassland Block A

Merri Creek, north of
Summerhill Road,
Craigieburn



Friends of Merri Creek

Friends of Merri Creek



The Friends of Merri Creek is an independent voluntary community group that plays an important role in the Merri Creek Management Committee. The Friends group nominates six representatives to the MCMC Committee of Management, has input to MCMC and its policies and is involved in works, activities and planning along the Merri Creek.

The Friends share the MCMC goal to protect and restore the Merri Creek Parklands. Accordingly, members are offered the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of activities, including:

- revegetation and bushland management;
- waterway clean-up and litter control;
- campaigns on key issues, such as the Merri Creek freeway and preserving native grasslands;
- publications and newsletters;
- walks, talks and tours;
- water quality testing.

The Friends also comment on Council and State Government plans that are likely to impact on the Merri. Over the last two years, the Friends have led a coalition of environment and community organisations (including MCMC) in opposing the proposed Merri Creek freeway.

Anyone can apply to become a Friend of Merri Creek and new members are welcome. Members receive a regular newsletter including information on current issues and forthcoming activities.

For more information, contact Max Sargent on 9480 5492 or write to PO Box 7, Northcote 3070. You can also visit the Friends internet home page www.vicnet.net.au/~fomc.

Friends of Merri Creek members and local residents after completing the community planting, funded by Parks Victoria, at Merri Merri District Park, Northcote on Sunday 20 August 2000.

Meadow Argus (*Junonia villida*) Jukes Road Escarpment, Merri Creek, Fawkner



Independent Auditor's Report

Independent Auditor's Report

Independent Auditor's Report
to the Members of Merri Creek Management Committee Inc.
for the Year Ended 30th September, 2000

Scope

I have audited the attached special purpose financial report comprising the Balance Sheet as at 30th September, 2000 and the Income and Expenditure Statement and Notes to the Accounts for the year then ended. The entity's Committee of Management is responsible for the preparation and presentation of the financial report and the information contained therein, and have determined that the accounting policies used are consistent with the financial reporting requirements of the entity's constitution and are appropriate to meet the needs of the members. I have conducted an independent audit of the financial report in order to express an opinion to the members of the entity on its preparation and presentation.

No opinion is expressed as to whether the accounting policies used are appropriate to the needs of the members.

The financial report has been prepared for distribution to members for the purpose of fulfilling the Committee of Management's financial reporting responsibilities under the entity's constitution. I disclaim any assumption of responsibility for any reliance on this report or on the financial report to which it relates to any person other than the members, or for any purpose other than that for which it was prepared.

My audit has been conducted in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. My procedures included examination, on a test basis, of evidence supporting the amounts and other disclosures in the financial report and the evaluation of significant accounting estimates. These procedures have been undertaken to form an opinion as to whether, in all material respects, the financial report is presented fairly in accordance with the accounting policies described in Note 1 to the financial statements. (These policies do not require the application of all Statements of Accounting Concepts and Accounting Standards.)

The audit opinion expressed in this report has been formed on the above basis.

Qualification

Nil.

Audit Opinion

In my opinion, subject to the qualification noted above, the financial report presents fairly in accordance with the accounting policies described in Note 1 to the financial statements the results of the operations of MERRI CREEK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE INC. for the year ended 30th September, 2000.

Dated at Lower Plenty: 30th November, 2000

FRED GERARDSON
Chartered Accountant
Registered Company Auditor

Notes to the Financial Statements

Notes to the Financial Statements

For the Year Ended 30th September, 2000

NOTE 1 – SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES

This special purpose financial report has been prepared for distribution to the members to fulfill the Committee of Management's financial reporting requirements under the entity's constitution. The accounting policies are consistent with those provided in previous years unless otherwise stated and are, in the opinion of the Committee of Management, appropriate to meet the needs of members.

(a) Basis of Accounting

The Balance Sheet and Income and Expenditure Statement have been prepared on an accruals basis under the convention of historical cost accounting.

(b) Depreciation of Non-Current Assets

All non-current assets having a limited useful life are systematically depreciated over their useful lives in a manner which reflects the consumption of the service potential embodied in those assets.

Minor Assets:

Assets with a purchase price under \$2,000 are expensed in the year of purchase.

Computers:

Depreciated 40% of purchase price in first year followed by straight line to Nil over the next three years.

Motor Vehicles:

Depreciated straight line over their useful life to the entity (usually 3 years) after allowing for the estimated residual value at the end of that useful life.

(c) Employee Entitlements

Employee entitlements are accrued on a pro rata basis for annual leave and long service leave in respect of services provided by employees up to the reporting date. Such accruals are assessed as at each reporting date, having regard to current awards, rates of pay and other factors including employee departures and their periods of service.

The superannuation for the reporting period is made up of the statutory contribution the Committee makes in accordance with local government regulations to the superannuation plan which provides benefits to its employees.

(d) Investments

Investments are valued at cost. Interest revenues are recognised as they accrue.

(e) Grants, donations and other contributions

Grants, donations and other contributions are recognised as cash in hand when the Committee obtains control over the assets comprising the contributions and as income in the period in which the related expenditure is to take place.

Control over granted receipts is normally obtained upon their receipt or upon notification that a grant has been secured.

Unrealised contributions over which the Committee has control are recognised as receivables.

Contributions received in advance and which are to be wholly or partly expended in the following period are accrued as advanced receipts.

Balance Sheet

Balance Sheet

AS AT 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2000

	NOTE	2000	1999
EQUITY:			
Retained Funds – Start		245545	258737
Add Surplus / (Deficit)		16690	-13192
Retained Funds – End		<u>\$262,235</u>	<u>\$245,545</u>
Represented By:			
CURRENT ASSETS:			
Cash at Bank	3	212273	146894
Bonds		780	780
Sundry Debtors & Prepayments		118447	72020
Less Provision for Doubtful Debts		-7000	0
		<u>324500</u>	<u>219694</u>
FIXED ASSETS:			
Computer Equipment – @ Cost	1(b)	23342	20990
Less Prov'n for Depreciation		-14414	-10149
Plant & Equipment – @ Cost		13763	11584
Less Prov'n for Depreciation		-7494	-4779
Buildings		14180	11980
Less Prov'n for Depreciation		-4921	-255
Vehicles – @ Cost		119493	119493
Less Prov'n for Depreciation		-24064	-14102
		<u>119885</u>	<u>134762</u>
Total Assets:		<u>444385</u>	<u>354456</u>
Less:			
CURRENT LIABILITIES:			
Advanced Receipts		83928	47787
Trade & Sundry Creditors		36985	18877
Provisions for Leave	1(c)	61237	42247
Total Liabilities:		<u>182150</u>	<u>108911</u>
NET ASSETS:		<u>\$262,235</u>	<u>\$245,545</u>

Statement of Income & Expenditure

Statement of Income & Expenditure

FOR THE TWELVE MONTHS ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER, 1999

	NOTE	<u>2000</u>	<u>1999</u>
INCOME:			
Grants			
Municipalities		371286	317545
Other Government		298200	109200
Non Government		8450	6500
Contracts		440217	403366
Interest Received		7952	7809
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets		0	7991
Sale of Publications		559	4072
Sundry Income		2554	3127
Total Income:		<u>1129218</u>	<u>859610</u>
LESS EXPENDITURE:			
Wages & Salaries		665626	551763
Salaries Oncosts		78127	66021
Materials & Plant Hire		225451	98638
Vehicle Running		14050	12309
Admin, Project & General		88677	117410
Provisions			
Depreciation	1(b)	21607	18464
Annual & Long Service Leave	1(c)	18990	8197
Total Expenditure:		<u>1112528</u>	<u>872802</u>
NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):		<u><u>\$16,690</u></u>	<u><u>(\$13,192)</u></u>

Notes to the Financial Statements (cont'd)

Notes to the Financial Statements (cont'd)

	<u>2000</u>	<u>1999</u>
NOTE 3 – STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS		
Cash Flows from Operating Activities		
Receipts	1125932	779973
Payments	-1053823	-847540
Net cash from operating activities	<u>72109</u>	<u>-67567</u>
Cash Flows from Investing Activities		
Proceeds from sale of vehicles and eqpt	0	46247
Payments for vehicles and equipment	6730	77955
Net cash from investing activities	<u>-6730</u>	<u>-31708</u>
Net Increase / (Decrease) in Cash Held	65379	-99275
Cash at beginning of the financial year	146894	246169
Cash at the end of the financial year	<u><u>212273</u></u>	<u><u>146894</u></u>
Reconciliation of Cash		
For the purposes of the Statement of Cash Flows, cash includes cash on hand, cash at banks and investments in money market institutions.		
Cash at the end of the financial year as shown in the Statement of Cash Flows is reconciled to the related items in the Balance Sheet as follows:		
Operating Account	126914	24890
No. 2 Account	50067	122004
Long Service Leave Account	35292	0
	<u>212273</u>	<u>146894</u>
Reconciliation of Net Cash Used in Operating Activities to Operating Result		
Operating Result	16690	-13192
Add back		
Provisions for Depreciation	21607	18464
Provisions for Doubtful Debts	7000	0
Provisions for Leave	18990	8197
Increase in Advanced Receipts	36141	-56887
Increase in Trade Creditors	18108	-1399
Less		
Increase in Trade Debtors	-46427	-14759
Gains on sale of vehicles and eqpt	0	-7991
Net cash from operating activities	<u>72109</u>	<u>-67567</u>
NOTE 4 – AUDITOR'S REMUNERATION		
Audit Fees	2760	2600
Other Services	960	1240
	<u>3720</u>	<u>3840</u>

Member Representatives & Staff

Member representatives and staff - 1999/2000

Staff

Management

Manager: Tony Faithfull
 Conservation Manager: Judy Bush
 Administration Officer: Ray Radford
 Finance Officer: Kathleen McPherson
 Cleaner: Jasmine Corbett, Ann Currie

Community Education Team

Education Program Manager: Chris Smyth
 Education Project Officer: Maree Pollard, Nigel Philpot
 Waterwatch Officers: Warren Davies, Paul Evans, Robert Dabal
 School Program Performers: Donna De Palma, Craig Woolridge, Maria Romnios
 Auto & Construction Project Officer: Angela Foley
 Festival Coordinator: John Lane

Parkland Management Team

Coordinator: Barb Miles
 Technical Officer: Brian Bainbridge
 Team Leader: Nicole Drever
 Team Members: Phil Bush, Sal Collyer, Chrissie Cowcher, Megan Jericho, Deb Lawson, Georgia Leunig, Matt MacDonald, Emma Stevens
 Casuals: Aaron Beutel, Michael Bourke, Tim Brown, Francesca Carta, Melleta Elton, Dion Howell, Carla Hutchison, Karen Moore, Jacqui O'Shea, Claire O'Sullivan, Bronwen Price, Josh Puglisi, Ray Radford, Jayne Zaygar.

Special Projects

Graphic Designer: Anna Benlow (until 7/10/99)



MCMC Directors

From October 1999 to September 2000, MCMC held the following meetings:

- 4 Committee of Management meetings and 1 Annual General Meeting, a total of 5 meetings (M);
- 3 Planning and Issues Sub-Committee meetings (P&I);
- 3 Merri Creek and Environs Strategy Implementation Sub-Committee meetings (MCESI);
- 12 Executive Sub-Committee meetings (E);
- 4 Finance Sub-Committee meetings (F);
- 4 Merri Creek and Environment Fund meetings (MCEF).

Unidentified beetle found in revegetated native grasses in East Brunswick.

Below is a list of member representatives to the above meetings. MCMC Directors are indicated by (D); representatives who have been nominated to attend a specific Sub-Committee have that sub-committee shown in brackets; those who attended meetings as a substitute representative are indicated by (Sub.); representatives who left before the completion of the twelve-month period are indicated by (res.). A dash indicates that the person was not a member of the relevant Committee or Sub-Committee.

REPRESENTATIVES	M (5)	P&I (3)	MCESI (3)	E (12)	F (4)	MCEF (4)	REPRESENTATIVES	M (5)	P&I (3)	MCESI (3)	E (12)	F (4)	MCEF (4)
Darebin City Council							Yarra City Council						
Cr Vince Fontana (D)	4	-	-	-	-	-	Cr Robyn Williams (D)	4	3	2	5	-	-
Libby Hynes (D)	2	-	-	-	-	-	Ros Kilgour (D)	0	-	0	-	-	-
Michelle Bennett (Sub.)	1	-	-	-	-	-	Melbourne Water	1	1	3	-	-	-
Fiona McKinnon (Sub.)	1	-	-	-	-	-	Kane Travis (D) (res.)	1	1	-	-	-	-
Adam Shalekoff (MCESI)	-	-	3	-	-	-	David Taylor (D)	1	-	-	-	-	-
Lucy Botta (P&I) (res.)	-	1	-	-	-	-	Scott Seymour (D)	0	-	-	-	-	-
Warren Wood (P&I)	-	0	-	-	-	-	Friends of Merri Creek						
Hume City Council							Allie Dawe (D)	3	1	1	-	-	-
Cr Drew Jessop (D)	3	-	-	-	-	-	Trevor Hausler (D)	4	-	-	8	-	-
David Blair (D)	2	-	-	-	-	-	Ann McGregor (D)	3	2	-	8	-	1
Brenda Hunt (res.)	1	-	1	-	-	-	Paul Prentice (D)	5	2	2	-	-	-
Karen Wilson (MCESI)	-	-	1	-	-	-	David Redfearn (D)	5	2	2	8	4	4
Margaret Abbey (P&I)	-	2	-	-	-	-	Max Sargent (D)	5	2	3	9	-	3
Moreland City Council							Harold Mackrell (Sub.)	3	2	3	-	-	-
Cr Leigh Snelling (D) (res.)	2	-	-	-	-	-	Alan Brennan (MCESI)	-	-	1	-	-	-
Cr Rosemary Kerr (D)	2	-	-	-	-	-	Linda Parlane (Sub.) (res.)	1	-	-	-	-	-
Alistair Phillips (D)	2	-	-	-	-	-	Accountants (F)						
Nancy Krause (MCESI)	1	-	1	-	-	-	Judy Schreiber (res.)	-	-	-	-	3	-
Julie Hallyburton (P&I)	-	0	-	-	-	-	Lynda Poke	-	-	-	-	1	-
Whittlesea City Council							Esteemed People (MCEF)						
Cr Stefan Kozmevski (D)	2	-	-	-	-	-	Glenyys Romanes MP	-	-	-	-	-	4
Bruce Schroder (D)	4	-	-	-	-	-	Alex Smart	-	-	-	-	-	2
Felicity Ayres (MCESI)	-	-	0	-	-	-							
Ruth Spielman (P&I)	-	0	-	-	-	-							



Moreland City Council



City of Whittlesea



2 Lee Street, East Brunswick 3057
Phone: (03) 9380 8199 Fax: (03) 9380 6989
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