

MERRI CREEK



MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Merri Creek flows south from the Great Dividing Range near Wallan to join the Yarra River in Abbotsford, four kilometres north-east of Melbourne's CBD.

Merri Creek Management Committee Inc. (MCMC) is an environmental coordination and management agency formed in 1989 to achieve a shared vision for the waterway corridors of the Merri Creek Catchment. Its members include all municipalities in the catchment: Darebin, Hume, Moreland, Whittlesea, Yarra and Mitchell; plus the Friends of Merri Creek and the Wallan Environment Group.

Representatives from these groups form the Committee of Management that guides MCMC's activities.

MCMC's primary aim is to ensure the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, and the ecologically sensitive restoration, development and maintenance of the Merri Creek and tributaries, their corridors and associated ecological communities.

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

MCMC's mission

MCMC respects and honours the spirit of the land and its peoples, indigenous plants and animals, and works with the community to preserve, restore and promote the Merri Creek, its catchment and neighbouring region as a vital living system.

Wurundjeri acknowledgement

MCMC acknowledges the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the land of the Merri Merri. We pay our respects to the Elders past present and future.

Above photo:

Students from St Paul's Primary School, Coburg, exploring the Merri Creek valley at Galada Tamboore in Campbellfield, March 2018.

Annual Report

2017-2018



President's Report

This Annual Report provides a glimpse of the wide variety of roles and activities of the hard-working staff of the Merri Creek Management Committee. For example:

- introducing families to frogs and waterbugs;
- representing the Merri catchment in workshops and advisory committees;
- training volunteers to survey for the invasive [South African Weed Orchid](#);
- preparing imaginative (and mostly successful) project funding applications;
- tracking down the cause of extreme turbidity in the Merri after heavy rain;
- re-discovering Emu Foot (*Cullex tenax*), an endangered plant not seen locally in over a decade, during Gorse control work.

Collaboration is fundamental to MCMC's work. Our partners include member Councils, Wurundjeri Tribe Council, community groups and Melbourne Water.

The innovative [Secret Seven project](#) is a collaboration between MCMC, Friends of Merri Creek, CERES Environment Park, Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Co-operative, and volunteers who are growing seven rare Merri Creek plant species in order to harvest the seeds for future propagation and planting.

The long-term benefits of MCMC's Ecological Restoration Program are shown in an analysis of the bird habitat value of [30ha of Merri Creek woodland](#) in Fawkner, created over the last 30 years, with considerable volunteer input. 33 woodland bird species now regularly use this area.

The two staff members of MCMC's Catchment Program delivered an extraordinary total of 294 events or sessions in 2017-18, involving nearly 6,000 participants from schools, festivals, tertiary students and community groups.

Our website includes a busy calendar of public events – opportunities to explore, enjoy, learn and get involved.

We investigated erosion and sediment problems following wide-spread community concern about the extremely muddy appearance of Merri Creek. This was reported on in a [photo essay of issues in the upper catchment](#) and a [report on turbidity levels](#).

The erosion risk associated with development in parts of the upper catchment threatens to degrade Merri Creek and continues to be a major issue of concern.

We advocated for retention of the Merri's open space corridor in the face of land sell-offs by state agencies. In Fawkner, we celebrated Moreland Council's successful purchase of [former VicRoads land](#) near McBryde St and the making of an offer on another VicRoads parcel at Leonard St.

We joined with a number of groups in a successful VCAT challenge to a townhouse development at the end of [Spry St in Coburg North](#) and celebrated purchase of the land by Moreland Council for future creek parkland.

The volunteer directors of MCMC's [Merri Creek Environment Fund](#) (MCEF) organised the production, promotion and sale of *Merri Christmas* cards featuring the delightful Spotted Pardalote as a fundraiser for MCMC bird habitat projects. This was followed by the MCEF mid-year appeal which raised \$13,200 from 71 donors.

We are grateful for the support through the year of Councillors and staff of member Councils, volunteers, funding agencies, partner organisations, and of course, our dedicated MCMC staff.

Ann McGregor, President

Planning and Coordination

We receive funding from our member Councils to respond to issues, opportunities and threats affecting biodiversity, stream health, landscape, heritage and amenity along waterways in the Merri catchment. This also supports our governance and communication services. For the year it totalled \$250,100.

We continued to promote our vision for the [Greater Wallan - Merri Park](#), which is more important than ever now that most of the catchment is within Melbourne's Urban Growth Boundary. The state government made promising [election commitments](#) for the park and we hope to see these enacted in 2019.

In late September 2018, a nut factory fire in in Campbellfield near Galada Tamboore resulted in fire water runoff entering Merri Creek. Fortunately the impact was minimal, but the general issue of industrial fires remains a major risk to Melbourne's waterways.

We made comments on 18 formal planning permit applications affecting properties adjacent to Merri Creek and appeared at one Panel Hearing for an inner suburban site adjacent to Merri Creek.

We were involved in significant workshops to improve the Merri's health. We helped co-develop Melbourne Water's [Healthy Waterways Strategy](#), attending five workshops over the year, as well as providing written information and comments to the process. We also participated in two of the four workshops convened by the Victorian Government's [Improving Stormwater Management Advisory Committee](#), where we strongly supported the need for better stormwater management. And we participated in a master-planning workshop for a critical part the upper Merri Creek corridor in the Kallo and Cloverton developments near Kalkallo.

We contributed to Darebin Council's impressive [Natural Heritage film](#), which showcases two of 'our' Merri sites.

We provided specialist advice on ecological restoration and rare species to relevant management agencies.

We developed 7 grant project proposals, 5 in partnership with 'friends of' groups; all were successful, except for one that lapsed.

We publicised 128 community events on our [calendar](#); sent out customised emails and flyers for 34 of these events; produced 3 issues of [Merri e-News](#) and contributed items to the [Friends of Merri Creek facebook](#) page.

We protected our nationally significant image collection by digitising negatives and cataloguing images, thanks to our volunteer archivist and volunteer cataloguers whose efforts are valued at over \$20,000 for the year.

Our Committee of Management developed a Child Safe Policy and overhauled our Finance Procedure.

We produced a draft of our organisational strategy for key stakeholders and aim to finalise the strategy in 2019. This work is being funded by a generous capacity building grant from The Myer Foundation.

Photos: [Above](#): Locals enjoying a tour of VicRoads land alongside Merri Creek at Leonard St, Fawkner in May 2018.

[Below left](#): A very muddy Merri upstream of Blyth St Brunswick East after high rainfall in June 2018.

[Below centre](#): Planting at Say G'Day trail at top of the catchment, Heathcote Junction, August 2018.

[Below right](#): Walk & talk after planting at Aitken Creek, Craigieburn in May 2018.



Ecological Restoration

Our Ecological Restoration Program manages over 70 indigenous vegetation sites along Merri Creek, its tributaries, adjoining catchments, and some high value vegetation well beyond the Merri catchment.

Around 37% of our works focussed on shrublands and woodlands, 34% on wetlands and the banks of waterways, and 25% on grasslands. More than half of these works supported the regeneration of remnant vegetation. [Reconstruction](#) of significantly degraded sites accounted for 40% of our works. Ecological monitoring and community engagement made up the remaining 6%.

We planted nearly 8,000 plants, 88% of which were ground-storey, 7% were shrubs and 5% trees. This included creating in-situ Seed Production Areas for three plant species rare to the catchment. We also directly sowed indigenous grasses, using over 12 kg of seed.

Our [Flora and Fauna report](#) outlines key sightings and discoveries for the year.

Volunteer contribution

Involving community in hands-on activities is key to our work. 681 volunteers learned about restoration through contributing 2,011 hours, 900 more hours than last year. This is equivalent to \$60,000 of work. We hosted 42 community events including plantings, sowing seed, weed management, training and ecological surveys; 12 of these were in partnership with Friends of Merri Creek.

Of the 681 volunteers, 208 attended planting or direct seeding events (470 hrs), 249 helped

with weeding (1,020 hrs) and 11 surveyed insect pollinators (28 hrs).

Individual week-day volunteers worked with our staff for 53 days, contributing 400 hours (equivalent to \$12,000 of work) and gaining restoration skills as they worked.

207 participants from groups including Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Cooperative, Melbourne Polytechnic and Green Army, contributed 837 hours at 22 of these events.

Wurundjeri collaboration

We continued our collaboration with Wurundjeri Traditional Owners, contracting their Narrap Team to burn Ngarri-djarrang native grassland with us in Reservoir.

Funding

Total income for Ecological Restoration projects was \$895,600.

Agreements with member Councils:

Ongoing funding agreements with Darebin, Hume, Moreland and Yarra Councils funded \$302,900 of our vegetation improvement and community ecological engagement work.

Grants: We delivered \$144,900 of works funded by grant programs from the state government, Melbourne Water, [Port Phillip & Westernport CMA](#), The Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation (for a [GIS project](#)) and by donations to our own [Environment Fund](#). Of this, \$59,900 was delivery for grants received by Friends of Merri Creek and Collingwood Children's Farm, and we developed each of these grant applications.

These grants, plus the \$60,000 value of volunteer contributions, brought significant added value to our council funded restoration and vegetation maintenance works.



Contracts: We maintained various ‘bushland’ areas for local councils through contracts worth \$244,800. Key locations were Merri Creek sites in Moreland and Ngarri-djarrang Grassland in Darebin.

Contracts with other clients worth \$200,900 included: continuing offset works on a Merri Creek grassland in Craigieburn; restoration and management of 22 ecologically diverse rail biosites throughout metropolitan Melbourne for Metro Trains, VicRoads and the Level Crossing Removal Authority; revegetation and weed control to mitigate the impact of a new gas pipeline in Heathcote Junction; and weed control of serious infestations at a grassland in Wollert for the APA Group.



Catchment

Our Catchment Program staff led 5,931 people for eco-cultural waterway and biodiversity learning, including *Waterwatch* activities. In total, 294 events were held with support from 16 separate funding streams including from four of our member councils, Darebin, Moreland, Whittlesea and Yarra.

Funding

Total income for Catchment projects was \$194,200. Of this, 55% came from member councils through ongoing funding agreements; the rest came from partnerships and grants.

Catchment Education Highlights

We developed new projects with grant funding from the Environment Protection Authority, Eucalypt Australia, Sustainability Victoria and Moreland Council. This enabled us to reach a rich profile of community groups and early years, primary, secondary and tertiary groups.

Our focus on very young children and early years learning centres continued, including *Nature Play* in ‘wild’ public areas. We celebrated Eucalypt Australia Day at the Merri-Edgars wetland with Djirri-Djirri dancers at our fourth family *Merri Magical Morning*.

We produced [eucalypt-focused teaching materials](#) which are applicable Australia-wide. We developed and delivered teaching approaches that integrate knowledge of local nature and Indigenous perspectives, by acknowledging Wurundjeri Country.

Our connections with the Wurundjeri Tribe Land Compensation & Cultural Heritage Council continued with a new three year partnership grant from the City of Yarra to

expand public appreciation of the Merri-Yarra confluence, culturally and ecologically.

We also helped support the ninth [Murnong Gathering](#) at Coburg in November 2017.

Waterwatch

The MCMC *Waterwatch* program, funded by Melbourne Water and the four Councils noted earlier, supported 9 volunteer groups (including Thornbury High School) to conduct regular monitoring of water quality at 14 sites in the Merri, Edgars, Darebin, Moonee Ponds and Lower Yarra catchments, including Westgate Park and Trin Warren wetlands in Parkville. 16 volunteer monitors led these groups, with a further 20 community members contributing their time on a regular basis. New volunteers were welcomed and we held 2 water quality and 2 [waterbug](#) training events

Water quality monitoring results showed no improvement in the poor condition of Merri Creek and its tributaries. The lower, urbanised reaches were in worse condition than the more rural upper reaches, although erosion issues in the upper catchment contributed to very muddy flows in the Merri after heavy rainfalls (see President’s Report p.1 and photo p.2).

We engaged 2,716 students and other community members in [Waterwatch education](#) sessions at a variety of creek-side locations as well as in schools, local libraries, workshops, festivals, and early learning centres.

Our popular frog walks and talks continued with 10 events. 145 participants learned about local frog species and collected data for Melbourne Water’s [frog census](#).

Litter Project

We began delivery of a three year project for the Friends of Merri Creek to clean up litter in the creek after high rainfall. The project is funded by a grant from the [Port Phillip Bay Fund](#) and aims to establish a rapid response community network. Twenty-nine volunteer clean-ups were held with 350 participants. We provided clean-up equipment for these. We also posted information on the Friends’ website about safety procedures, insurance cover and other [frequently asked questions](#).

Photos: [Top:](#) Fawkner P.S. & Melbourne Girls College students in a Kids Teaching Kids in the field event at Merri Creek, Fawkner, August 2018.

[Left - top:](#) Burning with the Wurundjeri Narrap Team at Ngarri-djarrang, Reservoir, April 2018.

[Left - middle:](#) [Whittlesea Threatened Species Day tour of Galada Tamboore](#), September 2018.

[Left:](#) Fitzroy High School students classify bugs by Merri Creek in Fitzroy North, August 2018.

Financial Report

Summarised Balance Sheet as at 30th September 2018

	2018	2017
EQUITY:		
Retained Funds - Start	87,045	63,215
Transfer to/from Env. Fund Reserve	(4,837)	(24,035)
Add Surplus / (Deficit)	59,949	47,865
	142,157	87,045
Environment Fund Reserve Balance	68,068	63,231
Retained Funds - End	210,225	150,276
Represented By:		
Current Assets	774,725	751,389
Fixed Assets	93,866	56,057
TOTAL ASSETS	868,591	807,446
Less:		
TOTAL LIABILITIES	658,366	657,170
NET ASSETS	210,225	150,276

Summarised Statement of Income & Expenditure for the twelve months to 30th September, 2018

	2018	2017
INCOME:		
Grants:		
Municipalities	639,180	655,444
Other Government	69,828	81,456
Non Government	108,991	99,732
Contracts	*525,474	*390,133
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets	-	-
Sale of Publications	4,104	552
Environment Fund Donations	15,972	34,466
Interest & Sundry Income	10,435	10,751
Total Income:	1,373,984	1,272,534
LESS EXPENDITURE:		
Wages, Salaries & Oncosts	1,124,316	1,012,284
Consultants, Materials & Plant Hire	77,648	74,257
Vehicle Running	27,262	17,705
Admin, Project & General	96,877	83,423
Depreciation & Leave Provisions	(12,068)	37,000
Total Expenditure:	1,314,035	1,224,669
NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):	59,949	47,865

* Includes delivery of grants for community groups valued at \$70,000 in 2018 and \$58,400 in 2017. These were projects where MCMC played a lead role in designing and developing the grant applications and took responsibility for delivery and reporting.

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the year ended 30th September 2018. The full financial statements and the Auditor's report are on the MCMC website.

Auditor:

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

Merri Creek Environment Fund:

We gratefully acknowledge the 76 generous donors to the Merri Creek Environment Fund including S. & J. Gunson, M. Steventon, and P. McLure.

Member Representatives and staff 2017-2018

Committee of Management:

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

City of Darebin:	Cr Susan Rennie (3) Luke Sandham (4)
City of Hume:	Cr Jodi Jackson (2) Damien Harrison (Secretary) (3)
City of Moreland:	Cr Natalie Abboud (1) Alli Coster (4)
City of Whittlesea:	Cr Stevan Kozmevski (2) Tim Connell (Sub.) (2) Lisa Pittle (1) Mark Williams (Sub.) (1)
City of Yarra:	No representatives appointed.
Shire of Mitchell	Cr Rob Eldridge (Vice-President) (3) Elyse Kelly (3)
Friends of Merri Creek:	Ann McGregor (President) (3) Ann Sanson (Treasurer) (3) Nicole Lowe (Vice-President) (3) Pascale Pitot (2) Jane Miller (4) Lisa Lawrence (3)
Wallan Environment Group:	Claudia James (4)

Sub-Committees:

The following Sub-Committees met during the year:

Executive Sub-Committee (6 times)
Finance Sub-Committee (4 times)
Merri Creek Environment Fund Sub-Committee (2 times)
Merri Creek & Environs Strategy Implementation Sub-Committee (1 time)

MCMC Staff:

Manager:	Luisa Macmillan
Information Officer:	Ray Radford p/t
Administration Officer:	Monica Williamson p/t
Finance Officer:	Ruth Rankin p/t
IT Manager/Strategic Projects:	Tony Faithfull p/t
Cleaner (casual):	Catalina Perez, Claudia Marulanda
Archivist (volunteer):	Leslie Fraser p/t
Cataloguers (volunteers):	Jane Miller p/t, Janet Buick p/t

Catchment Program:

Special Engagement Programs Coordinator:	Angela Foley
Waterwatch Coordinator:	Julia Cirillo p/t, Trevor Hausler (casual)
Program Assistant (volunteer)	Jessie Knott p/t

Ecological Restoration Program

Program Manager:	Katrina Roberg p/t
Works Coordinator:	Jonathan Wilson, Sarah Boys
Planner:	Brian Bainbridge p/t
Program Coordinator:	Michael Longmore
Team Leaders:	Megan Maroney p/t, Chris Geary, Jessica Slade p/t
Team Members:	Jim Brien p/t, Pip Jones, Oska Liebert, Cameron Walls, Charlotte Wood
Temporary Team Member:	Sarah Jones
Casual Team Members	Tony Bracey, Sophie Lavence, Dominic McKenzie
Team Volunteer:	Angela Viney p/t



Merri Creek Management Committee

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