



Annual Report

2000-2001

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 (until December 2001) Melbourne Water. Representatives of these member groups form a Committee of Management which guides MCMC's activities.

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

Funding for MCMC's programmes comes from direct support from its local and state government

members, from state and federal grant programs, and from competitively won tenders.

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

Their work includes:

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

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



*Pea Blue Butterfly.
Garnet St, Brunswick.
Photo by Brian Bainbridge*

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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.

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.

Shared vision for Merri Creek Corridor

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

President's Report

Once again we have reached the end of another busy year for the MCMC and all the community and local government groups that support its restoration and preservation work along the creek.

Planting work continued at a large number of sites and the successful application for funding for three Parks Victoria projects has helped with this. In the educational area the continued development of the "Catch On" project has seen visits to twenty automotive workshops in the City of Darebin and their involvement in reducing stormwater pollution reaching the creek. Work has also started on reviewing of MCMC's objectives and function and on negotiating a new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement.

Community action against the F2 freeway proposal continues despite the Federal Government giving it the go ahead on September 5th. On top of the freeway a new threat to the Creek arose this year with the plan to run an underground gas pipeline through the grasslands at O'Herns swamp and crossing the Curly Sedge and Merri creeks. This pipeline would feed gas to a power station in Somerton. Community anger at this hasty proposal led to protests and picketing of the site. Although the pipeline will still go ahead the community action has won significant concessions. I thank all those involved for their hard work and dedication.

Once more it is important that the hard work and dedication of the MCMC staff is acknowledged. These people, with the support of the local community, have turned the creek and adjacent parkland into the asset we all enjoy today. I would especially like to mention Simon Fell who took up the position of Catchment Manager early this year. Simon has brought a wealth of experience to MCMC and his experience in fundraising for environmental projects is already evident. Thanks also to the other members of the executive, David Redfearn, Robyn Williams and Ann McGregor for the time and experience they donated to the organization. Lastly, to all the other directors, thank you for the effort put in during the year.

Although we still face challenges, I continue to take heart from the restoration work, and the return of wildlife, that I see occurring with each passing season. I am confident that this will continue for many years to come.



Trevor Hausler, President

Manager's Report

2000–2001 culminated with MCMC being one of only four finalists for the National RiverPrize awarded in Brisbane in September. Being a finalist was a real endorsement of MCMC's objectives and the quality of its activities.

Melbourne Water announced its intention to resign from MCMC in December 2000, and after earlier confirming it would provide funding, withdrew this commitment. The Committee and staff spent considerable time and effort to have Melbourne Water remain a member, but to no avail. The Darebin Creek Management Committee and Moonee Ponds Creek Coordination Committee are also experiencing similar problems trying to work with Melbourne Water on their Creeks.

Discussions were held with the Shire of Mitchell regarding the possibility of it joining the Committee. The Shire occupies the headwaters of the Merri catchment, and the potential impacts on Merri Creek of development in that part of the catchment could be significant.

Members' representatives workloads continued to grow, and it became harder for Councillors and Officers to attend meetings. This workload also seems to be reducing the communication within member organisations, making coordination more difficult.

MCMC commenced a review of its operations. Scoping sessions were held with staff and with member group and other community group and agency representatives. The broad issues raised include reviewing MCMC's purposes, improving and consolidating stakeholder relations, clarifying medium-term strategies, and reviewing MCMC's structure accordingly. The Committee has resolved to first review MCMC's purposes as progress on the other issues depends on clarity in this area.

Despite the challenges, the continuing commitment of the staff (whose names appear inside the back cover of this report) was a delight. Thanks to all the staff.

Thanks also to the member representatives, especially the Office Bearers, for setting aside the time to be involved in MCMC and for their constructive input.

The writing of this report has been a team effort, and demonstrates the breadth of MCMC's activities and the diversity of skills held by the organisation.



Tony Faithfull, Manager

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

Land Use Planning

"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."

Merri Creek and Environs Strategy

Merri Creek's concept plan was published in 1999 and named the Merri Creek and Environs Strategy (MCES). MCMC's MCES Implementation Subcommittee met three times during the year to discuss progress on the Strategy. The June meeting decided that meetings should focus on one section of the Strategy at a time. The September meeting focussed on section 5.1 Planning.

During the year MCMC's Strategy Implementation database was enhanced to allow the entry of information on progress from each of the accountable organisations. After requesting this level of reporting, most Councils have been slow to provide information, with progress on 72% of the accountabilities currently unreported. A small number of actions which the strategy lists for State Government and other agency action have been declined by the agencies, who claimed not to have been consulted by Melbourne Water on their being listed as accountable for the actions.

Of the five actions for which MCMC itself is accountable, one is complete, two are underway, one is commenced and one ongoing. Of the 73 high priority actions for which MCMC has a coordination role, five are complete, 13 commenced, eight underway, 33 ongoing, 11 not yet commenced, and the status of three is unclear. Additional resources for implementation of the coordination role for the strategy would speed MCMC's implementation.

Planning Schemes

MCMC made input to a number of planning scheme amendments during the year, primarily on the outskirts of the urban area. The most critical was part of the Hume Freeway Advisory Committee hearings (discussed below). The proposed Epping North development in Whittlesea, largely in the Merri Catchment (Edgars Creek, a tributary of the Merri, flows through the area of the subdivision) was opposed by MCMC on the basis that it pre-empted the Metropolitan Strategy being prepared by the State Government. The rezoning of the old Cooper St tip (which was zoned open space, but used for varying recycling purposes) to Industrial was opposed by MCMC because of concerns relating to the integrity of the capping of the tip and to possible future impacts on future open space along the Creek.

MCMC liaised with VicRoads regarding the duplication of Cooper Street, in an attempt to protect conservation and heritage values around the proposed Creek crossing, but due to pressure of

time (the hearings coincided with the hearings regarding the Hume Freeway) did not make input to the Panel hearing.

Merri Creek Parklands and Merri Creek State Park

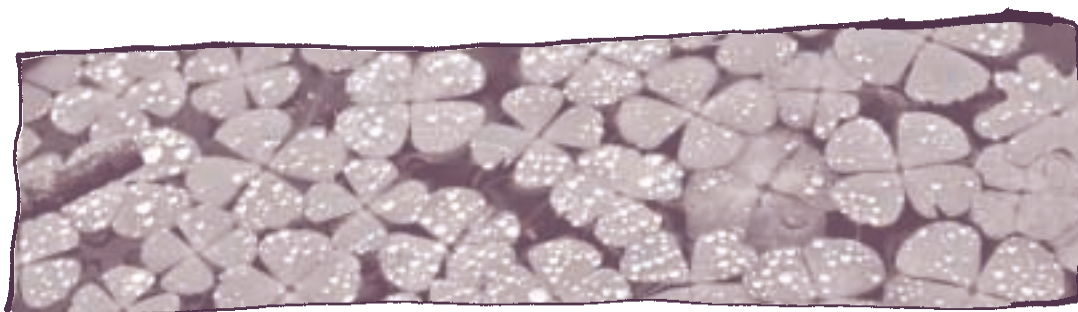
The Merri Creek Parklands currently extend in a continuous stretch on at least one side of the Creek from Clifton Hill to Mahoneys Road interrupted only by eight road crossings. Acquisition is needed of several parcels of land in Reservoir which were reserves in plans of subdivision but were never transferred to public ownership, and Darebin City Council is investigating these. A couple of other properties remain with titles which reach to the creek bank, and the Creek frontage of these properties needs to be acquired through purchase or planning trade-off.

North of Mahoneys Road the concept of a Merri State Park includes the various remnant native grassland areas from Bald Hill south and recreation nodes linked together by open space corridors along the Creek. A number of core elements of the State Park are in place – Melbourne Water's Galada Tamboore area, part of Craigieburn Grassland, and part of Cooper St Grassland. The City of Whittlesea has commenced acquisition of the balance of the Craigieburn Grassland, but is seeking further financial assistance.

Subsequent to the Hume Freeway inquiry, the State Government has declared its commitment to creating a regional park along the Merri Creek spine linking the Ring Road to Craigieburn. North from Craigieburn MCMC will work towards a State Park along the Merri Creek and its tributaries, linking particularly to the Bald Hill Grasslands and sensitively managed privately owned grasslands to the east and north of Bald Hill, and including the Craigieburn East Grasslands. The proposal does not require purchase of all of these lands, providing sensitive management can be ensured.

Cooper St grasslands

The riparian frontage of Cooper St Grassland is privately owned by Istra Social Club, who also own most of the Cooper St frontage to the grassland. The riparian strip retains important habitat and conservation values and MCMC has been requesting that the land be transferred to public ownership to ensure appropriate management. It has been proposed that there be a land swap where a small portion of the flat land to the south of Istra (mostly weed dominated) currently owned by Parks Victoria, be swapped for the riparian strip.



*Hall Reserve Wetland.
Nardoo – Marsilea drummondii.
Photo by Brian Bainbridge*

Parks Victoria is keen to resolve land ownership issues before the end of the year. MCMC staff met with staff from Parks Victoria and DNRE on the northern boundary of Cooper St grassland to inspect conservation values and weed invasion levels in this area. MCMC has prepared a map of the area showing location of significant species and weed invasion boundaries to assist Parks Victoria to determine possible boundaries for land to be transferred.

Hume Freeway

This was the most significant issue the Committee dealt with during the year. The provision of a freeway in the catchment will not only have direct impact on the Creek and its biological and recreational values, but will drive development and traffic growth in the catchment, creating major indirect impacts.

MCMC attended and presented to the second Advisory Committee hearings held in October and November 2000 as part of a coalition of groups opposed to the construction of the freeway in the Merri Creek valley. The Advisory Committee reported in December 2000, although the Minister for Planning only announced his response to the report in February 2001. The Minister overturned the first advisory Committee's recommendations for an alignment to go around the eastern side of the Craigieburn East Grasslands and on the basis of the second Committee's recommendations chose a cheaper route splitting the two grasslands. Contrary to the second Advisory Committee's recommendations the Minister moved the alignment closer to the Creek to avoid the Whittlesea Gardens area.

MCMC's efforts to have a package of measures evaluated as an alternative to a freeway were never taken seriously by the Government, VicRoads or the Advisory Committee. MCMC remains unconvinced that the decision made by the State Government is the best decision in terms of integrated transport planning, but we are sure that the amended freeway proposed will still be very damaging, and MCMC's longstanding policy opposing the construction

of a freeway in the Merri Creek valley has not changed in relation to the amended proposal.

MCMC also strongly advocated for the establishment of the Merri Creek State Park during the process, and the Advisory Committee and the Minister for Planning supported the establishment of a regional park as a result.

Gas pipeline

Power shortages caused by air-conditioners in Summer led to AGL commencing construction of a gas-fired power plant in Campbellfield to meet this peak demand. Gas is to be supplied by GPU GasNet, via a pipeline from the east, crossing through the Craigieburn Grasslands, and the O'Herns Road wetland because this was the cheapest and quickest route.

MCMC worked with Friends of Merri Creek to oppose locating the pipeline through the grasslands and supported a route along the soon to be constructed Cooper Street duplication instead, but unsuccessfully. The State Government's fear of power shortages in summer of 2001–2 prevented a proper evaluation of routes and impact assessment. Instead, a last minute minor amendment moved the alignment along a somewhat degraded access track, still passing through the O'Herns Road wetland.

Construction commenced before a rehabilitation plan had been developed. The whole process is another example of the failure of existing legislation and impact assessment procedures to protect native grasslands and biodiversity. At no point was the whole question of the overall environmental impact of construction of a series of gas-fired plants to meet peak demand evaluated against options such as, for example, massively subsidising solar voltaic installations.

Friends of the Earth and a number of unions joined Friends of Merri Creek in blockading construction of the pipeline and the power plant, and as a result, extracted some agreements from AGL and the State Government for a number of projects and injection of funding to contribute to threatened frog conservation in the Merri catchment.

Catchment Planning

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

*Managing a creek means managing its catchment.
Photo by Angela Foley*

Planning applications

MCMC made comments on 30 planning applications referred by member Councils for developments at specific properties adjacent to the Creek.

Strategic planning

During the year MCMC made formal comment 47 times on strategic planning matters ranging from major infrastructure issues such as the Freeway, fibre optic cable installation and gas pipeline, land development issues such as Epping North, to stormwater management plans, Metropolitan Strategy, landscape masterplans, open space guidelines, and precinct plans.

Merri Parklands Masterplan Clifton Hill

Yarra City Council is preparing a masterplan for the Merri Creek Parklands south of Heidelberg Road. MCMC had input to development of the consultants' brief, emphasising the area's significance for flora and habitat values as well as being a vital link in the Merri – Yarra habitat corridor. MCMC was a member of the steering committee for the project and also attended consultants' presentations to local community. The masterplan details the location and extent of recreational facilities, paths and plantings, including development of further wetlands similar to the Rotunda Wetland constructed by MCMC in 1999–2000.

Edgars Creek Landscape Plan

MCMC provided comments during the preparation of the Edgars Creek Masterplan, focussing on indigenous composition of plantings, staged control of weeds, and conservation and enhancement of habitat values. The plan covers Edgars Creek between Childs Rd and Main St, Thomastown, and includes recommendations for planting, path development, lighting and in-stream works to enhance habitat values and water quality.

Central Creek development

MCMC worked with Darebin City Council and the Urban Land Corporation to ensure the design of the Grassland Reservation and urban subdivision package for the Central Creek Grasslands area was as positive as possible for biodiversity. The Central Creek Grasslands, although small, retain a high diversity of regionally significant plant species, and a number of national or state significant species. The retention of approximately 60% of



the grassland – primarily the best quality parts of the grassland – as a reserve, together with some funding for the management of the reserve, is a good outcome. Darebin City Council has become the Committee of Management for the Reserve, and MCMC will continue to offer its grassland management skills to Darebin for the Reserve.

Vegetation pruning under powerlines

MCMC continued to liaise with the managers of the high voltage transmission line that follows Merri Creek from Brunswick to Coburg, and then follows Edgars Creek. MCMC has sought protection of remnant trees, identification of inappropriate plantings, and staged replacement rather than simple removal. MCMC are encouraging the transmission line managers to adopt a strategic approach using a Vegetation Management Plan (in line with the Electricity Ombudsman agreement and Codes of Practice for vegetation clearing under Powerlines) to identify remnant trees, planting areas and required powerline clearances, reducing the need for annual or biannual pruning.

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. The subcommittee provides an important forum for information and ideas exchange between the councils, community and MCMC, as well as an opportunity to discuss works planning, funding sources, new and emerging weeds and restoration techniques. The subcommittee covered a range of issues in 1999–2000 including:

- Agencies' progress on addressing residents' encroachment into public open space along Merri Creek.
- Merri Creek Fire Plan. The process for preparing a fire protection plan for Merri Creek was discussed, including collating existing council and Parks Victoria plans. The plan will include objectives, location of access points and firebreaks, identify risks and cultural and natural heritage values to be protected, and would include specifications for reducing fire hazard in revegetation works through planting design and species selection. The plan would also include details about conducting ecological burns, including how to minimise impacts on neighbours.
- Habitat Management. The subcommittee reinforced the importance of managing Merri Creek's parklands for habitat values as well as passive recreational space in recognition of the existing faunal significance of the Merri Creek wildlife corridor.

Stormwater management plans

Stormwater Management Plans were completed by Darebin, Hume, Yarra and Moreland Councils and have been submitted to the Environment Protection Authority.

The Shire of Mitchell has appointed PPK as consultants who have commenced preparation of their plan. To date the local community and MCMC have been involved in identifying areas and issues of concern. A priority management issues paper has been prepared.

The Whittlesea City Council is planning to commence its Stormwater Management Plan soon.

Coburg fish ladder

Melbourne Water and Moreland City Council constructed a fish ladder beside the Coburg Lake weir wall, to allow fish movement above and below this point. The area for the fish ladder is very constrained, which means that some length of the ladder had to be constructed within a concrete "slot". Associated works included removal of the willow infestation below the weir wall and some replanting. A fish survey was carried out before construction and shortly after construction to assess the immediate impacts of the fish ladder on fish movement, and initial results are promising. MCMC assisted with input to design of the ladder and of planting.



*Hatty Court escarpment
at Galada Tamboore.*

Photo by Brian Bainbridge

Creek Parkland Management

"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."

*Chrissie Cowcher used ropes to descend the Rushall Escarpment to treat Fennel and other weeds that have been blown or washed onto the site.
Photo by Barb Miles*

Merri Creek Parklands restoration projects

MCMC worked with staff from Councils, community and other agencies in the planning and implementation of a number of projects along Merri Creek. Projects included:

- **Moomba Park Wetland:** MCMC met with Moreland City Council officers and landscape planning consultants to discuss location, design and function of a wetland to be constructed at the north end of Moomba Park within the next five years. The construction of a wetland was proposed in the Moomba Park Concept Plan. The Landscape Consultants are keen to create a wetland of striking design that will draw people into the area. MCMC is keen to balance landscaping values with habitat and water quality values.
- **Galada Tamboore:** MCMC notified Melbourne Water and Hume City Council of various land management issues arising in this wonderful expanse of open space spanning the creek in Campbellfield – Thomastown. Issues to be dealt with included liaising with Melbourne Water staff in the planning for a small series of wetlands to recreate this habitat type in the valley floor, expanding habitat values; and notifying Hume City Council of a small feral goat population on the steep escarpment.
- **Jones Park East Brunswick.** MCMC provided input to planting design for indigenous display gardens on the west side of the park.

Creek Parkland management

The restoration programme for Merri Creek is achieving significant expansion of native habitat for the region's native fauna, as well as providing valuable passive open space for residents of Melbourne's northern suburbs. MCMC strives to implement our revegetation and restoration programmes based solidly on an expanding understanding of the ecology of the catchment, and on the contributions and partnerships provided by local communities. The residents of the northern suburbs of Melbourne bring a rich and diverse cultural heritage to our work.

Restoration works focus on sites along Merri Creek and its tributaries from the confluence of Merri Creek with Yarra River at Dights Falls Clifton Hill, upstream to Rushwood Drive Craigieburn, a stretch of more than 20 kilometres. MCMC also carries out some restoration projects on Moonee Ponds Creek. Merri Creek Parklands include a range of vegetation communities, including native grasslands and grassy wetlands, escarpment shrublands, Red Gum grassy woodlands, creekside shrublands and aquatic herbfields.

MCMC gratefully acknowledges the agencies that provided funding of \$700,000 to MCMC to continue the restoration of Merri Creek. Funding was provided by Hume, Moreland, Darebin and Yarra City Councils, by Parks Victoria Agency Grants Program (three major grants totalling \$238,945) and by SPI PowerNet. MCMC also completed a number of restoration contracts for



local councils, Parks Victoria Grassland Unit, Department of Natural Resources and Environment and for smaller clients such as local schools and universities.

Revegetation and restoration

The Parkland Management Team's approach to restoring the creek environment incorporates a number of stages and different approaches. Integrated weed control techniques are utilised, where herbicide application is used alongside weed suppression mulches, community handweeding days and dense plantings of appropriate competitive species. MCMC aims to create environments where indigenous vegetation is given an ecologically competitive advantage.

Ecological burns are an integral element of native grassland management. In 2000–1, MCMC carried out five ecological burns within Merri Creek grasslands.

MCMC designs our revegetation plantings using only indigenous plants – those species native to the local area. The Parkland Management Team planted 38,228 indigenous plants this year. Of these 6% were over-storey species (trees), 11% mid-storey (shrubs), 80% ground storey (grasses and wildflowers) and 4% aquatic species (wetland plants). Planting included projects to reinforce existing remnant vegetation, infill planting to replace plants lost by drought and vandalism, and planting of newly prepared areas that were previously bereft of indigenous species.

Direct seeding allowed establishment of selected species in areas where planting was not possible due to steep, shallow or rocky soils. The technique also allows for establishment of dense swards of native grasses such as Kangaroo Grass and Wallaby Grasses, without the associated soil disturbance (and potential increased weed invasion) associated with planting techniques. MCMC collected seed from native grasslands on both publicly and privately owned land, to spread within our restoration sites.

MCMC's program of reintroduction of rare and significant species, begun in 1999, continued with more seed collection days jointly organised by MCMC and Victorian Indigenous Nursery Collective (VINC). VINC propagated plants from the seeds collected, and MCMC reintroduced the species to secure sites to expand regional populations. The program is not only increasing the number of sites at which



these plants are now growing, but is also expanding our knowledge of their propagation requirements and ecological niches.

*Michael Brodie with Princess Hill SC Year 7 students at the Merri Park Wetland as part of National Tree Day.
Photo by Sal Collyer*

Significant flora

There are many significant wild plants and communities found along Merri Creek, in native grasslands, escarpment shrublands and creekside environments. MCMC continues to add incidental observations of unusual plant species, made in the course of our works and activities, to flora listings of the area. Reference is made to botanical texts, sometimes indicating that the plants are newly recognised species or re-discovered populations. New taxonomic descriptions that change the identity of well-known plants are also reviewed by MCMC. Specimens are submitted to the Herbarium of Victoria and information is submitted to the Victorian Flora Database. Mapping of populations may be necessary, with the information adding to MCMC's geographic information system.

Several interesting plant records were made in the previous year:

- *Cullen tenax* Emu Foot or Tough Scurf-pea
This plant is endangered in Victoria. A small patch of several individuals was discovered in mown grass in the railway reserve at Waterloo Rd Glenroy in Spring 2000. The patch has been mapped and managed for weeds. Seed has been collected and propagated by VINC for planting in secure grassland sites.

- *Drosera whittakeri* Scented Sundew This regionally significant plant was recorded in 1992 in Cooper St Grassland. The population was again mapped by MCMC in August 2001. Three patches containing about 500 individuals exist within the southern section of the Grassland. The area, despite having large weed infestations of Artichoke Thistle, Briar Rose and exotic Stipoid grasses, also contains a high diversity of indigenous wildflower species.
- *Stackhousia* 'species 1' 'Plains Creamy Candles' This is a recently described Basalt Plains species that has been distinguished as a different species from the widespread *Stackhousia monogyna*. A member of Friends of Merri Creek located a population of the species near O'Herns Rd, Craigieburn in September, while documenting flora that may be affected by installation of the underground gas pipeline through the area. The identification of the plant was verified by the Herbarium of Victoria; while this species is possibly widespread in the area the Herbarium of Victoria had yet to receive any confirmed specimen from the Greater Melbourne area.
- *Carex inomitata* Sedge Populations of the sedge, thought to be Tall Sedge, *Carex appressa*, found last year at Galada Tamboore, Campbellfield and Jukes Rd, Fawkner were subsequently recognised as the regionally significant species, *Carex inomitata*, a closely related plant. Seed has been collected and propagated plants will be included in MCMC's significant species reintroduction program for replanting at a variety of sites.

Significant fauna

Merri Creek Management Committee has been keeping records of fauna sighting for six years. Repeated observations have confirmed the role of remnant vegetation and revegetation as habitat for a range of species. The maturation of plantings has seen an increase in diversity of wildlife as new food sources develop. The fauna records book has become a popular resource to be perused by the public at community events and this is prompting fauna sightings from the wider community. Over 200 entries were made in the 12 months to October 2001. Some of the most interesting include;

- Single Common Bronzewing pigeon was feeding below Acacias at Merri Park,

Northcote in November 2000 and at the CERES gate in September 2001. This suggests that at least one bird has taken up residence amongst revegetation.

- Bellbirds were seen on Edgars Creek Coburg in November 2000. These have possibly established a colony there.
- Single Small (Grassland) Copper Butterfly in Central Creek Grassland on December 2000. This species is depleted near Melbourne, it relies on native grassland to survive.
- Collared Sparrowhawks bred in Lake Reserve Coburg this summer. A fledgling was observed begging food from parents throughout January 2001.
- Crested Shrike-tits breeding at Robinson Reserve Preston in January 2001 and feeding at other sites including Elizabeth Street North Coburg. Another family group was observed at Anderson Rd and Strettle Lagoon, Thornbury during September 2001.
- A local resident reported to MCMC a very reliable sighting of a platypus in Merri Creek North Coburg in January 2001. This is the same area that another resident reported a sighting in October 2000.
- Sacred Kingfishers were observed hunting in the newly constructed Merri Park Wetlands in January 2001. Numerous sightings of Sacred Kingfishers were recorded from this area and other areas along the creek during Summer 2001. Unfortunately a dead Kingfisher was found in Winifred Street Northcote in January. We suspect it was hit by a car.
- Little Eagles were observed several times along Merri Creek this year, mostly at Galada Tamboore Campbellfield but also at Moomba Park Fawkner.
- Eastern Grey Kangaroos were observed at Central Creek Grassland Reservoir and Galada Tamboore. The problem of living with humans is particularly acute for this species and this was illustrated by reports of road fatalities. Contact with the local Wildlife Rescue volunteer has expanded our knowledge of the perils faced by our local wildlife, which include attacks by dogs. The volunteer attended a community planting day at Central Creek Grassland with an orphaned joey, helping to raise awareness of the wider community.
- Little Button-Quail was flushed from the northern end of Cooper St Grassland in March 2001. It is considered regionally significant in the Melbourne Area.



- Tawny Frogmouths bred at East Coburg near Tate Reserve again this year, the fourth year noted at this site. At least two young were observed by late September. This pair has become quite a tourist attraction and many local people are aware of their presence.
- Flame Robin seen at Fran Street on Moonee Ponds Creek in July 2001 and one hunting amongst indigenous plantings at Merri Park Wetland Northcote in July 2001. Bird observers consider this species to have seriously declined in recent years.
- Nine Gang-Gang Cockatoos flying over Central Creek Grasslands Reservoir and 6–10 were observed at Hall Reserve Clifton Hill the next day in May 2001.
- Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos were observed at Hall Reserve. They have become regular spring visitors. Up to thirty were observed using this area in September 2001.
- Yellow-billed Spoonbill on Merri Creek at Capp Reserve Thornbury in September 2001. This species is very infrequently recorded on the Merri Creek, preferring still-water habitats such as wetlands in which to forage.

A local resident submitted some fascinating observations including;

- Six Diamond Firetails observed at the Koorie Garden area at the mouth of Merri Creek in Yarra Bend Park in January 2001
- A Platypus seen from the Koorie Garden area in December 2000.

Weed monitoring and control

MCMC maps and assesses environmental weed outbreaks of particular concern, especially new and emerging weeds and 'Weeds of National Significance'. Outbreaks are mapped and added to MCMC's Geographic Information System for future eradication planning.

- **Oxalis glabra* Finger-leaf Oxalis Inspection by MCMC staff of infestations of **Oxalis glabra* within the Rushwood Drive council reserve Craigieburn in July 2001 indicated a substantial reduction of areas that this weed was occupying as a result of the eradication program commenced in 2000. The reduced population was mapped using GPS equipment. Remaining isolated patches of the weed were sprayed with herbicide and will continue to be monitored in future years. The weed is still present outside the reserve in nature strips and privately owned land within Craigieburn and Somerton.
- **Achnantherum caudatum* Broad-kernel Espartillo, **Moraia miniata* Two-leaf Cape Tulip, **Echium plantagineum* Pattersons Curse The first is a newly emerging weed, the latter two are listed noxious weeds. MCMC has been mapping outbreaks of these species as part of eradication programs.
- Priority Grassy weeds such as **Phalaris aquatica* and **Nassella neesiana* Fine scale vegetation mapping at Jukes Road Grassland established boundaries of priority grassy weeds to assist planning of weed control priorities for future works at this site.
- **Euphorbia exigua* Tiny Spurge A plant specimen provided to the National Herbarium of Victoria in 1999 for identification has been identified as this species. Formerly recorded in South Australia, this is a new record for Victoria. The specimen was collected on the east side of Merri Creek at Galada Tamboore Thomastown within VicRoads owned land. Small patches on the west side of the creek at Galada Tamboore Campbellfield have also been found. The plant is a tiny annual, thousands of individuals cover the ground thickly, especially in disturbed ground near tracks. MCMC will be liaising with Department of Natural Resources and Environment regarding appropriate control of this species and will convey this information to the relevant landowners

Eradication of Priority grassy weeds at Cooper St Grassland Reserve in Campbellfield.
Photo by Chrissie Cowcher

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."

Participants at a community planting day at Merri Park Wetland.

Photo by Barb Miles

Merri Plains Grassy Ecosystem Reference Group

The group continues to meet regularly and provides an important forum for information exchange and discussion of the management of Merri Creek's native grasslands. For the time being it is convened and chaired by MCMC staff. Meetings are 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. The group has been used as a model for establishment of a similar group covering grasslands of western Greater Melbourne and Keilor Plains.

Over the previous year, a number of new grassland reserves have been created within the Merri catchment at Kalkallo, Craigieburn and Mt Ridley, but unfortunately grasslands continue to be destroyed or degraded through development and accidental damage such as at Beveridge during installation of a fibre-optic cable, and at Craigieburn with installation of a gas pipeline.

Port Phillip and Westernport Weed and Rabbit Action Plans

MCMC submitted comments on the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment and Land Protection Board Weed and Rabbit Plans. The weed strategy will be useful in contributing to regional information on priority weeds, assisting MCMC to prioritise weeds and weed management actions at a catchment level. The rabbit strategy had a strong focus on rural and rural-urban interface areas, and did not identify urban areas as being of priority for control. MCMC's submission highlighted the importance of rabbit control, particularly along urban habitat corridors, and of the importance of community education and information.

Port Phillip and Westernport Native Vegetation Plan

MCMC submitted comments on the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment and Land Protection Board Native Vegetation Plan. The plan identifies the original vegetation in the area and the existing remnants. It uses this information to generate a number of maps showing depletion of habitat, vegetation communities, reservation, fragmentation, etc, which are then used to



prioritise strategic directions, actions and management recommendations. Because of the scale at which information was collected, there are a number of inaccuracies for the Merri Creek catchment (including a number of significant existing remnants not shown). This then affects the level of priority given to a number of actions related to the catchment.

Integrated catchment management

During the year the Committee considered whether to expand MCMC's role in catchment management. Members were concerned that MCMC shouldn't try to assume responsibility for accountabilities held by other organisations but could play a useful role in facilitating information exchange in the catchment and in providing community education services to member groups on catchment management issues. A Stormwater Working Party is to be formed to facilitate information exchange between agency staff and MCMC, particularly focussing on implementation of councils' stormwater action plans.

MCMC's Automotive and Construction/ Demolition Industries Project (described in more detail below) is an example of how MCMC can take on an educational role (in this year with

small automotive workshops) and develop an educational relationship impossible for an enforcement agency.

Stormwater Management Plans were completed by four of the six catchment Councils, with the Shire of Mitchell commencing preparation of theirs and Whittlesea City Council planning to commence soon.

Resource sharing

MCMC actively shares resources by making its services available on a fee for service basis to member groups and other agencies. The Parkland Management Team provided their expertise on maintenance of revegetated areas, weed control in remnant vegetation areas, and organising planting through a range of contracts with the Cities of Moreland and Yarra, to DNRE, Parks Victoria's Grassland Unit, RMIT, University of Melbourne and others.

Other contract work included assisting Moreland City Council with the development and production of interpretive signage for the Creek.

MCMC acted as the Melbourne Waterwatch coordinator for the Merri and Moonee Ponds Creeks.

Information exchange

MCMC facilitates or participates in a range of groups for which a major role is information

exchange. In 2000–2001 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 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, Mitchell Shire's Stormwater Management Plan consultative committee, Yarra Valley Water's Northern Sewage Strategy Consultative Committee, EcoRecycle Victoria's Litter Education Advisory Committee, City of Yarra's East Clifton Hill Precinct Plan Steering Committee. MCMC staff also met regularly with Melbourne Water Yarra Region Operations staff up until their restructure.

Pollution spills

14 pollution spills were reported to MCMC during the year from Coburg (5), Northcote (3), Brunswick (2), Campbellfield, Fawkner, Reservoir and Somerton. MCMC records any pollution report and promptly directs the complaint to the EPA Pollution Watch hotline on 9695 2777.



*Kangaroo Grass
Themeda triandra.
Photo by Brian Bainbridge*

Community Participation

"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."

Above right: Autumn Planting Festival 2001.

Photo by Simon Fell

Below: Plant identification and handweeding day with Friends of Quarries, Clifton Hill at Hall Reserve.

Photo by Barb Miles

Community festivals

Hume City Council held their annual Spring Planting, Refugee and Reconciliation Planting Festival on October 1st 2000 at Merlynston Creek (a tributary of Merri Creek) off Camp Road Broadmeadows. The festival was titled the "Willy Wagtail Festival" to celebrate the local birds. MCMC staff attended and assisted the Greening Hume team in coordinating the planting aspects of the day.

MCMC prepared a display and ran face painting at the Darebin Festival at Edwardes Lake. MCMC shared a marquee with Friends of Merri Creek and Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Cooperative, which was useful in broadening the scope of each other's displays and information available.

MCMC participated in the Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival at CERES. We provided talks and games on Kingfisher lifecycle, prepared a display on the Sacred Kingfisher and Merri Creek, highlighting areas where the Kingfisher had been sighted, and led the parade and start of the performance with our symbolic creek. (The creek, made of three strips of satin, was developed last year for 10th anniversary celebrations.)

In celebration of International Year of Volunteers, MCMC worked with local communities, residents, friends groups and students to implement our revegetation and restoration program. 4,600 volunteer hours were contributed to the creek's restoration in organised community activities.

Handweeding, planting and seed collection days

MCMC organised 10 handweeding, seed collection and weedmat removal days and nine planting days in 2000–1 in partnership with Friends of Merri Creek, Friends of Quarries Clifton



Hill, and local residents' groups. Most activities were held on Sunday mornings, although some handweeding activities at Merri Park wetland were held in the early evening on weekdays, following a suggestion from a resident. These provided a wonderful opportunity to watch the birdlife of the area as dusk approached.

In recognition of volunteers' hard work, MCMC staff finish most community activities with a walk and talk of the local creek environment, followed by a free BBQ or morning tea. MCMC prepare displays and provide community members with information about identification of indigenous plants and weeds, and information about the conservation values of the area.

MCMC invited Friends members and staff and volunteers from Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Cooperative to assist with the collection of seed and propagating material of rare and significant plants from Galada Tamboore, Merri Creek Thomastown, and Lalor Golf Course as part of MCMC's significant species reintroduction program.

MCMC also provided assistance to two school groups that organised indigenous plantings within their school grounds, or on Merri Creek near their schools. MCMC provided information about which species to plant, sourced indigenous plant stock and assisted with planting techniques and provision of planting tools for the planting days. MCMC also organised planting activities within Merri Creek Parklands for 13 school groups.

Training, walks and talks

MCMC staff delivered a number of training sessions and informal walks and talks to primary, secondary, tertiary and TAFE students, members of the community and community groups. We took six groups to our native grasslands for wildflower walks, to our streamside and wetland habitats for plant identification and ecological processes studies, and along the Merri Shared





path to spot birds, lizards and insects that have returned to Merri Creek.

MCMC staff also delivered seven formal lectures and talks on Merri Creek, revegetation techniques and grassland restoration to environmental studies and natural resource management students, and to industry-based short courses.

Student Work Placements

MCMC's Parkland Management Team provided three students from tertiary institutions with revegetation work experience to fulfil course requirements. Students worked alongside staff for a total of 19 days.

MCMC also hosted groups of students who spent a day at Merri Creek studying habitat and working beside MCMC's Parkland Management Team.

Parkland staff also assisted three tertiary students with minor research projects, which included monitoring survivorship of MCMC's significant plant re-establishment program in 2000 and 2001 at Hall Reserve Wetland Clifton Hill, Merri Park Wetland Northcote and Queens Parade Fawkner. Two students developed a wetland manual to be used by volunteer hand-weeders.

Community information and publications

MCMC produced two more brochures in the "day in the life of" cartoon series targeting younger audiences; the first brochure of the series featuring the life cycle of the Radar Beetle, was produced last year. This year the brochures featured creekside environments, with Wanda the Water Rat, and basalt escarpments with the Cunningham's Skink.

As part of Earth Alive! Biodiversity Month in September, and World Threatened Species Day on September 9th, MCMC organised a walk by well known field naturalist Allan Reid at Hall Reserve Clifton Hill, to discover the myriad animals that live amongst the varied habitat of the area. MCMC produced a small brochure "Merri Creek Parklands

Biodiversity and Habitat" and a display featuring these animals and the niches they inhabit.

Publicity

Local or metropolitan newspapers included the following articles featuring MCMC and Merri Creek: 16 on the F2 freeway campaign, nine on various MCMC activities – including a series on MCMC's Manager's experiences of the Creek from Wallan to Abbotsford, eight on MCMC's Automotive, Construction and Demolition Project, five on MCMC being a national finalist in RiverPrize 2001, five on community planting, four on pollution in the Creek, two on the Somerton gas pipeline, two on weeds, two on indigenous planting, and one each on native animals, snakes, flooding and water quality testing.

Community Information

MCMC exhibited information displays, most including leaflets and posters, at seven or more festivals and community events. At least one stall and display was provided within each member municipality. Usually, the displays included information about the Friends of Merri Creek and they were staffed by MCMC and/or members of the Friends.

From 28 November 2000 to 28 February 2001, MCMC had a prominent display near the door of the DNRE Information Centre, featuring articles on the Growling Grass Frog and general MCMC information.

The notice board on the front fence of the MCMC office is updated monthly to inform passers-by about current events on the Merri Creek.

Two editions of Merri News were published in December 2000 and August 2001 and circulated to over 1000 interested people and organisations in the community.

Left: Brian Bainbridge with Brunswick Brownies and Guides on a walk and talk and planting. Photo by Barb Miles

Below: Park Victoria's Community Jobs Program participants handweeded in Merri Park Wetland as part of their training program. Photo by Judy Bush





Website development

During the year MCMC's website has been significantly updated. Information about MCMC's structure and programs has been added, and further information about Merri Creek will be added as funding permits. MCMC's website is at www.vicnet.net.au/~mcmc.

Melbourne Waterwatch

Investigations of aquatic life in Merri Creek continued in 2001. MCMC Waterwatch Officers worked with 33 schools (over 3,000 students), three friends groups, 10 community groups, 21 auto workshops and at community festivals and activity days. The groups were pleased to discover that yabbies, shrimps, freshwater mussels, damselfly nymphs and many other aquatic invertebrates call Merri or Moonee Ponds Creeks home.

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.

Waterwatch Officers took the creek to auto workshop workers who gained a greater appreciation of the life to be found through looking at sample buckets of macro-invertebrates. Ben North from Friends of the Quarries Clifton Hill, is undertaking water-quality monitoring in Hall Reserve Clifton Hill and John Lawson is coordinating Friends of Merri Creek's Streamteam testing at Galada Tamboore. Peter Foote and Tia Stewart are university students who are regularly monitoring at Goodwin Street. Judy Allen and volunteers from the Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Coop are monitoring at Heidelberg Road. Nastasha Baldyga and volunteers from Friends of the Trigger Plant have received Waterwatch training and undertook some testing which they will resume on Yuroke Creek at Broadmeadows after Melbourne Water construction works are completed at their site.

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

Whittlesea Custodians

Merri Creek Management Committee was funded through the Whittlesea Community Development Grants Program to run an environmental education program, "Edgars Creek Community

Custodians". The program worked with local schools, ESL (English as a Second Language) groups and Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) groups within the municipality of Whittlesea.

The Edgars Creek Custodianship program involved presentation of Creek Talk workshops to ESL Classes, Community groups and local Primary and Secondary Schools from the Edgars Creek region. These workshops introduced issues of custodianship of the Edgars Creek parklands. Participants were invited to explore the parklands through a series of environmental education activities located along Edgars Creek. The activities culminated in the exploration of the aquatic animal life abundant in the waters of Edgars Creek.

A community waste-free picnic was planned and prepared by the custodian participants. It was to be the culmination of the program to celebrate Whittlesea's diverse environments and culture, but unfortunately due to heavy rain had to be cancelled.

Autumn Planting Festival

John Lane was sub-contracted to help MCMC's Catchment Team co-ordinate the Autumn Planting Festival for Moreland City Council on the 5th May 2001. It was held at the Denzil Don Reserve in Brunswick West on the banks of the Moonee Ponds Creek. On the festival day more than 500 people joined eight community groups from Turkish, Kurdish, Chinese and Italian backgrounds that worked closely with the project. They participated in and enjoyed planting activities, Waterwatch activities, creek walks and talks, a shared food feast prepared by each of the groups, a Wurundjeri opening ceremony and musical performances from the participating groups.

A small grant of \$1,500 was received from the Department of Family and Community Services' International Year of Volunteers 2001 Small Grants Program for translations of promotional and workshop materials.

Sustainable Schools

The Sustainable Schools and Communities project was funded by the cities of Moreland and Darebin. It enabled Parkland Management and Catchment Program staff to visit eleven schools in those municipalities to discuss the potential to develop indigenous gardens within their school grounds. School visits took up to two hours with plant lists prepared in keeping with individual school's objectives. A package of materials was prepared for each school to guide them in fundraising, garden

Merri Creek Environment Fund

design, establishment and maintenance.

Curriculum resources to integrate the garden into learning activities were also distributed. Schools in Darebin, Moreland and Whittlesea will take part in the program during 2001/2002.

Automotive, Construction & Demolition Industries Program

The Catching On project, funded by a \$17,100 grant from the Myer Foundation, enabled MCMC to systematically approach 32 automotive workplaces in Melbourne's northern suburbs. Thirty of these automotive workshops were then visited two or three times more over a four-month period. Information on catchment values, and minimising and preventing pollution were developed to circulate to these and many other automotive businesses. 2,000 copies of a brochure on clean workshops were printed with 1,000 copies distributed to Councils for distribution.

At Edwardes Lake on 29th May Sheryl Garbutt, Victorian Minister for Conservation & Environment, presented funding from the Victorian Stormwater Action Program (VSAP) of \$11,480 to MCMC's ACDIP activities in Darebin. This has been matched by funding from the City of Darebin. The VSAP funding is only available to local government, MCMC prepared the application on behalf of Darebin City Council who signed as project leader. The project is expected to be complete by early 2002. Additional Council contributions will enable the project to continue throughout the 2002/2003 financial year.



The Merri Creek Environment Fund is a tax-deductible fund which 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 Merri Creek Environment Fund does not receive sponsorship from businesses, but only gifts from the Community. Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible.

It is owned by Merri Creek Management Committee, and managed by a committee of people with a demonstrated commitment to the wider community, and reports to the Merri Creek Management Committee and the Federal Department of the Environment.

The fund is set up to provide a long term, ongoing and independent source of grants to private landowners, community groups and to the Merri Creek Management Committee to:

- research and promote environmentally sustainable transport options in the catchment
- work with schools to involve children in environmental projects
- undertake educational activities about the Merri Creek environment
- revegetate areas along the Merri Creek and its tributaries with indigenous plants
- create or restore and maintain wetlands
- undertake habitat improvement works such as re-introducing rocks and riffles to the waterways
- fence areas of remnant vegetation
- purchase land for conservation and
- install litter traps

Tax deductible donations began to flow into the Merri Creek Environment Fund during the year. Donations totalled \$7832 from seven donors. Grants issued from the fund totalled \$5000.

The MCMC and Merri Creek Environment Fund are not-for-profit and committed to ethical investments.

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

Jessica Miller showed Merri Creek's aquatic fauna to automotive workers who were surprised that anything lived in the creek.

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 and effectiveness

A number of key performance indicators (KPI) have been developed and monitored as a result of MCMC's Enterprise Bargaining agreement. The first KPI aimed to improve clarity for staff in terms of entitlements, policies, etc by developing and circulating a new Staff Handbook. This was completed in April 2001.

The second KPI aimed to improve the level of workplace safety by introducing a more structured process for the Occupational Health and Safety Committee meetings. This has been done and as a result actions are being implemented more promptly.

The third KPI aimed to improve the level of staff performance, already high, by improving the achievement of action plans and performance objectives from annual staff reviews. The measure, a running average over 12 months has fluctuated, but has increased since the KPI was set.

As part of its normal operations with the community, staff now ask participants (or if the activity is with a group, the group's own leader) to assess MCMC's performance using an evaluation form. The use of the form is the fourth KPI. By the end of the year, 165 forms had been returned, with an average rating of 4.8 on a scale of five, well exceeding the target of 4.0. Other comments received on the forms have been very useful in refining the design of community events.

The final KPI aimed to reduce electricity and gas use. A particularly cold winter in 2000 increased gas use considerably, and the

unexpected expense and complication of installing solar voltaic panels made planned reductions in electricity use impractical. Instead an energy audit has been commenced which should recommend practical strategies for reducing energy use.

These KPIs are to be reviewed as part of the new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement being developed for implementation in 2002. Additional performance measures will probably be developed as an outcome from the Continuous Improvement workshop held for staff during the year.

Fund seeking

37 separate funding applications or contract bids were lodged totalling \$1.16m, slightly up from the 32 totalling \$1.1m in the previous year, with a success rate of around 83%. Many of the applications or bids lodged in one year relate to money which would be received in MCMC's following financial year.

Funding was received from the following organisations:

- Moreland City Council (\$353,025 grants and contracts)
- Parks Victoria Grants Program (\$238,945)
- Darebin City Council (\$120,214)
- Yarra City Council (\$54,257 grants and \$51,639 through Citywide Service Solutions contract)
- Hume City Council (\$55,000)
- Whittlesea City Council (\$24,184)
- Myer Foundation (\$17,100)
- National Heritage Trust via Melbourne Water (\$13,300)
- GPU PowerNet (\$5,000)
- City of Moonee Valley (\$3000)
- City of Melbourne (\$2086)
- Department of Natural Resources and Environment (\$3,000 contract)
- Department of Family and Community Services (\$1,500)

Melbourne Water initially confirmed a grant of \$20,000 but then withdrew the offer.

Sponsors

Ford Australia Broadmeadows continued to sponsor MCMC's educational activities by providing an LPG fuelled Ford Falcon to enable the program to take equipment and staff to schools and other community activities.



Jessica Miller discuss MCMC's Waterwatch activities at the launch of National Water Week with John Landy, AC, MBE, Governor of Victoria.
Photo by Joanne McManus

Treasurer's Report

MCMC made a loss of \$8,020 in 2000–2001 on an accrual basis, despite Melbourne Water withdrawing \$20,000 worth of committed funds. This loss was relatively small in comparison to MCMC's turnover for the year of \$978,141.

MCMC's Finance Subcommittee met quarterly to consider financial reports prepared on a quarterly basis including balance sheet, income and expenditure and budget statement, list of cheques, receivables and payables reports, and a cash flow projection, and to discuss financial controls and policy. Minutes of the meetings were referred to the Committee of Management, along with copies of the balance sheet and income, expenditure and budget statement. Thanks to members of the Finance Subcommittee, and particularly to Kath McPherson our Finance Officer, and Tony Faithfull Manager.

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

During the year Judy Schrever was appointed as MCMC's accountant.

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

As a result of Melbourne Water withdrawing their un-tied funding, additional costs including MCMC's Information Officer's salary have been moved to the shared costs area across all MCMC programs. This will result in a small increase in MCMC charge out rates in 2001–2.

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

A balance sheet is provided as part of the Auditors Report which shows that at the end of the year MCMC had net assets of \$254,215. No major assets were purchased during the year.

Employees of MCMC during the year are listed on the inside back cover of this report. Appropriate salary and superannuation payments and long service and annual leave provisions have been made consistent with MCMC's Enterprise Bargaining Agreement.

David Redfearn

David Redfearn, Honorary Treasurer
22 November 2001.

Merri Creek Management Committee Inc Income, expenditure & budget statement October 2000 through September 2001

	Actual Oct-Sept	Annual Budget 00-01 Approved 22/05/01	Actual 1999-2000
MANAGEMENT INCOME			
Municipalities	\$115,600	\$115,600	\$100,000
State & Federal Govt	\$0	\$20,000	\$20,000
Contracts	\$0	\$7,500	\$13,870
Other Income	<u>\$12,254</u>	<u>\$7,685</u>	<u>\$8,710</u>
Total MANAGEMENT INCOME	<u>\$127,854</u>	<u>\$150,785</u>	<u>\$142,580</u>
MANAGEMENT EXPENSES			
Salaries	\$138,742	\$129,464	\$136,964
Salaries On-Costs	\$20,296	\$20,880	\$14,964
Interdepartmental chargeouts	(\$15,200)	(\$18,560)	(\$19,167)
General expenses	\$4,896	\$3,075	\$10,080
Operational Expenses	(\$24,923)	(\$43,896)	(\$27,315)
Grant Expenses	\$2,500	\$4,500	\$0
Vehicle running costs	\$1,771	\$1,690	\$1,701
Other expenses	\$16,582	\$24,674	\$32,818
Provisions	<u>(\$4,612)</u>	<u>\$21,442</u>	<u>\$22,799</u>
Total MANAGEMENT EXPENSES	<u>\$140,052</u>	<u>\$143,269</u>	<u>\$172,844</u>
MANAGEMENT SURPLUS1(DEFICIT)	<u>(\$12,198)</u>	<u>\$7,516</u>	<u>(\$30,264)</u>
PARKLAND MGMT INCOME			
Municipalities	\$165,925	\$174,000	\$191,351
State Government	\$213,975	\$215,785	\$237,162
Federal Government	\$0	\$0	\$0
Contracts	\$315,251	\$356,888	\$406,539
Other	<u>\$5,338</u>	<u>\$5,024</u>	<u>\$6,478</u>
Total PARKLAND MGMT INCOME	<u>\$700,489</u>	<u>\$751,697</u>	<u>\$841,530</u>
PARKLAND MGMT EXPENSES			
Salaries	\$417,872	\$412,347	\$424,909
Salary On-costs	\$50,116	\$67,096	\$51,991
Interdepartmental chargeouts	\$17,323	\$19,253	\$19,167
General expenses	\$16,005	\$16,479	\$19,074
Operational Expenses	\$69,249	\$85,324	\$72,996
Project costs	\$90,139	\$88,616	\$172,293
Vehicles	\$10,251	\$9,985	\$11,714
Other expenses	\$0	\$0	\$0
Provisions	<u>\$17,767</u>	<u>\$16,365</u>	<u>\$15,941</u>
Total PARKLAND MGMT EXPENSES	<u>\$688,723</u>	<u>\$715,465</u>	<u>\$788,085</u>
PMT SURPLUS(DEFICIT)	<u>\$11,767</u>	<u>\$36,232</u>	<u>\$53,445</u>
CATCHMENT PROGRAM INCOME			
Municipalities	\$63,716	\$61,125	\$79,935
State Government	\$24,970	\$30,215	\$28,038
Federal Government	\$14,800	\$13,300	\$13,000
Contracts	\$19,506	\$16,240	\$19,807
Schools & non-govt	\$580	\$580	\$3,450
Other income	<u>\$17,995</u>	<u>\$17,100</u>	<u>\$318</u>
Total CATCHMENT PROG INCOME	<u>\$141,567</u>	<u>\$138,560</u>	<u>\$144,548</u>
CATCHMENT PROGRAM EXPENSES			
Salaries	\$102,173	\$84,992	\$103,753
Salaries Oncosts	\$11,958	\$13,384	\$11,172
Interdepartmental chargeouts	(\$2,123)	\$0	\$0
General Expenses	\$1,220	\$3,027	\$2,243
Operational Expenses	\$15,054	\$15,415	\$11,635
Project expenses	\$20,271	\$23,000	\$20,339
Provisions	<u>\$2,219</u>	<u>\$1,300</u>	<u>\$1,856</u>
Total CATCHMENT PROG EXP.	<u>\$150,772</u>	<u>\$141,118</u>	<u>\$150,998</u>
CATCH PROG SURPLUS(DEFICIT)	<u>(\$9,205)</u>	<u>(\$2,558)</u>	<u>(\$6,450)</u>
Operating Profit	<u>(\$9,637)</u>	<u>\$41,190</u>	<u>\$16,731</u>
OTHER INCOME			
Sales of Publications	\$399	\$0	\$559
Merri Creek Environment Fund	<u>\$7,832</u>	<u>\$0</u>	<u>\$0</u>
Total OTHER INCOME	<u>\$8,251</u>	<u>\$0</u>	<u>\$559</u>
OTHER EXPENSES			
Cost of Publications	\$1,515	\$16,000	\$600
Merri Creek Environment Fund	<u>\$5,098</u>	<u>\$0</u>	<u>\$0</u>
Total Other Expenses	<u>\$6,613</u>	<u>\$16,000</u>	<u>\$600</u>
MCMC NET SURPLUS(DEFICIT)	<u>(\$8,019)</u>	<u>\$25,190</u>	<u>\$16,690</u>

Please note that this report does not form part of the auditors report.

Auditor's Report

Auditors Report

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF MERRI CREEK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE INC. FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2001

SCOPE

I have audited the attached special purpose financial report comprising the Balance Sheet as at 30th September, 2001 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, 2001.

Dated at Lower Plenty: 16th November, 2001

FRED GERARDSON
Chartered Accountant
Registered Company Auditor

Balance Sheet

MERRI CREEK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE INC. BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2001

	NOTE	2001	2000
EQUITY:			
Retained Funds – Start		262235	245545
Add Surplus / (Deficit)		-8020	16690
Retained Funds – End		<u>\$254,215</u>	<u>\$262,235</u>
Represented By:			
CURRENT ASSETS:			
Cash at Bank	2	240731	212273
Bonds		780	780
Sundry Debtors & Prepayments		127545	118447
Less Provision for Doubtful Debts		0	-7000
		<u>369056</u>	<u>324500</u>
FIXED ASSETS:	1(b)		
Computer Equipment – @ Cost		23342	23342
Less Prov'n for Depreciation		-19084	-14414
Plant & Equipment – @ Cost		13763	13763
Less Prov'n for Depreciation		-10249	-7494
Buildings		14180	14180
Less Prov'n for Depreciation		-9648	-4921
Vehicles – @ Cost		119493	119493
Less Prov'n for Depreciation		-34023	-24064
		<u>97774</u>	<u>119885</u>
Total Assets:		<u>466830</u>	<u>444385</u>
Less:			
CURRENT LIABILITIES:			
Advanced Receipts		84478	83928
Trade & Sundry Creditors		67894	36985
Provisions for Leave	1(c)	60243	61237
Total Liabilities:		<u>212615</u>	<u>182150</u>
NET ASSETS:		<u>\$254,215</u>	<u>\$262,235</u>

Income and Expenditure

MERRI CREEK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE INC. STATEMENT OF INCOME & EXPENDITURE FOR THE TWELVE MONTHS ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2001

	NOTE	2001	2000
INCOME:			
Grants	1(e)		
Municipalities		345241	371286
Other Government		253745	298200
Non Government		22680	8450
Contracts		334758	440217
Interest Received		9052	7952
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets		0	0
Sale of Publications		399	559
Environment Fund Donations		7832	0
Sundry Income		4434	2554
Total Income:		<u>978141</u>	<u>1129218</u>
LESS EXPENDITURE:			
Wages & Salaries		658787	665626
Salaries Oncosts		82370	78127
Materials & Plant Hire		121250	225451
Vehicle Running		12689	14050
Admin, Project & General		84850	88677
Environment Fund Disbursements		5098	0
Provisions			
Depreciation	1(b)	22112	21607
Annual & Long Service Leave	1(c)	-995	18990
Total Expenditure:		<u>986161</u>	<u>1112528</u>
NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):		<u>(\$8,020)</u>	<u>\$16,690</u>

This statement is to be read in conjunction with the attached auditor's report

Notes to the financial statements

MERRI CREEK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE INC. NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2001

NOTE 1 – SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES

This special purpose financial report has been prepared for distribution to the members to fulfil 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 expended 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 three 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.

NOTE 2 – STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS

	2001	2000
Cash Flows from Operating Activities		
Receipts	962593	1125932
Payments	-934135	-1053823
Net cash from operating activities	28458	72109
Cash Flows from Investing Activities		
Proceeds from sale of vehicles and eqpt	0	0
Payments for vehicles and equipment	0	6730
Net cash from investing activities	0	-6730
Net Increase / (Decrease) in Cash Held	28458	65379
Cash at beginning of the financial year	212273	146894
Cash at the end of the financial year	240731	212273
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 Accounts	180741	126914
No. 2 Account	0	50067
Environment Fund Account	2735	0
Term Deposit – Bendigo Bank	10293	0
Cheque Account – Bendigo Bank	9492	0
Long Service Leave Account	37470	35292
	240731	212273
Reconciliation of Net Cash Used in Operating Activities to Operating Result		
Operating Result	-8020	16690
Add back		
Provisions for Depreciation	22112	21607
Provisions for Doubtful Debts	-7000	7000
Provisions for Leave	-995	18990
Increase in Advanced Receipts	550	36141
Increase in Trade Creditors	30909	18108
Less		
Increase in Trade Debtors	-9098	-46427
Gains on sale of vehicles and eqpt	0	0
Net cash from operating activities	28458	72109
NOTE 3 – AUDITOR'S REMUNERATION		
Audit Fees	3100	2760
Other Services	800	960
	3900	3720

This statement is to be read in conjunction with the attached auditor's report.

Member Representatives & Staff

Staff from October 2000 to September 2001

Management and Administration

Manager:	<i>Tony Faithfull</i>
Conservation Manager:	<i>Judy Bush</i>
Administration Officer	<i>Ray Radford,</i> <i>Sylvia Harris (casual)</i>
Finance Officer:	<i>Kathleen McPherson</i>
Cleaner:	<i>Anne Byrnes</i>

Catchment Program Team

Catchment Program	
Manager:	<i>Chris Smyth, Simon Fell</i>
Catchment Program	
Officer – Waterwatch:	<i>Nigel Philpot, Jessica Miller</i>
Catchment Program	
Officer:	<i>Angela Foley</i>
Education Officer:	<i>Natasha Van Velzen</i> <i>(casual)</i>
Education Performers	
(casual):	<i>Maria Romnios,</i> <i>Maria Callipari</i>
Festival Coordinator	
(casual):	<i>John Lane</i>

Parkland Management Team

Coordinator:	<i>Barb Miles</i>
Technical Officer:	<i>Brian Bainbridge</i>
Team Leader:	<i>Nicole Drever</i>
Team Members:	<i>Sal Collyer,</i> <i>Chrissie Cowcher,</i> <i>Megan Jericho,</i> <i>Deb Lawson,</i> <i>Georgia Leunig,</i> <i>Matt MacDonald,</i> <i>Emma Stevens</i>
Casual Team members:	<i>Aaron Beutel,</i> <i>Michael Brodie,</i> <i>Garth Cross,</i> <i>Geoff Brown,</i> <i>Mellela Elton,</i> <i>Laura Johnson,</i> <i>David McPherson,</i> <i>Claire O'Sullivan</i>

MCMC Directors from October 2000 to September 2001

From October 2000 to September 2001, MCMC held the following meetings:

- four Committee of Management Meetings and one Annual General Meeting, totals five (M);
- two Planning and Issues Sub-Committee Meetings (P&I);
- four Merri Creek and Environs Strategy Implementation Sub-Committee Meetings (MCESI);
- 10 Executive Sub-Committee meetings (E);
- four Finance Sub-Committee Meetings (F);
- two Merri Creek and Environment Fund Meetings (MCEF).

Representatives who attended the meetings are listed below. 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 resigned before the completion of the twelve-month period are indicated by (res.) and their replacements are shown by (new). A dash indicates that the person was not a member of the relevant Committee or Sub-Committee.

REPRESENTATIVES	M (5)	P&I (2)	MCESI (4)	E (10)	F (4)	MCEF (4)
Darebin City Council						
Cr. Vince Fontana (D)	1	–	–	–	–	–
Allan Wicks (D)	5	–	–	–	–	–
Suzanne Becker (P&I)	–	1	1	–	–	–
Libby Hynes P&I	–	1	–	–	–	–
Cr. Tim Lawrence (Sub.)	1	1	–	–	–	–
Adam Shalekoff (MCESI)	–	–	3	–	–	–
Hume City Council						
Cr. Drew Jessop (D)	3	–	–	–	–	–
David Blair (D) (res.)	3	–	–	–	–	–
Mei Lee (D (new)	0	0	–	–	–	–
Karen Wilson (MCES)	1	–	2	–	–	–
Margarita Caddick (P&I)	–	0	–	–	–	–
Moreland City Council						
Cr. Rosemary Kerr (D)	2	–	–	–	–	–
Alistair Phillips (D)	2	–	–	–	–	–
Nancy Krause (MCESI)	–	–	0	–	–	–
Julie Hallyburton (P&I)	–	0	–	–	–	–
Cr. Leigh Snelling (Sub.)	1	–	–	–	–	–
Leanne O'Shea (Sub.)	–	–	1	–	–	–
Geoff Bellamy (Sub.)	–	–	1	–	–	–
Whittlesea City Council						
Cr. Stefan Kozmevski (D)	4	–	–	–	–	–
Bruce Schroder (D) (res.)	2	–	–	–	–	–
David Turnbull (D (new)	0	–	–	–	–	–
Felicity Ayres (MCESI)	–	–	1	–	–	–
Chris De Silva (P&I)	1	2	–	–	–	–
Yarra City Council						
Cr. Robyn Williams (D)	4	1	4	5	–	–
Ros Kilgour (D)	0	–	–	–	–	–
Sylvana Predebon (MCESI)	2	–	1	–	–	–
Melbourne Water (res.)						
David Taylor (D) (res.)	2	–	1	–	–	–
Friends of Merri Creek						
Brendan Casey (D)	2	–	3	–	–	–
Allie Dawe (D)	3	1	–	–	1	–
Trevor Hausler (D)	5	2	1	6	1	–
Ann McGregor (D)	5	2	1	8	–	–
David Redfearn (D)	4	2	1	8	4	1
Max Sargent (D)	5	2	0	–	–	–
Harold Mackrell (Sub.)	1	1	3	–	–	–
Paul Prentice (Sub.)	3	2	1	–	–	–
Alan Brennan (MCESI)	–	–	1	–	–	–
Accountants (F)						
Lynda Poke (res.)	–	–	–	–	2	–
Judy Schrever (new)	–	–	–	–	2	–
Esteemed People (MCEF)						
Glenyys Romanes MP	–	–	–	–	–	2
Alex Smart	–	–	–	–	–	2



Moreland City Council



City of Whittlesea



Melbourne
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