

MERRI CREEK



MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

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 new members, the Friends of Wallan Creek. Representatives of these member 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. It employs specialist and dedicated staff and its' programs are funded by Council members, by state and federal grant programs, by competitively won tenders, by grants from philanthropic organisations and through sponsorship.

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.

MCMC prizewinner

MCMC was awarded the 2002 Theiss Services National Riverprize for excellence in waterway management.



Annual Report

2005-2006

President's Report

In 2006 we are again facing a severe drought after very low winter and spring rainfalls. During these harsh times, the Merri Creek parklands will again provide a haven for birds and other wildlife, further re-enforcing the importance of the continuing revegetation and restoration work that started more than two decades ago.

This wildlife haven will be further enhanced by the development of the Merri Creek Park that will protect some of the native grasslands that once covered much of western Victoria. After a long delay, Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) was pleased to see the release of the Parks Victoria proposal for this Park north of the Ring Road. However, we would like to see the Park extended further north to protect other important sites not incorporated into the current plan.

Recently, the Friends of Wallan Creek joined MCMC, strengthening the community representation on the Committee and increasing the number of activities and projects in the northern part of the catchment.

MCMC has continued to provide support to school communities to help them develop and maintain indigenous gardens in school grounds and to assist them develop relationships with the creek environs and an understanding of waterway health issues

New ways to reach the culturally and linguistically diverse communities that

characterise our outer urban catchment have been explored. This included a series of plantings with children from Our Lady Guardian of the Plants church in Campbellfield, whose congregation is drawn from Iraqi immigrants, and walks and talks for groups associated with local community houses and adult migrant English classes.

The repercussions from the discoveries of Golden Sun-moth populations in 2004 have widened. The species is now a consideration in land developments across the north and west of Melbourne. MCMC has continued to play a role in the development of better understanding of the species and the maintenance of its habitat through cooperation with other agencies and research bodies.

We have undergone big staff changes over the last year and we welcomed new key members Katrina Roberg (Conservation Program Manager) and Greg Woodward (Waterwatch Coordinator), plus other new staff, Sarah Crinall, Sam Bretherton, Jill Hildebrandt and Dimi Bouzalas.

Finally thanks to all the staff, Committee members, Council representatives, Friends' group members and others from the general community who have again worked tirelessly to improved this important community asset and vital native habitat.

Trevor Hausler, President

Parkland Management

– restoration of remnant vegetation

Habitat

Golden Sun-moths continued to provide a focus for activities in the Native Grasslands of the Merri. In December 2005, Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) coordinated the Friends of Merri Creek's second community survey at Craigieburn Grassland in partnership with Parks Victoria, Department of Sustainability and Environment and Latrobe University. This survey was designed to reveal details of the moth's distribution. MCMC also provided support to an Honours student at Latrobe University who uncovered important ecological features of the local populations of this Critically Endangered species. MCMC staff and community members studied vegetation in known moth activity areas and identified further moth habitat in the Cooper St Grasslands.

142 entries were made in MCMC's Fauna Book, including a number of Echidna sightings in the urban and rural parts of the creek during summer. Students from Holmesglen TAFE documented the Echidna sightings and this will assist in their future management. Other unusual sightings included a spectacular green and blue Dollarbird (an uncommon visitor from the north). A vigorous colony of Growling Grass Frogs was identified in a stormwater wetland of an industrial development site in Craigieburn. Further north, a colony of the beautiful Imperial Hairstreak Butterfly was identified in summer during an inspection of remnants and plantings on Wallan

Creek, an upper tributary of the Merri. Numbers of Swamp Wallabies were spotted at Craigieburn and Cooper St Grassland riparian areas and near plantings in Coburg. A small family group of Eastern Grey Kangaroos has persisted at the Central Creek Grassland Reserve in Reservoir despite surrounding residential development. Rufous Fantails, a bird associated with wetter forests to the east of Melbourne, were encountered at two suburban indigenous gardens.

A number of interesting flora observations were made including new populations of the State significant pea species *Cullen tenax* (Emu-foot) and *Desmodium varians* (Slender Tick-trefoil) at Kalkallo and at Campbellfield, in escarpments that had been burnt by wildfire and ecological burns.

Management of native grasslands, escarpments and creekside ecological communities

MCMC carried out ecological management works along the Merri Creek and its tributaries at over 80 sites from Clifton Hill to Wallan Creek in the upper catchment. Direct funding and contracts with member Councils provided for maintenance of remnant and revegetated sites. The continuing support of Landcare Australia with Citipower at Merri Park Wetland, Northcote, and with Spicers Paper at Iमारoo St, Fawkner, allowed staged revegetation of an ambitious scale and complexity. MCMC was successful in securing funding through the alternative penalties provision of the Environment Protection Act and used it to extend revegetation works at Galada

Below and below left: The Kangaroo Grass harvest at Cooper St Grassland is a popular annual event with the Friends of Merri Creek members.





Tamboore. MCMC also undertook works elsewhere at that site under contract to Melbourne Water.

Monitoring and research tasks included a revision of vegetation quality maps at Central Creek and Jukes Rd Grasslands. A Friends of Wallan Creek grant funded the assessment of vegetation quality, revegetation and habitat in the Wallan Community Park, which has been the focus of this dynamic community group. Funding from Councils was used to map emerging weed species such as Hemlock, Arum Lily and Water Parsnip, allowing targeted weed control and follow-up. Casual observations by staff members continued to be important in identifying new outbreaks of other emerging weeds such as Alligator Weed, Tangier Pea and Brazilian Parrot Feather.

Restoration and revegetation works focused on establishing and maintaining indigenous vegetation through strategic weed control, mulching, planting and direct seeding. Consolidation of existing sites and finding effective, practical treatments that foster vegetative rejuvenation have been ongoing themes as plantings reach maturity. MCMC conducted two ecological burns in the summer months at Native Grasslands in Fawkner and Reservoir. These burns are essential to the health of the Native Grassland communities that developed with traditional Wurundjeri burning practices. Post-burn conditions also provide ideal opportunities to eradicate serious environmental weeds.

Approximately 24,700 plants were planted in 2005-6. This was less than the peak in 2004-5, reflecting the need to consolidate earlier works. Seventy-six

percent of plantings were of ground-storey and a further ten percent were semi-aquatics. Semi-aquatics formed a relatively high proportion of MCMC's plantings this year due to a focus on soil stabilisation in areas subject to storm water flows.

Community involvement in restoration and revegetation

During the year MCMC organised 53 events for community involvement in cooperation with Friends of Merri Creek, Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA), South Alphington and Fairfield Civic Association (SAFCA), Friends of Wallan Creek and schools. The Port Phillip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority's Community Grants scheme funded the *Making Friends for Urban Grasslands* project, which connects local communities with their neighbourhood grassland reserves.

Community participation through organised activities, and individual volunteers working alongside MCMC's team, contributed a total of 4,418 hours, equivalent to \$88,360 of in kind contributions (based on the Federal Government's suggested rate of \$20/hr). Activities included weekend and weekday plantings, weed identification, weed monitoring, weed removal, weed management workshops and Golden Sun Moth surveys. MCMC also helped organise and run the City of Yarra's National Tree Day activities at Quarries Park, Clifton Hill.

This year has seen an increase in funding and participation from corporate groups. Staff from Spicers Paper, ANZ, Golder Associates, Yarra Valley Water and Sensis have become regular participants and contributors to the creek environment, as have CVA volunteers.



Above left: Sea of treeguards at Imaroo St, Fawkner.

Above: Imperial Hairstreak Butterflies courting.

Local resident groups played an important role in developing projects that addressed specific site issues. SAFCA together with the City of Yarra funded MCMC to develop an innovative series of weed seminars which included visits to the surrounding streets to discover the source of environmental weeds. Similar seminars and resources were delivered with Landcare/CitiPower funding for residents at Merri Park Wetland and with a Natural Heritage Trust Envirofund grant for Friends of Wallan Creek.

Over the year, 14 activities were arranged with students from primary and secondary schools, TAFE and tertiary colleges, totalling 1,536 hours. Princes Hill Secondary College continued their strong relationship with Merri Creek with 938 hours of student participation over a two day period. Children from the appropriately named 'Our Lady Guardian of the Plants' Chaldean Catholic Church participated in a series of plantings at Galada Tamboore in conjunction with Hume City Council. A number of special excursions to the Craigieburn Grasslands were organised for students of NMIT's Adult Migrant English Program.

Seven tertiary students undertook their industry placement at MCMC, and eight secondary school students participated in work experience. MCMC continued to provide help to community, Councils, utilities and educational institutions to address issues regarding parkland, flora and fauna, often being the first point of contact for people concerned about flooding and fallen trees.

Catchment Program

– stream health and stormwater

Waterwatch

MCMC hosts a Waterwatch program for the Merri and Moonee Ponds Creeks and the lower Yarra River. The program uses activities such as water quality monitoring, biological assessment of aquatic life, drain stenciling and habitat surveys to develop a community connection with local waterways and to assist understanding of stream health issues, such as stormwater pollution.

MCMC's Waterwatch program is part of Melbourne Waterwatch and is supported by the Natural Heritage Trust, Melbourne Water, and the municipalities of Darebin, Hume, Melbourne, Mitchell, Moonee Valley, Moreland, Whittlesea and Yarra.

During the year more than 3,500 students from 35 primary, secondary and tertiary institutions were involved with the program. Waterwatch activities at festivals, community days and training events reached a further 784 people.

Over 100 community monitors, including school groups, conducted regular monitoring of waterway health at 14 different sites. The data collected by these groups is supplied to local councils and also entered onto an Australia-wide database. Five Waterwatch Advanced Training sessions conducted by MCMC staff trained a further 71 community monitors.

MCMC helped four schools obtain funding from Melbourne Water to purchase monitoring equipment and receive advanced training for staff.

A new initiative this year was 'Lake Watch', a monitoring program focused on Edwardes Lake, Reservoir. Four schools and two community groups started regular water quality monitoring program of both the Lake and Edgars Creek, a major tributary of the Merri.

Merri Creek in-stream health

Waterwatch monitoring confirmed the poor in-stream health of the lower reaches of Merri Creek. This was highlighted by the

generally low diversity and abundance of macroinvertebrate aquatic life and the high levels of phosphate. The key contributing factor to this is poor quality stormwater entering the Creek, especially from industrial areas. Better in-stream conditions were generally found in upstream tributaries such as Malcolm Creek and Aitken Creek, and the Merri itself around Craigieburn.

MCMC continued to receive calls from the community about pollution events in the Merri waterways and referred these on to the EPA.

Stormwater education

MCMC worked with Campbellfield Heights Primary School students to explore and learn about stormwater pollutants and flows, as well as the habitat and cultural heritage of the nearby Galada Tamboore. Students collected, drew and pressed local weeds to develop a weed herbarium; planted indigenous shrubs and grasses and surveyed the macroinvertebrate aquatic life of Merri Creek.

Preliminary development of a Litter Strategy for Merri Park Northcote was undertaken by MCMC. The Strategy will engage major stakeholders and park users in an audit of users' litter management practices and a review of litter prevention requirements.

'Stop the Butts' Project

This year MCMC commenced a new project extending the state government's "Bin Your Butt" message to non-English speaking background groups. *Stop the Butts* was funded by Sustainability Victoria and aimed to raise awareness about problems associated with littering. The project partners were Darebin Council, Preston Market, Darebin Ethnic Communities Council and the Northern Region Waste Management Group.

The project produced educational materials for English language classes and received coverage in the ethnic media and local press. A poster competition, to communicate the butt litter reduction message, was conducted amongst schools in the Preston Market area and a winning poster was selected for display on Yarra Trams routes 86 and 112.



Schools' indigenous gardens

MCMC supports the creation of indigenous gardens in school grounds through two programs, *Learning Grounds* and *Common Grounds*. This year MCMC was contacted by 24 schools seeking advice about indigenous gardens and assisted seven schools with nine grant applications related to indigenous gardens.

MCMC responded to schools' problems with garden maintenance by offering educational sessions about indigenous plants and weeds including botanic drawing and the development of reference herbarium collections.

With support from the Myer Foundation for the *Common Grounds* program, MCMC facilitated networking between school communities that either have or are planning indigenous gardens. Representatives from ten schools visited five schools with a total of 19 exchanges occurring between schools in the cities of Yarra, Darebin, Moreland and Whittlesea.

Students were also able to visit Merri Creek to explore connections between school grounds and local natural areas.

Evaluation of *Common Grounds* highlighted students' recall about botanical aspects and their strong interest in access features such as paths and boardwalks. Visitors to schools with indigenous gardens noted that the gardens could withstand intense student play and that their development led to many opportunities for student involvement and learning.

Left: Students from Findon Primary School in Mill Park welcoming students from Fawkner Primary School to a tour of the indigenous gardens on their school grounds.

Above: MCMC Waterwatch Coordinator, Greg Woodward, addresses Fawkner Primary School students down by the Merri in Fawkner.



Planning and Coordination – open space and conservation

Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) works closely with government agencies and the community on a range of strategic issues and development projects affecting waterway corridors in the Merri catchment. This function is supported by direct grants from MCMC's member Councils.

This year, MCMC commented on three planning amendments, 35 planning permit applications, and participated in one VCAT Review. Meetings were also held prior to planning applications for the new Wholesale Fruit and Vegetable Market in Epping, and the former Kodak site next to Edgars Creek, Coburg. MCMC's responses were based on the *Development Guidelines for the Merri Creek (2004)*.

Revision of the *Merri Creek and Environs Strategy* is progressing, including alignment with the Port Phillip & Westernport Regional Catchment Strategy.

Upper reaches of Merri Creek – Wallan to Donnybrook

Although the upper reaches of the Merri are predominantly rural, rapid growth in Wallan is impacting on local tributaries. MCMC worked closely with the Friends of Wallan Creek in response to a number of development applications. Advice was also provided to Mitchell Shire on management of revegetation works on Wallan Creek and of remnants in Beveridge.

The Merriang to Donnybrook reach of the Merri includes significant remnant vegetation on private land and key fauna habitat, including that of the Growling Grass Frog. MCMC participated in the steering committee for the Department of Sustainability & Environment's (DSE) Merriang Local Area Biodiversity Plan,

which is overseeing actions to conserve the area's biodiversity.

Middle reaches of Merri Creek – Kalkallo to Western Ring Rd

The middle reaches of the Merri catchment contain a mix of established and newly urbanising areas, both residential and industrial/business, as well as rural and extractive industry zones. The designation of Melbourne's new Urban Growth Boundary increased land available for development in this part of the Merri. Studies undertaken by DSE confirmed key areas of high biodiversity and identified new areas of conservation significance.

New development has led to pressures on important habitat in Kalkallo Creek for the federally listed Growling Grass Frog. MCMC helped identify rectification measures after Yarra Valley Water (YVW) trenched a water main through this habitat and expressed concerns to VicRoads about the effects of shading from a proposed new bridge over the Creek.

MCMC sat on the Community Reference Group for YVW's *Northern Sewer Project – Campbellfield to Craigieburn* and provided detailed information on areas of significance within the route alignment.

Formal comment on Parks Victoria's draft concept plan for the *Merri Creek Park*, north of the Western Ring Road, was provided. MCMC argued for additional areas to be included in the Park to be extended north beyond Craigieburn Rd East.

Two dumpings of significant amounts of illegal fill over the Merri Creek escarpment by industrial land developers in Thomastown and Somerton were reported to Councils.

Lower reaches of Merri Creek – Western Ring Rd to Clifton Hill

The lower Merri catchment is fully urbanised. MCMC's was involved in matters related to the redevelopment of sites and infrastructure, and with proposals for improvement to habitat and community amenity in the Creek environs.

MCMC attended Community Reference Group meetings with Melbourne Water and Yarra Valley Water for Stages 1 & 2 of the Northern Sewerage Strategy and provided specialist information, particularly for the area near Jukes Rd Grassland, Fawkner.

Two cases of illegal dumping of fill at the Central Creek Grasslands Reserve, Reservoir, were identified by MCMC staff who subsequently supervised removal of fill.

Comment was provided to Melbourne Water on the *Merri Creek Improvement Project*, an ongoing project to remove serious environmental weeds and establish indigenous vegetation on the Creek banks.

MCMC continued its involvement in the Edwardes Lake Neighbourhood Improvement Plan providing a focus upon communications and community engagement. In Clifton Hill, MCMC liaised with Melbourne Water and Yarra Council about the development of a new wetland in the Creek valley at the end of Walker St.

MCMC worked closely on the production of a map for the Merri Creek Shared Path and was briefed on the safety review of the Merri Shared Path.

Below left: Friends of Merri Creek members hand-weeding at Merri Park wetland, Northcote.

Below: Malcolm Creek, a northern tributary of the Merri.



Financial Report

Summarised Balance Sheet as at 30th September 2006

	2006	2005
EQUITY:		
Retained Funds – Start	289,652	286,873
Add Surplus / (Deficit)	6,589	2,779
Retained Funds – End	<u>\$296,241</u>	<u>\$289,652</u>
Represented By:		
Current Assets:	573,338	426,578
Fixed Assets:	140,023	157,095
TOTAL ASSETS:	<u>\$713,361</u>	<u>\$583,673</u>
Less:		
TOTAL LIABILITIES:	<u>\$417,120</u>	<u>\$294,021</u>
NET ASSETS:	<u>\$296,241</u>	<u>\$289,652</u>

Summarised Statement of Income and Expenditure from 1st October 2005 to 30th September, 2006

	2006	2005
INCOME:		
Grants		
Municipalities	405,117	371,602
Other Government	64,791	26,000
Non Government	44,669	162,391
Contracts	425,719	394,414
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets	–	9,472
Sale of Publications	811	1,429
Environment Fund Donations	1,560	200
Interest & Sundry Income	20,125	21,184
Total Income:	<u>\$962,792</u>	<u>\$986,692</u>
LESS EXPENDITURE:		
Wages, Salaries & Oncosts	764,767	759,280
Materials & Plant Hire	52,061	80,085
Vehicle Running	14,784	20,354
Admin, Project & General	102,036	116,773
Environment Fund Disbursements	–	–
Depreciation & Leave	22,555	7,421
Total Expenditure:	<u>\$956,203</u>	<u>\$983,913</u>
NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):	<u>\$6,589</u>	<u>\$2,779</u>

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the year ended 30th September 2006.

The full financial statements and the Auditor's report are on the MCMC website at www.mcmc.org.au or copies are available from the MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick.

Auditor

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

Member Representatives and staff 2005–2006

Committee of Management 2006:

City of Darebin:	Cr Vince Fontana, Allan Wicks (<i>Vice President 1</i>)
City of Hume:	Cr Drew Jessop, Alan Brennan
City of Moreland:	Cr Andrea Sharam, Eamonn Fennessy
City of Whittlesea:	Cr Stevan Kozmevski, David Turnbull
City of Yarra:	Cr Kathleen Maltzahn, Silvana Predebon
Shire of Mitchell	Cr Robert Gordon / Cr Donna Allan
Friends of Merri Ck:	Trevor Hausler (<i>President</i>), Ann McGregor (<i>Secretary</i>), Allie Dawe (<i>Treasurer</i>), Peter Mollison, Paul Prentice (<i>Vice President 2</i>), Harold Mackrell, Ruth Shiel, Ray McMahan (sub.)
Friends of Wallan Ck:	Claudia James

Sub-Committees in 2006:

The following Sub-Committees also met during the year: Executive Sub-Committee, Finance Sub-Committee, Planning and Issues Sub-Committee, Merri Creek and Environs Strategy Implementation Sub-Committee.

MCMC Staff:

Manager:	Luisa Macmillan
Conservation Program Manager:	Katrina Roberg
Administration Officer:	Ray Radford
Finance Officer:	Ruth Rankin
Project Officer (casual):	Tony Faithfull
Cleaner:	Tiziana Tosti-Guerra



Catchment Program Team

Waterwatch Coordinator:	Kate Rhook/Greg Woodward (<i>from March '06</i>)
Waterwatch/Education Officer:	Sarah Crinall (<i>from Feb '06</i>)
Catchment Program Officer:	Angela Foley
Butt Litter Project Officer:	Dimi Bouzalas

Parkland Management Team

Co-Coordination:	Megan Jericho and Brian Bainbridge
Team Leader:	Alex Davern
Team Members:	Sam Bretherton, Dave Crawford, Nicole Drever (<i>until Jan '06</i>), Jill Hildebrandt, Deb Lawson, Ben North
Temporary Team Members:	Dan Barnet, Jane Bevelander, Jess Hard, Aravis Thompson, Tully Sumner

Planning Consultant

Michael Kirsch

MERRI CREEK



MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

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