

Merri News

AUGUST 2009

Newsletter of Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) 2 Lee St East Brunswick VIC 3057

Join in MCMC's twentieth anniversary celebrations

Everyone is invited to come along to two special events:

Galada Tamboore Merri Creek Gorge

Photographs by David Tatnall

Synergy Gallery, 253 High St Northcote

12 – 30 August, Wednesday – Sunday 11am – 4 pm

Opening: Tuesday 11 August, 6-8pm

Artist talk: Saturday 15 August 1.30pm

MCMC is proud to present this photographic exhibition of the spectacular Galada Tamboore area by David Tatnall, who is renowned for his luminous images of the Australian landscape. See his website: www.davidtatnall.com

20th Anniversary BIG Planting & Free BBQ:

Sunday 16 August, near Rushall Station, Nth Fitzroy

10am-1pm (Melway 30 D12). Join in this BIG planting, and free barbecue with vegetarian and halal options. Funded by an Australian Government 'Caring for our Country' grant.



Seeding the Future film out soon

Watch out for a spring launch of *Seeding the Future*, a film on the identification, collection and storage of indigenous seed. The film is the result of a partnership between Judy Allen (propagator for Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Cooperative) and MCMC, with funding from Melbourne Water and the Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association.



Go Wild at Aurora

A new partnership has been created between MCMC and VicUrban for the community at the Aurora estate in North Epping. A terrific mini environmental expo held on 30th June highlighted the area's biodiversity and waterways, arousing lots of interest and requests for further events.

Community views from Galada

MCMC's recent community engagement work has contributed to Parks Victoria's master planning for the Galada Tamboore area on Merri Creek. Through this and the *Nearby Nature* project over 100 people have visited the valley to discover its environmental and cultural treasures.

Photo: MCMC staff ran a great environmental mini expo for VicUrban.

Urban Growth threatens the upper Merri

The State Government's proposed expansion of the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) into the upper Merri represents a huge, 83% increase to the area of the catchment which would be within the UGB. A huge new Outer Metro Ring transport corridor (freeway and rail) will bisect and 'cradle' the mid upper catchment and a 1,000 ha freight & logistics precinct, with a new interstate rail freight terminal operating 24 hours a day, is proposed east of Beveridge.

The expanded area includes many species and ecological communities that are protected by Federal legislation, so a Strategic Impact Assessment of the proposal is being undertaken. This requires approval by the Federal Minister.

Within a very tight timeframe of 28 days, MCMC prepared a substantial submission, including detailed comments on the proposals for dealing with Grassland and Grassy Woodland, and the numerous endangered species in the area.

Main points in the MCMC submission:

- The background ecological data is insufficient for making such big decisions. Much more work needs to be done at the strategic level before any rezoning occurs;
- The proposal to clear native grassland in the Merri and locate the 'offsets' more than 60km away in new grassland reserves west of Werribee is unacceptable;
- There is no explicit proposal to establish an interconnected network of conservation reserves for the Merri;

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Slow revegetation gets results

Once referred to as the 'wildlands', the stretch of the Merri Creek between the Coburg Drive-in and Hare St Fawkner – Broadhurst Ave Reservoir now supports families of finches, wrens, and spinebills amongst native vegetation.

Great expanses of Fennel, Hawthorn and Boxthorn once choked the creek. These were legacies of unenlightened industrial and urban planning; dumping grounds, spoil-covered escarpments, old quarries and toxic sites. Among the rubble and weeds were a few cliff sides and indigenous vegetation maintained by MCMC near Lorne St, Fawkner.

Residential housing fronted this wild expanse for the first time in 2002, with a new development at nearby Imaroo St Fawkner. MCMC and Moreland Council met with the new residents and we worked together to screen unsightly wreckers yards on the opposite creek bank. This inspired bigger plans for the site and since 2005 it has received ongoing funding from Spicers Paper, through Landcare.

Among the thickets of weed, many native birds found shelter, insects, berries and nectar. In consideration of this wildlife, MCMC began the staged removal of woody weeds and re-establishment of indigenous Escarpment Shrubland. This staged approach also avoided damaging hidden treasures such as remnant groundcovers, endangered Matted Flax-lily, old quarry infrastructure and a historic drystone wall. We are now trialling indigenous planting below a thinned out canopy of Hawthorn; the Hawthorn is later removed.

The results of this staged approach are pleasing. Red-browed Finches feeding on tiny Saltbush berries are sheltered by the retained Hawthorn canopy. In the older plantings, dense Rock Correa patches are alive with New Holland Honeyeaters. The beautiful Eastern Spinebill also uses the nectar from these winter flowering shrubs. Superb Blue Wrens and White-browed Scrubwrens hunt through patches of Mat-rush (*Lomandra*). The beautiful cliffside boulders are framed by indigenous shrubs likely to support an even wider range of wildlife in the future (*see lower photo on right*).

Such transformations would not be possible without Council funding and the sort of ongoing support shown by Spicers - both financial and through their annual staff planting days.



Top: The Imaroo St site in 2005 - Fennel and Hawthorn dominate.

Bottom: The same site in winter 2009. Dense plantings of low shrubs have attracted birdlife, like the Red-browed Finch (*left*).

Community planting & BBQ at Imaroo St Fawkner, Saturday 8th August, 10am-1pm.

Help out with planting then join in some birdwatching.

The Merri Creek Environment Fund

The Merri Creek Environment Fund is seeking donations for revegetation and conservation works in the Merri Creek catchment. *Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible.* Please make cheques out to Merri Creek Environment Fund and send to MCMC, 2 Lee Street, East Brunswick, 3057, or drop in a cash donation (sorry, no credit card facilities) or contact us to arrange a direct deposit.

Merri Urban Growth threat *(continued)*

- The extent, location and mechanisms for protecting areas identified as 'non-urban' are extremely unclear;
- The value of smaller reserves for biodiversity has been incorrectly dismissed;
- The impacts of urbanisation on hydrology, water quality and Growling Grass Frog habitat hasn't been analysed;
- There's a lack of detail for audit and review processes.

Overall the strategic impact assessment fails to adequately consider and provide for the biodiversity values of the upper Merri on matters of national environmental significance. MCMC believes it doesn't meet the terms of reference for the assessment between the Federal and State Governments.

MCMC recommends:

- That Federal Minister shouldn't endorse the program in its current form.
- That there should be further community consultation on the revised Strategic Impact Assessment Report.

Although submissions have closed, letters can still be written to the Federal Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, the Hon Peter Garrett, PO Box 6022, House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600.

See our full submission on our website: www.mcmc.org.au

For upcoming community events see the MCMC website: www.mcmc.org.au

Merri Creek Management Committee produces these quarterly newsletters for the wider community in the Merri Creek catchment. You can download this in colour from our website (see below) or contact Ray Radford for a hardcopy at:

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