

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. 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

2004-2005

President's Report

As I write this President's Report in my home alongside the Merri Creek in Coburg, it is a calm peaceful spring day. Wattle-birds chase each other through the trees and the Merri Creek babbles along its way. I am, however, reminded that it is not always so. In February this year (2005), after Melbourne suffered its heaviest rainfall recorded in any 24-hour period, the Creek was anything but peaceful. It flooded much of the parkland and reached nearly to my back fence. Much of the infrastructure and vegetation along the Creek was damaged and a vast amount of litter was left suspended in trees. This flood created a huge amount of cleanup work for the MCMC Parkland Management Team as well as the Councils, the Friends of Merri Creek and other community groups.

Many positive things have also happened during the year. Following on from last years' review of our Statement of Purpose we have commenced the process of creating a new strategic plan that will set goals for guiding MCMC through the next ten years.

Two firsts for the year were a six month project by a Green Corp Team, who worked on a number of revegetation

projects along Merri Creek and the largest ever student activity – 178 tertiary students participated in a planting activity at Galada Tamboore in Campbellfield.

MCMC has also worked on enhancing our relationship with Melbourne Water. After some initial talks and a meeting, MCMC and Melbourne Water agreed on the benefits of closer cooperation. So, we look forward to a closer working relationship with Melbourne Water in the near future.

I need to mention the 'loss' of two of our longest serving and most experienced staff. Judy Bush and Barb Miles have been at MCMC for almost 16 years and have both contributed enormously to the organisation. It will be a difficult task filling their shoes but we all wish them the best for the future, Judy in her new position with the Moreland Energy Foundation and Barb on her property at Dereel.

Lastly thanks to all the staff, committee members, Council representative, Friends of Merri Creek members and others from the general community for making this another productive and successful year on the Merri Creek.

Trevor Hausler, President



Parkland Management

Habitat

The discovery of Golden Sun moths, a critically endangered species, in two Merri Creek grasslands in late 2003 was followed up by energetic efforts to secure the species future. A Threatened Species Network Grant enabled the Friends of Merri Creek (FoMC) and MCMC to collaborate on several novel activities, notably two moth population surveys in the Craigieburn Grasslands and the planting of 7,500 Wallaby Grass food plants for the moth's caterpillar. Meetings convened by MCMC to plan and evaluate the activities were attended by FoMC, Parks Victoria, Latrobe University, Whittlesea Council, Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Victorian Entomological Society. Three additional populations of the moth were also identified, bringing to five the known populations in the Merri Creek corridor. MCMC and FoMC also assisted the work of a research student from Latrobe University who is studying the Moth's habitat.

This year, 238 entries were made in MCMC's Fauna record book. The Atlas of Victorian Wildlife maintained by the Department of Sustainability and Environment was informed of significant sightings.

The Fauna book entries opened in October 2004 with a sighting of Whiskered Terns hunting over settling ponds at Wallan sewage treatment plant. Sightings of 'favourites' including Sacred and Azure Kingfishers, Nankeen Night Herons, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters were regularly entered, highlighting the importance of the creekside habitat. Surprises included an Echidna reported by residents along the Merri Creek in Collingwood in January, one resident redirecting an animal about to attempt a crossing of the Eastern Freeway! Boobook

Owls were observed in Coburg and North Fitzroy.

Heavy rains in November 2004 led to the re-emergence of an ephemeral wetland in Galada Tamboore in Campbellfield attracting Black-winged Stilts, Royal Spoonbills and Pacific Herons. Whilst flooding can be destructive, it is a natural 'pulse' to which ecological communities are ever ready to respond.

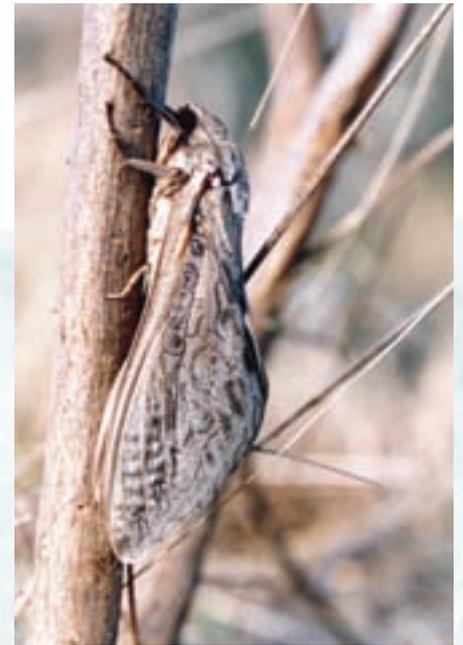
Management of Native grasslands, escarpments and creekside ecological communities

MCMC continued to undertake ecological management works at more than 80 sites along the Merri Creek and its tributaries, from Clifton Hill to Kalkallo. Works were funded by direct grants and contracts from member Councils and by grants through Landcare Australia, the Australian Government's Envirofund, the EPA alternative sentencing scheme and the Threatened Species Network. MCMC undertook work at Galada Tamboore under contract to Melbourne Water and maintained, under contract, 13 sites on the Moonee Ponds Creek and the Yarra River. The allocation of Natural Heritage Trust funds to MCMC through the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority's Regional Catchment Investment Plan (RCIP) was a major source of funding for key restoration works.

Evaluation projects supporting strategic ecological management included an audit of revegetation sites along Merri tributary, Aitken Creek, in Craigieburn. The RCIP grant funding assisted in conducting 'Habitat Hectare' assessments, a measure of habitat quality, on over 50 hectares across the catchment.

Restoration and revegetation works focused on establishing and maintaining indigenous vegetation through targeted





weed control, mulching, planting and direct seeding. MCMC conducted five ecological burns through the summer months at Native Grasslands. These burns are essential to the health of the Native Grassland communities that developed with traditional Wurundjeri burning practices.

Approximately 41,000 plants were planted in 2004-5 constituting the second largest planting year for MCMC. 80 per cent of plantings were of ground-storey and a further five per cent were semi-aquatics. MCMC has an ongoing commitment to developing and maintaining ground cover as it forms critical habitat for invertebrates, reptiles and amphibians.

In the last decade, over a quarter of a million plants have been planted by MCMC.

The Green Corp team for which MCMC was a partner agency completed their six months project in February 2005. The contribution of the Green Corp team provided a mighty boost to Merri Creek's environment. MCMC also received valuable assistance from two other Green Corp Teams during this year, helping their host organisations provide participants with diverse work experiences.

Community involvement in restoration and revegetation

During the year MCMC organised 26 community activities, most in partnership with FOMC. Community input from organised activities and from individual

volunteers working alongside MCMC's team totalled 2208 hours, equivalent to \$44,160 of in kind contributions (based on the Federal Governments suggested rate of \$20/hr). Activities included weekend and weekday plantings, weed monitoring, mapping, woody weed removals, identification workshops and Golden Sun Moth surveys. MCMC particularly appreciated the reliable and cheerful involvement of FoMC members at events. Some large plantings at Rushall Station also engaged Friends of the Earth and local residents in notably enthusiastic, productive and sociable days.

Participation from businesses, both monetary and staff, has enhanced creekside projects, the Spicers/Landcare project near Imaroo Street, Fawkner, being a notable example. The partnership with broker organisations such as Tree Project and Landcare Australia has been valuable in establishing relationships with groups such as SPI PowerNet (now SP Ausnet) and CitiPower.

Local residents groups played an important role in developing projects that addressed specific site issues. Cooperation with South Alphington and Fairfield Civic Association led to development of a series of weed awareness workshops funded by Yarra City Council. This project won the Community Pride Award at the 'Keep Australia Beautiful Awards' in May.

Over the year, 12 activities were arranged with students from primary and secondary schools, TAFE and

tertiary colleges totalling 1,770 hrs. One spectacular day involved 178 students from the National Association of Australian University Colleges Conference who undertook planting and tree-guarding at Galada Tamboore. During 2004-5, six tertiary students undertook their industry placement at MCMC, and six secondary school students participated in work experience with the PMT. With funding from a City of Whittlesea Community Development Grant, two special excursions to the Craigieburn Grasslands were organised for adult students from NMIT's Adult Migrant Education Program to introduce new residents to natural values of the area.

A daily stream of phone calls, letters and emails confirmed MCMC's role as a hub of information for residents, councils, state and national agencies, business, educational institutions and the wider community.

Page 2 far left: View of parkland south of Brunswick Velodrome, East Brunswick, February 2005 floods with the concrete roll sculpture half submerged in centre.

Page 2 left: National Association of Australian University Colleges Conference (NAAUC) planting activity, June 2005.

Top left: Merri Creek, Cooper Street Grasslands.

Top right: Goat Moth at Cooper Street Grasslands, Campbellfield.

Catchment Program

Waterwatch

MCMC hosts a Waterwatch program for the Merri and Moonee Ponds Creeks and the lower Yarra. This year Waterwatch involved more than 4,000 people, including 2,700 students from 42 primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Waterwatch activities at 12 festivals and community days reached 1,315 people.

Hands-on investigation of water quality parameters and the diversity of aquatic life developed community understanding of stormwater pollution issues and the impact that our practices have on waterways. Drain stenciling activities were also undertaken.

79 community monitors, including some school groups, voluntarily monitored waterway health at 55 different sites. Results were added to the state Waterwatch database. 17 Waterwatch training sessions conducted by MCMC developed the skills of monitors in data collection.

MCMC helped nine schools obtain funding from Landcare and Melbourne Water to purchase monitoring equipment. MCMC involvement with the Department of Education's Schools for Innovations and Excellence Program assisted clusters of schools in Darebin and Yarra to focus on Waterwatch.

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.

Merri in-stream health

Waterwatch monitoring during the year generally confirmed the poor in-stream health of the lower reaches of Merri Creek. Better conditions were found in upstream tributaries such as Malcolm Creek, Craigieburn, and, surprisingly,



in the middle reaches of the Merri in Campbellfield. The latter may have been related to drought conditions – less rain meant less frequent entry of polluted stormwater to the Creek. Similar temporary improvements in aquatic life were also recorded at some downstream sites. Of concern to MCMC were reports from the VicRoads' Craigieburn Bypass project of consistent problems with elevated levels of turbidity, after rain events, in Malcolm and Curly Sedge Creeks. In both cases the high turbidity was associated with upstream activities and not related to the Bypass itself. The Craigieburn Sewage Treatment Plant continued to discharge effluent to Merri Creek pending decisions about the Creek's flow need and whether a substitute flow should be provided from the new Aurora Treatment Facility. MCMC participated in a Yarra Valley Water workshop addressing these issues.

Stormwater Improvements

MCMC participated in the steering committee of a key project undertaken by the City of Hume to address problems of polluted stormwater entering Merri Creek from industrial premises in Campbellfield.

Through its own automotive workshops' stormwater program, *Catching On*, MCMC made 67 visits to 18 automotive workshops for the City of Melbourne. The program focused on activities that may pollute waterways, such as car washing detergents, radiator leakages and dust from sanding car bodies. Staff at auto workshops became more aware of local waterways and relevant by-laws through structured visits and discussion prompted by samples of stream life.

MCMC continued its involvement in the development of the Edwardes Lake Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan (NEIP). Edwardes Lake, Reservoir, is on Edgars Creek, a major tributary of the Merri. NEIPs are an initiative of the Victorian Environment Protection Authority.

MCMC also participated in meetings of the Northern Litter Group, coordinated through the Northern Region Waste Management Group and took the lead in discussions with Northcote High School and Darebin Council to develop a strategy to deal with litter in Merri Park.



Schools' indigenous gardens

MCMC's Learning Grounds program encourages school communities in Darebin and Whittlesea to plan indigenous gardens for their school grounds. Five education sessions were held, including activities such as botanic drawing and local walks. 13 schools were visited with detailed plant lists, and site assessments were provided to eight schools through the Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Cooperative. MCMC assisted nine schools with successful applications for funds to develop indigenous gardens from Landcare and Melbourne Water grants.

Common Grounds is an extension of Learning Grounds and allows school communities to share their experiences in developing their indigenous gardens and related learning activities. It is funded by the Myer Foundation and The Ian Potter Foundation. In a pilot exchange, students from Newlands Primary School in Coburg, visited Pender's Grove Primary School in Thornbury to see how the students transformed a previously disused part of the school grounds, after which they visited Merri Creek.

Top: Merri Creek Primary School sampling for aquatic macroinvertebrates

Left: Students from Newlands Primary School in Coburg visited Pender's Grove Primary School in Thornbury to share ideas about creating indigenous gardens in school grounds.

Planning and Coordination

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. MCMC's planning and coordination functions are supported by direct grants from its Council members.

This year MCMC commented on 18 planning permit applications on land abutting the Creek corridor using the standards set out in MCMC's Development Guidelines for the Merri Creek (2004). In a process convened by the **Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE)** these Guidelines were used to draft stronger waterway planning controls for Merri Creek and to provide a 'model' provision adaptable to other waterways across northern Melbourne. The redrafted controls will need to be adopted by Councils through coordinated planning scheme amendments.

Revision of the Merri Creek and Environs Strategy is well underway with completion expected in 2006. The Strategy provides strategic direction and specific actions for management of the waterway corridors of the Merri catchment.

Upper reaches of Merri Creek – Wallan to Donnybrook

The upper reaches of the Merri are predominantly rural and include the township of Wallan and a major tributary, Wallan Creek. MCMC worked closely with the Friends of Wallan Creek on a weeds audit for rehabilitation of an urban stretch of the stream and on a funding application.

The rural Donnybrook to Merriang area includes significant remnant vegetation on private land and key fauna habitat, including that of the Growling Grass Frog. DSE's Merriang Local Area Biodiversity Plan addresses priorities for conserving the area's biodiversity. MCMC continued its involvement with the steering committee for the Plan.

Middle reaches of Merri Creek – Craigieburn to Western Ring Road

The middle reaches of the Merri catchment contain a mix of established and newly urbanising areas abutting substantial areas of high conservation value. It includes major industrial subdivisions and encompasses the Hume Growth corridor area designated

under the Melbourne 2030 strategy. MCMC participated in workshops for growth area planning and provided information on environmental values and conservation planning.

MCMC attended monthly meetings of the Craigieburn Bypass Environs Coordination Group, a group which has monitored environmental management plans during freeway construction. Construction is now close to completion. Identification of areas to meet the project's native vegetation net gain requirements is still being finalised and is one of the factors delaying the release of Parks Victoria's draft concept plan for the proposed Merri Creek Park, north of the Western Ring Road. This delay of more than 18 months has been of great concern to MCMC and the subject of letters and direct meetings with state agencies.

The most significant planning scheme amendments for the year were those associated with the Cooper Street Employment Area, Epping. Major landuse changes are slated for the upper Edgars Creek, a tributary of the Merri. Panel Hearings commence in December 2005.

Lower reaches of Merri Creek –

Western Ring Road to Clifton Hill

MCMC participated in Stakeholder Reference group meetings for Melbourne

Water's Merri Creek Improvement Project for Brunswick, Northcote and North Fitzroy. The project aims to remove serious environmental weeds and to establish indigenous vegetation on the creek banks.

Initial field investigations were undertaken by MCMC, Moreland Council and Friends of Merri Creek to investigate opportunities for establishment of wetlands within the Moreland section of the Merri corridor.

MCMC participated in a number of meetings with Councils and other agencies in preparation for a review of the Merri shared path and low-level creek crossings.

MCMC attended Community Reference Group meetings with Melbourne Water and Yarra Valley Water about Stages 1 and 2 of the Northern Sewerage Strategy. Stages 1 and 2 involve constructing diversion sewers within the lower reaches of Merri and Edgars Creeks to decrease the incidence of sewage overflows during wet weather and to cater for additional growth in the catchment.

The Melbourne Fire Brigade participated in a planting at Cunningham Street, Northcote.



Financial Report

Summarised Balance Sheet as at 30th September 2005

	2005	2004
EQUITY:		
Retained Funds – Start	286,873	273,809
Add Surplus / (Deficit)	2,779	13,064
Retained Funds – End	<u>\$289,652</u>	<u>\$286,873</u>
Represented By:		
Current Assets:	426,578	411,193
Fixed Assets:	157,095	111,228
TOTAL ASSETS:	<u>\$583,673</u>	<u>\$522,421</u>
Less:		
TOTAL LIABILITIES:	<u>\$294,021</u>	<u>\$235,548</u>
NET ASSETS:	<u>\$289,652</u>	<u>\$286,873</u>

Summarised Statement of Income and Expenditure from 1st October 2004 to 30th September, 2005

	2005	2004
INCOME:		
Grants		
Municipalities	371,602	370,500
Other Government	26,000	18,687
Non Government	162,391	37,250
Contracts	394,414	442,970
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets	9,472	50
Sale of Publications	1,429	1,193
Environment Fund Donations	200	-
Interest & Sundry Income	21,184	22,017
Total Income:	<u>\$986,692</u>	<u>\$892,667</u>
LESS EXPENDITURE:		
Wages, Salaries & Oncosts	759,280	615,478
Materials & Plant Hire	80,085	84,453
Vehicle Running	20,354	11,637
Admin, Project & General	116,773	140,207
Environment Fund Disbursements	-	-
Depreciation & Leave	7,421	27,828
Total Expenditure:	<u>\$983,913</u>	<u>\$879,603</u>
NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):	<u>\$2,779</u>	<u>\$13,064</u>

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the year ended 30th September 2005.

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 2004–2005

Committee of Management 2005:

City of Darebin:	Cr Vince Fontana, Allan Wicks (<i>Vice President 1</i>)
City of Hume:	Cr Drew Jessop, Matt Ruchel, Carol Jadrage
City of Moreland:	Cr Fraser Brindley, Cr Andrea Sharam, Eamonn Fennessy
City of Whittlesea:	Cr Stevan Kozmevski, David Turnbull
City of Yarra:	Cr Gurm Sekhon, Cr Kathleen Maltzahn, Silvana Predebon
Shire of Mitchell	Cr Robert Gordon
Friends of Merri Ck:	Trevor Hausler (<i>President</i>), Ann McGregor (<i>Secretary</i>), Allie Dawe (<i>Treasurer</i>), Paul Prentice (<i>Vice President 2</i>), Alan Brennan, Peter Mollison, Harold Mackrell (sub.), Julie Mason (sub.), David Redfearn (sub.) Ruth Shiel (sub.)

Sub-Committees in 2005:

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

MCMC Staff:

Planning and Coordination

Manager:	Luisa Macmillan
Conservation Coordinator:	Judy Bush (<i>until August 05</i>)
Administration Officer	Ray Radford
Finance Officer:	Ruth Rankin
Project Officer (casual):	Tony Faithfull (IT support)
Cleaner:	Tiziana Tosti-Guerra

Catchment Program Team

Waterwatch Coordinator:	Jessica Miller (<i>mat. leave from May 05</i>)
Waterwatch Officer:	Kate Rhook (<i>from Jan 05</i>)
Catchment Program Officer:	Angela Foley
Temporary Team Members:	Erin Shroeder, Dimi Bouzalas

Parkland Management Team

Coordinator:	Barb Miles (<i>until Sept 05</i>)
Technical Officer:	Brian Bainbridge
Team Leader:	Megan Jericho
Team Members:	Chrissie Cowcher (<i>until Dec 04</i>), David Crawford, Alex Davern, Nicole Drever, Deb Lawson, Ben North

Temporary Team Members: Sam Bretherton, Craig Dodson,
Nerida Hames, Jessica Hard,
Emma Lipianin, Alicia McCormack,
Kevin Walsh

Planning Consultant:

Lester Townsend, Integrated Urban Management

MERRI CREEK



MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE

Merri Creek Management Committee
2 Lee St, East Brunswick,
Victoria Australia 3057
Telephone (03) 9380 8199
Fax (03) 9380 6989
Email address: admin@mcmc.org.au
Website: www.mcmc.org.au
Incorporated Association Number: A0018144A