

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, since 2006, 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

2006-2007

President's Report

As I review last year's President's Report I am reminded of the severe drought we faced then and, despite the flooding early this winter, still face now. Recent government announcements related to water allocations for irrigation and the likelihood of continuing water restrictions in Melbourne reinforce the fact that we live in a very dry continent and that water must be treated as a precious resource to be conserved for future generations. Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) and other catchment management bodies play an important role in this new awareness.

On the bright side, the lack of polluted stormwater entering the creek last summer probably led to improved conditions for some aquatic life. Baetid mayflies, a pollution sensitive species rarely found in lower parts of the creek, were found in relative abundance over summer. Unfortunately they disappeared after the first heavy rains in autumn, illustrating the ongoing challenge of improving urban stormwater quality.

In a clear indication of the success of revegetation efforts along Merri Creek, MCMC staff sighted the Splendid Ochre Butterfly for the first time. The caterpillars of this species feed exclusively on Spiny-headed Mat Rush, which has been heavily planted along Merri Creek in recent years.

This year has seen an increase in the number of corporate events hosted by MCMC. These events provided valuable volunteer labour while providing the participants with

practical experience and their organisations with effective team building activities.

It has also been a good year for obtaining funding from diversified resources. A key new initiative has been the *Northern Nature - Creek Connections* project in collaboration with the Creek Committees for the Moonee Ponds and Darebin Creeks with funding for two years by the Natural Heritage Trust. As part of this project, MCMC hosted a seminar on community engagement in urban grassland conservation which was attended by 47 people.

MCMC took its message to a wider forum by presenting a poster paper about community involvement in Merri Park Wetland Northcote at the 10th International *Riversymposium* in Brisbane.

Given these successes, it is most disappointing that Parks Victoria has not released the final plan for the new *Merri Creek Parklands* north of the Western Ring Road, since comments on the draft plan closed in May 2006.

Finally thanks to all the staff, committee members, council representatives, Friends and others from the community who have again worked tirelessly to improve this important community asset and vital native habitat.

Trevor Hausler, President



Above: Some of the ANZ staff planting at Kirkdale St Fawkner. Right: Splendid Ochre Butterfly.

Parkland Management

– *restoration of remnant vegetation*

Management of native grasslands, escarpments and creekside ecological communities

Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) continued to undertake ecological management works at more than 80 sites along the Merri Creek and its tributaries from Clifton Hill to Wallan near the Merri's source and at several nearby sites outside the catchment.

Direct funding from MCMC's member Councils, as well as contracts for site maintenance with Councils and Melbourne Water/Theiss Services funded essential site works. Extension of these works and development of new sites was tackled with funding sourced from grants and additional contracts.

Spicers Paper's sponsorship arrangement with Landcare Australia funded ongoing habitat restoration at Imaroo St Fawkner and rehabilitation works at Jukes Rd Grassland Fawkner.

Extensive works at Central Creek Native Grassland Reserve Reservoir, Moomba Park Fawkner and Rushall Reserve Clifton Hill were funded by the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) through the two-year *Northern Nature-Creek Connections* project. The Alternative Penalties Provision of the Environment Protection Act provided for further community and vegetation works at Moomba Park.

Friends of Merri Creek contracted MCMC to implement several grants-funded projects including: the *Black & Blue* project, aimed at re-establishing dense shrub habitats for small birds like

Blue Wrens, in areas where exotic weedy habitat like Blackberry is being eradicated; establishment of semi-aquatic vegetation at four sites along the edges of the Merri Creek; restoration of grassy wetland habitat at Central Creek Grassland and Aitken Creek; and Golden Sun-moth surveys.

The Merri parklands in Fawkner received a facelift with the planting of 6,230 plants and 24 community events. Jukes Rd Grassland and its protective fence was burned by wildfire in January resulting in the urgent need for fence replacement and increased weed control. MCMC secured funding from Yarra Valley Water, Spicers Paper, Moreland City Council, and the Port Phillip & Westport Catchment Management Authority which resulted in a new fence protecting an expanded area of native grassland within four months.

Our on-ground expertise in the upper reaches of the Merri Creek has been strengthened with the development of management plans for the Beveridge Wallan Rail Reserve and Wallan Community Park under contract to the Merriang District Landcare Group and Friends of Wallan Creek respectively. *Conserving our Biodiversity* Grants from the Dept of Sustainability & Environment funded works at grasslands and wetlands in Beveridge Wallan Rail Reserve, Cooper St Grassland Reserve and Kalkallo Common.

MCMC continued its program of ecological burning at Central Creek Native Grasslands, Reservoir, and utilised optimal post burn conditions to control serious environmental weeds.

Despite dry conditions, over 27,500 plants were planted, 71% percent of which

Below: One of the community events was a cooking picnic with Fawkner Community House at Jukes Road Grassland, Fawkner.



Right: Teachers from Santa Maria College, Northcote at Merri Park wetland, Northcote.

Far right: The results of a community/corporate planting at Imaroo St Fawkner.

were ground-storey species. Twenty percent were semi-aquatics established in the somewhat drought-proof edges of the creeks.

Restoration and revegetation works focused on strengthening habitat corridors. Indigenous vegetation was strategically established and maintained through weed control, mulching, and planting. Consolidation of existing sites and fostering vegetative rejuvenation have been ongoing themes as plantings reach maturity.

Community involvement in restoration and revegetation

We continued our strong relationships with community member groups, Friends of Merri Creek and Friends of Wallan Creek, as evidenced by the success of 83 MCMC community events and the efforts of three new Friends of Merri Creek sub-groups: the Friends of Malcolm Creek, the Friends of Edgars Creek and the Merri & Edgars Creeks Confluence Area Restoration Group.

MCMC held community events in partnership with the above groups as well as with Fawkner Community House and local schools, Tree Project, Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) and just outside the catchment, with South Alphington and Fairfield Civic Association and Friends of Darebin Creek.

Community participation through organised activities and individual volunteers with the MCMC team contributed a total of 2,765 hours, equivalent to \$82,950 of in kind contributions (based on the Federal Government's suggested rate of \$30/hr). Activities included plantings, weed management activities and Golden Sun Moth surveys as well as Fawkner Safaris and other



customised interpretation events for diverse communities. An exciting logistical test was organising the City of Yarra's National Tree Day activities at Hardy Gallagher Reserve, Princes Hill, which involved coordinating 185 people, planting almost 4000 plants, and preparing food.

This year has seen another increase in participation from corporate groups. Staff from ANZ, Spicers Paper, Golder Associates, Citipower and SP AusNet have continued regular participation in the catchment as have CVA volunteers. Over 320 corporate staff contributed 1,384 hours of vegetation management. One notable day saw 40 ANZ staff involved in planting, laying jute mat and mulching at the new raingarden in Hall Reserve, Clifton Hill. We were also grateful to Delfin Lend Lease for assistance with the *Community Engagement in Urban Grasslands* seminar (see *President's Report*).

MCMC assisted local groups with weed awareness and skills development. Workshops were delivered with NHT and Landcare Citipower funding for residents, Friends of Merri Creek and teachers from Santa Maria College, Northcote, at Merri Park Wetland. NHT grants funded similar projects for Friends of Wallan Creek and Friends of Strathnaver Grasslands (on Moonee Ponds Creek).

Over the year, MCMC's Parkland Management Team trained and supervised eight new staff members. Seven tertiary students undertook projects or industry placement and 205 students from six primary and secondary schools participated in parkland management activities.

MCMC also helped achieve the best outcome for the creek environment on a number of issues, including: dissuading residents from feeding wild kangaroos, notifying council about broken parkland barriers, translocating rare plants from development sites, removing graffiti, alleviating concerns about snakes and advising on path issues.

Habitat

The Merri Creek's value as a habitat corridor and refuge was demonstrated by increased fauna sightings, totalling 158 entries in the MCMC Fauna Book, including short-term residents, migratory animals and species taking up new residence.

Visitors included a pair of Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters (typically a bird of the inland) staying over winter in the creekside parklands around Fawkner, and the dazzling white variety of the Grey Goshawk (more typical of tall, wet forests) seen at Craigieburn and Fawkner.

New residents in the lower Merri Creek included the Splendid Ochre Butterfly (see *President's Report*) and a Swamp Wallaby that appeared south of Mahoney's Road Fawkner. Possibly the same individual spent several days in the creekside plantings at Merri Park in Northcote and Brunswick East.

All of MCMC's work aims to strengthen the Merri Corridor, particularly the Friends of Merri Creek's *Black & Blue* project (see *above*) and all of this work supports the resilience of fauna populations, enabling them to adapt to climate variations.



Far left: Wildfire at Jukes Rd Grassland, Fawkner.

Left: Participants in the Community Engagement in Urban Grasslands Seminar inspect the nearby grasslands alongside Malcolm Creek Craigieburn.

Catchment Program

– stream health and environmental education

Waterwatch and stormwater

Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) hosts a *Waterwatch* program for the Merri and Moonee Ponds Creeks and the lower Yarra River. It is part of *Port Phillip & Westernport Waterwatch* and is funded 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 4,300 students from 76 primary, secondary and tertiary institutions were involved in one or more of the following: water quality monitoring, biological assessments of aquatic life, drain stenciling and freshwater habitat surveys. *Waterwatch* activities at festivals, community days and training events reached a further 1,700 people, leading to better community understanding of waterway problems such as stormwater pollution.

This year saw a significant expansion of the volunteer water quality monitoring groups from four to thirteen. Over 100 community monitors, including some school groups, conducted regular monitoring of waterway health at 28 different sites. The data collected by these groups is supplied to local councils and entered onto an Australia-wide database.

Funding from Whittlesea City Council for the *Storming for Cleaner Water* program enabled MCMC to use Council's catchment models, in conjunction with *Waterwatch* materials, to demonstrate to the community and school students how stormwater and pollution moves through the catchment. The program was delivered to over 300 students and teachers and was on display at the Whittlesea Community Festival.

MCMC built on *Waterwatch* activities with funding through the Alternative Penalties Provision of the Environment Protection Act to deliver information on stormwater and riparian environments to 136 students from three primary schools, highlighting impacts of polluted stormwater on Merri Creek. The same source funded MCMC to provide targeted teaching materials on the importance of catchments for clean waterways to an ESL class at Fawcner Community House and enabled the participation of women from the class in riparian planting activities.

MCMC staff have been monitoring five sites on the Merri and one on Malcolm Creek (a tributary) for physical/chemical parameters and macroinvertebrates ('waterbugs') on a quarterly basis since spring '06. This monitoring confirms the poor in-stream health of Merri and Malcolm Creeks. For all sites the *SIGNAL* scores, which are a measure of the diversity and abundance of macroinvertebrates, were low indicating probable severe pollution. Apart from a rural site affected by salinity, the key factor is poor quality urban stormwater entering the creek, especially from industrial areas.

MCMC received 12 pollution reports from the community during the year and referred these on to the EPA. The most dramatic involved large numbers of dead carp associated with a milky white discharge. The cause, due to inadvertent contamination of Merlynston Creek, was successfully traced by the EPA.

With the support of Darebin council, MCMC worked with 23 stakeholders from 12 groups who have a special interest in Merri Park Northcote to form a Litter Focus Group and to develop a litter prevention and reduction strategy. A memorandum of understanding is being developed between all stakeholders which features statements about their current responsibilities and ongoing commitments.

Diversity for schools and community

MCMC's *Learning Grounds* program, funded by the Cities of Whittlesea and Darebin, supports the development of indigenous gardens in school grounds. This year six new schools were supported and a review commenced of the 53 schools that MCMC has been in contact with since 2000. Main issues for schools



are maintenance (weeds, fences, planning infill planting) and competing priorities in school grounds such as construction issues and the popular move towards edible gardens. Schools gave top rating to MCMC's ongoing support with advice and funding assistance.

The Natural Heritage Trust funded *Northern Nature – Creek Connections* program enabled the development of educational materials emphasising local geology and the biodiversity of the Victorian Volcanic Plains bioregion. Guided walks, botanic drawing and a *Volcanoes Rock* activity were delivered to 149 students over five occasions.

MCMC played a pivotal role in the development of a ten week *Bilingual Parks Tour Guides* course, the first program of its sort in Australia. It trained 11 community volunteers, each from different cultural backgrounds and speaking 14 languages between them, as park guides. The course covered the flora, fauna and geology of Victoria's parks, with a focus on the woodlands and grasslands of Melbourne's north; presentation and public speaking skills; and the logistics of organising a community group park outing. As part of the course, the Bilingual Park Guides organised and conducted tours in their own languages for over 100 members of the culturally and linguistically diverse community groups in the City of Whittlesea. The project was a result of a constructive partnership between MCMC, Parks Victoria, the City of Whittlesea and the Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT), with funding support also from the Office of Women and the Department for Victorian Communities.

Stop Press: The Bilingual Parks Tour Guides were awarded the Multicultural Award at Parks Victoria's 2007 Kookaburra Awards.

*Left: An indigenous garden at Bell Primary School, Preston.
Above: The Bilingual Parks Tour Guides at their graduation.*



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. We are supported in this role by direct grants from member Councils.

This year MCMC commented on one EPBC referral, three planning scheme amendments, participated in one Planning Panels hearing (for Aurora in North Epping) and appeared before one Priority Development Panel (for Wholesale Fruit and Vegetable Market in Epping). MCMC also responded to 37 planning permit applications and participated in three VCAT Reviews. Meetings and site inspections were held prior to planning applications for the Clifton Hill Rail Project and the Donnybrook Rail Passing Lane.

Written submissions were made to the Melbourne 2030 audit and the State Government's Land and Biodiversity discussion paper. The former stressed the need for strategic planning for waterway controls and habitat corridors in the Hume Growth Area and heightened standards for stormwater treatment.

MCMC worked towards completing revision of the Merri Creek and Environs Strategy to align it with the objectives of the Port Phillip & Westernport Regional Catchment Strategy.

Upper reaches of Merri Creek – Wallan to Donnybrook

Although the upper part of the Merri catchment is predominantly rural, rapid growth in Wallan is impacting on local tributaries. MCMC worked closely with the Friends of Wallan Creek and provided advice to Mitchell Shire on waterway

planning controls and on managing remnant wetland vegetation 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 continued to participate in the Merriang Local Area Biodiversity Plan and has now taken on the role of convening and providing support for the ongoing implementation of the Plan.

Middle reaches of Merri Creek – Kalkallo to Western Ring Rd

The middle reaches of the Merri catchment contain a mix of established and newly developing areas, both residential and industrial/business, in addition to rural and extractive industry zones.

Development of new infrastructure has led to pressures on important habitat in Kalkallo Creek for the federally listed Growling Grass Frog. MCMC liaised with Yarra Valley Water (YVW) and VicRoads in finalising a monitoring plan for the frog.

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 first-stage route alignment. Comment was also made on a pipe alignment from the Aurora Treatment Facility to the Craigieburn Sewage Treatment Plant.

Illegal dumping and incursions from industrial land are still an issue in this section of the creek and MCMC sought action at a number of sites.

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

The lower Merri catchment is fully urbanised. Redevelopment of infrastructure



and plans for improving habitat and community amenity in the creek environs prompt MCMC involvement.

MCMC liaised with Melbourne Water and Yarra Valley Water on works for new sewer lines along the creek alignment for Stages 1 & 2 of the Northern Sewerage Strategy. Close consultation with waterway planners from Melbourne Water is ongoing, particularly for the Merri Creek Improvement Project to remove serious environmental weeds and establish indigenous vegetation on banks of the Merri in Coburg.

MCMC assisted the Friends of Edgars Creek in determining the relocation of sediment dumped on remnant vegetation and appropriate revegetation works, after damage wrought to the creek environs by Melbourne Water maintenance works.

Involvement in the Edwardes Lake Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan in Reservoir continued and MCMC worked closely with Melbourne Water and Yarra Council in producing community information materials about the proposed raingarden near Walker St Clifton Hill. MCMC similarly liaised with residents at Bundara St Nth Fitzroy about revegetation works in this area.

MCMC participated in the launch of the Merri Trail brochure and provided detailed comments on the draft Merri Creek Trail Review report. Information was also provided on the alignment of new sections of the path in Fawcner and near Merri Park wetland in Northcote.

Community notification enabled MCMC to identify the unauthorised clearing of planted indigenous vegetation for a new sewer servicing an industrial subdivision in North Coburg. MCMC worked with authorities to mitigate the situation and to ensure the best outcome.

Above: MCMC's Megan Jericho demonstrates planting.

Far left: Students on MCMC's excursions enrich their understanding of indigenous habitat through botanic drawing.

Left: Car dumped in the creek reserve at Merri Concourse, Campbellfield. Dumping is an ongoing problem.



Financial Report

Summarised Balance Sheet as at 30th September 2007

	2007	2006
EQUITY:		
Retained Funds – Start	296,241	289,652
Add Surplus / (Deficit)	<u>(6,694)</u>	<u>6,589</u>
Retained Funds – End	<u>\$289,547</u>	<u>\$296,241</u>
Represented By:		
Current Assets:	834,023	573,338
Fixed Assets:	<u>122,951</u>	<u>140,023</u>
TOTAL ASSETS:	<u>\$956,974</u>	<u>\$713,361</u>
Less:		
TOTAL LIABILITIES:	<u>\$667,427</u>	<u>\$417,120</u>
NET ASSETS:	<u>\$289,547</u>	<u>\$296,241</u>

Summarised Statement of Income and Expenditure For the twelve months ended 30th September, 2007

	2007	2006
INCOME:		
Grants		
Municipalities	490,930	405,117
Other Government	212,109	64,791
Non Government	40,887	44,669
Contracts	443,590	425,719
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets	-	-
Sale of Publications	678	811
Environment Fund Donations	865	1,560
Interest & Sundry Income	<u>28,335</u>	<u>20,125</u>
Total Income:	<u>\$1,217,394</u>	<u>\$962,792</u>
LESS EXPENDITURE:		
Wages, Salaries & Oncosts	944,092	764,767
Materials & Plant Hire	75,825	52,061
Vehicle Running	14,236	14,784
Admin, Project & General	125,114	102,036
Environment Fund Disbursements	-	-
Depreciation & Leave	<u>64,821</u>	<u>22,555</u>
Total Expenditure:	<u>\$1,224,088</u>	<u>\$956,203</u>
NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):	<u>(\$6,694)</u>	<u>\$6,589</u>

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the year ended 30th September 2007. 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 2006–2007

Committee of Management 2007:

City of Darebin:	Cr Vince Fontana, Allan Wicks (<i>Vice President 1</i>)
City of Hume:	Cr Drew Jessop, Alan Brennan (<i>until August 2007</i>)
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 Donna Allan
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>), Harold Mackrell, Ruth Shiel, Ray McMahon (sub.)
Friends of Wallan Ck:	Claudia James

Sub-Committees in 2007:

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
IT Manager/Project Officer:	Tony Faithfull
Cleaner:	Tiziana Tosti-Guerra

Catchment Program Team

Waterwatch Coordinator:	Greg Woodward
Waterwatch/Education Officer:	Sarah Crinall (<i>until Dec 2006</i>) Jane Bevelander
Catchment Program Officer:	Angela Foley
Butt Litter Project Officer:	Dimi Bouzalas

Parkland Management Team

Coordinator:	Megan Jericho
Senior Team Leader:	Brian Bainbridge
Team Leader:	Alex Davern
Team Members:	Dan Barnett, Dave Crawford, Deb Lawson, Ben North, plus Sam Bretherton and Jill Hildebrandt (<i>both until Dec 2006</i>)

Temporary Team Members:	Bridget Bainbridge, Jane Bevelander, Jasper Eames, Suzanne Edney, Aaron Eulenstein, Fraser Montgomery, Tristan Mules, Tara Palmer, Philip Thompson, Maryann Weatherill, Kellie Williams
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Planning Consultant

Michael Kirsch

MERRI CREEK



MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

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