


Biennial Report **2022-2024**





Cover: Members of Merri Creek Management Committee's Ecological Restoration Team on the Merri Creek. Image by Annette Ruzicka.

“One can be completely surrounded by bush in the Upper Merri, with the creek on one side and wetlands on the other. It reminds me, that no matter how degraded a waterway is, with care and effort and given enough time, it can develop into a wonderful and peaceful place to be”

Claudia James, Wallan Environment Group



Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Acknowledgement

MCMC acknowledges that the Merri Creek flows through the cultural landscape of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and that recognition, reconciliation and engagement with Aboriginal people is central to achieving its primary purpose.





Our story

In 1989, a group of forward-thinking nature lovers came together in the belief that the Merri Creek, flowing from the heart of Melbourne's inner-north to the northern edges of the city, could one day return to its former role as a thriving connector of people, creatures and landscape. Mobilised by volunteer group, Friends of Merri Creek, and by an already strong history of community campaigning and advocacy, Merri Creek Management Committee was born.

This vision was remarkable in its optimism: in the 1970s and 80s, the Merri Creek was a waterway in dire ill-health. Water quality was so low that the creek struggled to support the birds, frogs and small mammals that once lived here in abundance. The native vegetation that these creatures needed to thrive was overtaken by weeds. Local people saw the creek as an eyesore at best, a dumping ground at worst. And the recent threat of a major freeway right through the creek loomed as a reminder to stay vigilant.

More than 35 years later, the Merri Creek is a green corridor, much-loved by the community and with some species returning. The water quality, while still an ongoing concern, is monitored by passionate volunteers, and despite population growth and ongoing development along the Merri's banks, the catchment still supports species such as the vulnerable Golden Sun Moth, critically endangered Matted Flax-Lily and, in the northern reaches, Krefft's Gliders, Swamp Wallabies and echidnas. Critically endangered grasslands, reduced to less than two per cent of their former distribution, are being managed by careful ecological burning programs. Growling Grass Frogs have returned to areas in the south of the catchment not seen since the 1980s and plantings of native species support the food chain, from insects to the birds that forage on them.

Local people recognise the Merri Creek as a place to recuperate, recalibrate and reconnect with nature; real estate on its banks is much sought after; groups of passionate volunteers see themselves as caretakers of the land alongside the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Traditional Owners who care for the creek in the footsteps of their ancestors. Volunteer groups come together to weed, plant and remove litter, forming valuable connections with their fellow Melburnians and enjoying better health, both mental and physical.

This incredible story is not just our story but yours too – the people of Merri Creek. But while we celebrate what we have achieved, we strengthen our resolve for the work that is yet to be done: the threats of habitat loss, introduced species, inappropriate development and climate change continue to build. Stroll along the Merri with us and support our work towards an even healthier, cleaner creek that overcomes these threats and offers a home to the creatures and plants we love.



President's Report

MCMC manages Ngarri-djarrang (Central Creek Grassland) in Reservoir, a nine-hectare remnant of the volcanic plains grasslands that once stretched westwards to South Australia but are now a critically endangered plant community. MCMC played a key role in saving this precious site from residential subdivision in the early 1990s. Friends of Merri Creek volunteers, including myself, enjoy learning from and assisting MCMC's Ecological Restoration Team at Ngarri-djarrang and other sites.

The MCMC team has trialled innovative techniques to translocate threatened plants into the reserve and regularly conducts patch burns to sustain grassland diversity. In 2024 our team planted flowering grassland plants around the borders, to demonstrate the reserve is actively cared for and to raise public awareness of our little-known local species.

It was the end of an era when MCMC's Manager, Luisa Macmillan, retired after more than 22 years at the helm. Fortunately, we continued to benefit from Luisa's vast knowledge and connections, via her part-time position until October 2024. Luisa has an excellent understanding of waterway management, land-use impacts and ecological restoration and is a staunch advocate for Merri Creek and its parklands.

In August 2023, MCMC welcomed our new CEO, Bernadette Thomas. Bernadette brought a wealth of experience and knowledge of the Merri catchment through her previous position as Manager Sustainable Environment at Hume City Council. She brings energy, enthusiasm and a strategic approach, leading MCMC into a new phase.

We are very grateful for the immense contributions of three other very long-term staff members who retired in this period. Monica Williamson was our cheerful and efficient Administrative Support Officer for 15 years.

Ray Radford, as our Information Officer for decades, fielded public inquiries and produced very readable newsletters and other publications. Tony Faithfull was one of MCMC's first employees, starting as Revegetation Program Supervisor in 1989, becoming MCMC Manager for some years, then IT and Strategic Projects Manager. Tony wrote the Merri Creek and Environs Strategy 2009–2014 and other publications. He set up MCMC's first Geographic Information System in 1995 and the Merri Creek Environment Fund in 2000.

Planning for a major new park along the Merri upstream of the Ring Road progressed in 2022–2024 with completion of the marram baba Merri Creek Regional Parklands Future Directions Plan. MCMC is a member of the multi-agency Parklands Partnership Group and has managed a major signage design and installation project in the Parklands.

The achievements of MCMC are due to the dedication, support and hard work of our staff, committee members, member organisations, volunteers and supporters. Thank you all for your contributions.

Ann McGregor OAM
President

A message from the CEO

Reaching out to receive and hold a legacy that is as strong and cherished as the Merri Creek Management Committee is both an honour and an enormous responsibility: the creek is loved and protected by such a devoted community. Our organisation plays a critical role in bringing that community together. Thanks to 35 years of careful management, relationship building, and the skill and expertise built up by our team, partners, and supporters, MCMC is as strong in that unifying role as it's ever been.



In 2023 and 2024 we farewelled treasured staff who among them have given nearly 100 years of experience and service to MCMC. Thank you to Luisa, Tony, Ray and Monica for your vision, perseverance, and commitment to MCMC's work. Without you, MCMC would not be what it is today.

There have been some changes to the team and the organisational structure, with new roles dedicated to Operations, Planning and Communications, to better achieve our vision of acting as a unifying voice to champion and advance the protection and restoration of the Merri Creek.

In late 2024 the MCMC team came together to reflect on the completion of our 2020–2024 Strategic Plan and how we work together as a team. We also considered how we want to work with our community and stakeholders.

Consistent themes emerged from these reflections: the importance of engaging with communities in the upper Merri Creek; our support for and partnership with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung peoples; and maintaining our ambition for the work we do and what we can achieve together.

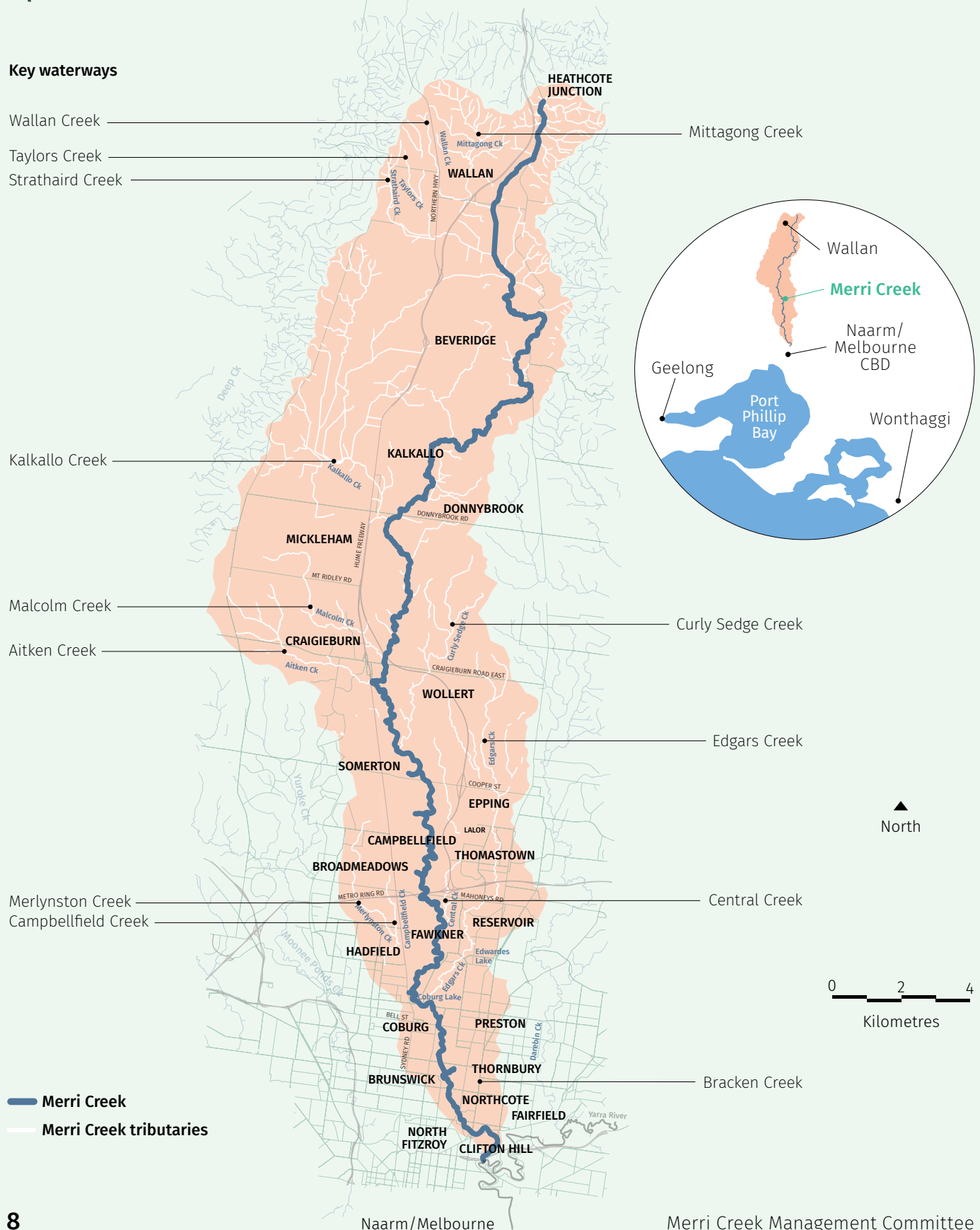
In October 2024, the entire MCMC team stood on Green Hill, looking south over Hearne's Swamp at the northern edge of the catchment, with beautiful Mt Fraser in the distance. We discussed the proposed wallan wallan Regional Parklands and the level of development that was planned for the area.

It reminded me just how important MCMC's work will continue to be, well into the future. Protecting natural places that we love is vitally important for the health of our planet. I hope you'll continue to support and join with MCMC in our work to protect and restore the Merri Creek and catchment.

Bernadette Thomas
CEO

Where we work on Wurundjeri Country

Merri Creek flows for more than 60 km from the Great Dividing Range south to the Birrarung/Yarra River in inner Naarm/Melbourne, draining an area of nearly 400 square kilometres.



What we protect

The Merri Creek ambles along a 60km stretch of landscapes and cityscapes nourished by the flow of life-giving water, a critical resource for native species and vegetation communities, many of which are surviving against the odds in diminishing numbers. Below are just some of the many species and vegetation communities that benefit from the work we do at MCMC with the help of our supporters.

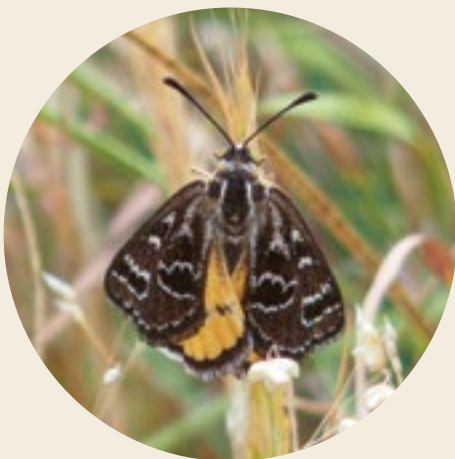


Growling Grass Frog

Status: vulnerable

The Growling Grass Frog, known for its distinctive call, requires a combination of on- and off-creek habitat to flourish. In 2022-2024, MCMC worked with three councils, three government agencies, and community stakeholder groups to improve and expand habitat in the southern parts of the catchment, where these beautiful frogs have been recorded in convincing numbers for the first time since the 1980s. Our annual appeals in 2023 and 2024 raised \$53,908 to improve habitat and reduce threats for the Growling Grass Frog.

Image by Dr Geoff Heard.



Golden Sun Moth

Status: vulnerable

Golden Sun Moths were once common in the grassy plains surrounding Melbourne but have suffered a dramatic population decline due to loss of habitat. In 2022-2024, MCMC managed Golden Sun Moth habitat on five sites, reducing the impact of weeds and improving the function of grass tussocks as breeding habitat, with ecological burning, weeding and brushcutting.

Image by Brian Bainbridge.

What we protect *continued*



Latham's Snipe

Status: vulnerable

This migratory bird rests and feeds in many of Victoria's wetlands after flying several thousand kilometres from its breeding grounds in Japan. Latham's Snipe is likely to occur in the wetlands of wallan wallan, where MCMC is a key advocate for wetland protection and re-creation. Latham's Snipe also benefits from the habitat improvement work we do at sites along the Aitken Creek, a tributary of the Merri, in Craigieburn.

Image by Geoff Park.



Matted Flax-Lily

Status: critically endangered

By 2010, only a few thousand Matted Flax-Lily plants at a couple of hundred locations were considered to survive after dramatic decline due to habitat loss. In 2022–2024, MCMC managed 40 sites where this perennial lily persists, carrying out weeding, ecological burns and introducing plants to new areas.

Image by Nayt Housman.

What we protect *continued*



Natural Temperate Grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plains

Status: critically endangered

Less than two percent of the Natural Temperate Grasslands (which feature herbs, grasses, and wildflowers) that once occurred in Victoria exist today. MCMC works on 22 sites to restore these grasslands, including reducing biomass, control of woody and grassy weed species, the harvesting of seeds fencing and rubbish removal.

Image by MCMC.



Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands of the Victorian Volcanic Plains

Status: critically endangered

These woodlands, found in the Victorian Volcanic Plain bioregion (from Melbourne to Hamilton), occur on flat to gently undulating plains with stony knolls, tree canopies and a predominantly grassy understorey. These woodlands have experienced significant decline, making our work to protect remnant woodlands even more vital. In 2022-2024, MCMC worked on restoring seven Grassy Eucalypt Woodland sites.

Image by Michael Longmore.

Our vision

Merri Creek, its tributaries and its environs will be of high environmental quality and deeply treasured by the community.

Our mission

To act as a unifying voice to champion and advance the protection, restoration and stewardship of the Merri Creek, its tributaries and environs.

Strategic Objectives



Strategy 1

Leadership and advocacy



Strategy 2

Partnerships and collaboration



Strategy 3

Waterway corridor restoration



Strategy 4

Education and engagement



Strategy 5

Organisational strengthening





“Thanks so much for the opportunity to broaden our skills and capacity as Waterwatch volunteers. It was a great reminder that every single day we go out to monitor, matters”

Sofia Enrigue, Waterwatch volunteer

About you: the Merri community

From the northern reaches of the Upper Merri to the confluence of the Merri with Birrarung/Yarra River on the edges of Naarm/Melbourne, communities of nature lovers who recognise the sustenance the creek provides, support our mission to act as a unifying voice for the Merri. Our work together is a partnership and a network.

Our members

MCMC works with nine member groups: a partnership between the community, local government, and Melbourne Water:

- Friends of Merri Creek
- Wallan Environment Group
- City of Darebin
- Hume City Council
- Merri-bek City Council
- Mitchell Shire Council
- City of Whittlesea
- Yarra City Council
- Melbourne Water (rejoined in August 2024)

Representatives of these member groups form a Committee of Management which guides our activities.

Our volunteer community

Many volunteer groups in the catchment form localised Friends-of groups who support our work and provide “boots on the ground” – the hands-on work of planting, weeding, monitoring, litter-removal and water-testing as well as advocacy and responding to planning and development proposals within the catchment. Some volunteers also fulfil important roles on the many committees that guide our work on specific projects.

In 2022-2024, we supported nine WaterWatch groups and 13 Friends-of groups in the Merri catchment. We thank them for their passion and energy.

Clients and corporate sponsors

Our work sometimes takes us off-creek to conduct work for clients who recognise and seek out our expertise in managing grasslands and remnant vegetation, and monitoring ecosystem restoration. We host groups of corporate volunteers to work with our Ecological Restoration and Catchment teams to plant, weed, collect litter and monitor nest boxes.





932

hectares
managed



130

Sites
managed



189,054

pieces of litter
removed*

*From 1 Jan 2022 to 31 Dec 2024

4,940

Volunteer
hours



37

volunteer groups
supported



644

Environmental
education or
restoration
events held



12,740

Event/activity
participants



51

Statutory and strategic
planning matters
responded to

41

clients and
funding partners



\$86,569

raised to support habitat
protection and restoration





Strategy 1

Leadership and advocacy

MCMC plays a central role in our community to lead and facilitate a shared vision for Merri Creek. Part of this role is to bring First Peoples, community, government, and private stakeholders together, to work towards achieving better environmental and community outcomes. We act as a key advocate for policy changes that will help achieve our purpose and enable decision-makers to understand the impacts of their decisions on the creek and across the catchment.



marram baba Parklands. Image by Dom McKenzie.

Advocating for better waterway protections

In May 2023, MCMC co-led a workshop with the Darebin Creek Management Committee (DCMC), councils, Melbourne Water and community representatives to identify priorities for improving waterway planning protections. The event was attended by 24 participants, including Friends of Merri Creek members.

A follow-up webinar in September 2023 introduced the Victorian Government's Planning for Waterways program, attracting 40 participants.

This program will implement new planning controls for 14 waterways across Melbourne with a focus on protecting landscape, environmental and cultural characteristics.

MCMC has since established a working group with DCMC and council representatives to discuss key issues and champion holistic protections for Merri and Darebin Creeks and their tributaries.

Case study

marram baba Merri Creek Regional Parklands



marram baba Parklands. Image by Dom McKenzie.

The marram baba Merri Creek Regional Parklands Future Directions Plan, endorsed by the Victorian Government in 2023, represents a significant achievement for MCMC and its long-time partner, Friends of Merri Creek.

Spanning 2,778 hectares from Campbellfield to Beveridge in Melbourne's north, this ambitious plan aims to link parks and open spaces into a continuous ecological corridor. It recognises and supports the goals of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people for future management of the Parklands.

For decades, Friends of Merri Creek, supported by MCMC, has championed the vision of continuous parklands along Merri Creek. Their efforts began in 1989, evolving through various plans and eventually culminating in the marram baba Plan. Meaning "body of mother" in Woi-wurrung, the name reflects the land's deep cultural and environmental significance.

Over the last two years, MCMC's Luisa Macmillan and Michael Longmore have provided critical input through the Partnership Group and Working Group. They have provided expert guidance on ecological values, shared valuable resources and facilitated connections with stakeholders. MCMC's long history as a repository of ecological knowledge, data, and policy work was instrumental in shaping the plan.

"The Future Directions Partnership Group greatly valued MCMC's enthusiasm, knowledge and commitment to environmental protection and conservation in this very special area of Melbourne," says Holly Alsop from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

"MCMC collaborated with many stakeholders to inform ongoing land management and the protection of ecological and cultural values along the Merri Creek."

The plan envisions the parklands as Melbourne's northern natural corridor, fostering biodiversity, cultural heritage and community connections. Key initiatives include protecting habitats for vulnerable species establishing co-management frameworks with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and introducing new recreation facilities.

According to MCMC President Ann McGregor, the plan's long-term, strategic vision will allow native species to move across the landscape.

"A lot of species that move seasonally or to find food are finding that increasingly hard as Melbourne continues to expand," she says. "A connected habitat is vital for these animals."

While full implementation of the plan will take decades, MCMC remains committed to bringing this vision to life.

"We've learnt how to work with all sorts of people from different organisations to build support for our vision and bring others along for the ride," reflects Ann McGregor. "The plan provides an integrated parklands concept to protect key sites with conservation value. It represents a lot of good intentions but resourcing it will be key to its effectiveness."



Strategy 2

Partnerships and collaboration

Working collaboratively with partners is part of our DNA at MCMC: collaboration has been fundamental to the way we've worked since our inception. We build strong, long-term, strategic partnerships with community, government and private partners to achieve a whole-of-catchment approach to planning, restoring and decision-making for the Creek. Our work with and in support of First Peoples has always been of major importance and will be a key feature of our collaborative work in the future.



Members of UPMC Landcare Group removing woody weeds.
Images by Chris Cobern.



Nest box workshop.

Dry Creek, Upper Merri

MCMC is supporting the formation and work of new community groups such as the Upper Plenty Merri Catchment Landcare Group, to improve habitat and increase biodiversity in local areas.

"The establishment of our Landcare group in 2022 was spearheaded by MCMC and Mitchell Shire Council, with additional support from local environment groups," says the group's Secretary, Michael Watson.

"MCMC has been invaluable in helping us get established and achieve our goals. Chris helped us plan a nesting box project for Krefft's Gliders, which was very popular."

The project resulted in much-needed homes for these gliders, who face a significant threat: the loss of mature, hollow-bearing trees, which are crucial to their shelter and survival.

"Our community response has been fantastic – and that momentum is still building. We look forward to more projects on the Merri Creek."

**Michael Watson,
UPMC Landcare Group**

Case study

Strategic collaboration drives landscape-scale impact



An Ecological Restoration team member working in Darebin. Image by MCMC.



A landscape returning to life in Hume. Image by Indi Randall.

Along Aitken Creek in Craigieburn, the landscape is undergoing a transformation. Pre-colonisation, this creek was surrounded by dense tussock grasslands and ancient red gums.

Over the last few decades, various restoration efforts have taken place, each contributing to the landscape's renewal. However, with multiple contractors involved over time, the approach has naturally varied, resulting in a mosaic of different management approaches and outcomes.

Now, Aitken Creek – which lies within Hume City Council – is the focus of a new connectivity effort by Merri Creek Management Committee. MCMC has taken on the management for a continuous stretch of the creek and is exploring ways to support threatened species such as Matted Flax-Lily by creating ecological “stepping stones” to help pollinators like native bees move between fragmented habitats.

In recent years, MCMC's role in landscape-scale bushland management has grown significantly. In 2022, the City of Darebin engaged MCMC as its principal bushland contractor after refreshing its supplier panel and in early 2023, Hume City Council transitioned from an internal bush crew to relying on external contractors like MCMC. These changes positioned MCMC to take on larger, more continuous areas, allowing for long-term, strategic planning.

“Previously, managing scattered sites alongside other contractors made it difficult to think strategically,” explains Michael Longmore,

MCMC's Ecological Restoration Program Manager. “Now, with control over entire stretches of creeks like Aitken, we can design projects that address connectivity and ecological processes at a landscape level.”

One such initiative is a Green Links grant recently awarded to MCMC for Aitken and Merri Creeks, which will improve pollination corridors for the Matted Flax-Lily. By enhancing native vegetation and creating habitat stepping stones, MCMC hopes to address the needs of species whose survival depends on connected ecosystems.

Other habitat improvement efforts focus on the Growling Grass Frog, combining revegetation, controlled burns and surveys to map and support frog populations along the Merri Creek in Craigieburn.

In Darebin, MCMC's expanded presence includes managing the vegetation at Edwardes Lake, where collaboration with Friends of Edwardes Lake has strengthened community engagement.

“Having continuity across sites means we can work with partners to realise strategies rather than just advocate for them,” says Michael Longmore. “This approach is already unlocking new opportunities and promises to deliver meaningful results for biodiversity and the community.”



Strategy 3

Waterway corridor restoration

Restoring the Merri Creek is the foundation of our work. For over 35 years, we have developed expertise in waterway corridor restoration and applied this to the Merri Creek landscape. We use our knowledge of best-practice restoration and repair to give the plants, animals and ecological communities that rely on this precious waterway, a better chance of survival in the face of increasing development, climate change and pressure from a rapidly growing human population.



Bababi Djinanang, Fawkner. Images by Michael Longmore.

Leonard St Grassland

Back in 2019, the Friends of Merri Creek and MCMC heard the news they'd long been working towards: Leonard St Grassland would become a public reserve, rather than a residential development, thanks to tireless advocacy and campaign efforts as well as Merri-bek Council's forward-thinking purchase of this valuable land.

These grasslands are now one of the newest sites in MCMC's ecological burning program. Active management by MCMC, including seasonal prescribed burning, is now giving the species found here a better chance at flourishing.

While burning supports weed control efforts, its primary purpose is as an essential ecological process critical to maintaining grassland health, including sustaining native biodiversity and enhancing critical habitats.

"You can stand in one spot and see how the land has responded to last year's burn and then turn your head and see what we burned the year before that: you're seeing what fire can do over time, right in front of you."

Matt Tudor, MCMC Ecological Restoration Team Leader

Case study

Ecological burning in Merri-bek Council



Bababi Djinanang, Fawkner.



Spring burn, Bababi Djinanang, Fawkner.

In the remnant plains grasslands of the Merri Creek valley, the delicate, star-shaped flowers of the Matted Flax-lily add a vibrant splash of violet to the landscape.

The grasslands are slowly healing, responding to an ecological burn program spanning 30 years. In 2023, this included clearing of invasive weeds and grassy biomass, creating the conditions for native wildflowers to flourish.

For more than 30 years, MCMC has been at the forefront of ecological restoration, pioneering prescribed burning programs in Merri-bek City Council's grasslands. This long-term commitment has not only transformed the landscapes but also fostered community support and understanding of fire's critical role in maintaining biodiversity.

A cornerstone of this effort is Bababi Djinanang grassland, Fawkner. This four-hectare site represents one of MCMC's most enduring success stories. Annually burned for three decades, Bababi Djinanang demonstrates how consistent, scientifically guided management can restore and protect native ecosystems.

The grassland supports more than 60 indigenous plant species, including the largest known population of the Matted Flax-lily. The area also provides critical habitat for reptiles such as the endangered Tussock Skink and birds like the Black-Shouldered Kite whose presence reflects the grassland's ecological health.

Building on this success, MCMC has broadened its prescribed burning to new sites across Merri-bek, and since 2022 has reintroduced regular fire to five grassland sites in Fawkner which had not been burned at all in living memory or only very infrequently.

MCMC has also been trialling burns at different times of year – a shift that reflects the organisation's commitment to adaptive management.

"We normally burn in autumn or early winter," says Sophie Lavence from MCMC. "But in 2024 we tried a spring burn. That's because there are a lot of summer-growing grassy weeds, so it gave us the opportunity to do some detailed weed control over the warmer months while they're still actively growing."

One of the most remarkable outcomes of MCMC's work is the strong community support it has cultivated. In urban settings, prescribed burns often face public opposition. However, in Merri-bek, decades of regular burning have fostered community trust.

"MCMC have a long history of leading burns – they're a very skilled, capable crew that we can trust to deliver good outcomes," says Vince Andreana, from Merri-bek City Council.

"The combination of that strong track record, along with the communication work we do in the community, means we very rarely have concerns from residents."

The longstanding collaboration between MCMC, Merri-bek Council and local residents illustrates how conservation initiatives can thrive when they are deeply rooted in community, transparency and shared responsibility.

By maintaining and expanding its prescribed burning program, MCMC continues to create healthier, more resilient ecosystems, setting an inspiring precedent for urban conservation efforts across Australia.



Strategy 4

Education and engagement

Helping people connect to nature is at the heart of our work at MCMC. We do this by supporting citizen science and enabling community stewardship of indigenous biodiversity and waterway health. Our catchment education team works with students from early years to those completing their PhDs and with a diverse range of volunteers, including linguistically and ethnically diverse communities. Our catchment team also supports MCMC's corporate volunteer program and engages the community via MCMC's communications channels, bringing updates, stories and opportunities to participate in creekside activities.



STEM Catalyst's nature-based activities help to break cultural barriers.



Images by STEM Catalyst.

Growing a nature-loving community

Arjumand Khan has inspired hundreds of people from culturally diverse backgrounds to connect with the Merri Creek through her education initiative, STEM Catalyst.

After arriving in Australia from India in 2006, Arjumand took on the challenge of leading a local walking group for new mothers. Since then, she has grown into a respected leader in nature-based STEM education.

Working in partnership with the catchment education team at Merri Creek Management Committee, Arjumand has co-delivered citizen science programs, including waterbug and wetland discovery events, as well as frog walk-and-talk events.

By breaking cultural barriers and engaging both children and adults, and with the support of MCMC, Arjumand helps communities embrace the creek's biodiversity while inspiring the next generation to protect and cherish Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country.

“Murnong is an endangered grassland species – a daisy – and the way its seeds disperse through the wind is quite beautiful. It was harvested by women, which is a great connection for us as a girls’ school.”

Andrew Vance,
Melbourne Girls College

Case study

Community of Practice



Community of Practice educators benefit from building networks and knowledge. Image by MCMC.



Creek activities engage children with nature. Image by Angela Foley.

Long before Melbourne Girls College students explored their campus on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country, billabongs and wetlands thrived along the floodplain where the College now stands.

Nestled between the basalt plain of western Melbourne and the sedimentary mudstone to the east, the college was once home to a rich ecosystem, shaped by Birrarung (the Yarra River).

Andrew Vance, Sustainability Coordinator for the college, vividly recalls the moment this history reshaped his understanding of the place. "We learned through MCMC that our school was never a forest; it was always on the edge of grasslands. Once we knew that, we switched from planting trees to planting grassland species."

For the last three years, MCMC has hosted Community of Practice (CoP) gatherings to provide educators with opportunities to connect with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung knowledge in environmental and ethical ways.

These events are initiated and led by MCMC's (non-Indigenous) Dr Angela Foley and are informed by Angela's research and projects involving the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community. CoP events address a critical gap for educators seeking to embed Indigenous knowledge into their teaching.

Supported by the City of Darebin, the gatherings bring together educators from diverse disciplines and age groups, all the way from early learning to university.

"Teachers were calling me, asking how to deliver Indigenous perspectives in their classrooms," explains Angela.

"These conversations were happening one-on-one, but I saw an opportunity for MCMC to support that network with the resources and knowledge they needed."

Andrew attended the 2024 CoP event at Darebin Parklands.

"The events run by MCMC don't just provide educators with practical ideas we can take back to the classroom," continues Andrew. "They also give us the confidence to use them."

The long-standing relationship between MCMC and Melbourne Girls College has influenced how the school approaches its own sustainability practices. Andrew has integrated what he's learnt about things such as bush foods.

The CoP events place an emphasis on understanding and responding to the unique ecological and cultural characteristics of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country.

"I encourage people to be local, specific and particular," says Angela. "That means not just engaging with social history, but also with place history and all that encompasses: language, seasons, biodiversity, waterways and geology."



Strategy 5

Organisational strengthening

The strength and longevity of our organisation is due to our good governance, a highly skilled and experienced workforce and strong partnerships and relationships. We have developed a person-centred organisational culture, supporting staff to grow professionally. To continue our work and maintain our role in restoring the creek, we have shifted our focus to attracting secure, stable and diversified funding and to ensuring our contact with stakeholders remains relevant and interesting.



Team members on a field day. Image by MCMC.



MCMC ecological restoration team members. Image by Annette Ruzicka.

A growing “bush crew”

Our reputation as experts in ecological restoration is evident in the growth of our bushland management contracts in the City of Darebin and Hume City Council, as well as for Metro Trains biodiversity program. Our capacity grew in 2022–2024 with 23 staff now in our restoration team, one of the largest teams we’ve employed since our founding.

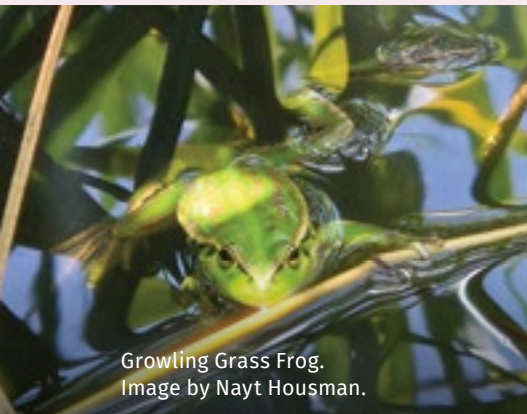
This allowed us to offer career growth opportunities for staff, becoming an employer of choice and, importantly, allowed us to increase both our revenue and our impact.

In 2023, MCMC recognised the importance of our staff by investing in a weekend field trip for our ecological restoration team. Staff took a leap out of the Merri catchment to spend time in the Otway Ranges, where Victorian Volcanic Plains (also found in the Merri catchment) occur.

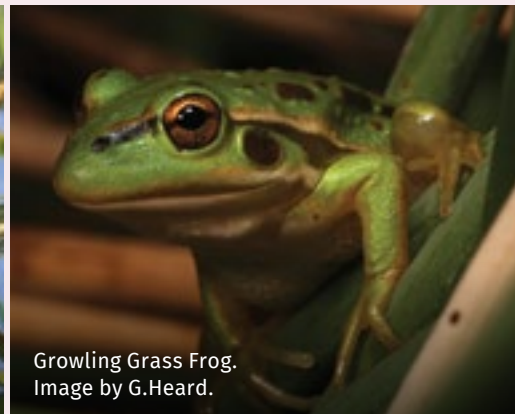
Opportunities like this strengthen relationships within a team that rely on each other in physically demanding roles and sometimes challenging conditions, as well as meeting the team’s appetite for constant learning.

Case study

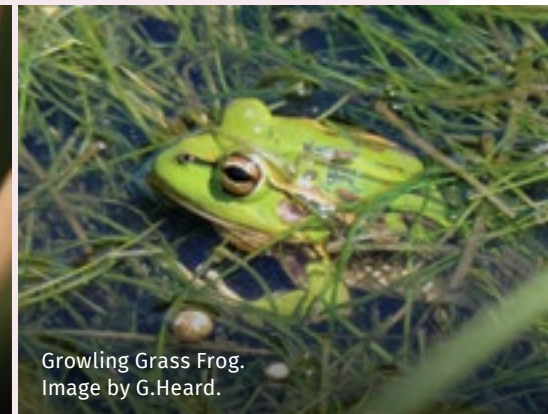
Growling Grass Frog



Growling Grass Frog.
Image by Nayt Housman.



Growling Grass Frog.
Image by G.Heard.



Growling Grass Frog.
Image by G.Heard.

The dusk light faded on the summer night and a small group, gathered at the edges of a wetland, switched their spotlights on and cast beams across scattered grasses and ponds.

The night was warm and still – perfect for spotting frogs. Three staff from Merri Creek Management Committee and Merri-bek Council began their work surveying for the Growling Grass Frog.

This, the final of three surveys, was just one of a series of MCMC actions in 2022–2024 that contributed to a better future for the frog and which also delivered on our goal to position MCMC as a lead organisation for Merri Creek stewardship.

The surveys were the next step in our campaign to protect the Growling Grass Frog in an area they hadn't been seen for decades. In 2023, seventy-three donors had stepped up to help us confirm the presence of Growling Grass Frog by funding an ecological survey.

When MCMC reached out to our community again in 2024 to fund further surveys, we saw an opportunity to grow that community and trial a strategic fundraising approach.

We worked with scientist Dr Brendan Casey, “the boy who loved frogs”, to tell his inspiring story of a childhood spent exploring the Merri, which led to a PhD with RMIT studying the bioacoustic monitoring of frogs. We told Brendan's story through a range of communication channels, appealing for support through a compelling video on social media and an email campaign in addition to our traditional approach through the mail, at the close of the tax year.

The surveys made possible by those donations found evidence of a small breeding population.

This – coupled with the August 2022 release of a report by Dr Geoffrey Heard citing a 40% decrease in populations of the Growling Grass Frog across northern Melbourne since 2002 – built an even stronger case for habitat improvement and further studies.

This resulted in a 69% increase in donors and a 43% increase in the income raised on the previous year. The resulting funds will allow us to monitor four populations, including three new sites, and improve habitat at Moomba Park Wetlands, while protecting the Growling Grass Frog from a key threat, chytrid fungus.

In May 2024, MCMC endorsed a new Growling Grass Frog strategy, set to be launched in 2025, bringing together the many organisations working to ensure this precious frog's call is heard in the southern reaches of the Merri for decades to come.

“I couldn't believe it when the call sounded out across the wetland – we'd thought this frog might be lost to the lower Merri.”

**Michael Longmore, Ecological Restoration
Program Manager, MCMC**

Finance Report 2022-2024



Summarised Balance Sheet

As at 30th September 2024

Equity	2024	2023
Opening Retained Funds	504,637	520,979
Transfer (to)/from Environment Fund Reserve	(17,658)	(18,172)
Add Surplus/(Deficit)	81,438	1,830
Retained Surplus	568,417	504,637
Environment Fund Reserve	146,259	128,601
Total Retained Funds	714,676	633,238
Represented By		
Current Assets	1,441,143	1,148,422
Non-Current Assets	166,017	176,536
Total Assets	1,607,160	1,324,958
Less Total Liabilities	892,484	691,720
Net Assets	714,676	633,238

Auditors

MCMC's Auditor for 2023 was Fred Gerardson from Chartered Accountant, Colville Williams & Co. P/L, Lower Plenty. Our auditors for 2024 are Karina Ho, Chris Gorgioski and Simon Aukstin from McBain McCartin & Co.

Summarised Statement of Income & Expenditure

For the twelve months to 30th September 2024

Income	2024	2023
Grants Municipalities	812,599	771,899
Other Government Grants	112,954	302,743
Non-Government Grants	29,365	16,678
Contracts	1,400,650	1,141,153
Donations	70,807	40,481
Other Income	52,469	61,866
Interest	26,014	12,736
Total Income	2,504,858	2,347,556
Less Expenditure		
Employee Benefits and Related Expenses	2,040,187	1,742,816
Project Expenses	85,944	105,578
Depreciation Expense	26,218	20,424
Consultant Expenses	68,477	295,722
Administration Expenses	163,989	166,084
Miscellaneous Expenses	38,605	15,102
Total Expenditure	2,423,420	2,345,726
Net Surplus/(Deficit)	81,438	1,830

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the years ended 30th September 2023 and 30th September 2024.
The full statements are at mcmc.org.au.

A cleaner Merri thanks to our litter cleanup volunteers

Plastic straws, lolly wrappers and bottle caps are among the plastic items that MCMC's Julia Cirillo displays in the palms of her hands as she peruses the haul from just one of the 152 litter cleanup events she has supported in 2023 and 2024.

"Aside from the visual impact that litter has, many of the animals we love to see in the Merri and its tributaries – like frogs, fish, birds and Rakali – can be impacted by ingesting microplastics from litter," says Julia. "This can lead to blocked digestive tracts and starvation – and can ultimately lead to an animal's untimely death."

Julia's events are part of MCMC's Rapid Response to Litter program, which has enjoyed increased access to litter collection kits and improved streamlined data collection forms and data submission procedures in this period.

From January 2023 to December 2024, just over 189,000 pieces of litter were collected by program volunteers and in 2024 almost 500kg of litter were removed from the Merri and Moonee Ponds catchments.

The program continues to be generously funded by the Darebin City Council, Merri-bek City Council, City of Yarra, Whittlesea City Council and just recently, the City of Hume.



Friends of Bracken Creek litter cleanup group at work. Image by Tania Struzina.

Melbourne Water rejoins Merri Creek Management Committee

After 25 years living in Melbourne, Victoria Penko couldn't imagine the city without the Merri Creek.

As Head of Waterway and Catchment Services North-West for Melbourne Water, Victoria describes MCMC as “a pioneering trailblazer in collaborative waterway management”. With these sentiments in mind, it was a “no-brainer” to rejoin as an MCMC member organisation in August 2024, an announcement which MCMC President Ann McGregor describes as “a very welcome move”.

“Melbourne Water is the primary waterway management authority for Melbourne and the Merri Creek,” says Ann. “We already enjoy a good relationship at the operational level, but having Melbourne Water as a member will open up many opportunities for collaboration and mutual support.”

“MCMC is a trusted entity with a respected, rich history and its members obviously have a strong, passionate vision for the creek and its catchment,” says Victoria.

MCMC CEO Bernadette Thomas is excited about the opportunities the collaboration will bring. “This collaboration with Melbourne Water is vital if we are to achieve our goals of protecting Melbourne’s best-loved waterway,” she says. “Melbourne Water has vast knowledge and experience, so we’re looking forward to seeing what we can achieve together.”

Victoria Penko (Melbourne Water) with Shaun Leane MP.
Image courtesy of Melbourne Water.





Ecological monitoring at Western Grassland Reserve

In spring 2022 and 2023, the Arthur Rylah Institute* contracted our Ecological Restoration team to assist with annual Spring grassland monitoring of the Western Grassland Reserves on the plains between Werribee and Geelong.

The goal of this important, ongoing work is to track changes in the condition of vegetation in properties acquired for protection by the Victorian government under the 2020 Melbourne Strategic Assessment Program. These properties were purchased to offset development within the northern corridors of the Merri catchment.

With less than two percent of grassy plains surrounding Melbourne left, MCMC has an important role to ensure that both the Victorian government and the public have robust data to measure the condition of these properties.

This is the first time MCMC has contracted out our monitoring services at such scale for the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, showing a growth in expertise and a deepening of our relationships with DEECA scientists, who we hope will become valuable allies in a range of future projects.

It also offers our crew the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of grasslands and increase their plant identification skills.

The Arthur Rylah Institute is the Victorian government's biodiversity research institute and a part of DEECA.



Community volunteers at National Tree Day with Yarra City Council.



Images by Madeline Bishop, courtesy of Yarra City Council.

National Tree Day with Yarra City Council

MCMC collaborated with Yarra City Council to coordinate this annual tree-planting event, in which a huge 4,000 plants were planted in less than an hour along the Monash Freeway fence line in Burnley.

Sixty-nine community volunteers and Yarra City Councillors joined MCMC staff, planting species such as Wallaby and Kangaroo Grasses and shrubs like Rock Correa, Gold Dust Wattle, Hop Goodenia and Twiggy Daisy Bush. These shrubs are found in the endangered vegetation community known as Plains Grassy Woodlands and will provide important shelter for small woodland birds such as Spotted Pardalotes and Willie Wagtails.

MCMC team members prepared the site and hosted the day, offering environmental education activities including “Kingfishers on Kids”, a craft activity focusing on regular spring visitor to the Merri Creek, the Sacred Kingfisher, and “Waterbug Discovery” where community members identify local aquatic macroinvertebrates, learning about the clues they provide about the health of waterways like the Merri Creek.



Member representatives

Friends of Merri Creek

Ann McGregor OAM, President 22/23 (4), President 23/24 (3)
Nicole Lowe, Vice-President 22/23 (3), Vice-President 23/24 (2)
Judy Schrever, Treasurer and Secretary 22/23 (2), Treasurer 23/24 (3)
Ann Sanson, Substitute Treasurer 22/23 (2), Substitute 23/24 (3)
Jane Miller 22/23 (4)
Anne Frost, Substitute 22/23 (2)
Phil Sinclair, Substitute 22/23 (1), 23/24 (3)
Kate Jost 23/24 (3)
Peter Ewer 22/23 (2), 23/24 (3)

Wallan Environment Group

Claudia James 22/23 (4), 23/24 (4)

City of Whittlesea

Tim Connell, Vice-President 22/23 (2), Substitute 23/24 (1)
Debbie Wood, 22/23 (2)
Lisa Souquet-Wigg 23/24 (2)
Linda Martin-Chew 23/24 (1)

Hume City Council

Cr Jodi Jackson 22/23 (2), 23/24 (1)
Damien Harrison, Treasurer and Secretary 2022 (0)
Liz Turner 22/23 (1)
Cassandra Borg, Substitute 22/23 (1)

City of Darebin

Cr Tom Hannan, Substitute 22/23 (2)
Cr Trent McCarthy 22/23 (2)
David Melli, Substitute 22/23 (3), 23/24 (1)

Merri-bek City Council (formerly Moreland)

Cr James Conlan 22/23 (0)
Richard Tolliday 22/23 (3), 23/24 (4)
Cr Lambros Tapinos 23/24 (0)
Vince Andreana, Substitute 22/23 (1)
Cr Angelica Panopoulos 23/24 (1)

Mitchell Shire Council

Cr Rob Eldridge 2023 (3), Vice-President 23/24 (3)
Elyse Kelly 22/23 (1)
Narelle Liepe, Substitute 22/23 (2), 23/24 (3)

City of Yarra

Cr Bridgid O'Brien 22/23 (3), 23/24 (1)
Craig Lupton 22/23 (3), 23/24 (2)

Those listed above were General Members unless noted otherwise. (x) = meetings attended annually.



Lemon Beauty-heads at Bababi Marning.
Image by Chris Clarke.

