

Annual Report 2024-2025



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

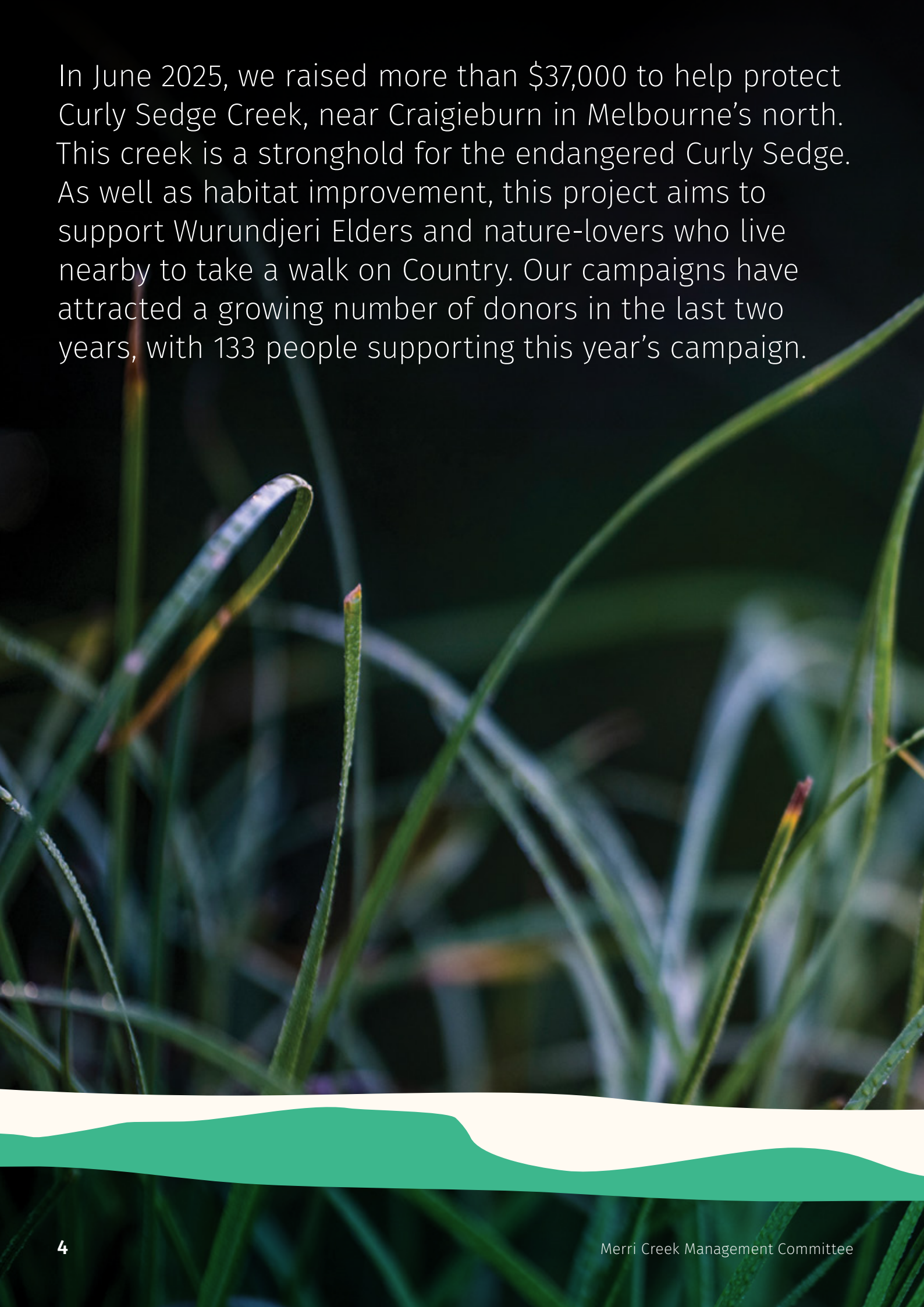
In 1989, a group of forward-thinking nature lovers came together in the belief that the Merri Creek, flowing from the heart of Melbourne's inner-north to the northern edges of the city, could one day return to its former role as a thriving connector of people, creatures and landscape. Mobilised by volunteer 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 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 local citizen scientists, 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.



In June 2025, we raised more than \$37,000 to help protect Curly Sedge Creek, near Craigieburn in Melbourne's north. This creek is a stronghold for the endangered Curly Sedge. As well as habitat improvement, this project aims to support Wurundjeri Elders and nature-lovers who live nearby to take a walk on Country. Our campaigns have attracted a growing number of donors in the last two years, with 133 people supporting this year's campaign.

The endangered Curly Sedge, photographed at Curly Sedge Creek, Melbourne's only stronghold for the species. Image by Annette Ruzicka.



President's Report

MCMC's 2024-2025 financial 'year' has only been nine months long, because we have re-aligned to the July-to-June period used by most organisations. Nevertheless, much has been achieved, as these pages show. We have begun the important task of renewing the Merri Creek and Environs Strategy with our partners and stakeholders. The aim is to produce a completely new strategy, identifying actions that will progress the shared vision for the Merri catchment's waterway corridors.

Approximately 50 partner representatives participated in workshops in May. A community survey attracted around 200 responses. We heard very clearly that our community loves the creek and catchment and is supportive of the work that MCMC undertakes in partnership with the community and key stakeholder groups.

After three years of work involving local government and other land managers, we launched the *Growling Grass Frog Strategy for the Southern Metapopulations of the Merri Creek* with a field trip in February. The Strategy presents a multi-pronged approach to protecting and increasing populations of this endangered frog, between Fawkner and Somerton. Generous donations from many of our supporters in response to our 2024 fundraising campaign allowed MCMC to begin monitoring frog populations at four sites. Growling Grass Frog activity was detected along and near Merri Creek in Campbellfield, Somerton, Epping and in Fawkner. In one location, more than 30 adult frogs were observed – many foraging in areas that have seen habitat improvement works.

The *wallan wallan Regional Park Feasibility Study* was released by the State Government. MCMC and partners are advocating to ensure the Government commits to delivery of this extensive new parkland in the rapidly urbanising upper catchment.

There are alarming signs of decline and loss of Australia's natural diversity. Threatened bird, mammal, plant, and frog populations have declined across the country by an average of 58% since 2000. In the Merri catchment, designated future Conservation Areas could wait for decades to be incorporated into the marram baba Merri Creek Regional Parklands. Meanwhile, their conservation values are degrading through lack of management or in some cases, direct destruction.

MCMC's on-ground work, community engagement and advocacy to protect and restore our catchment ecosystems and species are increasingly important, as we confront the challenges of urban expansion and climate change. There are many success stories here – nature is remarkably resilient when we give her a hand. We appreciate the ongoing support of our member organisations for this work.

On behalf of the Committee of Management, I want to thank MCMC staff, member organisations, volunteers and supporters for your diverse contributions this year.

Ann McGregor OAM
President

A message from the CEO

Walking along the Merri for any length of time can be a balm to the senses. The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people knew this long ago and Western studies also show that connection with nature is hugely beneficial to our health. You, our supporters, know this too – it's likely one of the many reasons you've joined in the wonderful community of nature lovers that fight to protect the waterway as the life force that binds our native creatures, our people, our grasslands, and woodlands together.



Image by Annette Ruzicka.

In 2024–2025, Merri Creek Management Committee collaborated with many individuals, organisations, and agencies to make a real and lasting impact on the health of the Merri Creek, through our one-creek, one-strategy approach, which reaches across tenures, council borders, and ecological communities. And in 2025, that impact has never been needed more.

We are racing against time to protect what remains of our precious biodiversity as the city of Melbourne grows and as the impacts of climate change are felt. Our best tool in this race is often planning tools applied early, before development has a chance to take away what we will never get back. Protected areas along the Merri Creek corridor are in various stages of planning, including marram baba and the proposed wallan wallan Regional Parklands. But while we urge government to hasten the process, we lose precious places, including those that harbour the two percent of the Natural Temperate Grasslands that remain after decades of decline.

While the illegal destruction of grasslands in other catchments has received much-deserved publicity, similar destruction of wetlands and Growling Grass Frog habitat, otherwise destined for future protection, has occurred in the Merri catchment too, with less attention. Thankfully, there are people taking notice, who are passionate and willing to act: our staff, our partners, and our community are among them.

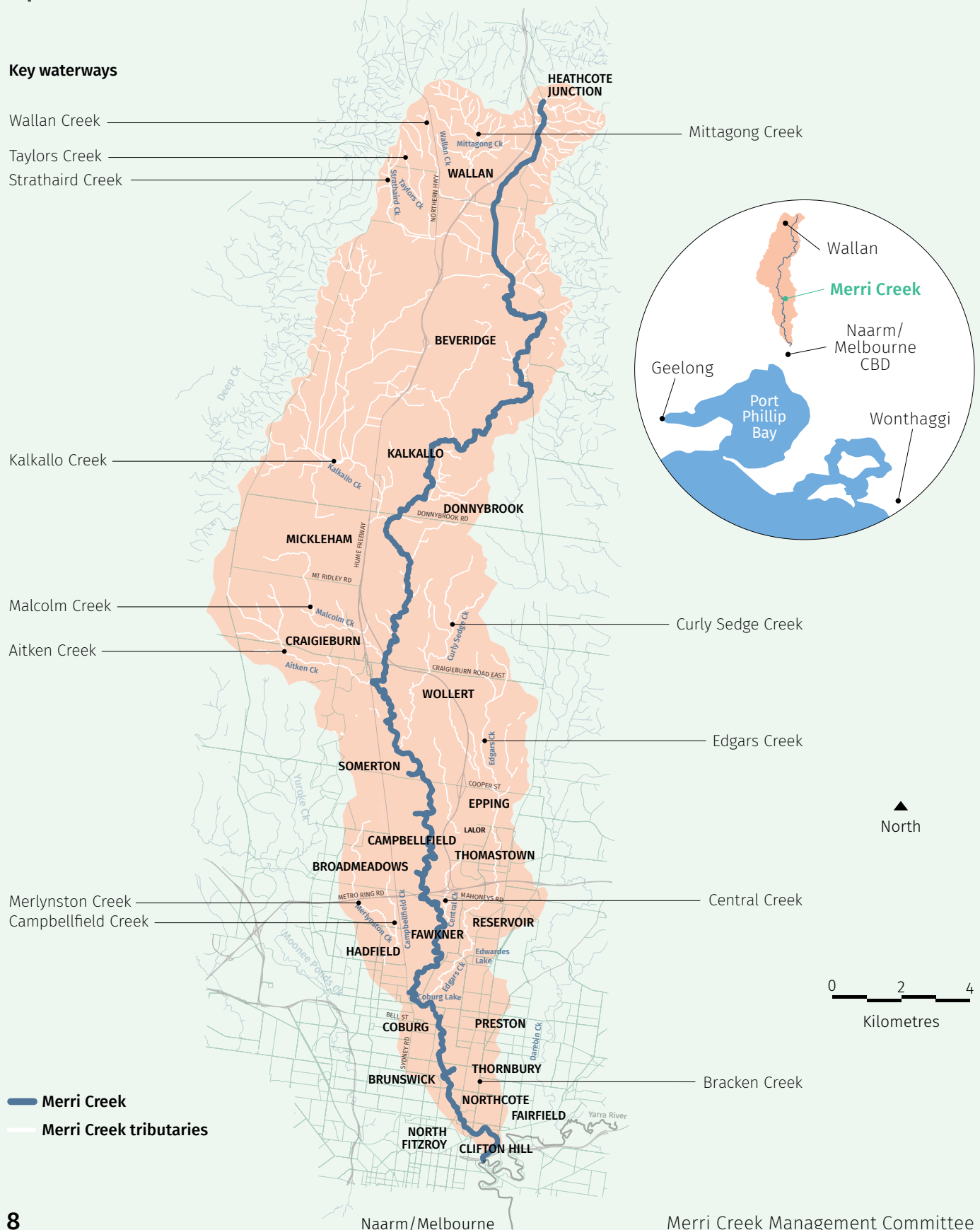
Traditional Owners of the Merri Creek, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, are integral to understanding how to best care for the Merri and working with them is essential to working in harmony with the entire community along the reaches of the Merri. In 2025 we collaborated with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation on a partnership agreement to strengthen the relationship and our impact. We look forward to sharing this plan with you when it is finalised.

It's a privilege to lead an organisation charged with protecting and enhancing a waterway as loved as the Merri Creek. I'd like to thank all of you who work with us and support us – for your incredible passion, drive and care, and for placing your trust in us. We won't let you down.

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 2024–2025, MCMC published the Growling Grass Frog strategy, a shared plan for the many groups protecting the frog's habitat in the southern Merri catchment. We improved habitat at Moomba Park Wetlands and other areas, completed monitoring surveys and ran six community and citizen science events, including popular torchlight tours.

Image by Dr Geoff Heard.



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.

* in Victoria's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act Threatened List 2025

† in the national EPBC Act

What we protect *continued*



Platypus

Status: vulnerable*

The much-loved platypus, a monotreme (egg-laying mammal) known for its duck bill and underwater agility, was once sighted regularly enjoying the waters of the Merri Creek, however in recent times, sightings have become rare. Returning this iconic species to the creek is the vision, however, of a Friends of Merri Creek volunteer group called the Merri Platypus Paddle. MCMC's Julia Cirillo supports this group in their aim to "lay the foundations for the eventual return of the platypus to Merri Creek". The group run annual platypus walks beside the Birrarung and Merri, helping assess habitat for platypus, removing litter and monitoring waterbugs, an essential part of the platypus diet.

Image by Dave Watts / Lochman LT.



Curly Sedge

Status: endangered*

Curly Sedge is an endangered wetland sedge, with scattered populations across Victoria. In Melbourne, its only known stronghold is at Curly Sedge Creek in the Merri catchment, where it persists in damp basaltic soils. MCMC worked with ecologist Doug Frood in the first half of 2025 to raise awareness of this plant and its namesake creek among the rapidly growing communities of the Craigieburn area, as well as fundraising for critical work. We have begun to implement targeted weed management to reduce competition and improve habitat conditions. This work aims to secure the long-term viability of Curly Sedge at this critical site, while strengthening habitat for other rare and threatened species.

Image by Annette Ruzicka.

* in Victoria's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act Threatened List 2025

† in the national EPBC Act

What we protect *continued*



Blue-banded Bee

Status: least concern*

The Blue-banded Bee, a native bee known for its distinctive blue stripes and the loud buzzing sound it produces, is a key pollinator of the Critically Endangered Matted Flax-lily which requires buzz pollination to reproduce. MCMC has strengthened habitat for both species by planting indigenous plants, reducing weeds, and establishing 'stepping stone' populations of Matted Flax-lily to connect fragmented sites. MCMC managed 40 sites where this perennial lily persists, carrying out weeding, ecological burns and introducing plants to new areas, which will benefit the ongoing health of the Blue-banded bee.

Photo by Brian Bainbridge.



River Red Gums

Status: least concern*

River Red Gums are iconic floodplain eucalypts that provide critical habitat for countless species, including birds, bats, insects and aquatic life. For the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, River Red Gums (*be-al*) are a source of food: grubs, or *djeri*, are found in the bark. Along Merri Creek, some remnant Red Gums are centuries-old, supporting hollows that are increasingly scarce in urban landscapes and crucial habitat for a wide range of birds and mammals. MCMC works to protect these trees by controlling invasive weeds, restoring understorey vegetation, and improving water conditions. Planting young River Red Gums also helps secure future canopy cover, ensuring the ecological, cultural, and landscape values so that these keystone trees endure.

Image by A. Topalidou.

* in Victoria's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act Threatened List 2025

† in the national EPBC Act

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



“I’ve learned so much about how weather and rain impact water quality, and how resilient the flora and fauna are around the creek, through volunteering with the Merri Mayflies WaterWatch group (supported by MCMC). It’s great to feel like I’m contributing in a small way to paint a bigger picture of the health of the waterway.”

James, WaterWatch monitor, Merry Mayflies

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

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

Our volunteer community

Many volunteers in the catchment form localised, Friends-of groups (often subgroups of Friends of Merri Creek) 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. We also support volunteers who work alongside our Ecological Restoration Team on individual sites and students completing tertiary studies.

In 2024-2025, we supported 10 WaterWatch citizen science groups and 30 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.



MCMC staff worked with Friends of Bracken Creek volunteers. Image by MCMC.



Merri Platypus dusk walk, 2024, supported by MCMC in partnership with Yarra River Keepers Association, Merri Platypus Paddle and Australian Conservation Foundation. Image by David Redfearn.

1,080

hectares
managed



138

sites
managed

1,513

volunteer
hours



13,000

plants
planted



40

volunteer groups
supported





64,999

pieces of litter removed

5,611

event/activity
participants



269

environmental
education or
restoration
events held



36

clients and
funding partners



20

statutory + strategic
planning matters
responded to

\$48,569

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.



Julia Cirillo, MCMC, with members of the Merri Platypus Paddle.



Images by DEECA.

MCMC wins at the 2023-2024 Landcare Awards

In July 2024, Landcare Victoria awarded Merri Creek Management Committee winners of the Victorian 2024 Australian Government Community Partnerships Landcare Award*. This award acknowledged our work over 35 years, transforming the Merri Creek from a weed-smothered drain to a much-loved waterway corridor together with our many volunteer and Friends-of groups.

We thank the many people that have been part of this ongoing journey and who continue to love the Merri Creek through their volunteering, their advocacy, their donations and their support. The awards received a record number of 146 nominations over 16 categories.

*In September 2025, we also won the National Australian Government Community Partnership Landcare Award!

“Seeing the protection and revival of this grouping of wetlands via the new parkland, would be very special.”

Yasmin Kelsall,
Environmental Planning Lead

Case study

wallan wallan Regional Parklands: feasibility study



View of wetlands in the Merri catchment from Green Hill, Wallan. Image by Rob Eldridge.

Standing at the top of Green Hill in Wallan – just under an hour from Melbourne and at the northern edge of the Merri Creek catchment – gives Yasmin Kelsall from MCMC a unique perspective, as she takes in the visual mix of volcanic plains, grasslands and urban development.

“These are some of the last wetlands of their kind in this part of Victoria,” says Yasmin, our Environmental Planning Lead. “They once flourished across Melbourne, but most were extensively drained.”

In April 2025, a long-awaited feasibility study for the wallan wallan Regional Parklands was finally released, sparking hope and enthusiasm among conservationists, local advocates, and the wider community.

MCMC has supported the proposed parklands since 2015 and has provided both ecological expertise and planning support to the campaign for the parklands. The parklands, extending north from the planned marram baba Merri Creek Regional Parklands, would protect a significant green corridor – comprising both environmental refuges and outdoor recreation areas – within Melbourne’s rapidly expanding northern growth corridor.

Habitat for threatened species such as the Growling Grass Frog, Latham’s Snipe, and the Golden Sun Moth makes the area ecologically significant.

Local campaigner Rob Eldridge has been advocating for the parkland’s establishment since 2010. Through his work with MCMC and the Wallan Environment Group, he refined a vision that balances conservation, recreation and cultural heritage.

“The vision has been refined over the years, as we have found out more about the environment, the previous wetlands and the significance of the area to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people,” says Rob.

Rob believes the parklands, which could include protected wetlands as well as active recreation areas, could provide a spectrum of recreational opportunities – bringing both physical and mental health benefits.

Since the release of the study, MCMC has begun advocating for the establishment of the parklands alongside Wallan Environment Group, Friends of Merri Creek, and BEAM Mitchell Environment Group, calling on government to commit resources and funding to turn this vision into a reality.

Rob Eldridge says that the announcement in August 2025 of the North Central Quarry, which will impact significantly on the Spring Hill region of the park, is a clear example of the urgency to draw up a plan for the parklands.

“The quarry will lock up a significant area within the buffer zone, damaging remnant vegetation and stirring up the sodic soil that will end up in Taylor’s Creek. You can’t retrofit a park of this size, so the feasibility report needs to be used urgently, to get the planning process underway.”



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 catchment. 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.

New WaterWatch group listens for a distinctive call

In late 2024, MCMC received a request from the local Fawkner community, in particular from people of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds who had found there weren't any WaterWatch groups in the local area. Concerned about the water quality of the Merri Creek, the Fawkner residents were interested in the ecological health of the new wetlands at Moomba Park, where MCMC has been improving habitat for Growling Grass Frogs. MCMC's Citizen Science and Waterway Education Coordinator Julia Cirillo facilitated the creation of a new group, which is now sampling water quality and monitoring frog populations.

Thanks to the Wettenhall Environment Trust for helping us to kick-start this new group increasing local community knowledge of the ecological health of Merri Creek.

"The wealth of knowledge our local communities hold is invaluable and I always learn something new each session about Country."

Participant at a recent water testing event



Fawkner WaterWatch volunteers supported by MCMC.



Images by Julia Cirillo.

Case study

A collaborative vision for the Growling Grass Frog



Image by Anna Lanigan.



Image by Danielle Pascuzzo.

In 2024, MCMC supporters showed a strong affection for a frog with a distinctive call and a worrying trend of decline: the Growling Grass Frog, through our campaign to know more about local populations of this frog and improve its habitat.

But the fragmented tenure and land management of the habitat in which Growling Grass Frogs live, remained a large-scale challenge. In February 2025, however, a group of land managers, scientists and community supporters gathered by wetlands in Fawknor's Moomba Park to celebrate the launch of a new strategy for this precious frog.

The strategy envisions a future where the frog is regularly heard and seen throughout the Merri Creek and its tributaries from Somerton to Fawknor, supported by collaboration between land and water managers, scientists, Traditional Owners, and local communities.

Yasmin Kelsall, MCMC's Environmental Planning Lead, explains the urgency of the strategy: "The southernmost populations of Growling Grass Frog in the Merri Creek exist in a precarious state, threatened by an intensification in private land development, particularly within the last 20 years. These beautiful frogs are also threatened by the devastating chytrid fungus, as well as the effects of new developments upstream within Melbourne's northern growth corridor."

Historically, Growling Grass Frogs flourished in natural wetland environments along the creek, but changes in urbanisation and stormwater runoff have made the waterway a less stable habitat.

"Stormwater really flushes through in great volumes," Yasmin explains. "It washes away vegetation that the frogs like to use, and in the breeding season, it can wash away the eggs."

The strategy's ambitious goals include increasing the number of sites occupied by Growling Grass Frogs by 20% within the next decade and expanding off-stream wetland areas by the same margin. Importantly, it aims to ensure that no breeding populations identified in 2024 are lost.

MCMC began monitoring frog populations at four sites along the Merri in 2024 and 2025, including three new locations, thanks to donations from our supporters. Initial results were promising: In one location, more than 30 adult frogs were observed – many foraging in areas that have seen habitat improvement works. The final round of monitoring, completed in early 2025, determined successful breeding in almost all locations.

Habitat restoration efforts are almost complete. Weed control is ongoing, with Merri-bek Council's First Nations Working Group and Friends of Merri Creek volunteers assisting with revegetation efforts in late winter. These efforts are vital to creating and maintaining the wetlands needed for the frogs to thrive.

Community engagement remains a central pillar of the strategy's success. Two MCMC events, torchlit 'After Dark with Growling Grass Frogs' tours, gave volunteers and local residents a chance to see the frogs up close.

With strong scientific backing, community engagement, and on-the-ground conservation efforts, this strategy represents a hopeful step forward for the Growling Grass Frog.

MCMC acknowledges the Growling Grass Frog Trust for supporting the development of this strategy and the Urban Rivers and Catchment program for implementation.



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.



Friends of Merri Creek East Coburg, planting at Tate Reserve. Image by Verity Campbell.

We started out on our Connecting Up Communities project this year with site preparation, weeding, planting 9,000 plants, running community events and installing fences. We will continue this work in 2025/2026 to complete the following project targets:



Control **13.7 hectares** of high-threat weeds



Plant **12,200** grasses, rushes, and sedges



Plant **4,650** trees and shrubs



Deliver **28** community events



Install **533** linear metres of fencing

“MCMC has been instrumental in developing the strategy and funding for Green Links to support large-scale habitat restoration and related works along the Merri Creek.”

Rachael Bathgate,
Friends of Merri Creek East Coburg

Case study

A habitat island in the city sea: Green Links



Friends of Merri Creek East Coburg, planting and nest box checking at Tate Reserve.



Images by Verity Campbell.

For Friends of Merri Creek East Coburg volunteer Rachael Bathgate, Tate Reserve is “a habitat island in the city sea – a bushland respite in the inner north of Melbourne that is accessible to everyone.”

Under the shade of the reserve’s beautiful eucalypt canopies, visitors can see Black Currawongs, Kookaburras, water birds such as White-faced Herons, Wood Ducks, and Swamp Hens with the occasional sighting of nocturnal Tawny Frogmouths.

In 2024/2025, Merri Creek Management Committee worked in partnership with Friends of Merri Creek East Coburg (a subgroup of FoMC, set up by local Verity Campbell) to restore and protect habitat at Tate and Egan Reserves, thanks to funding support from the Victorian Government’s Green Links grant program. The project, *Connecting Up Communities*, aims to improve habitat on a four-kilometre stretch of the Merri, including the East Coburg area.

The project is creating fenced, densely planted refuge areas that will provide safety and shelter for urban populations of animals including birds, reptiles mammals and invertebrates. Over 9,000 mid-storey shrubs, grasses and herbs have been planted so far, at strategic locations to improve habitat connectivity, including 3,800 at Tate and Egan Reserves.

The Reserves’ proximity to residential areas makes them especially vulnerable to disturbance, but also presents a unique opportunity to connect people with nature right on their doorstep.

“Walking at Tate Reserve in the early morning is wonderful,” says Rachael. “But because it’s so well used and loved, it’s vulnerable to habitat degradation.”

Ecological Restoration Manager Michael Longmore says that MCMC has worked in the broader area for over twenty years. “We’ve been planting and carrying out annual weeding, but mid and understorey plants are still lacking. Increased foot traffic from people and dogs into off-track areas, were impacting on the ability of plants to establish and wildlife to move between habitat areas.” This is the reason the project included the installation of 500m of fencing around 2.1ha of habitat. “The fenced area will allow all people to safely access the bushland,” says Rachael. “It also minimises disturbance to existing and establishing vegetation, reduces dog impacts on wildlife and creates new habitat for small birds, including small insectivorous birds.”

“MCMC, along with Friends of Merri Creek, have driven the success of our work to date and without their resources, communications and personal support from staff we would not have achieved what we have so far,” says Rachael.

“MCMC has been instrumental in developing the strategy and funding for Green Links to support large-scale habitat restoration along the Merri. They are knowledgeable, professional and know a thing or two about plants.”

Michael Longmore acknowledges the considerable commitment of the FoMC volunteers. “We’re lucky to have such devoted locals who turn their love of nature into community action.”



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.



Galada Kinder children at Edgars Creek.



Collecting water in Edgars Creek with Galada Kinder. Images by Julia Cirillo

Galada Kinder caring for Edgars Creek

Five years ago, preschool-aged children attending Galada Kindergarten didn't venture to the nearby Merri Creek, but thanks to MCMC's environmental educators and the passion of the YMCA staff, three- and four-year old children now play and learn in the natural setting of the Merri Creek regularly. In May 2025, MCMC again joined children and teaching staff, this time 'illustrating the value of healthy waterways', through a hands-on water-quality testing session. Children explored Edgars Creek, a Merri Creek tributary, investigating whether the water was healthy for local plants and animals through simple scientific testing, with children collecting water samples and learning about turbidity, temperature and the invisible nature of some pollution.

“That blend of plants and animals and water and seasons provides a coherent, friendly interaction that is not so possible for many people who only know one of those contexts.”

Dr Angela Foley,
MCMC's Coordinator Biodiversity and
Waterway Education (Caring for Country)

Case study

Walking on Country: Seeing with new eyes



National Sorry Day at Granite Hills, South Morang, within the larger bunjil nganga Parkland (Quarry Hills). Image by Angela Foley.

From the ridge above bunjil nganga Parklands, the view stretches across the basalt plains towards Port Phillip Bay. On the horizon, the bay meets the flat expanse of Melbourne's northern suburbs. But here at Granite Hills, a group of 18 people stand between boulders on National Sorry Day and as part of Reconciliation Week 2025 taking in the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country enveloping them.

"The boulders along the path are a tangible reminder of the time, the ancestral lives of Wurundjeri people, and cultural practices within the landscape," says Kyoko Imazu, who took part in the Walk on Country delivered by Merri Creek Management Committee in partnership with the City of Whittlesea.

Walks on Country invite participants to experience the landscape in a different way, according to MCMC environmental educator Dr Angela Foley who led the walk.

"A Walk on Country blends the geology, the history and the ecology of Country," says Angela.

Participants learned to recognise the distinctive flowering patterns of she-oaks in Waring season, and to imagine the volcanic forces that shaped the Merri's valley. They also discussed stories of social histories, colonisation, and the enduring presence of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and Country, as Kyoko explains.

"I learned that Indigenous concepts of Country extend far beyond the physical earth. Country is an interconnected whole that includes the sea, sky, plants, and animals – all of which are inseparable from Indigenous identity and well-being."

For MCMC, such experiences demonstrate the impact of our environmental education program. With the support of donors, councils and community partners, we deliver activities that open eyes and hearts to the Merri and its connected landscapes and engender a sense of why it matters to protect them.

"Some participants have lived in the local neighbourhood and have run or walked up and down this area, but not known much about it," says Angela. "But when we walk together, they're full of surprise."

Thanks to the support of our members and supporters, MCMC creates engaging experiences in nature for schools, community groups and local residents, combining scientific expertise with cultural awareness and grounding participants in the living Country around them. By helping people see beyond the familiar, we nurture a sense of belonging and care for the Merri Creek.



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.



Striped Legless Lizard (*Delma impar*) Image by Rob Valentic.

Spotlight on the Striped Legless Lizard

The nationally vulnerable Striped Legless Lizard (*Delma impar*) depends on native grasslands for shelter and breeding. Often mistaken for a small snake, this shy, non-venomous reptile has delicate stripes and emits a distinctive high-pitched squeak when disturbed. Once widespread across Victoria's volcanic plains, it now survives only in fragmented pockets of habitat, including rail reserves.

Through the Metro Trains biosite program, MCMC has undertaken targeted surveys along the Sunbury Line, confirming a small but significant population at St Albans.

These surveys provide critical data on where the lizards live, their activity patterns, and their habitat use.

This knowledge directly informs management decisions – including the timing and extent of ecological burns, staged weed control, and grassland restoration – helping to maintain habitat quality and connectivity, reduce predation risk, and support the long-term survival of this threatened species.

Case study

Strengthening skills through rail corridor restoration



Many rail corridors harbour important biosites.
Image by Ben Roberts, Metro.



Image by MCMC.

For most Melburnians, the view from a Metro train window rushes past in a blur – an unremarkable stretch of grass, perhaps a small patch of scrub. Few realise that these seemingly ordinary rail corridors are home to some of Victoria’s most threatened grassland species and ecological communities.

Since 2018, MCMC has played a central role in helping Metro Trains protect and restore these vitally important ‘biosites’. When the current Metro franchise began, there were 30 sites identified as having significant ecological values, many of them neglected or poorly documented. Metro engaged specialist contractors to restore and monitor the sites, with MCMC taking responsibility for the majority – particularly the most sensitive or complex grassland reserves.

The results have been striking. Mid-franchise monitoring showed a 314% increase in the abundance of threatened species across the network, the recovery of three nationally threatened ecological communities, and the presence of five threatened species never before recorded in the rail reserve system. Much of this success can be traced directly to MCMC’s on-the-ground work, which includes ecological burning, careful hand-weeding around threatened plants, surveys and monitoring.

“MCMC manage 20 of the original 30 sites for us, and we really appreciate their expertise, especially when it comes to native grasslands,” says Ben Roberts, Biodiversity Manager for Metro Trains. “As the only ecologist working within Metro, I also rely on Michael Longmore as a sounding board for ideas or concerns that I have.”

Over time, the partnership between the two organisations has grown in both scope and strength.

Today, Metro manages more than 50 biosites, with MCMC continuing to deliver the lion’s share. The collaboration has also expanded into new restoration trials. Along the Sunbury Line, MCMC has been working with Metro and the University of Melbourne to test direct seeding techniques for grassland restoration – methods never before attempted in an active rail corridor. Maintenance and monitoring are now taking place, with the trial showing promising early results. For MCMC, involvement with the Metro Trains biosite program represents far more than just fee-for-service income. According to Michael Longmore, MCMC’s Ecological Restoration Program Manager, it has been a powerful driver of organisational strengthening, broadening the skills of the ecological restoration team.

“Through the Metro program, the team has been exposed to techniques they may not have previously used, like direct seeding,” he says. “They’ve also gained opportunities to survey for threatened species like Striped Legless Lizards. We’ve since been able to apply those skills back in the Merri Creek catchment for the benefit of our member councils.”

What seems to commuters like a simple strip of grass is in fact a place where threatened ecosystems are recovering, new restoration methods are tested, and MCMC’s team is gaining expertise that will serve the community for years to come.

Finance Report 2024-2025



Summarised Balance Sheet

As at 30 June 2025

Equity	30 June 2025	30 September 2024
Opening Retained Funds	568,417	504,637
Transfer (to)/from Environment Fund Reserve	(29,931)	(17,658)
Add Surplus/(Deficit)	51,443	81,438
Retained Surplus	589,929	568,417
Environment Fund Reserve	176,190	146,259
Total Retained Funds	766,119	714,676
Represented By		
Current Assets	1,763,951	1,441,143
Non-Current Assets	305,590	166,017
Total Assets	2,069,541	1,607,160
Less Total Liabilities	1,303,422	892,484
Net Assets	766,119	714,676

Auditors

Our auditors are Karina Ho and Simon Aukstin from McBain McCartin & Co.

Change in Reporting Period

To align the year-ending reporting period with the generally accepted financial year end of June, MCMC have decided to change the reporting year-end to 30 June. The change in year-end from 30 September to 30 June has resulted in the comparatives for these financial statements not being entirely comparable.

Summarised Statement of Income & Expenditure

For the nine months to 30 June 2025

Income	FY25 (9 months)	FY24 (12 months)
Grants Municipalities	665,912	812,599
Other Government Grants	272,202	112,954
Non-Government Grants	79,149	29,365
Contracts	1,219,820	1,400,650
Donations	49,411	70,807
Other Income	3,062	52,469
Interest	14,832	26,014
Total Income	2,304,388	2,504,858
Less Expenditure		
Employee Benefits and Related Expenses	1,827,922	2,040,187
Project Expenses	140,169	85,944
Depreciation Expense	23,725	26,218
Consultant Expenses	122,362	68,477
Administration Expenses	121,482	163,989
Miscellaneous Expenses	17,285	38,605
Total Expenditure	2,252,945	2,423,420
Net Surplus/(Deficit)	51,443	81,438

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the 9 month period ended 30th June 2025. The full statements are at mcmc.org.au.



A Krefft's Glider seeking refuge in a nest box.
Image by Chris Cobern.

Fauna monitoring at Hidden Valley

Fauna monitoring has revealed exciting evidence of a Slender-tailed Dunnart, Brush-tailed Phascogales and Krefft's Gliders at Hidden Valley Bushland Reserve in the north of the Merri Creek catchment.

MCMC's Upper Merri Landcare Facilitator Chris Cobern has been supporting Hidden Valley Environment Sub-committee (HVES-c) to get a better understanding of what wildlife occurs in the area, including woodland birds, native orchids and wildflowers, through citizen science surveys.

HVES-c and the Wallan Environment Group have also been rehabilitating bushland nearby in the adjoining rail reserve, with the support of MCMC. Funding has been provided by VicTrack for MCMC to oversee weed control, revegetation and install nesting boxes, working with contractors, the Wallan Scout Group and ANZ staff through our corporate volunteer program.



Amy Sledziona. Image courtesy of Friends of Malcolm Creek.

Friends of Malcolm Creek re-established

Thanks to the passion of one woman, a committed MCMC staff member and a bunch of willing community members, Malcolm Creek (a Merri Creek tributary in Melbourne's north) is once again benefiting from the love and energy of a volunteer Friends group.

Group founder and new Craigieburn resident Amy Sledziona reached out in 2023 for support to help re-establish Friends of Malcolm Creek as a subgroup of Friends of Merri Creek (FoMC), after feeling her rapidly growing community needed to do more to look after the environment.

"I contacted Julia Cirillo from MCMC after hitting dead ends seeking help for my local environment," says Amy. "Julia validated my concerns and helped me organise a round-table discussion with the wonderful environmental community group leaders from the area."

Attendees talked about Amy's plan to re-establish Friends of Malcolm Creek and, together with Claire Weekley from FoMC, provided much-needed guidance about setting up the group. Julia helped to set up the group's first litter cleanup, now a monthly occurrence.

"I am hugely grateful to be working with these wonderful organisations and have their on-going support, encouragement and positive energy. It's so important to feel that you are not alone and that others are with you, championing for our environment," says Amy.

Design awards for marram baba Merri Creek Regional Parklands signage

“Wominjeka Wurundjeri balluk yearmann koondee biik: Welcome to the land of the Wurundjeri people.”

This is the warm and generous greeting, written in Woi-wurrung and endorsed by Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders, which visitors to the marram baba Merri Creek Regional Parklands receive when they view a suite of interpretive and wayfinding signs that won a Gold Award in the Melbourne Design Awards, Australian Design Awards and the World Design Awards in 2024.

“We had recognised a need to bring unified signage to the marram baba Merri Creek Regional Parklands, which is a multi-ownership park,” said former MCMC Manager Luisa Macmillan. “As a collaborative organisation that works across jurisdictions and has a deep knowledge of Merri Creek, MCMC was well placed to take on the task.”

Led by MCMC on behalf of the marram baba Merri Creek Parklands Partnership Group, the project was managed by Dr Toni Roberts of Hatchling Studio,

who worked with design company Diadem, signage company Icon Creations, the state government’s Suburban Parks Program, Cities of Hume and Whittlesea, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria and the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

“There are some very important ecological areas in the parkland,” said Toni. “But a lot of it remains quite hidden. Unless you knew about it, you wouldn’t think to drive to the end of the street and go through a fence to find this incredible natural bush area.”

Making the parklands more accessible for visitors through improved wayfinding and interpretation, as well as promoting Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung place names, supports MCMC’s goal of fostering a community to love and protect the many values of the Merri Creek.





Beveridge Environment Group members on a bird walk in Beveridge. Image by Chris Cobern.

MCMC supports formation of new Beveridge Environmental Group

A new environmental group has formed in the north Melbourne region of Beveridge in early 2025, thanks to support provided by MCMC's Landcare Facilitator Chris Cobern, and inspiration from enthusiastic naturalist Ron Litjens.

The group, a subgroup of Friends of Merri Creek, had its first community meeting in May, has a focus on community environmental education and enhancing the environmental values of public land areas in Beveridge. Plans include environmental activities such as community tree planting days, nature/bird watching walks, frog nights, spotlighting for native wildlife, litter clean-ups, and environmental programs such as Gardens for Wildlife.

According to MCMC's Chris Cobern, the need for such a group in the rapidly expanding area of Beveridge, is magnified by the proposed Beveridge Internodal Freight Terminal.

"The group has a mix of new and long-term residents, from both the newer and older, rural parts of Beveridge. They're enthusiastic members who are keen to help protect and improve the natural areas and the wildlife that their part of the Merri Creek catchment supports. They also love increasing their knowledge of nature and the actions they can take locally to encourage greater biodiversity."

The group is also excited by the future opportunities that the proposed wallan wallan Regional Parklands could offer them if done right.

Member representatives

Friends of Merri Creek

Ann McGregor OAM, President 24/25 (3)

Nicole Lowe, Vice-President 24/25 (3)

Judy Schrever, Treasurer 24/25 (2)

Peter Ewer, Vice-President, 24/5 (2)

Kate Jost, 24/5 (3)

Phil Sinclair, 24/5 (2)

Ann Sanson, Substitute 24/25 (0)

Claire Weekley, Substitute 24/25 (1)

Wallan Environment Group

Norbert Ryan, 24/25 (3)

John Robinson, Substitute 24/25 (0)

City of Darebin

Cr Julie O'Brien, 24/25 (3)

City of Whittlesea

Lisa Souquet-Wigg, Secretary 24/25 (2)

Linda Martin-Chew, 24/25 (3)

Hume City Council

Cr Karen Sherry, 24/25 (2)

Cr Kate Hamley, 24/25 (3)

Melbourne Water

Vix Penko, 24/25 (3)

Jesse Barratt, Substitute 24/25 (0)

Merri-bek City Council (formerly Moreland)

Cr Nat Abboud, 24/25 (3)

Richard Tolliday 24/25 (3)

Cr Adam Pulford, Substitute (0)

Mitchell Shire Council

Cr Claudia James, 24/25 (3)

Narelle Liepe, 24/25 (3)

City of Yarra

Cr Kenneth Gomez, 24/25 (0)

Those listed above were General Members unless noted otherwise.

Curly Sedge Creek.
Image by Annette Ruzicka.



Merri Creek Management Committee thanks the many supporters, including Friends of the Merri Creek, who have generously provided their images free-of-charge for this report.

