

Strategic
Plan

Healthy Merri and Country

2026–
2031



Merri Creek
Management Committee



The Merri Creek Management Committee acknowledges that the lands and waterways of the Merri Merri are the unceded territories of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respect to their Ancestors, who cared for Country since time began, and to all Traditional Owners who continue to speak and care for Country.

↑ Wurundjeri Elders Aunty Julieanne and Aunty Gail Walking on Country at Galada Tamboore with Bernadette Thomas, MCMC CEO. Photo by Annette Ruzicka

← Cover: MCMC staff at Stellaria Nature Reserve, Wurundjeri Country. Photo by Annette Ruzicka



Welcome

As we settle into the 37th year of protecting the Merri Merri, we are reminded not just of the importance of what we do, but how we do it. MCMC's work has and always will, come from the ground up: from the communities and volunteers living along the Merri Merri, from our team, from local government and from First Peoples whose ancestors cared for the Merri Merri for generations and who continue to care for these lands and waters.

The vision to return the Merri Merri to nature began 50 years ago when a group of inspired community members were brave enough to imagine a different future for a largely forgotten waterway. The work of these visionaries ultimately led to the creation of the Merri Creek Management Committee. We will grow their legacy alongside generations of people who care for the Merri Merri, long into the future.

Our Strategic Plan is a link from the past to that future. Many of the challenges our founders encountered are still with us – loss of habitat, pressures and impacts of residential and industrial development, the quality and flow of water in the creek – but now they are exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. This makes our work even more important.

We'd like to pay tribute to Ann McGregor OAM, one of these founders and visionaries, who guided the organisation as President for 13 years. It was an honour for our incoming President Dr Peter Ewer, to accept the role of MCMC President when Ann stepped down from the role in late 2025. Ann continues to be an inspiration for the many who love and care for the Merri Merri.

As we look ahead to what's next, we are more committed than ever to our vision for the Merri Merri – Healthy Merri and Country: thriving, protected and cared for. Thanks to all our supporters and partners for sharing this work and vision. We look forward to continuing this most important work together.

Climate and biodiversity emergency acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the climate crisis and biodiversity loss are among the most urgent challenges facing our planet. Human activity has significantly disrupted Earth's natural systems, threatening the wellbeing of all species, including our own. We commit to the continued repair and restoration of Merri Merri Country and advocate for policies and practices that support action to restore the health of our planet.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the MCMC staff who contributed to the review and development of the Strategic Plan 2026–2031, and to our Project Steering Group and Committee of Management members who provided contributions and strategic visioning.

MCMC is an independent not-for-profit organisation, registered with the ACNC. All donations are tax-deductible.



↑ Wetlands in Wallan, in the north of Merri Merri Country.



Dr Peter Ewer
President
Merri Creek Management
Committee



Bernadette Thomas
CEO
Merri Creek Management
Committee

Our Vision

**Healthy Merri and Country.
Thriving, protected and
cared for.**

Our Mission

**Lead, support and work
with others in the protection
and restoration of Merri
Merri Country.**



↑ False Garden Mantid on Merri Merri Country. Photo by Annette Ruzicka

Who we are

We're a grassroots organisation powered by people who love this creek. Since the 1970s, we've brought together nature lovers, scientists, volunteers and partners to care for the Merri.

About us

Founded in 1989, the Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) is a values-driven community-based organisation. We work with communities, First Peoples, government (local, state, and federal), business, educators, developers, and landowners to improve the health of Merri Merri Country. We are a not-for-profit organisation with paid staff and a volunteer Committee of Management. Our members are the Friends of Merri Creek and Wallan Environment Group; the cities of Darebin, Hume, Merri-bek, Whittlesea, and Yarra, and the Shire of Mitchell; and Melbourne Water. We work closely with the many community groups that volunteer their time to protect the health of Merri Merri Country.

For more than 35 years, MCMC has developed substantial experience in caring for Country, specifically waterway corridor restoration, repair, and protection in urban, peri-urban, and rural settings. Our reputation of leadership and excellence in planning, on-Country works, education, and advocacy has been hard won. Our unique model of co-governance, management, and collaboration between the community and local government is sector leading. MCMC is a pioneer of urban creek protection.

Our vision is for the Merri Creek and Country to be thriving, protected, and cared for. We bring people together to support and protect the ecology and culture of Merri Merri Country. We act as stewards, and work with our community partners to engage and inspire action by others.

As our populations in the northern suburbs grow and the climate crisis worsens, Merri Merri Country is coming under increasing pressure from development, pollution, habitat loss and fragmentation, increased storm events causing flooding, prolonged dry periods, and the changing climate.

Our work restoring, repairing, and protecting Merri Merri Country has never been more important.

How we do our work

MCMC has been working with communities along the Merri Creek since its inception. With backing from our large community supporter base, we collaborate with community-led groups that also work along the Merri Creek. MCMC's organisational knowledge is extensive. We draw on the knowledge of long-term stakeholders and partners in our work. We focus on the long-term and use our experience and relationships to respond to critical issues like climate change.

We provide leadership and advocacy for a science-based whole of catchment approach, grounded in partnerships, collaboration, and engagement. We work across the catchment and beyond to bring together the diverse perspectives of land managers and stakeholders to develop an holistic and integrated approach to catchment management, development, and community engagement.

Our approach means we actively develop relationships with a wide range of stakeholders to:

- build knowledge and understanding.
- plan for, engage, organise, and mobilise volunteers.
- advocate, inform, and strengthen policy and planning frameworks and decision-making.
- conduct and support research, and share our findings far and wide; and
- provide information, planning, design, and management advice for works on Merri Merri Country to all levels of government, the community, and private operators.

We work closely with other community-led waterway organisations taking a collective approach to gathering support for improving urban waterway management. We assist other organisations to achieve sustainable environmental development of the Merri Creek and tributaries, in adjacent catchments, and the wider metropolitan area.

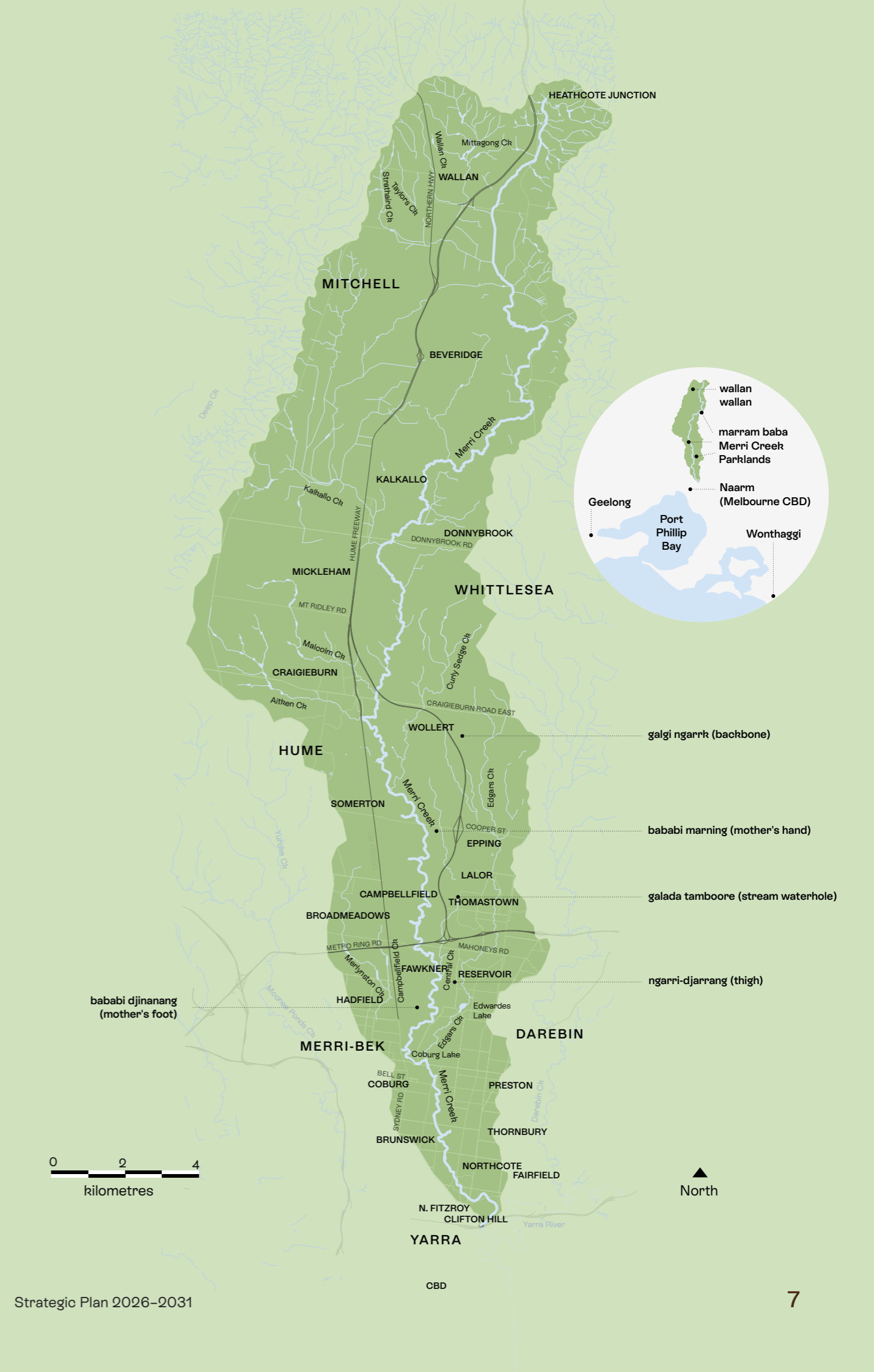
We respect the Merri Merri as a single living and integrated natural entity, flowing across human-made boundaries, and including land, waters, and its unique ecosystems.

Merri Merri Country

Merri Creek is one of Melbourne's most popular waterways. It flows for more than 60 kilometres from the Great Dividing Range, through Melbourne's northern suburbs to the Birrarung (Yarra River), with a catchment area of nearly 400 square kilometres. The Creek corridor and its tributaries have substantial ecological values, including sites of state and national significance.



↑ Photo by Max Roux



Merri Merri Country has always been and remains important to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung peoples, the Traditional Custodians of the area.

For thousands of years, Merri Merri Country provided food, material, and places for shelter and shared cultural practices for generations of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people over time immemorial, particularly where the Merri Merri flows into Birrarung. Merri Creek has substantial cultural importance to past, present, and future Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. It is a single living entity

Merri Merri Country provides many important benefits to people along the creek and further afield. It provides habitat for species; respite from the concrete nature of our cities; peaceful and restorative places, places to play, learn, explore and experience joy; and provides a critical role in helping to cool our urban environments in an increasingly warming climate.

This important natural asset in the heart of Melbourne has a number of major tributaries: Wallan, Strathaird, Taylors, and Mittagong Creeks in the upper catchment; Aitken, Kalkallo, Malcolm, and Curly Sedge Creeks in the middle catchment; and Campbellfield, Merlynston, Central, Edgars and Bracken Creeks in the lower catchment.



Most of the upper reaches of the catchment are currently rural but rapidly urbanising. In the middle and lower reaches, the catchment is predominantly industrial and residential. Over the past 45 years the conservation value of Merri Merri Country has been enhanced by the repair and restoration work of MCMC, First Nations people, the Friends of Merri Creek, Wallan Environment Group, and other local groups, and local and state governments.



↑ Krefft's Glider. Photo by Dikky Ossin

← MCMC with our network of waterway partners, launching the co-authored Growling Grass Frog strategy in 2025. Photo by Bernadette Thomas

The future of Merri Merri Country

There are new and emerging pressures that present challenges, opportunities, and uncertainties for MCMC and our partners and supporters working on Merri Merri Country.

Continuing urban expansion in the upper catchment will continue to be a key driver of change, leading to habitat loss and fragmentation, local extinctions, soil erosion, waterway degradation, destruction of geological sites, and impacts on tangible and intangible cultural values. It also presents us with an opportunity to create relationships with new communities and help build their connection and care for the creek and catchment.

Climate and ecological change will continue to impact on Merri Merri Country.

→ Rapid urban growth makes our work restoring and protecting habitat all the more critical. Photos by Max Roux

Climate and ecological change will continue to impact on Merri Merri Country. We are already witnessing and adapting to patterns of change, such as more intense rainfall events, flooding and flushing, altered seasonal flowering, increased fire risk, and hotter, drier seasons becoming the norm.



What does MCMC's future look like?

For many years, MCMC has connected the many stakeholders of Merri Merri Country. While each stakeholder manages their own unique needs and responsibilities in relation to the creek, we strive to integrate scientific, historic, community, and Indigenous knowledge and values with practical on-ground know-how across the entire catchment.

A role that is becoming increasingly important given the complex pressures of managing natural assets within rapidly changing cultural understandings, urban and rural environments, and a changing climate.

The scale and speed of change in the catchment, driven by urban expansion and climate change, continues to be the biggest threat to Merri Merri Country and demonstrates why we are needed more than ever.

At an operational level, we also face future potential challenges, including:

- securing ongoing sources of funding that will allow us to continue to lead, be ambitious, and work creatively,
- government funding models that are provided project by project and lack ongoing maintenance funding,
- maintaining our valuable partnerships,
- MCMC being perceived purely as a service delivery organisation, and
- the changing nature of our work and organisation due to climate change.

Our long-term approach, stability, experience, and community connections remain our most valuable assets as we look to the future. Being a bold leader, focusing on our role as a collaborator, demonstrating best practice in ecological restoration, advocating to government, and influencing decision-making about the Creek and catchment will be vital for MCMC to remain relevant and at the forefront of community-led waterway management of the future.

Opportunities exist to strengthen our community relationships and the support for Friends-of-groups and new communities, particularly in the upper reaches of the Merri Creek. There are also opportunities for greater Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung involvement in governance, on-ground stewardship activities, strategic planning, and knowledge sharing.

Securing sustainable and ongoing funding, not just for restoration and repair works, but also for catchment education, citizen science, community support, site maintenance, monitoring works, planning and advocacy, testing and piloting new ways of working, and operational functions that keep our organisation running, is key to our longevity and ability to influence and enact change.

Pursuing a collective approach to waterway management, repair and restoration, and community engagement remain fundamental to MCMC's culture and our future as stewards of this important and much-loved community and environmental asset.

Our member organisations, the community, stakeholders, partners, and clients continue to support and value our ongoing efforts and leadership. Our vision and purpose remain relevant.



↑ Volunteers collect water samples as part of the MCMC supported WaterWatch program. Photo by MCMC

Our goals for change

MCMC exists to protect and restore Merri Merri Country and engage communities in activities that enable the positive change we seek. We believe that a thriving, protected, and cared for creek and catchment is possible.

Our way of making this happen is through our stewardship approach – partnering with others, nurturing relationships, connecting people to Country, and supporting First Peoples’ efforts and embedding First Peoples’ culture in our work.

Our theory of change is simple – protect, restore, engage. We advocate to protect Merri Merri Country, work with others to repair and restore ecosystems, habitat, and the health of the creek, and connect people to nature through engaging activities. In addition, the strategic objectives we have developed provide more nuance, outlining in more detail our role and what the theory of change looks like in practice.

↑ galada tamboore. Photo by Annette Ruzicka

Protect

- Prevent and minimise environmental destruction and harm to Country through land use planning and development approval processes.
- Manage habitat and species so that they don't decline, with a focus on those that are threatened.
- Advocate for and support stronger protections in the planning approval process.
- Work with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to advocate for protection of tangible and intangible cultural values.
- Undertake, support, and share research and monitoring.
- Build and apply our knowledge of Country and First Nations cultural heritage.

Restore

- Undertake works on-Country to restore degraded and damaged ecosystems to better health.
- Maintain ecosystems through ecological burns, weed control, and facilitated regeneration.
- Conduct revegetation works to support habitat development.
- Rehabilitate areas to improve ecological function.
- Seek to substantially expand areas available to nature conservation.
- Seek opportunities to support and collaborate with Wurundjeri (Narrap Rangers) to work on Country.
- Respond to the impacts of climate change on ecosystems and habitat.

Engage

- Connect people to nature and Merri Merri Country through on-Country activities.
- Support and help facilitate creek-focused community groups to establish and develop technical skills and cultural understandings.
- Inform, engage, educate, encourage, and support community participation.
- Create dynamic learning experiences in both formal and informal settings.
- Build relationships with individuals and groups to work and learn together.

How will we make a difference?

Our work falls under four major strategic objectives. We have articulated below what each of these strategic objectives means and what they will look like in practice. The strategic objectives also link to the Action Plan that accompanies this Strategic Plan, and which includes a series of outcomes, actions, and measures of success.

Lead and Advocate

MCMC plays a central leadership role in our community to facilitate a shared vision for Merri Merri Country. 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 an advocate for policy and regulatory changes, and resources that will help achieve our purpose and enable decision-makers to understand the impacts of their decisions on Merri Merri Country.

- We'll work with our community partners and experts, and community waterway and environmental organisations, to prepare submissions, write letters, and participate in consultation processes to advocate to government to improve policies, plans, and development that impact on urban waterways.
- We'll be proactive and conduct and support community activities and campaigns to advocate for change.
- We'll conduct and support research and build an evidence base to inform decision-making by all levels of government.

Partner and Collaborate

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

- We'll create opportunities to work more closely with WWCHAC, First Peoples, Elders and others to walk and work on Merri Merri Country.
- We'll continue the work we've started on revising a strategic plan for Merri Merri Country.
- We'll continue to support our community partners and strengthen our collaborations with member organisations that do important work across the catchment.
- We'll create and use existing opportunities to share what we've learned with our member organisations, the Merri Merri community, and beyond.



↑ MCMC staff at Green Hill in Wallan, Wurundjeri Country. Photo by Max Roux

Protect, Restore and Engage

MCMC has built up significant expertise in ecological restoration and repair, waterway planning, and community engagement. We apply this expertise to the work we do to protect Merri Merri Country from inappropriate development, to restore and repair native habitat and vegetation and the many ecosystems of Merri Merri Country, and to engage, inspire, and support community action to keep the Merri Creek healthy.

- We'll respond to planning applications, local and state government strategies, plans, and strategic planning processes, seeking to improve environmental outcomes in planning decisions.
- We'll continue to develop our expertise in our work using innovative approaches, developed with our partners, to native vegetation restoration.
- We'll engage with educators and students (from prep to PhD) in shared activities that inspire a life-long commitment to caring for Merri Merri Country.
- We'll look for and create opportunities to do more of our work in the middle and upper Merri.

← Community volunteers at a National Tree Day planting in 2024, hosted by MCMC for Yarra City Council. Photo by Madeline Bishop, Yarra City Council

A Strong, Resilient Organisation

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 fair, person-centred organisational culture, supporting staff to grow professionally. To continue our work and maintain our role in restoring Merri Merri Country, we must attract secure, stable, and diversified funding and ensure our contact with stakeholders remains relevant and significant.

- We'll review what we do and how we do it, to make sure our approach remains current and focused on the future.
- We'll continue to support our committed staff, work with our generous volunteers and community experts, partner with corporate and academic clients and collaborators, and acknowledge our passionate and generous financial supporters.
- We'll reach new audiences and supporters through our communications and engagement activities.

Our collective impact

To achieve our vision of a *Healthy Merri and Country. Thriving, protected and cared for*, we work with other supportive and like-minded organisations and individuals. Working in partnership enables us to share resources and expertise, speak with a louder voice, and celebrate our collective successes!

First Nations

We explore ways to support the work of First Peoples, work in partnership to restore Country, and provide opportunities to access Country.

Communities

We benefit from, respect, listen to, partner with, and support the work of volunteer community groups in their work as environmental stewards, citizen scientists and advocates for Merri Merri Country.

Local government

We work with our local government member organisations to protect, restore and engage the community and to identify and address local issues of concern.

Non-government organisations

We join with other like-minded waterway, environmental, climate change, and advocacy organisations to speak up for Merri Merri Country.

State and Federal governments

We work with government departments, agencies, and authorities to identify emerging issues and advocate for policy and legislative change that will protect the health of Merri Merri Country.

Universities, TAFE, & researchers

We partner with research institutions to increase, refine and integrate the body of knowledge of Merri Merri Country, and to ensure our decisions are based on the best available scientific, ecological, and cultural knowledge and understanding.

Land managers

We provide services to public and private land managers to restore degraded habitats and develop new ways of working to restore and protect natural ecosystems.

Corporates

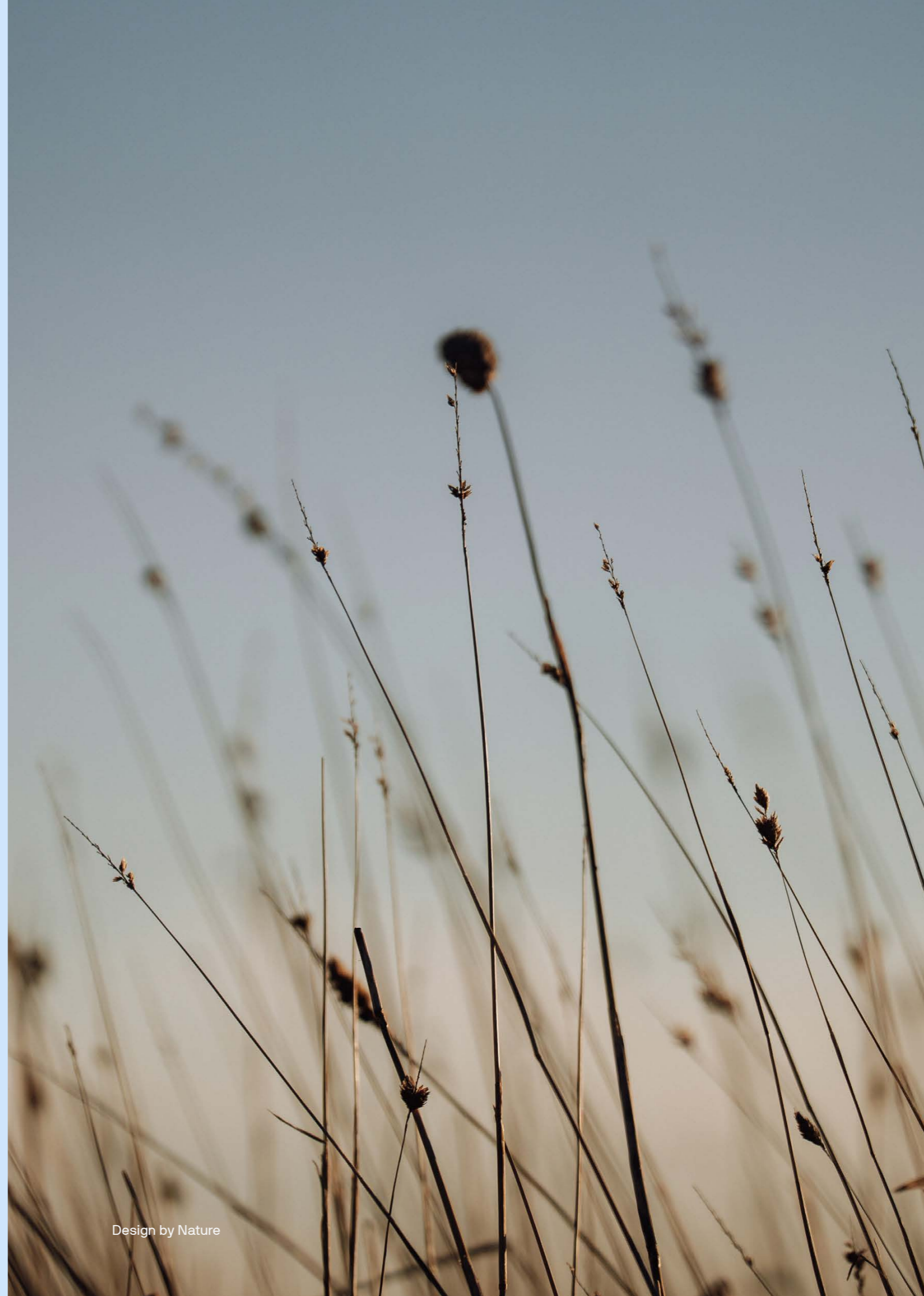
We engage with industry and businesses in activities that enhance their connection to the Merri Merri and to increase support for our work.

Schools & educators

We work with educators and students from prep to PhD, providing incursions and excursions on Merri Merri Country, volunteer and internship opportunities, and professional development for teachers and those supporting students at all levels.

Media

We collaborate with media organisations and employ social media to advocate for and increase awareness, support behaviour change, and knowledge of our work and the work of others engaged in work on and for Merri Merri Country.



Thriving, protected and cared for



Merri Creek
Management Committee

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