

# Merri News

FEBRUARY 2010

The quarterly newsletter of Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) - caring for the Merri Creek

## The red, red grass of home

In mid-summer, rusty red Kangaroo Grass is a beacon marking some of Merri Creek's original vegetation. It is a key species in the local ecosystem, so re-establishing it is an important part of restoration works.

Although Kangaroo Grass seedlings can be planted, 'direct seeding' creates less disturbance and can be more cost effective. Seed must first be collected and timing of the seed harvest is critical. Most seed ripens between Christmas and New Year, but a heatwave can suddenly ripen the seed causing most to drop off.

Individual seeds are crushed to determine the best harvest date. Seeds mature from 'empty' through 'milky' to 'doughy' then 'hard'. In hot weather, 'doughy' seed quickly ripens to the 'hard' stage. With an eye to the weather forecast, MCMC staff estimate the proportion of seed likely to mature in the next few days.

Seed from Bababi Djinanang (Jukes Road Grassland) was tested at the beginning of January revealing there was still a high proportion of immature 'milky' seed. A few days later the seed had matured with almost a third of the seed in the 'doughy' stage. This showed that the seed would be ready for harvest within days - it was time to call the troops!

On 7<sup>th</sup> January MCMC staff and nine Friends of Merri Creek volunteers collected 11 bales of thatch (seed plus stems) to be dried and stored for direct seeding in late spring.

Kangaroo Grass seed needs both heat and moisture to germinate. Early summer rainstorms have been a boon for seed spread last October at Bababi Djinanang. Thousands of new Kangaroo Grass seedlings have grown from the 2009 harvest.



Friends of Merri Creek volunteers harvest Kangaroo Grass seed at Bababi Djinanang (Jukes Rd grassland) Fawkner on 7 January.

**See the booming Kangaroo Grass seedlings on Sunday 14 February - join in the next bird survey, meet (8.45am) at the end of Jukes Rd Fawkner.**

## Annual Report 2008-09 available now

Download the report off our website at [www.mcmc.org.au](http://www.mcmc.org.au), or phone Ray Radford on 9380 8199 for a hard copy.

## Megan leaves and new staff begin

Farewell to Megan Jericho after over 12 years with MCMC, most recently as our Parkland Management Team Coordinator. The creek environs and the vegetation management industry have benefited enormously from her exceptional management skills.

We wish her well in her new role as River Health Officer – West for Melbourne Water.

Ben North, who was previously a team member, will take over most of Megan's role. Recently we have also welcomed Will Parker, Jim Brien, Luke Dragonetti, Meg Gasson, Hadley Coles and Amy O'Dell to the team.



## Why was the Merri so muddy?

Many people noticed the Merri Creek turned a muddy brown colour after heavy rain in early January. The mud is from headwater areas, north of Donnybrook, where parts of the Merri and its tributaries flow through light coloured sedimentary rock (rather than basalt, as in most of the catchment). Heavy rain may have eroded creek banks, farmland or development sites. (See the muddy Merri on *You Tube* via [www.mcmc.org.au](http://www.mcmc.org.au).)

MCMC reported the problem to the EPA who has investigated. You too can report muddiness and other pollution, including muddy water running off building sites, to the EPA Pollution Watch hotline: 9695 2777.

## Butt Litter teaching manual

MCMC has produced a new teacher manual and student workbook called *Clean Streets for Clean Rivers*, which brings the "Bin Your Butts" message to adult learners of English. You can download these materials from our website [www.mcmc.org.au](http://www.mcmc.org.au).

**For upcoming community events see the MCMC website: [www.mcmc.org.au](http://www.mcmc.org.au)**



## Merri Creek chemical spill threat

The ABC radio program *AM* reported on 13 January that a subsidiary of the Reserve Bank in Craigieburn, Securrency International, failed to promptly report a spill of 25,000 litres of methyl ethyl ketone (MEK). The leak occurred on New Year's Eve but authorities weren't notified until the following week. As an EPA licensed site, Securrency International is obliged to contact the EPA as soon as a chemical spill occurs.

Professor Ian Rae, an adviser to the Environment Protection Authority in Victoria, described MEK as a common industrial solvent. It is as flammable as petrol and chemically related to acetone, but more volatile.

The MCMC Manager, Luisa Macmillan, told the ABC that the delay in notification horrified her and she compared it to waiting for four days to call a doctor after someone had swallowed poison. Luisa was later interviewed for ABC TV news (as photo above).

EPA water samples from Merri Creek taken five days after the spill showed no traces of MEK. If the spill did reach the creek, heavy rain on the first two days of January would have diluted it and washed it away.

## Grants increase rare vegetation

The Merri Creek's endangered vegetation is reaping the benefits of \$181,236 worth of Federal *Caring for Our Country* management works last year.

The funding has enhanced 45 hectares of endangered riparian, escarpment and grassland vegetation at 16 sites from Clifton Hill to Beveridge. Over 300 volunteers contributed to this important work. Quality assessments and management recommendations for 10 sites will strengthen ongoing improvements.

### The Merri Creek Environment Fund

The Merri Creek Environment Fund is seeking donations for revegetation and conservation works in the Merri Creek catchment. *Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible.* Please make cheques out to Merri Creek Environment Fund and send to MCMC, 2 Lee Street, East Brunswick, 3057, or drop in a cash donation (sorry, no credit card facilities) or contact us to arrange a direct deposit.

## Creek Crusaders up close

MCMC's Merri – Moonee Ponds Waterwatch program is building more long-term relationships with schools to create a strong connection to local creeks. A recent EPA alternative sentencing payment has allowed MCMC to run the six session *Creek Crusaders* program in four schools along the Moonee Ponds Creek. The program is designed for three age groups: early childhood, upper primary and secondary schools. Students investigated many facets of creek life, such as stormwater pollution, water bugs, plants, frogs and water conservation. Local indigenous culture was presented to classes by Bronwyn Riddell and Fay Ball. Feedback was good. Participants said "it made the year more interesting with learning connected to the real world" and "it deepened their understanding of waterways and how they can affect them".

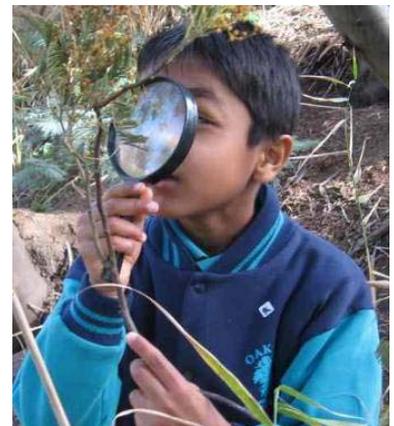
MCMC has now developed teacher manuals for the three age groups so that teachers can independently lead many of the Moonee Ponds Creek activities.

MCMC will be conducting a *free teacher training day* to launch the manuals and to show how the activities can be incorporated into the curriculum.

**When: Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> March, 9am – 12noon.**

Contact Jane Bevelander on 9380 8199 or email to: [jane@mcmc.org.au](mailto:jane@mcmc.org.au)

Photo: A student from Oak Park Primary School is engrossed with the natural environment along the Moonee Ponds Creek.



## Photos have national significance

According to an independent consultant, MCMC's photo collection is nationally significant. The collection includes over 17,000 slides, prints and digital photos dating from 1982. The photos illustrate "both the rise of community led activism in the 1970's and the emergence of the post-industrial Merri Creek cultural landscape over the last 30 years". We thank the foresight of Barb Miles, Judy Bush, Tony Faithfull, Pat Shaw and Ann and Bruce McGregor for these photos.

MCMC's archives also include artwork, maps, correspondence and regalia that were judged of local and regional significance. The assessment was funded by a National Library Community Heritage grant.

To help us identify ways to preserve this collection and our archives, the National Library of Australia has awarded MCMC a Preservation Needs Assessment grant of \$4,400. Once the priorities are identified, we will apply for funding for preservation. We have also applied for funding to scan and catalogue part of the slide collection.

Download Merri News from our website or obtain a printed copy from:

**Merri Creek Management Committee 2 Lee St East Brunswick VIC 3057. Phone: 9380 8199.**

**Email: [admin@mcmc.org.au](mailto:admin@mcmc.org.au) Website: [www.mcmc.org.au](http://www.mcmc.org.au)**