

Merri Creek Management Committee Inc. (MCMC) is an integrated environmental management agency formed in 1989 to achieve the shared vision of the various stakeholders in the Merri Creek Catchment. Its members are all the Councils in the Merri Creek catchment: Darebin, Hume, Mitchell, Moreland, Whittlesea and Yarra, plus the Friends of Merri Creek. Representatives of these member groups form the Committee of Management that guides MCMC's activities.

MCMC's primary aim is to ensure the preservation, restoration, environmental protection and ecologically sensitive development and maintenance of the Merri Creek and adjoining catchment areas. It employs specialist and dedicated staff and its programs are funded by Council members, by state and federal grant programs, by competitively won tenders and by grants from philanthropic organisations.

MCMC's mission

MCMC respects and honours the spirit of the land and its peoples, indigenous plants and animals, and works with the community to preserve, restore and promote the Merri Creek, its catchment and neighbouring region as a vital living system.

MCMC prizewinner

MCMC won the 2002 Theiss Services National Riverprize for excellence in waterway management.



Annual Report

2003-2004

President's Report

Once again I sit and reflect on another year on the Merri Creek. For me the highlight this year on the Merri Creek was seeing a pair of Black Cockatoos perched in a tree in my backyard in Coburg. It's fabulous to see fauna returning to the urban sections of the creek. Many equally exciting things have happened in other areas of the Creek. This includes the discovery of Golden Sun Moths, a critically endangered species, at Craigieburn Grasslands in December 2003. Only five other populations of this amazing moth are known in Victoria.

Despite the cessation of Parks Victoria's Agency Grants program, our budget situation has remained healthy with staff attracting new funding from a number of other sources.

As part of our organisational strategic planning process, we have completed a review of our Statement of Purposes, and it was adopted at our 2003-04 Annual General Meeting. This will help guide us in the next stages of our planning process during 2005.

The first Green Corps Team based at MCMC started their six month project in August, providing ten young people work in the conservation field.

They have already made a real difference on the Creek.

Improvement to Merri Creek's water quality continues to be an important goal, and it will be interesting to see the result of Melbourne Water's experimental toxicant treatment facility on the Barry Road drain. This drain collects stormwater from a Campbellfield industrial area and contributes high levels of heavy metals to the creek. If successful, this and other facilities could reduce one of the most significant pollution problems in the creek.

MCMC is supportive of initiatives to improve stormwater management, such as VicUrban's housing development project in north Epping. This project, on the Edgars Creek, a major tributary of the Merri, should provide a useful local model in stormwater management.

Lastly I must thank all the staff and committee members for their hard work during 2003-4. It was a year that started under a cloud of financial cutbacks but these have been overcome by hard work and dedication and it has been yet another successful and productive year.

Trevor Hausler, President



Parkland Management

Habitat

Golden Sun Moths were discovered in two of Merri Creek's native grasslands in December 2003 – a sighting of national significance! The moths were last recorded in the Melbourne area in 1916, and were presumed extinct in the Port Phillip Region. They are listed as *critically endangered* under the *Federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*. On a warm sunny day in mid December, members of MCMC's Parkland Management Team and a member of Friends of Craigieburn Grassland noticed the moths fluttering through the native Wallaby Grasses at Craigieburn Grassland. Brian Bainbridge, MCMC's Technical Officer, identified them as a significant find. With identification confirmed by the Museum and other entomologists, Merri Creek has become a focal point for works to protect and enhance the moths' habitat, and hopefully to undertake further research on their fascinating life cycle, habitat requirements and distribution.

Between October 2003 and September 2004, 243 entries were made to MCMC's Fauna record book. Sightings by MCMC staff, members of Friends of Merri Creek, local residents and school students are all recorded, and the sightings of significant species are forwarded to the Atlas of Victorian Wildlife, maintained by the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

The start of MCMC's financial year in October is heralded by the return of Sacred Kingfishers to several sites along Merri Creek, and many local residents eagerly watch for their first sightings of the birds in their familiar haunts. MCMC has also been excited to record Nankeen Night Herons, shy birds of state significance, hunting in the billabongs of Merri Park wetlands, Northcote. The wetlands have been created in the floor

of a flood retarding basin beside Merri Creek, transforming an area that only 15 years ago was a Melbourne Water works depot. The sight of these birds, and the diversity of other native fauna in both revegetation and restored remnant vegetation, reinforces the important role that recreated habitats play as part of the linked regional – state significant habitat network of the Merri Creek corridor.

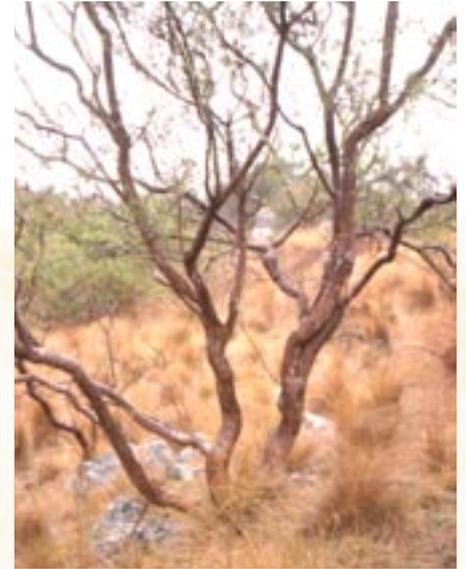
Management of native grasslands, escarpments and creekside ecological communities

Merri Creek Management Committee continues to undertake ecological management works at more than 80 sites along Merri Creek and its tributaries, Aitken, Central and Edgars Creeks, from Clifton Hill to Craigieburn. Works were funded by direct grants and contracts from councils, and by grants from Citipower and SPI PowerNet through Landcare Australia, the Australian Government Envirofund, and Urban Bushcare. In addition, MCMC maintained under contract 15 sites on Moonee Ponds Creek and three sites on the Yarra River.

Restoration and revegetation works focus on establishing and maintaining competitive indigenous vegetation, through carefully targeted weed control, mulching, planting and direct seeding, and within the native grasslands, mosaic ecological burns to maintain the diversity of wildflowers and the health of the Kangaroo Grass sward.

As part of the management of remnant and revegetation sites, MCMC planted 33,754 indigenous plants. Of these, more than 80 per cent were ground storey species, including native grasses, wildflowers and creepers, reflecting both the predominance of these plants within the ecological communities of the Basalt Plains through which Merri Creek flows, the habitat provided by such plants, and





their pivotal role in revegetation and restoration processes.

MCMC was successful in its application to be a partner agency for a Green Corps team. The team of 10 young people started their six month project in late August 2004, and MCMC is excited to have their contribution to the creek's restoration.

Community involvement in parkland management

Friends' members, students and local residents volunteered more than 5,000 hours to the restoration and revegetation of Merri Creek's native grasslands, escarpments and creekside environments.

Community involvement included weekend planting days, weekday Kangaroo Grass seed harvesting and evening handweeding and birdwatching. MCMC also worked with staff from local businesses during the busy planting season, providing opportunities for employees from completely unrelated industries to be involved in local environmental restoration projects.

A number of local residents have also worked beside the Parkland Team during normal weekday hours, or organised handweeding groups for their local patch of the creek, with assistance from MCMC in plant identification skills and removal of handweeded material.

During 2003-4, MCMC organised 31 weekend community activities, most of these in partnership with Friends of Merri Creek. Community input from these, from the weekday activities and from business and local resident volunteers working with MCMC's team totalled 4,012 hours, equivalent to \$80,240 of in-kind contributions (based on the Federal Government's suggested rate of \$20/hr).

School groups from primary, secondary, TAFE and tertiary colleges participated in planting, mulching and weeding at sites along Merri Creek from Clifton Hill to Craigieburn, as well as undertaking fauna surveys, site assessments, habitat studies and creek explorations. Student projects included investigating habitat values of dead wattles for wood-boring insects and

moth larvae, assessing survivorship of significant species plantings in native grasslands and categorising flood-borne litter within the creek and wetland areas. During 2003-4 there were more than 21 student group activities, and student input totalled 1,466 hours.

In addition to student group projects, MCMC provided industry placement projects for a number of students, who undertook more detailed research, with topics ranging from community attitudes to willow removal, assessment of Kangaroo Grass seed viability, and mapping of significant species. During 2003-4, 16 students undertook their industry placement at MCMC.

Page 2 far left: MCMC's Green Corps Team at Galada Tamboore, Campbellfield.

Page 2 left: Following major flooding of the Creek in December 2003, local residents organised a number of rubbish removal events to deal with the huge volumes of flood borne litter lining the Creek banks.

Top left: MCMC Parklands staff, Deb Lawson and Alex Davern, spray Priority One grassy weeds at Cooper Street Grasslands.

Top right: Scattered Sweet Bursarias and native grasses line Merri Creek at Craigieburn Grasslands.

Bottom far left: Staff from Metropolitan Fire Brigade work with MCMC's Parkland Management Team, planting and removing litter.

Bottom left: Merri Creek from the top of the beautiful Basalt escarpment at Moomba Park Fawkner.



Catchment Program

The Catchment Program Team works on community and school based education programs, activities and monitoring in the Merri Creek and adjacent catchments. During 2003–04, thousands of students across the catchment learnt about stream ecology, stormwater and indigenous flora and fauna.

Waterwatch

MCMC's *Waterwatch* Coordinator worked with students and teachers from 25 schools, both primary and secondary, and two universities, investigating water quality and the diversity of aquatic life in the Merri and Moonee Ponds Creeks, and in the lower Yarra.

The schools' *Waterwatch* program focused on stormwater to promote the links within the catchment to local waterways. Students learned how to monitor water quality by testing water chemistry, aquatic invertebrates and assessing riparian and instream habitat.

Thirteen training sessions in *Waterwatch* monitoring techniques were held for community members and school teachers wanting to join the program. Community-based groups regularly monitored 15 sites on Merri Creek and five on Moonee Ponds Creek. *Waterwatch* displays and activities were also presented at 12 festivals and community days. In addition, *Waterwatch* presentations were made at several teachers' conferences and forums.

One of the highlights of the year was attending the first International Symposium on Urban Stream Ecology. The conference confirmed that degradation of urban streams due to the impact of stormwater run off, is a worldwide issue.

MCMC's *Waterwatch* program is part of the Melbourne *Waterwatch* program and is supported by the Federal Government's Natural Heritage Trust,

Melbourne Water, and the Cities of Darebin, Hume, Melbourne, Moonee Valley, Moreland, Whittlesea and Yarra.

Creek Science in Schools

MCMC's *Waterwatch* Coordinator was funded by the Victorian Scientist in Schools program to be a resident scientist at Bell Primary in the latter part of 2003. The program culminated in November in a family science day held at Moomba Park, Fawkner, where 120 students and parents participated in scientific explorations of the creek and its surroundings. The *Sample Science* activity week, held in August 2004, introduced new schools to MCMC's environmental education programs. Students from five schools in Darebin participated in an activity day at the Creek which included: testing water quality, planting trees and grasses, learning about bats, botanical drawing lessons, frog identification and learning about Merri Creek's geology.

Stormwater

Catchment program staff attended meetings with Darebin Council, the EPA and community representatives to assist in developing the *Edwardes Lake Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan* (NEIP). This action plan aims to improve the health of Edwardes Lake. The development of NEIPs is an EPA program, operational across Victoria, involving communities working together to improve their local environments.

MCMC also participated in meetings of the Northern Litter group and showcased its *Catching On* program, a stormwater awareness program for automotive workshops, as part of the National Litter Conference in May 2004.

Learning Grounds

MCMC's *Learning Grounds* assists school communities to plan indigenous



gardens for their school grounds in a way that closely involves students. In 2003–04, the program had contact with 13 schools across the municipalities of Darebin, Moreland and Whittlesea. MCMC helped a number of the schools prepare successful funding submissions to develop their indigenous gardens.

Whittlesea's Wild Backyard

Funded by a City of Whittlesea Community Development Grant, the *Wild Backyard* project introduced a group of 50 non-English speaking background residents of the City of Whittlesea to the nationally significant Craigieburn Grasslands in Epping. Additional group activities will be undertaken in 2005.

The Catchment Program acknowledges the support of *Ford Australia*, in providing a vehicle and of *Kodak* for supplying a digital camera.



Top: Students, from Bell Primary school, look at a sample from the Merri Creek in Fawkner.

Far left: Students, from St James North Richmond, watch Jessica Miller, MCMC *Waterwatch* Coordinator, demonstrate field sampling techniques, Merri Creek in Clifton Hill.

Left: Bat specialist, Ryan Chick from Arthur Rylah Institute, demonstrates a harp bat trap on Merri Creek in Preston.

Planning and Coordination

MCMC provides comments on statutory planning matters and is also involved in working closely with agencies and the community on a wide range of broader strategic issues. MCMC's planning and coordination functions are supported by direct grants from its Council members.

Statutory and Strategic Planning

This year, MCMC made comments on 34 planning permit applications for developments abutting the creek corridor and on three planning scheme amendments, including the Cooper Street Employment Area in Whittlesea. Formal comment was also made on a referral to the Federal Department of Environment and Heritage under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*.

MCMC completed its revision of the *Merri Creek Development Guidelines*, which apply to any developments within the area covered by the creek's Environmental Significance Overlay. These Guidelines have also been used as a template for strengthening waterway planning controls across the region, in a series of meetings with the Department of Sustainability and Environment and Councils associated with the Merri, Darebin and Moonee Ponds Creeks.

During the year, MCMC completed its review of the 208 actions in the *Merri Creek and Environs Strategy*. The Strategy provides strategic direction and specific actions for management needs along the Merri corridor. The review identified over half the actions had been substantially implemented.

MCMC coordinated an *Encroachments Working Group* on the issue of private encroachments onto public land and three well-attended meetings identified the various types of encroachment and clarified issues relating to enforcement and removal of encroachments.

Working with other organisations

Upper reaches of Merri Creek

MCMC provided field survey data for the *Merriang Local Area Biodiversity Plan*, developed by the Department of Sustainability and Environment. This Plan outlines the actions needed to conserve significant native biodiversity across a number of grazing properties in the Merriang to Donnybrook area.

MCMC contributed information to assist the *Willows out of Wallan* project,

which aims to revegetate an urban section of Wallan Creek, a major tributary of Merri Creek in the **Shire of Mitchell**.

Middle reaches of Merri Creek

The State Government's *Melbourne 2030* report included this section of Creek in the Hume Growth Area, proposing up to 50,000 additional households for the area. MCMC provided technical information on biodiversity significance within this area to the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

MCMC was represented at monthly meetings of the **Craigieburn Bypass Environs Coordination Group**, which reviews and monitors the implementation of environmental management plans for the freeway, including the construction of crossings over Merri Creek and Curly Sedge Creek. MCMC also provided VicRoads with specialist advice on translocations of two endangered plant species.

MCMC participated in a meeting of the *Merri Park Working Group*, convened by **Parks Victoria**. The release of the draft proposal for the new Merri Park is pending. MCMC liaised closely with **Parks Victoria** on the alignment of the *Barry Road Grasslands Trail*, part of the new park, to avoid disturbance to the highly significant Galada Tamboore grasslands.

MCMC was also involved in **Yarra Valley Water's Stakeholder Consultative Committees** for the *Craigieburn Sewage Treatment Plant* (planned for closure) and the *Aurora Treatment Facility*, which will service the new suburb in North Epping. An existing discharge to Merri Creek from the Craigieburn STP is being maintained until the impact on the endangered Growling Grass Frog can be fully determined. MCMC provided critical comments to the EPA on Yarra Valley Water's proposal to replace this discharge with effluent from the Aurora

Facility. The works approval issued by the EPA requires Yarra Valley Water to minimise discharge to the creek and to provide a higher quality effluent.

MCMC was represented on the steering committee for **Hume Council's Industrial Stormwater Project**, a project aimed at improving the quality of industrially contaminated stormwater which discharges from a drain into the Merri at Barry Road Campbellfield.

Lower reaches of Merri Creek

Melbourne Water's Merri Creek Improvement Project for Brunswick, Northcote and North Fitzroy focuses on removal of serious environmental weeds, particularly Desert Ash and Willows, and replacement with indigenous vegetation. MCMC has participated in Stakeholder Reference group meetings and providing detailed comments on the planning and implementation of the project.

MCMC received funding from **SPI Powernet** through **Landcare Australia**, to implement SPI PowerNet's *Vegetation Management Plan*, which covers the high voltage transmission line easement within Merri and Edgars creeks. The plan identifies targeted removal of trees within the easement, and their replacement with indigenous shrubs, groundcovers and grasses.

MCMC participated in working group meetings with **Melbourne Water** and **Yarra Valley Water** about Stages 1 and 2 of the *Northern Sewerage Strategy*, which involves constructing diversion sewers within the lower reaches of Merri and Edgars Creeks to decrease the incidence of sewage overflows during wet weather, and to cater for additional growth in the catchment.

MCMC's Parkland Management Team carry out an ecological burn at Central Creek Grassland, Reservoir.



Financial Report

Summarised Balance Sheet as at 30th September 2004

	2004	2003
EQUITY:		
Retained Funds – Start	273,809	278,523
Add Surplus / (Deficit)	13,064	(4,714)
Retained Funds – End	<u>\$286,873</u>	<u>\$273,809</u>
Represented By:		
Current Assets:	411,193	361,305
Fixed Assets:	111,228	113,814
TOTAL ASSETS:	<u>522,421</u>	<u>475,119</u>
Less:		
TOTAL LIABILITIES:	<u>235,548</u>	<u>201,310</u>
NET ASSETS:	<u>\$286,873</u>	<u>\$273,809</u>

Summarised Statement of Income and Expenditure from 1st October 2002 to 30th September, 2004

	2004	2003
INCOME:		
Grants		
Municipalities	370,500	423,623
Other Government	18,687	185,210
Non Government	37,250	21,633
Contracts	442,970	267,020
Profit on Sale of Fixed Assets	50	2,223
Sale of Publications	1,193	2,839
Environment Fund Donations	-	-
Interest & Sundry Income	22,017	16,562
Total Income:	<u>892,667</u>	<u>919,110</u>
LESS EXPENDITURE:		
Wages, Salaries & Oncosts	615,478	671,213
Materials & Plant Hire	84,453	61,108
Vehicle Running	11,637	7,753
Admin, Project & General	140,207	174,574
Environment Fund Disbursements	-	-
Depreciation & Leave	27,828	9,176
Total Expenditure:	<u>879,603</u>	<u>923,824</u>
NET SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):	<u>\$13,064</u>	<u>(\$4,714)</u>

The above reports have been summarised from the audited financial statements of the Merri Creek Management Committee for the year ended 30th September 2004.

The full financial statements and the Auditor's report are on the MCMC website at www.mcmc.org.au or copies are available from the MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick.

Auditor

MCMC's Auditor is Fred Gerardson, Registered Company Auditor, Colville Williams & Co. P/L, Lower Plenty.

Member Representatives and staff 2003–2004

Committee of Management 2004:

City of Darebin:	Cr Vince Fontana, Allan Wicks (<i>Vice President</i>)
City of Hume:	Cr Drew Jessop, Matt Ruchel
City of Moreland:	Cr Ken Blair / Cr Fraser Brindley, Eamonn Fennessy
City of Whittlesea:	Cr Stevan Kozmevski, David Turnbull
City of Yarra:	Cr Gurm Sekhon, Silvana Predebon
Shire of Mitchell	Cr Robert Gordon
Friends of Merri Ck:	Trevor Hausler (<i>President</i>), Ann McGregor (<i>Secretary</i>), Allie Dawe (<i>Treasurer</i>), Alan Brennan, Peter Mollison, Paul Prentice, Harold Mackrell (sub.), Julie Mason (sub.), David Redfearn (sub.)

Sub-Committees in 2004:

The following Sub-Committees also met during the year: Executive Sub-Committee, Merri Creek and Environs Strategy Implementation Sub-Committee, Planning and Issues Sub-Committee, Finance Sub-Committee.

MCMC Staff:

Planning and Coordination

Manager:	Luisa Macmillan
Conservation Coordinator:	Judy Bush
Administration Officer	Ray Radford
Finance Officer:	Ruth Rankin
Project Officer (casual):	Tony Faithfull
Cleaner:	Tiziana Tosti-Guerra

Catchment Program Team

Catchment Coordinator:	Simon Fjell (<i>until Dec. 2003</i>)
Waterwatch Coordinator:	Jessica Miller
Catchment Program:	Angela Foley

Parkland Management Team

Coordinator:	Barb Miles
Technical Officer:	Brian Bainbridge
Team Leader:	Megan Jericho
Team Members:	Chrissie Cowcher, David Crawford, Alex Davern, Nicole Drever, Deb Lawson
Temporary Team members:	Catherine Brigal, Paul Davis, Jessica Hard, Luke Kelly, Ben North, Bruce Partland, Kevin Walsh

Planning Consultant:

Lester Townsend, Integrated Urban Management

MERRI CREEK



**MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE**

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