

MERRI CREEK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Planning & Coordination report: Mar - May 2018

MCMC receives funding from each of its member Councils to respond to issues affecting biodiversity, stream health, landscape, heritage and amenity along waterway corridors in the Merri catchment. This funding also supports our governance processes - servicing the MCMC Committee of Management and its various Sub-committees, our communication services - articles, event notifications and registration, Merri e-News, website and so on – and it pays for an important component of staff time to make grant applications. In 2017-18 Council funding for this purpose totals \$250,108 (*see breakdown on last page of this report*).

In addition, at times we access grants funding for important new initiatives for MCMC; for example the development of MCMC's Strategic Plan which is funded by a grant from The Myer Foundation.

The Planning & Coordination Report focusses on the first of these roles: liaison with stakeholders including those managing major infrastructure developments that potential impact the waterway corridors; liaison with funding bodies; responding to statutory and strategic planning matters; and the provision of specialist ecological advice to our members.

Federal Budget and Environment Initiatives

According to the Funding Centre newsletter (an initiative of OurCommunity.com.au), which MCMC subscribes to, the only environment initiative in the recent Federal Budget, aside from significant new funding for the Great Barrier Reef, is “*\$23.1 million over four years from 2018-19 for the Australian Heritage Grants Program (AHGP). The money will come from cuts to existing heritage programs and existing budgets*” [emphasis added].

1. Whole of MCMC & whole of catchment

1.1 Agency/organisation liaison

Melbourne Water – Healthy Waterways Strategy: Yarra Catchment

Melbourne Water is ‘refreshing’ its Healthy Waterways Strategy using a ‘co-design’ process. MCMC attended the third collaboration workshop for the Yarra Catchment on 16 March at which the focus was setting actions, performance objectives and targets. MCMC also discussed the targets and Merri issues with a private consultant (22.03.18) and submitted additional comments on the targets (12.04.18). The Draft Strategy is expected to be finalised and launched on 28 May 2018, with a 30-day period for further feedback. MCMC has registered to attend a workshop for the Yarra Catchment on the draft Strategy in June. MCMC has also registered for a workshop on collaborative implementation of the Strategy in late May (L.M).

Merri Creek Exhibition - Yarra River Keeper Association and The Victorian Environment Friends Network

The Merri Creek Exhibition was displayed at an event jointly run by the Yarra Riverkeeper Association and The Victorian Environment Friends Network. The full-day seminar was aimed at strengthening 'Friends' groups and fostering supportive relationships between groups. MCMC did not attend, but the Friends of Merri Creek Vice-president, Ann McGregor, attended and gave a presentation on how the FoMC had been so successful over the years (18.03.18).

Victorian Planning Authority

MCMC has registered interest with the Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) for consultation on all PSPs in the Northern Growth Corridor (Merri Creek Catchment). We were only alerted to a recent PSP (Craigieburn West) through the good work of a volunteer with the Victorian National parks Association (L.M 9.05.18).

Wurundjeri Tribe Council

Once again, as in previous years, MCMC's Ecological Restoration Team were delighted to have the involvement of the Wurundjeri Narrap Team in annual grassland burns (see Ecological Restoration May Quarterly Report).

1.2 Statutory & Strategic planning and other planning issues

MCMC comments on planning permit applications for developments within the Merri Creek Environmental Significance Overlay, and when needed makes representation at VCAT. Likewise comment is made on relevant planning scheme amendments and submissions are made to Panel hearings. These matters are listed in the relevant sections of this report.

1.3 Operational & Strategic Initiatives

A number of operational and strategic initiatives that were identified in the MCMC Business Model Review of 2015-16 are being undertaken with support from volunteers and a grant from The Myer Foundation. These include:

Operational Initiatives

1. MCMC Image library improvements – MCMC’s volunteer archivist, Leslie Fraser continues to work 2 days/week on digitising of images; volunteer cataloguers Janet Buick and Jane Miller are also cataloguing the images, half a day a week.
2. Improvements to GIS system including geographic thesaurus – this project has been partially funded by the Lord Mayor’s Charitable Foundation and is underway.
3. Improve management and storage of ecological records – 2. is a precursor to this and will require additional funding.
4. Upgrade/improve Website – Still to set up on-line shop. (T.F. Mar - May 18)

Strategic The development of MCMC’s Strategy is being overseen by the Project Steering Group, made up of reps from the MCMC Committee of Management. It is a standing agenda item for MCMC’s Committee of Management and its progress is reported in the minutes of these committees. The development of the Strategy is funded by a Myer Foundation capacity building grant.

2. Upper Merri: Headwaters to Kalkallo

2.1 Wallan STP discharge

MCMC received an annual update from Yarra Valley Water (YVW) on discharges from Wallan Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) to Taylors Creek, a tributary of Merri Creek (30.04.18). During the first season of operating under the new EPA licence, discharge from the plant took place from 7.08.17 to 22.09.17, avoiding discharge later in the season when and the Growling Grass Frog spawning season. There was a single water quality breach for ammonia (3.6 mg/l against a limit of 3 mg/l). An action plan to ensure this does not happen in future has been developed. For the coming 2018 winter season, it is anticipated that the STP will be discharging from approximately June to October. This won’t commence until stream flows increase and target dilution ratios can be achieved. YVW say they are confident that the issues with the water quality have been resolved and that the discharge will be fully compliant with the licence going forward (L.M).

2.2 Beveridge Township Development Plan

MCMC did not formally respond to this Plan (comments were due 16 May) as we had responded to an earlier opportunity to comment on a draft plan in August 2017, these comments had been taken on board in the latest iteration of the plan, and further comment was deemed not a priority (L.M).

2.3 805 Donnybrook Rd, Donnybrook - 717219

Planning permit application for a multi lot subdivision, creation of access to a road in Road Zone Category 1, removal of easement and works on land subject to Inundation Overlay and Incorporated Plan Overlay.

MCMC had no objection; the application is consistent with approved Lockerbie Precinct Structure Plan (PSP) and designated Growling Grass Frog Conservation Area. MCMC requested that stormwater treatment exceed best practice guidelines in order to limit degradation to Merri Creek (L.M 14.02.18).

2.4 Masterplanning for Merri Creek Corridor in Lockerbie PSP

MCMC and FoMC reps were briefed by Spire Landscape Architects on masterplanning for the Merri Creek corridor in the Lockerbie Precinct Structure Plan area (11.05.18). Spire is working on behalf of Stocklands. This is a massive new suburb north of Donnybrook Rd and east of the Hume Highway (see attached map). Friends of Merri Creek reps also attended. Both groups described their vision for Merri Creek, their vision for the Greater Merri – Wallan Park, their concerns about the impact of urban development on the creek especially in the vicinity of the proposed town centre where the width of the creek corridor is overly narrow, the importance of engaging and involving the local community in the creek parkland and the experience and expertise of both groups in this, positive collaborative experiences working with Wurundjeri, ecological expertise based on 30 years' experience of restoring Merri Creek, and in continuing to participate in planning for this part of the Merri Creek corridor. The next step in the process will be a workshop with representatives from all the stakeholders – Melbourne Water, DELWP, Wurundjeri, Hume, Whittlesea and Mitchell Councils, Bicycle Victoria, Yarra Valley Water (L.M; for FoMC – Ann McGregor, Nick Williams, Trevor Hausler & Rebecca Mayo).

3. Middle Reaches: Donnybrook Rd – Western Ring Rd

3.1 Growling Grass Frogs – Whittlesea Quarry

MCMC was pleased to receive a report from the City of Whittlesea on the latest Growling Grass Frog survey results from a former quarry site by Merri Creek in Epping which found successful breeding has occurred at this site for two consecutive years. The report 'Monitoring of a population of Growling Grass Frog *Litoria raniformis* and survey of vertebrate fauna at Epping, Victoria, December 2017' is by Peter N Homan. Whittlesea Council's monitoring and reporting is done as part of an EPBC controlled action requirement associated with the Melbourne Wholesale Market (L.M).

3.2 Growling Grass Frog Trust allocates funding to Craigieburn habitat

MCMC was delighted to hear that the Growling Grass Frog Trust Fund has agreed to allocate its funds to the creation of GGF habitat in the vicinity of Frog Court, Craigieburn, adjacent to Merri Creek. The Trust Fund was established in 2002 with \$100,000 funding from AGL after concerns their works on a gas pipeline had affected the water holding capacity of an ephemeral swamp known to be GGF habitat. The Friends of Merri Creek (but not MCMC) are members of the Trust (L.M).

4. Southern reaches – Mahoneys Rd – Clifton Hill

4.1 Celebrating Natural Heritage of Darebin – film launch & etc

MCMC staff were pleased to contribute to Darebin Council's new film celebrating Darebin's Natural Heritage. Brian Bainbridge appears in a segment of the film on the Ngarri-djarrang Native Grasslands (Reservoir) and participated in a panel discussion at the film's launch on 21.04.18. A week later, MCMC's Michael Longmore led a well-attended 'Explore Ngarri-djarrang' walk and talk, organised by Darebin Council as a complementary activity to the film launch (M.L 28.04.18). The film also features Leslie Fraser from the Friends of Merri Creek in a segment on Merri Park Northcote. Other sites featured are the Cherry St Reserve, Latrobe Wildlife Sanctuary and Bundoora Park. The film begins with a welcome from Wurundjeri Elder Uncle Bill Nicholson whose generous and thoughtful commentary also interleaves the five site segments.

The film can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GxD0l2Dmlk&feature=youtu.be>

4.2 Diesel Spill - Sydney Rd/Ring Rd

On 8 May 2018 a significant diesel spill occurred on Sydney Rd after a tanker crashed into lights at the M80 Ring Rd intersection. After an inquiry from MCMC's manager, Melbourne Water reported to MCMC that they had inspected both Campbellfield Creek and Merlynston Creek and didn't observe any smell or runoff in the waterways including no smell. As a preventative measure they installed some booms downstream of the M80 on

Campbellfield Creek. On 10 May Melbourne Water provided a further update on Campbellfield Creek that the booms had been inspected and there was still no evidence of diesel in the creek. The booms will be left in over the weekend given the predicted rain and will be reinspected on Monday morning (L.M).

4.3 104B McBryde St Fawkner – subdivision of VicRoads land

MCMC's manager met with the Fawkner Residents Association and a community member with landscape design and artistic expertise, to discuss developing a visual representation of community suggestions for the future use of this parcel of VicRoads land next to Merri Creek. MCMC outlined what we see as key design requirements for the creek corridor such as use of suites of indigenous plants appropriate to original ecological communities, the need for screening planting of the industrial interface, and setbacks of a path from the escarpment as well as planting constraints associated with overhead powerlines and gas easements (L.M 27.02.18). A concept plan was produced and presented to Moreland Council by the Fawkner Residents Association's Joe Perri.

4.4 Sale of VicRoads land Leonard St & McBryde St Fawkner

In April MCMC received notification from Moreland Council about VicRoads' proposed sale of land at McBryde St and Leonard St and Council's request for feedback on community preferences for the future use of the land. Friends of Merri Creek and Fawkner Resident's Association organised a well-attended rally at the site on 5 May, followed by a 'Nature Safari led by MCMC's Tony Faithfull. MCMC's manager attended and the event commenced with a very positive address from Moreland's Mayor, Cr John Kavanagh. Deputy Mayor and MCMC rep, Cr Natalie Aboud, also spoke and mentioned the many open space challenges facing Moreland Council – the need for new open space in southern parts of the municipality that are currently undersupplied and the need to retain parkland that's been managed as such for many years by Moreland when state agencies declare the land 'surplus'. Two other ward councillors also attended.

MCMC has submitted a letter to Council urging Council acquisition of the land for retention as an integral part of the Merri Creek Parklands (T.F & L.M 11.05.18).

4.5 Cape Ivy infestation – Merri Creek Brunswick Velodrome area

MCMC passed on a community complaint about Cape Ivy strangling a Melbourne Water revegetation plot near the Brunswick Velodrome (L.M 3.04.18). Melbourne Water promptly responded with assurances that treatment will be scheduled in the near future and follow-up maintenance programmed into the maintenance schedule for the stretch of Merri Creek between Normanby Rd/Moreland Rd and Arthurton Rd/Blyth St in Northcote/ Brunswick East.

4.6 Melbourne Water sewer – vegetation reinstatement sites

MCMC's Ecological Restoration Planner, Michael Longmore, accompanied Melbourne Water on an inspection of two sites, one near Strettle St, Thornbury and one near Sumner Ave, Northcote to discuss and agree on treatment and vegetation reinstatement of areas near Merri Creek disturbed by the sewer improvement works (6.04.18).

4.7 17 Anderson Rd Thornbury D/594/2017

Application for planning permit for powder coating booth and curing oven within existing warehouse, and a 4m flue. The 4m flue triggers a permit requirement under the Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO).

MCMC view: The site is well screened by existing revegetation on adjacent Merri Creek parklands so MCMC has no objection. MCMC asked for information on potential amenity impacts (noise and emissions) on users of adjacent Merri Creek Parklands and Shared Trail. MCMC also drew attention to the need to check that the flue complies with height/distance restrictions associated with high voltage power lines that traverse rear of the private property (L.M. 20.02.18 & 26.02.18).

4.8 2A & 2B Cunningham St Northcote

MCMC attended a site meeting on 23.04.18 with the developers of this site about their plans for 20 two-story townhouses and for revegetation of the adjacent public land in lieu of a greater setback(T.F). MCMC provided brief written comments on the pre-application proposal in which we reiterated that MCMC would be looking for a minimum 30m setback and some public/semi-public open space on the creek-facing boundary, consistent with the standards in the Merri Creek Development Guidelines (L.M 27.04.18). A formal planning permit application to Darebin Council is expected very soon and MCMC will have a further opportunity to comment.

4.9 4 McLachlan St, Northcote D/898/2017

Application for planning permit for partial demolition and two-storey extension. MCMC view - No objection: property does not have a direct interface to the Merri Creek Parklands - being separated by a street and by other residences (L.M 9.04.18)

4.10 39 Winifred St, Northcote D/75/2018

Application for planning permit for removal of 3 exotic trees in backyard. MCMC view - No objection, the three trees are exotic and arborist's report recommends removal to allow other trees to grow and to limit damage to house. Property does not have a direct interface with Merri Creek parklands and amenity impact is zero (L.M 5.04.18).

5. MCMC Staff Post-graduate Study

Michael Longmore, Program Coordinator - Ecological Restoration, started a Masters in GIS & Remote Sensing at Charles Sturt University at the beginning of this year (part-time).

Chris Geary, Team Leader - Ecological Restoration, continued into his second year of a Masters in Geospatial Science at Curtin University (part-time).

Cam Walls, Team Member - Ecological Restoration, is finishing the last semester of a Grad Cert in Catchment & Waterway Management at the University of Melbourne

Angela Foley, Special Engagement Projects Coordinator, expects to submit her PhD thesis later this year to the University of Western Sydney after 6 years of part-time research. Her thesis title is - Traditional Owners on Country today: the art of place-making in the Merri Creek catchment, Victoria

MCMC Staff contribution to Planning & Coordination role:

Luisa Macmillan (L.M) – Manager; Katrina Roberg (K.R) – Ecological Restoration Program Manager (0.25); Brian Bainbridge (B.B) & Michael Longmore - Ecological Restoration Planners (0.1); Tony Faithfull (T.F) – Strategic Projects Manager (0.3), Ray Radford (R.R) Information Officer (0.5).

MCMC Planning & Coordination Council Funding: Oct 2017-Sept 18	
Councils	TOTAL (ex GST)
Darebin	\$54,696
Hume	\$51,820
Mitchell	\$6,890
Moreland	\$53,280
Whittlesea	\$58,213
Yarra	\$25,209
TOTAL	\$250,108

This Planning & Coordination funding supports just over 2 EFT staff positions

14% of the Planning & Coordination funding (=\$35,015) contributes to MCMC general overheads. These overheads include salaries for the Finance Officer (0.4), Admin Officer (0.5) & IT manager (0.3), and rent, utilities, insurance etc). The 14% 'overheads levy' is applied to all income that MCMC receives. This ensures that organisation-wide overhead costs are shared across all cost centres and projects.