

The Merri Merri Parklands

A PROSPECTUS FOR THE VICTORIAN STATE ELECTION 2022



FoMC is a volunteer community group that was established in 1988 and currently has 670 paid members and over 7000 social media followers. Our affiliated partners include Wallan Environment Group and Friends of Edgars Creek. We have six delegates to the Merri Creek Management Committee, the joint community-council ecological restoration, community education, advisory and advocacy body.

Building on many years of advocacy and on-ground rehabilitation efforts, the Friends of Merri Creek is committed to the declaration of a regional park along the full length of the Merri Creek and major tributaries, to ensure the further restoration of a continuous biodiverse, open-space corridor through Melbourne's northern suburbs for people and wildlife.

This concept is a unique opportunity to demonstrate how a vibrant, biodiverse corridor can be integrated into the urban landscape, giving generations to come local access to nature. However, the ability to realise it is threatened by the rapid urbanisation of the upper Merri catchment and the many benefits of the vision may not be realised. These include:

- nature experiences for people of all ages, but especially children – this was particularly important during the pandemic;
- the use of urban spaces to promote biodiversity;
- furthering the process of reconciliation with the Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people, and learning from them how to better care for Country;

- urban cooling in a warming climate; and,
- water conservation and urban irrigation for sports and recreation spaces.

The *2021 Australia: State of the Environment* documents in stark terms the unsustainable damage being done to Australian ecosystems (see <https://soe.dcceew.gov.au>). Reversing and repairing this damage cannot be left solely to investments in 'rural' national parks and habitat preservation – vital though they are. To mobilise community interest and support, we need to encourage biodiversity where the great majority of Australians live – in our cities and suburbs. Promoting natural values in 'our backyard' is a bridge over which we can travel to a better and more sustainable Australia.

Realising this vision is multi-faceted, requiring integration across and within every level of government, and engagement with the community. But we have to start now, because rapid urban development is underway in the middle and upper catchment that unless sensitively undertaken will permanently affect the health of the Merri Creek and its ability to support biodiversity.

What an achievement it would be for the children and grandchildren of tomorrow's Merri Merri to regularly experience wallabies and sugar gliders, sacred kingfishers and yellow-tailed black cockatoos, and maybe even one day, the iconic platypus as they walk or ride the shared path through Melbourne's northern suburbs.



Priority actions required to advance this vision are:

Establish a Ministerial Advisory Council to develop an action plan for coordinated implementation by state government agencies

1. This proposal is based on opinion by leading environmental lawyer, Dr Bruce Lindsay, whose reviewed options for statutory protection of the Creek. A ministerial action plan for the Merri follows precedent established for Waterways of the West and the Barwon/Moorabool, and would improve coordination among state agencies, and thereby dovetail with the existing governance and advocacy role performed by Merri Creek Management Committee.

Conservation parklands along the middle and upper Merri

2. Declare and fund land acquisition and establishment of the *wallan wallan Regional Park* as proposed in the DELWP Suburban Parks Program 2022 feasibility study.
3. Complete park planning, declaration and funding for establishment of an appropriately scoped *marram baba Merri Creek Regional Parklands* between the Ring Road and Beveridge, overseen by the Suburban Parks Program.
4. Fund of \$8.7 million per annum to effectively manage existing conservation reserves along Merri Creek, including for ecological burning, control of weeds and pest animals at Galgi ngarrk/ Craigieburn Grasslands, Bababi marning/ Cooper St Grasslands, and Merri Creek Park.
5. Prepare and implement conservation management plans for all designated BCS Conservation Areas in the Merri catchment, to prevent the degradation of conservation values prior to these areas being incorporated into the *marram baba Merri Creek Regional Parklands*.

Protecting the waterway corridors

6. Introduce stronger and consistent planning controls, similar to those implemented along the Yarra River, to prevent intrusive developments along the Merri and its tributaries.
7. Fund of \$100,000 to audit and refresh the *Merri Creek and Environs Strategy 2009-2014*, under the auspices of the Merri Creek Management Committee.
8. Increase funding for Landcare initiatives in the Upper Merri catchment.

Merri Shared Trail

9. Construct missing links and upgrades to the Merri Shared Trail as outlined in the Northern Trails 2022 strategy. These require a funding commitment of \$20 million for capital costs but have benefit cost ratio of 1.6 and will:
 - Complete section of trail from the Metropolitan Ring Road to existing trail south of Horne Street
 - Extend the trail from Cambellfield to Donnybrook
 - Relocate and widen trail from Merri Creek Primary School to Sumner Park outside of the flood zone
 - Replace the Harding Street Bridge to cater for shared use
 - Replace the washed out section at Moomba Park, Fawkner approaching Mahoneys Road.

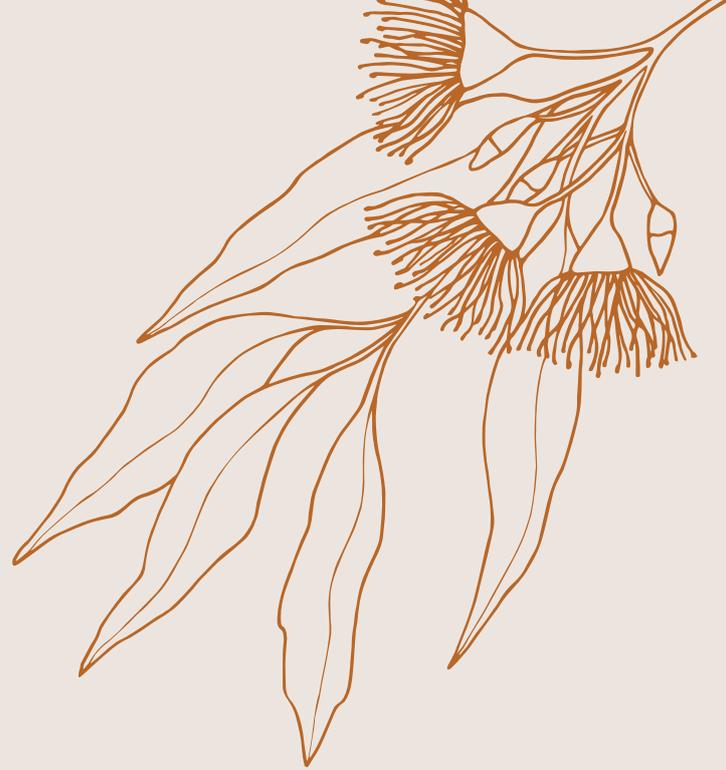


Improving water quality

10. Fund new Water Sensitive Urban Design infrastructure to improve urban water quality, including for new stormwater treatment wetlands at potential sites such as Northcote Golf Course and incentives to encourage uptake of “smart tank” technology. A \$10 million construction program over 5 years would allow Councils to bid for funding to construct a minimum of 5 new wetlands, with a capacity of 90-120 ML. Funding bids should be assessed against 3 criteria - storage capacity, catchment area and biodiversity values.

This investment is required to further the remediation of ‘urban stream syndrome’, the unnatural flows that arise from the use of the Creek as a stormwater drain. These unnatural flows are principal reason why species such as the platypus no longer inhabit the creek, a finding derived from research performed for the ‘Merri Paddle’, a coalition of community groups including FoMC dedicated to returning the animal to the Creek. See EnviroDNA (2022) *Returning Platypuses to the Merri Creek: a report for the Merri Paddle*, at https://www.friendsofmerricreek.org.au/content.cfm?page_id=1693885¤t_category_code=20982

11. Extend single-use plastic bans on a greater range of products, including microbeads, plastic cups and lids, and takeaway food containers.
12. Install toxicant treatment traps on stormwater drains from industrial areas, to improve the health of Merri Creek aquatic ecosystems. Funding of \$3 million is required to install such traps at six high-polluting sites:
 - Ainslie Rd Drain, Campbellfield
 - Cooper Rd Drain, Somerton
 - O’Herns Rd Drain, Somerton
 - Somerset Rd Drain, Campbellfield
 - Aitken Creek
 - Malcolm Creek.



The efficacy of such traps is proven by trials undertaken at Barry Road, Campbellfield, and would help remediate levels of toxicity which are so high in the middle reaches of the Creek that macroinvertebrate species are unable to survive, with consequential effects on the food chain and thus biodiversity. Professor Vincent Pettigrove, (2018) *Pollution Issues in the Melbourne Water Region and Options for their Management*. Technical Report No. 88. Centre for Aquatic Pollution Identification and Management, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria.

13. Launch a cross-agency process to investigate and improve the management of sodic and dispersive soils in areas to the north and west of Melbourne that are designated for urban growth. This is an ongoing issue significantly impacting water quality and aquatic life the length of the creek and into the Yarra.

Nature refuges in the city

14. Provide funding to plan, add and improve a network of linked urban wildlife refuges along the urban reaches of the Merri between Yarra Bend and Galada Tamboore, that facilitate local residents’ connection to urban nature.
15. Establish an increased number of robust and accessible sites for bush kinder sessions along the Merri and other waterways.



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