



Merri-bek
City Council

Achievements

Integrated Water Management Strategy 2040

Progress Review January 2025



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Merri-bek will be a Water Sensitive City. A liveable city where we take good care of our waterways and make the most of our precious water resources. We keep our open spaces resilient to climate change impacts and, enhance urban and natural environments and support community health and wellbeing. Council leads by example and working together with our key partners, supports community actions to become a water sensitive city.

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Executive Summary

The Integrated Water Management Strategy 2040 – Towards a Water Sensitive City sets a long-term vision for Merri-bek; a liveable city where we take good care of our waterways and make the most of our precious water resources. We keep our open spaces resilient to climate change impacts and, enhance urban and natural environments and support community health and wellbeing. Council leads by example and working together with our key partners, supports community actions to become a water sensitive city.

The next five-year Action Plan builds on the achievements and lessons from the previous Action Plan (2020–2025). It sets out clear, actionable steps to guide Merri-bek's progress toward the 2040 vision. Some actions are ongoing, while some are one-off activities. Combined efforts across many areas of Council are required. As this is a long-term strategy, actions are reviewed and updated every five years to remain aligned with evolving priorities, resource availability, and climate and community needs.

Achievements of 2020–2025 Action Plan

In 2020, Council adopted the Integrated Water Management Action Plan 2020–2025 to continue its transition toward a water sensitive Merri-bek. The Action Plan built on the foundations of Watermap 2020. Key focus areas included:

- Delivering stormwater harvesting and reuse infrastructure to reduce reliance on potable water
- Expanding stormwater treatment across more than 100 hectares through wetlands, raingardens, and passive irrigation projects
- Embedding Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) into Council capital works and private development
- Improving water use efficiency across Council assets and advocating for broader uptake of alternative water sources
- Strengthening cross-council integration and governance through the IWM Steering Committee
- Increasing community participation through education programs, local partnerships, and pilot projects
- Enhancing monitoring and reporting frameworks to better track performance and inform decision-making
- Piloting and researching new technologies and approaches to improve stormwater management outcomes
- Improving internal maintenance of green infrastructure by auditing WSUD assets, clarifying responsibilities, and building capability for ongoing care and performance tracking

This action plan marked a significant shift toward whole-of-council collaboration, setting the stage for continued investment and innovation in the 2025–2030 period.

Evaluation of the 2020–2025 IWM Action Plan

The current five-year Action Plan, now nearing completion, included 58 actions in total. Of these, 36 actions (62%) have been fully completed or are ongoing.

The plan has delivered a wide range of outcomes across infrastructure, community engagement, planning, and partnerships.

Key Highlights

- **Moomba Park Wetland (Fawkner):** Delivered multiple benefits, including treatment of 49 kg/year of nitrogen, habitat for the growling grass frog, improved community amenity, and interpretive signage.
- **Brunswick Parkland IWM Plan:** Achieved treatment of 108 kg/year of nitrogen and 22 ML/year of potable water savings through rainwater reuse.
- **Dunstan Reserve Stormwater Harvesting (Brunswick West):** Delivered 130 kg/year of nitrogen removal and 13 ML/year of potable water savings.
- **Gavin Park Raingarden (Pascoe Vale):** Treated 114 kg/year of nitrogen and enhanced stormwater quality.
- **Applied Pilots and Trials:**
 - CB Smith Reserve Passive Irrigation Trial introduced permeable kerb and channel infrastructure, passively irrigating four street trees, and ongoing monitoring of soil moisture and tree growth.
 - City Oval Permeable Pavement Trial tested surfaces designed for passive irrigation and local flood mitigation.
 - Both pilots contribute to urban cooling, improved soil moisture, and pollutant reduction.
- **Streetscape WSUD:** Construction of streetscape raingardens and tree pits including Stewart Street and Eddy Street, Brunswick.
- **Reimagining Moonee Ponds Creek (Stage 1):** Through the Chain of Ponds collaboration, rehabilitated 400 metres of urban waterway.
- **Community Education and Engagement:** Funded Merri Creek Management Committee, Waterwatch, and the Litter Working Group — supporting over 1,000 volunteers, 6,775 education participants, and 333 events.
- **Sector Leadership:** Continued involvement in the IWM Forum and collaboration with Melbourne Water and Yarra Valley Water.
- **Funding Success:** Secured \$2.03 million in external funding from partners including Melbourne Water and DEECA to support infrastructure, capability building, and policy development.
- **Alternative Water Use in Private Development:** Through enforcement of Merri-bek's **ESD Policy**, new developments have installed a total of **14.2 megalitres/year of rainwater tank capacity**, equivalent to saving close to **six Olympic-sized swimming pools** of drinking water annually (as of mid-2024/25).
- **Council irrigation efficiency:** Incremental upgrade of Council's irrigation systems to smart control systems, with remote access and real time control, to improve efficiency and operational flexibility.

Key Highlights continued



Image 1 – Moomba Park Wetland, Fawkner

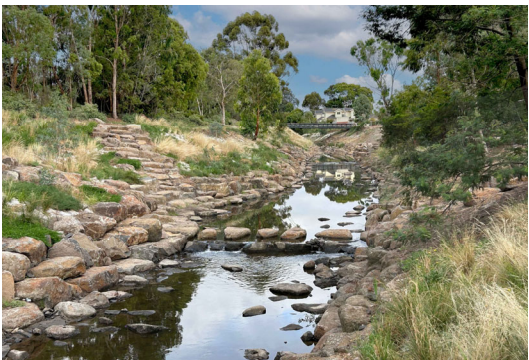


Image 2 – Reimagining Moonee Ponds Creek
– Chain of Ponds Collaboration, Oak Park



Image 3 – WaterWatch – Merri Creek



Image 4 and 5 – Opening of Gavin Park Wetland, Pascoe Vale

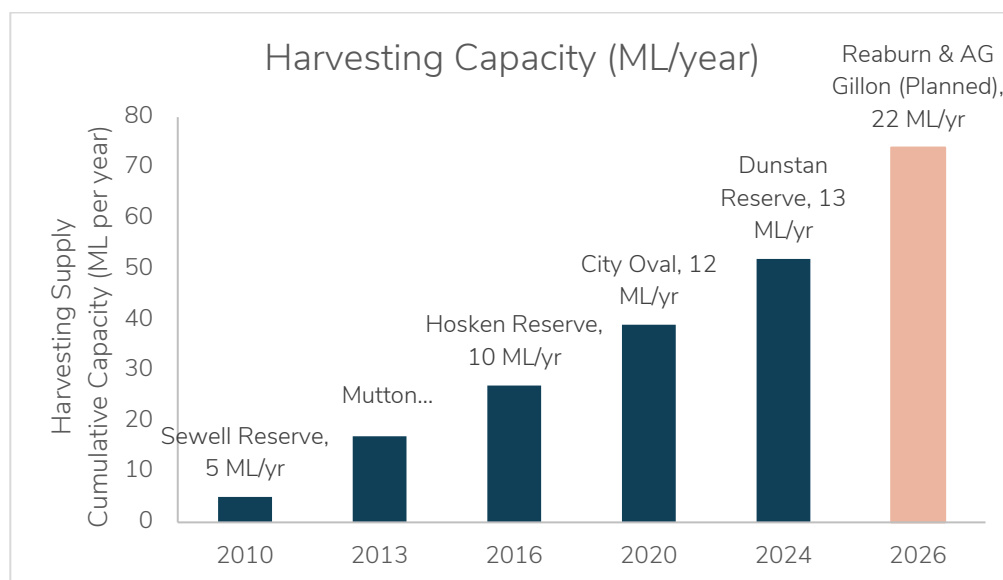
Stormwater Harvesting Achievements

From 2020 to 2025, Merri-bek expanded its stormwater harvesting capacity by 13 ML/year, continuing the momentum set by the Watermap 2020 strategy and positioning the city as a leader in sustainable water reuse. Council has secured partial funding and design approvals for stormwater harvesting at **Reaburn and AG Gillon Reserves**, expected to contribute an additional **22 ML/year** by 2026. This will bring Merri-bek's total capacity to over **75 ML/year** equivalent to saving close to 30 Olympic-sized swimming pools of drinking water annually.

These systems not only deliver significant environmental benefits, but also support climate resilience by sustaining green, cool public spaces.

As shown in the cumulative graph below, Merri-bek's stormwater harvesting program continues to build year-on-year, with a strong pipeline of planned infrastructure.

Figure 1 – Stormwater Harvesting Capacity



Council has established itself as a sector leader in integrated water management through strategic planning, governance, and project delivery. Recognition across the sector reflects Council's whole-of-organisation approach and continued high standards in compliance, infrastructure outcomes, and planning integration.

This work has been supported by the **Melbourne Water Liveable Communities, Liveable Waterways Program** which has provided significant funding and strategic collaboration.

Evaluation Findings

The new draft action plan has been informed by evaluation of action progress to date and targeted engagement over 2024 and 2025. Key findings from evaluation include:

- An identified gap and opportunity to increase support for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung as the Traditional Owners and custodians of Country (including waterways) aligning with Merri-bek's Statement of Commitment.
- Some actions from the previous plan should be streamlined or transitioned to ongoing internal operations—such as governance, monitoring, and asset management.
- Incomplete actions have been evaluated to understand what challenges or barriers delayed or prevented implementation, to inform how the outcome might still be achieved through the next action plan or through other aligned council action plan or council program.
- Some actions are now incorporated into other aligned strategies and plans such as Nature Plan and Open Space action plans.
- A lack of baseline data has made tracking progress and impact difficult. Future actions have been drafted to better monitor progress against appropriate measures and indicators.

The evaluation also found there is a need:

- To 'tell the story of water' better to improve communities' connection to the natural environment and develop understanding of the issues and what we can each do to help.
- To develop an approach to share information including across the organization, with partners, Traditional Owners, neighbouring councils, Melbourne Water and the public.
- For technical guidance and upskilling to support the uptake of Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) in the private and public realm. Internally this also means in capital works including but not limited to sports and park upgrades, road and transport projects.
- To continue to build an understanding of flood and climate modelling and how to interpret and apply it more comprehensively in decision making.
- To improve our interaction with our diverse community, including education resources about protecting our waterways and sustainable water use.

These findings directly shaped the structure and priorities of the 2025–2030 Action Plan.

Appendix

Performance Summary

Measure	Indicator	Progress Summary	Comments
2.1	% of urban forest supplied by non-potable sources	Passive irrigation implemented.	CB Smith, Stuart Street, Wheatsheaf Road; broader rollout constrained by infill and services. Technical note was developed to support broader integration of passively irrigated trees. Great uptake by capital works however, it is constrained by infill development and existing services.
2.2 (a)	Total area of hard surfaces re-paved	Measure retired	No longer reflects conditions. New indicators in development. Permeable asphalt trialled (e.g. City Oval).
2.2 (b)	% of developments retaining >20% perviousness	Enforced through planning	Ongoing application of ESD policy to retain minimum permeability
3.1	Annual potable water use target: 420 ML (5% reduction from 465 ML baseline, plus 18 ML stormwater offset)	On track	Dunstan Reserve: 13 ML/year offset. AG Gillon design complete, construction planned.
3.2	Alternative water supply target: 57 ML/year (including 18 ML/year new supply by 2025)	On track	Infrastructure development supports target achievement.
3.3	Per capita water use: 155 L/person/day	Advocacy underway	Promoting efficient water use and expanding rainwater tank installations across Council buildings and residential areas.
4.1	Area treated to BPEM Best Practice	100 hectares treated	Includes Moomba Park wetland, Gavin Park wetland, Newlands Road raingarden and Dunstan Reserve Stormwater Harvesting system.
5.1	Number of planning permits incorporating WSUD and area treated to BPEM	99% inclusion at planning stage.	All applications include WSUD reporting and are required to comply with BPEM.