

# From disaster to recovery

Rehabilitating a community and their urban creek after a catastrophic pollution event

## What happened



On 30 August 2018, a warehouse in West Footscray housing toxic chemicals caught fire and burned for two weeks. Firewater runoff washed into the creek, causing contamination and devastation to a 5 km reach.



The contamination resulted in a significant loss of plant and animal life, and for several days afterwards, the creek exceeded safe guidelines for human health. Odour lingered for many months.



Described as the worst pollution event to a Melbourne waterway in almost 30 years, the scale of the disaster, the high level of community concern and significant public impacts, commanded a matching response.

## What we did

### Response



Installed pollution containment structures to collect floating contaminants for removal by suction trucks.



Pumped 70 million litres of polluted water and removed 170 m<sup>3</sup> of contaminated sediment over two weeks.



Collected 2,500 dead fish from the creek and its estuary.

### Recovery



Our priority was to clean up the most publicly used areas first, and prevent further contamination downstream.



Removed toxic sludge by pressure-washing rocks and vegetation, scraped the creek banks, and removed affected trees and shrubs.



Removed more than 2,000 m<sup>3</sup> of contaminated sediment over five months.

### Rehabilitation



Local community input was used to create a rehabilitation plan, in collaboration with government agencies and organisations.



The plan includes long-term and sustained actions that span recovery to active rehabilitation of the creek and its surrounds.



Through community events, online activities and conversations, community members contributed ideas, aspirations and priorities to help restore, enhance and protect their creek into the future.

The immediate response and recovery works required a coordinated, multi-agency approach to inform the community. This included:

- A coordinated incident response taskforce
- Community bulletins delivered to 12,250 households and businesses

- Facebook live chat
- Social media updates
- A dedicated recovery page on Melbourne Water's website
- Public meetings and door knocks
- A community information day



## How we worked with the community

**PHASE 1** Involved the community to capture local insights and ideas for rehabilitation



**PHASE 2** Empowered community members to prioritise actions for the plan



**PHASE 3** Created a community-led rehabilitation plan reflecting public input



**“** I commend Melbourne Water for their leadership in the wake of this awful contamination of Stony Creek. The Council was the 'lead agency' on paper, but I feel it was really Melbourne Water that led the way with genuine engagement with the community and swinging into recovery of the creek.”

**Melbourne Water**  
Enhancing Life and Liveability