

MERRIGANG

[place of wild dogs]



Message from the Executive Officer

The spring 2011 issue of Merrigang features AMRRIC's 2011 conference. Held in Townsville on 11 October, the conference attracted over 60 attendees from across Australia and the UK. Conference participants and speakers – academics, vets, environmental health and animal management workers, government and shire staff – reflected the diversity of our stakeholders and the expanding reach of our work.

The highlight of the conference was the awarding of life membership to two remarkable individuals – Professor Rick Speare and Dr Jack Shield. Both have legendary status in the history of animal health programs in remote communities and in the establishment of AMRRIC (see page 2).

Our Annual General Meeting was held the preceding day, followed by a strategic planning session for the Board and staff facilitated by Philip Pogson of The Leading Partnership. Philip's pro bono involvement with AMRRIC started in 2007, and we are enormously grateful for his continuing wise counsel. The AGM also celebrated the launch of AMRRIC's first Annual Report – to download, visit our website at www.amrric.org.

Julia Hardaker
EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Utopia meets Canberra



Utopia dog health program team (left to right): Dr Michael Archinal, Dr Judith Mulholland, Dr Alison Taylor – holding the 100th dog to be desexed! – Brian Radovic, Barkly Shire Regional Animal Controller, vet nurse Denise Pagliaro and Geoff Kane, UHS nurse.



A different sort of visitor from Canberra descended on Utopia in August when ACT vets helped deliver AMRRIC's first dog health program in Utopia outstations.

Canberra veterinarians Drs Michael Archinal and Alison Taylor were joined by experienced AMRRIC member vet Dr Jude Mulholland and vet nurse Denise Pagliaro, both from Victoria, Tennant Creek Regional Coordinator of Animal Management Brian Radovic, Barkly Shire veterinarian Dr Malcolm MacDonald and Dr Jan Allen, AMRRIC Program Manager.

Over one week, the team desexed 114 dogs and treated dogs in 11 outstations for internal and external parasites. The community also made the difficult decision to euthanase 41 dogs.

Utopia's 16 permanent outstations are spread over 3,500 square kilometres, with populations ranging from 20 to 100 people. The program was centred on Utopia community Urapuntja, a three hour drive north east of Alice Springs.

The community first contacted AMRRIC in 2010, recognising they had an overpopulation of dogs with all the problems that posed to human and dog health. Around the same time, AMRRIC conducted a workshop for the ACT Australian Veterinary Association, initiating the involvement of Canberra vets in AMRRIC programs.

AMRRIC's team worked closely with the Urapuntja Health Service Aboriginal Corporation (UHS) and the surgery suite, a room attached to the UHS, was luxurious compared to many in remote communities. The team received enormous support from UHS staff, in particular CEO Sarah Doherty and nurse Geoff Kane, who undertook extensive community liaison before and during the visit.

The Canberra mob are recruiting more ACT vets to establish an ongoing service to Utopia outstations – the next visit is in April 2012. The successful inaugural dog health program has also encouraged Barkly Shire to organise programs in other communities.

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NEWS

WANTED! A volunteer to undertake photograph cataloging project. This can be undertaken at your pace and your place. Call Julia Hardaker on 0428 485 436.

EO Julia Hardaker presenting Professor Gisella Kaplan, the winner of our newsletter naming competition, with her promised bottle of wine. Gisella, an internationally renowned authority on animal behavior, is also due congratulations for the honorary degree of Doctor of the University (Science) bestowed on her in October by the University of New England Chancellor.



Program Manager Jan Allen delivered a session on AMRRIC's work at the Northern Australian Surveillance Symposium held in Townsville in October. The symposium brought together groups involved in conducting animal health surveillance activities across northern Australia and included discussion on the threat of rabies.

2011 AMRRIC Conference

The AMRRIC 2011 conference was held in Townsville on 11 October. Attendees and speakers travelled from across Australia and the UK, and concurrent lecture streams catered for the diversity of participants – from academics, vets, environmental health and animal management workers, to federal government and shire staff.

International speaker and Australian researcher Dr Liz Murchison, from University of Cambridge Wellcome Institute in the UK, collaborated with AMRRIC President Ted Donelan to present a session on Canine Transmissible Venereal Tumour. Other sessions included animal behaviour, animal management programs in QLD and WA, exotic disease surveillance in northern Australia, cross cultural education, advances



above: Keynote speaker Professor Rick Speare, James Cook University.

in wild dog control, and the demonstration of the blow pipe to safely sedate aggressive dogs. In keeping with AMRRIC's work and philosophies, the conference was remarkably rich in information and knowledge sharing.

Quantifying zoonoses

Keynote speaker Rick Speare, Professor at the Anton Breinl Centre for Public Health and Tropical Medicine at James Cook University, is perhaps Australia's best known expert on zoonoses in Indigenous communities (diseases transmitted from vertebrate animals to humans). His research focus is on tropical communicable diseases and their control in human and animal populations.

Professor Speare's presentation opened up opportunities for AMRRIC and its partners to support further research into zoonoses. He said, despite the significant volume of data and anecdotal evidence pointing to the impact of animal diseases on humans in remote communities, the number of peer

reviewed papers published in Australia is (embarrassingly) low.

Potential zoonoses from dogs include bacteria affecting skin, gut and urinary tract, intestinal protozoa, fungal skin diseases, and external and internal parasites. Researchers know, for example, that methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) has been generated in Aboriginal communities, and its presence in dogs is now under scrutiny. Similarly, PhD student Virginia Boon has shown dogs carry Group A *Streptococcus* virulence genes, suggesting the dog could be a reservoir of virulence genes for human pathogens.

Rick concluded by emphasising more complex, quantitative and dynamic studies are required to understand the impact of zoonoses and to create a solid evidence base – and that AMRRIC dog health programs are an essential and critical part of that process.



above: EO Julia Hardaker, Professor Rick Speare, President Dr Ted Donelan and Dr Jack Shield celebrating the AMRRIC life membership awarded to Rick and Jack.

Life Members

Two legendary figures were awarded Life Membership at the AMRRIC conference – Dr Jack Shield and Professor Rick Speare. Both have been outstanding initiators and supporters of animal health programs in remote communities for many years, and played key roles in the formation and development of AMRRIC.

Dr Jack Shield is regarded as a founding

father of animal health programs in remote communities. A Queensland government veterinarian, he began to collaborate with Professor Speare in 1992 at Yarrabah, QLD. He was instrumental in organising the 2000 Big Lick conference – the predecessor to AMRRIC – and worked closely with AMRRIC's first Executive Officer, the late Phil Donohue.

Professor Speare holds both medical and veterinary undergraduate degrees (MBBS and BVSc) and a PhD in parasitology. Rick was an early AMRRIC Committee member and has delivered countless educational and practical animal health sessions in communities for AMRRIC – undertaking post mortems and using a microscope to show parasites such as mange mites.

ABA partnership underway

A major part of AMRRIC's 3 year, \$2.89 million sustainable animal management program recently funded by the Northern Territory Aboriginals Benefit Account is underway. In October, EO Julia Hardaker, Project Manager John Skuja and East Arnhem Shire veterinarian and Animal Management Officer Dr Emma Kennedy signed the Shire's agreement in Townsville.

This is one of the most comprehensive projects ever to be developed and managed by AMRRIC, and John and Emma now have the challenging task of recruiting six animal management workers to fill the roles funded through the ABA project.

"We are thrilled to be working with such a progressive Shire and with Emma – one of AMRRIC's longstanding members," said Julia.



above: AMRRIC Project Manager John Skuja and East Arnhem Shire veterinarian and Animal Management Officer Dr Emma Kennedy celebrate the signing of the ABA project agreement.

Education through Remote Service Delivery

AMRRIC is contributing animal management expertise to FaHCSIA's national Remote Service Delivery (RSD) programs, primarily through the work of Education Officer Dr Sophie Constable. RSD locations with community dog health education underway include – Amata and Mimili in SA's Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, Mornington Island, QLD, and Maningrida in the NT.

In Mimili, Sophie is working with school teacher Louka Parry to plan dog health and wellbeing poster workshops for students, and dog health activities with school staff. The resources include posters showing dog's needs and dogs as a part of family, designed to build empathy and reinforce good dog caring skills. Older children create posters with 3D microbes and learn how microbes carried by dogs affect human health. The projects foster a better understanding of the connection between germs and disease, and the importance of hygiene.

At Amata, Sophie worked with liaison officer Allan Wilson on the Amata talking book resource. Allan dictated a story in Pitjanjatjara on dingoes and training dogs,



above: Amata malpa (liaison officer) Allan Wilson with Patricia Wilson and dogs Wilfred and Naiki.

and will photograph his own trained hunting dogs. Sophie and Amata school principal Jan Love enlisted primary students to contribute artwork to the book. The PK song recording team is writing a song about responsible dog ownership and empathy, and PY media is making a dog health education DVD, similar to the AMRRIC DVD "Caring for dogs, community and country".

In September, Sophie visited Mornington

Island, presenting to schools and working with Queensland Health District Environmental Health Worker Lena Krause on proper hand washing technique. Gerry the Germ makes this fun - the children rub a special cream into their hands that makes them glow under Gerry's blacklight. After washing the cream off, they put their hands back under the UV light to check how well they've washed. Posters were made by grades 1 to 4, showing the need of dogs for food, water, company, shelter, and hygiene.

After Sophie's visit, Mornington Shire Council Animal Management Worker Justin Chong will attend a training session on computer poster creation. Posters are an effective and important way to promote a range of dog health needs and Justin plans to create posters about veterinary services, care of animals after desexing, and general animal care.

At Maningrida, Sophie delivered school education activities in collaboration with NT Environmental Health Officer Michael Bethune. They visited 18 classes, from preschool to grade 9, delivering the Gerry the Germ program on hand washing – with an emphasis on germs shared by people and dogs – and teachers will use AMRRIC microbe colour-ins for follow-up learning. Maningrida school principal Stuart Dwyer and teacher Tracey Egan are working with AMRRIC on dog health and safety education units, including collaborating with Gusto Productions on student video projects.



left: Craig Highlands, AMRRIC member and Senior Ranger in the WA Shire of Northam.

WA: health for dogs and jobs for people

Senior Ranger in the WA Shire of Northam Craig Highlands has an impressively diverse background. A qualified chef who has worked throughout Europe, Craig has been director of his own construction company, a volunteer fire fighter and ambulance officer and, for the past four years, he has worked in local government.

Craig works closely with AMRRIC and is the developer and coordinator of an Indigenous Health and Animal Welfare Program, run jointly by Northam Shire and Max Employment. The program aims to improve the way companion animals are treated and, at the same time, train and assist local Indigenous people to gain employment.

Graeme Raine, TAFE lecturer and Max Employment trainer, said the Shire's animal management program was his first experience training for an Indigenous program. Referred to AMRRIC by former Board member Rick Walduck, he is now a member and huge fan: "It was a relief to discover the well-presented and informative AMRRIC DVD and manual, and to receive the constant support of Julia Hardaker and her team."

Graeme's experience of his course participants was equally significant.

"I was on a wonderful learning journey myself, hearing about their families and their dogs and how important this course was to them. In my seventeen years as a trainer, I have never been so emotionally affected by my participants." The program involved formal training plus practical experience working alongside Shire Rangers. It generated such interest there is a waiting list for future classes.



above: Sydney University vet students James Moody and Jen Millar.

Fundraising friends

AMRRIC's donor and supporter base continues to grow, providing important funds for our work. We warmly thank the wonderful volunteers behind two recent successful fundraising events.

In September the University of Sydney Veterinary Society (the Faculty's student body) raised a very impressive \$1,640 for AMRRIC during a week of full-on and fun activities. VetSoc President Jen Millar said the vet students wanted to support an Australian-based organisation that was making the world a better place for animals.

"We decided to choose an organisation that not only helps to resolve animal issues, but also, and perhaps more importantly, educates the community about prevention. What better an organisation to support than AMRRIC?" said Jen.

Brooke Connor has been an AMRRIC friend from the time she was working in the Barkly Shire delivering programs for school kids about caring for animals. Brooke remained a supporter after moving south and recently raised a fantastic \$500 at a screening of the movie Red Dog.

AMRRIC Resources

Watch this space! The Manual 'Conducting Dog Health Programs in Remote Communities; An Environmental Health Practitioners Guide' will soon be available on DVD. The DVD 'Caring for Dogs, Community and Country' is also included with relevant book chapters. This is an easy to use, instructional DVD that provides an alternative to the hard copy manual.

AMRRIC T shirts (\$35) and polos (\$45), featuring a Cheeky Dog design, are available in sand, steel blue and black (plus \$7 postage).

Email: info@amrric.org



! JOIN AMRRIC

Membership not only provides critical support to AMRRIC, members receive full access to AMRRIC website resources, including Dr Samantha Phelan's "Conducting Dog Health Programs in Indigenous Communities - A Veterinary Guide".

If you would like to become a member, please complete an online membership form and post it, along with the fee, to AMRRIC, PO Box 1464, Nightcliff, NT 0810. Download at: <http://www.amrric.org/membershipform.pdf>

? HOW YOU CAN HELP

Every contribution from our donors and supporters helps make sustainable dog management a reality in remote communities across Australia.

Donations to AMRRIC are tax deductible and it's easy to become a regular monthly donor. To donate, visit our website at www.amrric.org or call us on (08) 8948 1768.

