

CANINE RABIES IN AUSTRALIA: AN EAST COAST PERSPECTIVE

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It is likely that canine rabies, an acute fatal viral zoonosis, will first impact upon northern Australian communities and then spread undetected, both east and southwards. Reliably estimating how rabies will spread is vital to the development of useful management models and requires a collaborative approach.

Australia's large populations of wild, free-roaming and restrained domestic dogs, often in close proximity to one another, require research attention. Predicting where rabies will enter Australia is important but understanding dog population dynamics, including contact rates, in and around human populations is essential if we hope to limit the impact on people and animals.

We are using GPS tracking collars and remote camera stations to quantify both inter- and intra-specific contact rates in north eastern New South Wales. We are also implementing surveys of key human populations to collect data on domestic dog ownership and dog bites, hunting dog movements and interactions with wild dogs.

By combining this information and data collected in Indonesia (our closest, rabies endemic country), we can develop robust models to predict canine rabies' spread in the Australian environment. In turn, we can develop effective rabies management plans that will minimise reaction times and improve our chances of containing outbreaks.