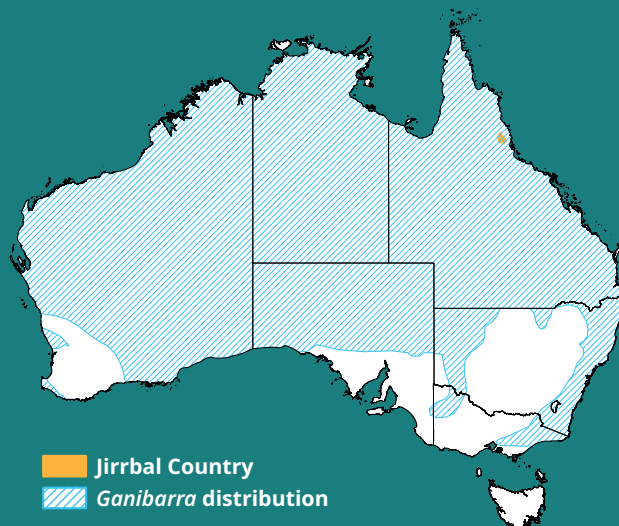


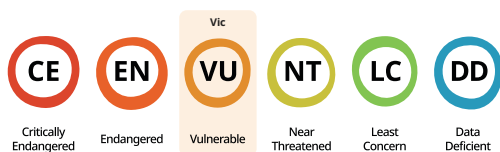
# Ganibarra (Dingo) on Jirrbal Country

© Sonya Takau, Jirrbal

Common name: Dingo  
Scientific name: *Canis familiaris*  
Language name: *Ganibarra*



## Status



*Ganibarra* were assessed as Vulnerable under the IUCN Red List in 2004 but are no longer listed due to taxonomic changes.

## Description

*Ganibarra* are Australia's largest mammalian carnivore, they are opportunistic hunters but also scavenge for food. They prefer larger prey (like wallabies and kangaroos) but eat a wide variety of other animals such as rabbits, birds, lizards, insects, as well as plants and fruit.

Most *Ganibarra* belong to socially integrated packs whose members meet every few days or during the breeding season to mate and rear pups. Females generally have a single breeding season per year.

They are an apex predator and a 'keystone species', playing an important role in the maintenance of biodiversity.

*Ganibarra* also suppress feral cats, foxes and over-abundant native herbivores and omnivores. For this reason, the 'Cascading effects caused by the loss or removal of dingoes from Australian landscapes' has been repeatedly (but unsuccessfully) nominated for listing as a Key Threatening Process under the EPBC Act.



*Ganibarra*. Photo: 169169/stock.adobe.com

## Distribution

*Ganibarra* used to be found across mainland Australia including on a number of islands but have contracted in range since colonial settlement. They are now most commonly found in northern, north-western and central Australia'. They are not found and did not occur in Tasmania.

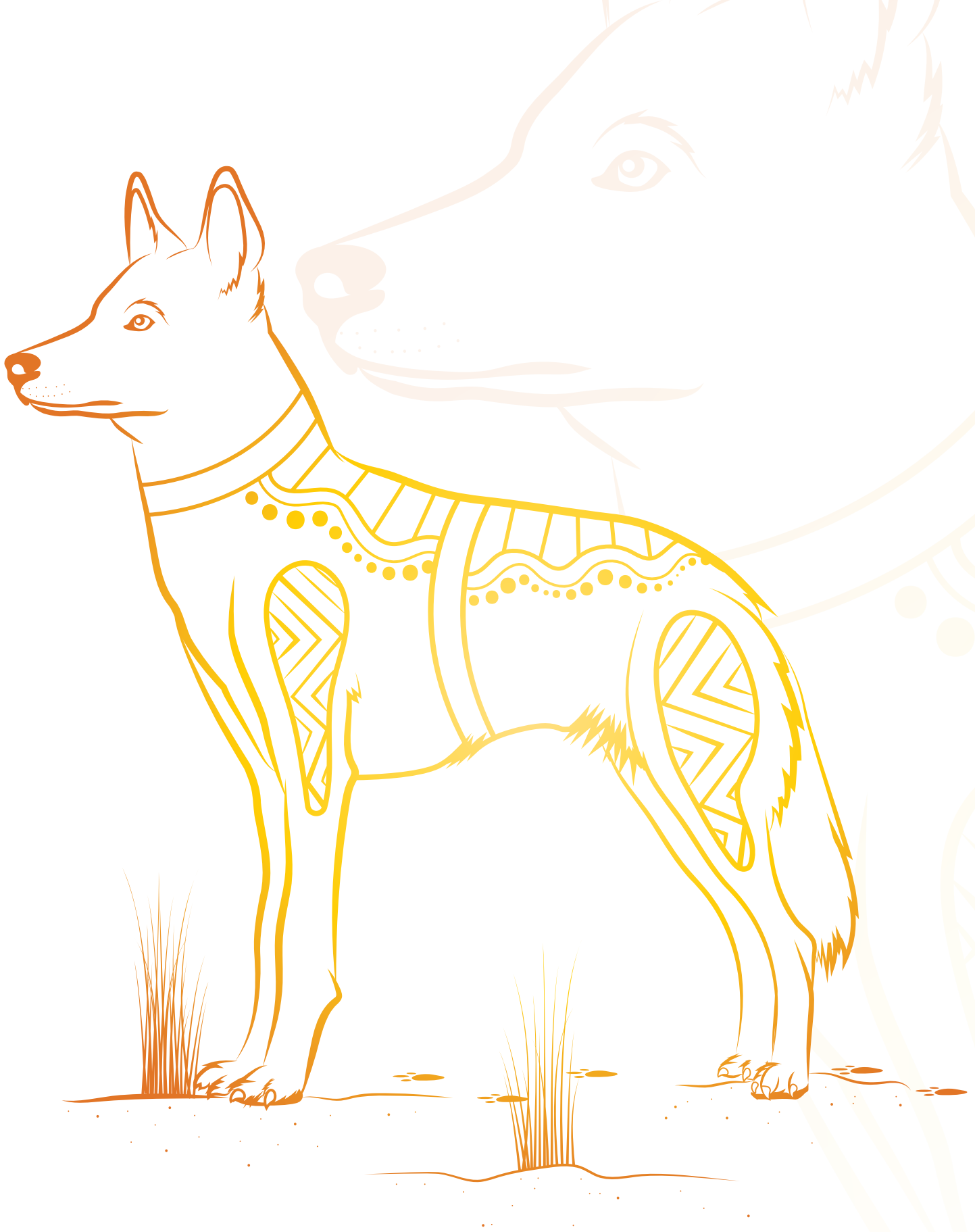
## Habitat

*Ganibarra* are highly adaptable and live across a wide variety of habitats including rainforest, woodlands, deserts and alpine areas.

## Threats

Threats to *Ganibarra* include:

- **Lethal control**, by farmers and pastoralists (including shooting, trapping and baiting) which is a widespread occurrence across Australia
- **Interactions with humans**, particularly tourists, in places such as *K'gari* (Fraser Island) which can lead to incidents/attacks that result in the euthanasia of animals
- **Barrier fencing**, disrupting their natural movements across the landscape
- **Wrong-way fire**, reducing the quality of habitat
- **Climate change**, including higher temperatures, and reduced or more unpredictable rainfall
- **Misinformation**, and inflammatory language such as the use of the term 'wild dog'.



<sup>1</sup> Cairns, K. M., Shannon, L. M., Koler-Matznick, J., Ballard, J. W. O., & Boyko, A. R. (2018). Elucidating biogeographical patterns in Australian native canids using genome wide SNPs. *PLoS One*, 13(6), e0198754.

<sup>2</sup> Weeks, A. R., Kriesner, P., Bartonicek, N., van Rooyen, A., Cairns, K. M., & Ahrens, C. W. (2025). Genetic structure and common ancestry expose the dingo-dog hybrid myth. *Evolution Letters*, 9(1), 1-12.

<sup>3</sup> Mason, R. T., Rendall, A. R., Sinclair, R. D., Pestell, A. J., & Ritchie, E. G. (2025). What's on the menu? Examining native apex-and invasive meso-predator diets to understand impacts on ecosystems. *Ecological Solutions and Evidence*, 6(2), e70032.



## Cultural Connections

**Ganibarra** connects Jirrbal with other surrounding groups from Cooktown, out west and down to Townsville, through [an important story](#). **Ganibarra** is chasing kangaroos and where the **Ganibarra** stops and rests along the way there are landmarks which help to keep the story alive.

Recent **Ganibarra** gatherings in Canberra have included Traditional Custodians from across Australia, with cultural connections actively coming together to improve protections for **Ganibarra**. The National Inaugural First Nations Dingo forum, hosted by Giringun Aboriginal Corporation, was held in September 2023. At the conclusion of this forum, more than 20 groups signed a [National First Nations' Dingo Declaration](#), which highlighted the cultural importance of **Ganibarra**, and has gained support from many more Indigenous groups since.



Sonya holding a **Ganibarra**. Photo: Valerie Keenan.

## Cultural Values

### Country

**Ganibarra** are important to the overall health of Country, without **Ganibarra** we know Country is sick and unbalanced. Jirrbal spend time watching **Ganibarra** to understand Country, they gain critical information from their movement patterns, including health of other species and weather/seasonal patterns.

***“Ganibarra are the bosses of Country, they keep everything in balance.”***

*Sonya Takau, Jirrbal*

### Knowledge

**Ganibarra** are embedded into the Jirrbal knowledge system. The movement of **Ganibarra** are the foundations for the distribution of other species within the ecosystem. They also guide hunting practices for Jirrbal and help ensure food sources are plentiful by the role they play as an apex predator.

***“Ganibarra are knowledge holders of Country, telling us when to hunt and move across the Country.”***

*Sonya Takau, Jirrbal*

### Kin

**Ganibarra** are a part of the kinship system in Jirrbal culture, with many given a clear set of responsibilities to care for **Ganibarra**. For some, **Ganibarra** is their totem species and in Jirrbal Lore, those people will be returned to the spirit of **Ganibarra** once they pass.

***“Ganibarra are central to our kinship system, they are family and carry our spirit.”***

*Sonya Takau, Jirrbal*



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Design and layout by Nani Creative

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## Results of Poor Management

### Loss of an apex predator

As a consequence of ongoing persecution for more than 200 years, *Ganibarra*, an apex predator, have been lost or reduced in numbers in many parts of Australia. This has led to a reduction in the cultural and ecological health of Country.

*“We are going to lose Ganibarra like we lost the thylacine. Can you imagine African savannas without the lion?”*

Sonya Takau, Jirrbal

### Misconceptions

*Ganibarra* are often labelled as aggressive due to negative human interactions.

*“The dingo is the most demonised native animal in Australia.”*

Sonya Takau, Jirrbal

Agriculture and tourism industries with the help of media often use misleading terms such as ‘wild dogs’ to justify the inhumane euthanasia of *Ganibarra*.

### Government laws and policies

Governments continue to sanction the killing of *Ganibarra*. The supply of 1080 poison is government funded.

Queensland state legislation, the Biosecurity Act, does not recognise our cultural values or allow cultural practice to be implemented. We can't keep, feed, or give away *Ganibarra* because they are listed as a restricted invasive species.

The Wild Dog Action Plan 2020-2030 was developed without consultation with Traditional Custodians. It was developed in alignment with the Australian Pest Animal Strategy 2017-2027 which provides national guidance on pest animal management but does not recognise the cultural significance of pest species (as threats or otherwise) and does not mandate the inclusion of Indigenous people in pest animal management planning.

## Jirrbal Vision

### Protection for Ganibarra

We want *Ganibarra* to be reclassified in legislation both at national and state levels, stressing the need for them to be recognised as culturally and environmentally significant.

### Our voices heard

The [National First Nations' Dingo Declaration](#) states “We have the right as Traditional Custodians to be directly involved in decision-making in all legislation and management actions that impact dingoes, across all levels of government”.

### Community education

The work of [Dingo Culture](#) is helping to change the narrative, demonstrating via DNA studies<sup>2</sup>, that there is no hybridisation of *Ganibarra* with the domestic dog. Further, studies of *Ganibarra* scats<sup>3</sup> have shown sheep and other livestock only make up a very small proportion of their diet.

### Non-lethal solutions

We understand that farmers, particularly sheep and goat farmers, will be concerned about protecting their livestock from predation by *Ganibarra*. The [Dingo Advisory Council](#) is working with stakeholders to develop alternative management actions across the nation.

### Permit systems

We demand a permit system so that wildlife carers, including Aboriginal people, can look after *Ganibarra* on Country. We don't want rescued animals to be taken to sanctuaries off Country. We want to be able to look after them, because they are family.

### Capturing cultural significance across the nation

The [Traditional Knowledge Recording Project](#) is working with groups to document Traditional knowledge about *Ganibarra* for future generations.



National Environmental Science Program



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