

New program set to save the Dingo

Monash University, the Norwood Animal Conservation Group and the Dingo Care Network are joining forces to help save Australia's native dog, the pure-bred dingo.

Pure-bred dingoes are currently threatened with extinction. Their main threats are inter-breeding with domestic dogs, 'wild-dog' eradication programs, hunting, inbreeding and loss of genetic fitness.

To help save the dingo Monash, through its Animal Gene Storage Resource Centre of Australia, and the Norwood Group have established the Dingo Species Recovery Program, being launched today.

The program will be conducted with the cooperation of dingo conservation organisations, dingo owners and breeders, zoos, conservation parks and universities. It will combine traditional captive-breeding programs with assisted reproductive technology to ensure that both the captive and the wild dingo populations can be incorporated into the recovery program.

There are three dingo sub-species: alpine, desert, and tropical. There are fewer than 150 pure Alpine dingoes in captivity in Australia. These animals may be the last pure genetic pool of the Alpine type.

Dr Shae-Lee Cox, director of Monash University's Animal Gene Storage Resource Centre, said the initial stage of the recovery program would establish a national gene bank of frozen semen and other reproductive tissue collected from dingoes that are classified as genetically elite or diverse. The tissue will be stored in liquid nitrogen, at minus196 degrees centigrade, ensuring its preservation.

"This tissue will act as a national security reserve and also as a source of genetic material for selected assisted breeding programs in the future," Dr Cox said. "The rate at which genetic and reproductive technology is proceeding suggests there is an unlimited potential for these samples in the future."

The program will also support research into the reproductive function and performance of Australian dingoes, which will be invaluable for captive breeding management, particularly with the use of artificial insemination and monitoring populations in the wild.

Founding member of the Norwood Conservation Group Dr Ian Gunn said although dingoes were now considered a native Australian mammal, there were currently no conservation strategies in place to reduce the threat of extinction.

"Dingoes are believed by some environmentalists to play a vital role in the health of Australian ecosystems," he said. "Yet we don't protect this animal. We need to consider a new approach to protecting dingoes."