



Technical Submission on behalf of The Dog Lab, IISER Kolkata

Response to Supreme Court order dated 07 November 2025 concerning relocation of community dogs

Executive Summary

The Dog Lab, IISER Kolkata, submits this technical statement in response to the Supreme Court order dated 07 November 2025 that directs large-scale displacement and relocation of community (free-ranging) dogs. While we express the highest respect for the Hon'ble Court, we contend that the impugned directions are: (1) prima facie inconsistent with the statutory framework governing humane population management; (2) unsupported by contemporaneous scientific evidence regarding dog ecology, behaviour and public-health outcomes; and (3) likely to cause immediate, large-scale and irreversible harm to animal welfare, public safety and existing humane population-management programmes. We request prompt judicial reconsideration and provide targeted recommendations to avoid avoidable harms while meeting public-safety objectives.

Key takeaways

- Mass relocation of community dogs is an ecological, unscientific, and ethical disaster compromising both animal and human safety.
- The order passed by the Hon'ble Court on 7th November 2025 overrules existing laws under the Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules, 2023 and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 and goes against the humane and scientifically proved methods of ABC and vaccination as mandated by WHO and WOAH.
- Permanent residence of dogs in shelters is completely unsuitable, keeping dog behaviour and ecology in mind, and will create the next hotspots for zoonotic outbreaks.
- Dogs are a part of the urban, sub-urban and rural ecosystems, and contribute to the ecological networks in the human-dominated habitats. Their removal can create a vacuum effect, providing opportunities for other scavengers like rats and mice to rapidly increase in number, thereby spreading disease.
- Millions of caregivers across the country will face severe emotional distress and mistrust in governance and judiciary.
- Facts and figures considered for justifying the abovementioned order are spurious and need to be reconsidered as there are currently no standardized method of data keeping for dog bites.

- Dog aggression arises from environmental and human factors, not mere presence.
- Humane, data-driven ABC and vaccination programs are the only sustainable solution.

Introduction

The Dog Lab, IISER Kolkata, is a research group with sixteen years of systematic research experience on free-ranging (community or street) dogs in India. Our work spans behavioural ecology, welfare assessment, human-dog interactions, and applied population-management interventions. Our empirical findings and policy recommendations are informed by field surveys, longitudinal monitoring, rigorous scientific studies, and community engagement across urban and peri-urban Indian settings.

Prima facie the impugned directions are:

- inconsistent with the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 and the Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules, 2023 (ABC Rules);
- unsupported by contemporaneous scientific evidence and empirical data about dog ecology, welfare, and public-health outcomes; and
- likely to produce immediate and irreversible harm to animal welfare, public safety and ongoing humane population-management programmes.

We therefore respectfully request the Hon'ble Court to review and modify the directions in light of the scientific record and the statutory scheme.

Scientific findings on dog behaviour and ecology

- Dogs have co-existed with humans in the Indian subcontinent for millennia. Global studies estimate the human-dog relationship to be around 25000-40000 years old. Archaeological and cultural records document long-term human–dog relationships in India. From Sarama in the Rigvedas, Lord Bhairava with his vaahan, the dog, the dogs of Yama, Dattatreya Muni, the Mahabharata, and to the cave paintings in Bhimbetka and ancient pottery fragments from the Indus Valley, dogs have existed with us since time immemorial.

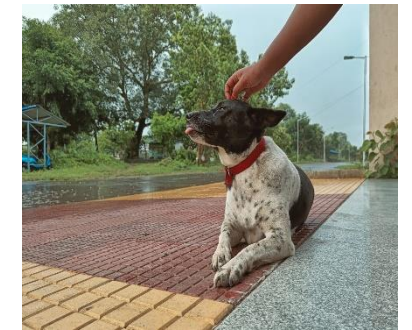


Rock painting of dog on a leash from Bhimbetka rock caves (7000 BCE)



Bust of dog unearthed from Mohenjodaro (3400-1700 BCE)

- Street/community dogs are not equivalent to feral or truly 'stray' animals- they represent generations of urban-adapted, human-associated populations.



- Free-ranging dogs are **territorial and group-living**- observed group sizes in Indian field sites typically range from 3 to 15 individuals. Territory sizes range from 0.1 to 7.9 hectares.
- Dogs form stable social groups and defend resting, feeding and denning spaces- Disruption of group composition destabilizes social hierarchies and increases stress and conflict.
- They have two major heat cycles (mating season)- July to September (major) and February-April (minor; only for dogs who did not mate during the July-Sep mating season). Although litters initially range from 1-14 pups, more than 80% of the pups die due to natural and human-induced causes. Typically, only one in five pups born in a season survive to attain adulthood. Thus, there are already existing natural population controls, to which if ABC is added, will substantially aid in humane control of dog population.



- Dogs are highly attuned to human social cues and modulate behaviour in response to human actions. They know to differentiate between friendly and harmful humans. They understand physical gestures by humans and adjust themselves accordingly. Our studies have shown dogs prefer petting over food in long-term human-dog relationships, and humans have been found to be important parts of their social interaction networks. Thus, they are animals for whom humans have a very special meaning, not just as providers of food, but also as “friends”.
- **Chasing and biting-** Dogs do not bite or chase without any reason. Indeed, humans are responsible for managing dogs' environment to prevent stressful or fear-inducing situations. Failing to be aware of a dog's body language and triggers, or putting a dog in situations where it feels cornered or threatened, can lead to aggressive reactions. Chasing usually happens when the dog in question or one of their group members has or had been involved in a vehicular accident. Another cause is the internal health of the animal itself. Indeed, ongoing work from our lab shows that around 40% dogs that enter shelters are victims of accidents. Biting is the most extreme form of self-defense for dogs.

It is paradoxical that the very same humans who raised and evolved dogs for protection (barking to alert, chasing to keep safe, biting to protect, and self-defense) are now labeling the same traits a ‘nuisance’. Therefore, one must speculate on the attitudes of the community residents where the alleged aggressive dogs reside and how the situation came to arise.

- Street dogs, in general, show inactive behaviours for more than 50% of the day, with higher activity during diurnal hours. Recent ongoing study shows that out of the remaining 50% of the time that they are active, they spend only around 2% of that time interacting with humans, showing mostly positive behaviours like begging, approaching, being petted or fed, etc.
- Multiple studies around the globe have examined the human-dog bond and noted similarities with the mother-child bond. Just as separating a child from their mother is not acceptable, removing dogs from their caregivers is equally condemnable.
- Our studies have shown that over 70% of people, irrespective of living in rural, semi-urban or urban places, showed positive experience with dogs while 22% had mixed experiences. Less than 5% of participants reported negative experiences with street dogs. Out of 1290 participants surveyed, 11.7% wanted dogs to be removed from the streets, 82.9% did not want and 5.4% said they were not sure.



- Multiple national and international studies have shown how **relocation and/or culling of dogs is completely ineffective in dog population management and in rabies control**. India can take note from other countries where the dog population and rabies has been managed humanely and successfully by a combination of ABC and annual vaccinations without the need for mass imprisonment.
- Community caregivers and feeders are members of the society. They are integral to ensuring wellbeing of the dogs, promoting humane capture for sterilization/vaccination, post-operative monitoring, and long-term programme success. Our ongoing study on feeders show that most feeders come from lower-middle-class or middle-class backgrounds. Their main source to procure food for dogs is from their own salaries or a few individuals who contribute to their cause. They receive no incentive or support from the government, yet they continue this service out of love.
- Our study on adopted street dogs echoed identical sentiments from both national and international adopters. Street dogs make excellent pets with very low investment, both physically or financially. Contrary to popular media and people's anecdotes, one study showed that people from lower socioeconomic classes or those who are much more exposed to the hazards of sharing habitats with street dogs show positive attitudes towards street dogs.

- Shelters in India, except for a few large ones, are in extremely poor conditions, while they have the best of intentions. A study on Indian animal rescue shelters identified inadequate funding, community conflict, and too many animals in need created a challenge for animal shelter work.

Current systemic problems (data & implementation gaps)

- Dog-bite and conflict data are methodologically inconsistent: inadequate differentiation between pet and community dog bites; duplicate counting (e.g., booster visits); no differentiation between pre-exposure or post-exposure bites; inconsistent record keeping across institutions, including government offices; lack of data from rural and remote areas; inconsistency between shelter/health center records and the numbers shown by the government.
- Regarding rabies elimination, **relocation or removal is actively counterproductive because it undermines herd immunity by removing vaccinated dogs, who are then rapidly replaced by unvaccinated, susceptible puppies and immigrants.** This replacement mechanism makes it exceedingly difficult to maintain the required vaccination coverage, which the World Health Organization recommends should be at least 70% annually to prevent the overall immunity level from dropping below the critical 20–40% threshold needed to interrupt transmission between campaigns
- Improper implementation of the ABC program has currently led to a large population of dogs in the country. The lack of sustained efforts over the last 25 years, and lack of importance to the matter have left coverage patchy and programme outcomes suboptimal in many areas.
- Infrastructure shortfall: India lacks shelter capacity and operational infrastructure to accommodate large-scale intake; shelters primarily function as treatment and rescue facilities, not permanent residences.
- Waste management and food sources: ubiquitous, unregulated waste disposal and ad-hoc food provisioning sustain high dog densities in human-occupied spaces.
- No regulation of pet shops, import of foreign breeds, responsible pet ownership, or pet abandonment.
- Veterinary and service deficits: limited access to timely veterinary care in Tier-2/Tier-3 and rural areas contributes to morbidity, pain-related aggression and untreated medical conditions. The measly number of currently available shelters is already at capacity, full of underpaid staff working overtime.
- Rampant animal abuse, feeder intimidation, and frequent clashes between the public further undermine efforts towards a compassionate coexistence.

Repercussions of mass relocation under the current order

- Disruption of social structure: crowding large numbers of dogs into restricted facilities will disrupt group composition, increase intra-group aggression, injury and stress, and compromise welfare outcomes.
- Disease risk amplification: mass aggregation of undernourished or immunocompromised animals increases infectious-disease transmission risk, leading to the perfect opportunity for zoonotic diseases and complicates quarantine and biosafety control.
- Ecological vacancy and immigration: removal of established, sterilized populations create ecological vacancies that are rapidly filled by migrant, unsterilized and unvaccinated dogs-raising conflict and operational difficulty for subsequent CNVR efforts. The ecological importance of dogs cannot be ignored. Our research has revealed them to be key players in the urban and semi-urban scavenging networks. They are known to control pest populations, including rodents, thereby potentially suppressing outbreaks related to such pests. Their scavenging activities make certain resources available to other scavenging species. They eat up human-generated wastes and help in garbage disposal. Removal of this urban-adapted species can therefore affect the “health” of the cities negatively. India suffered a similar ecological disaster when the vulture population in India collapsed during the 1990s, leading to the death of more than 5,00,000 humans.
- Service and logistical collapse: India is far, far away from being a country with high standards of veterinary service and logistics to support the same. Staffing and biosafety provisions are insufficient to sustain humane mass intake without severe welfare compromise and caregiver burnout.
- Socio-psychological harm: Millions of caregivers and community members will experience significant distress (equivalent to parents losing their kids); increases in vigilante action and erosion of trust in institutions are foreseeable. Furthermore, interactions between dogs and humans are known to have positive feedback effects on both species, leading to their well-being. Mass removal of the dogs will lead to stress among millions of dog friendly people, who are not necessarily feeders or caregivers on a day-to-day basis, but are generally fond of dogs.

Consideration of the Indian Knowledge System

The Indian sub-continent has a long and rich cultural heritage, which has contributed to the IKS. A knowledge system is not restricted to academic learning, but encompasses the socio-cultural, philosophical and traditional knowledge of a community. The IKS teaches us to be inclusive, to respect nature. Our mythologies and folklores have celebrated dogs as loyal friends and followers, and highlighted their co-existence with humans over centuries. The street dogs of today behave no differently from Sarama protecting her pups or from the dog that followed Yudhisthira to heaven. The dog lovers of today are no different from Yudhisthira, to refused to enter heaven without his loyal companion. The proposed actions will be in direct contradiction to this philosophy of co-existence.

Recommendations

We respectfully propose the following judicially actionable measures to balance public-safety goals with statutory compliance and animal welfare:

- Stay implementation of any nationwide mass-displacement/non-release directive and permit only targeted, evidence-based interventions pending review.
- Direct strict compliance with the Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules, 2023 and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960: relocation or non-release should be permitted only in medically certified exceptional cases (e.g., confirmed rabies, severe untreatable aggression) and after transparent, reasoned orders by designated State ABC Committees.
- Require State Governments and municipal bodies to submit audited returns within a specified period documenting: shelter capacity, intake/occupancy rates, CNVR coverage maps, staffing ratios, quarantine/biosafety measures, and allocated funds for humane care.
- Advise strict and mandatory expansion of ABC (sterilisation + vaccination) with sustained, data-driven mop-up campaigns in priority zones and buffer areas to reduce immigration risk.
- Ensure point-to-point veterinary resources and universal, free access to post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) across urban and rural public health facilities.
- Mandate meticulous, standardized bite-reporting and incident investigation protocols with case definitions, single-entry databases and requirements for corroborative evidence (medical records, photographs, CCTV where available).
- Dogs labelled as ‘aggressive’ must be inspected by people who have been scientifically trained in animal behaviour assessment.
- Constitute a Joint Monitoring Committee for interim oversight comprising veterinarians, AWBI/State ABC Committee representatives, recognised AWOs and independent scientific experts to certify feasibility of any proposed transfers and ensure humane SOPs are followed.
- Protect community caregivers and feeders from harassment and criminalization- formally integrate them into capture and post-operative monitoring programmes and provide liaison mechanisms with municipal services.
- Direct immediate financing and capacity-building assistance for humane shelter infrastructure, staff training, and independent audits of municipal animal-welfare operations.
- Promote data-driven digital tools for ABC planning, vaccination scheduling, and shelter management (centralised databases, mapping, and monitoring platforms).
- Implement public education programs (school-level and community) on animal behaviour, safe interactions, and reporting pathways for injured or aggressive animals.

Conclusion

A rapid administrative “fix” based on mass displacement or indiscriminate transfer of community dogs risks undermining statutory procedures, established humane population-management strategies, public-health goals and the welfare of millions of animals and caregivers. The Dog Lab, IISER Kolkata, reiterates its commitment to scientifically grounded, humane and legally compliant solutions, and respectfully but strongly requests the Hon’ble Court to reconsider and modify the impugned directions in accordance with the recommendations above.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of,

The Dog Lab,

IISER Kolkata.

Lab webpage: <https://sites.google.com/view/doglabiiserkolkata/home>

Annexure

Scientific publications on street dog behaviour, ecology, and welfare

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- The evidence against the use of culling for dog and cat ‘control’
- <https://www.icam-coalition.org/evidence-against-culling-dogs-and-cats/>
- World Health Organization on Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases (Rabies)

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