

MEDIA RELEASE

January 2024



Let's get a Woof Woof for the 2024 Australian Dog of the Year! Paw-stralians recognised for inspiring and making an impact in communities nationwide

It's not only humans being recognised for their outstanding achievements. Dogs are remarkable, inspiring and make a profound impact on society, too!

From Medical Assistance and Therapy Dogs to Conservation Detection and Palliative Care Dogs (and every honourable pooch in between), the **Puppy Tales Australian Dog of the Year** and **People's Choice Awards** recognise canine companions that represent the essence of the Australian doggo - love, courage, inspiration, assistance and fur-iendship.

"In its fourth year, the Puppy Tales Australian Dog of the Year Awards reminds us yet again how incredible dogs are!" said Kerry Martin, international award-winning pet photographer, author and founder of Puppy Tales, an online portal aimed at helping pet owners make the most of life with their dogs. "We see how ordinary fur-citizens from around Australia have helped their people, made a difference to others and be outstanding Paw-stralians in the communities that they live in."

The Puppy Tales Australian Dog of the Year is **Kali the German Shepherd** and the People's Choice Award recipient is **Heidi the Australian Cattle Dog x Koolie**.

Australian Dog of the Year

Kali, German Shepherd, VIC

'The Gentle, Trusted Therapy Dog'

Chosen Charity: [Animal Aid](#)

Almost 12yo Kali has worked with Sharyn Thompson for nearly 11 years as a Therapy Dog, helping children with literacy needs via Story Dogs Australia, supporting staff and patients in the Emergency Department, Cancer Care and the Ambulance Bay of Latrobe Regional Hospital and providing a furry shoulder to cry on in the 2020 bushfires in East Gippsland.



*Therapy Dog **Kali** at Latrobe Regional Hospital's Emergency Dept*

"When we first got there, I was putting the vest on Kali and a gentleman came up to us and asked, 'Can I pat your dog?' I said 'Of course, that's what she is there for.' He buried his face in her fur and cried. After a while, he said thank you and left. I went to sign in, in tears," said Sharyn.

Kali changed the life of a young girl who had a phobia of dogs. She was so scared of dogs that she couldn't even get out of the car. Six weeks later, she was happily walking beside Kali and playing recall with her at the park!

Kali represents DOGS Victoria at pet events and presentations, such as Melbourne University Medical Students' information sessions. She also attended Parliament House for the Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms and Pet Shops) Bill 2016 hearings.

"Kali's nomination stood out in many ways," said Kerry. "Over a decade, Kali has done a lot to contribute to communities everywhere, from the Gippsland bushfires to Parliament to hospitals, schools and more. Her nomination was also uniquely written from Kali's perspective."



Heidi with Cathy's dad in palliative care

People's Choice Award

Heidi, Australian Cattle Dog x Koolie, VIC

'A Heart Dog Making A Difference'

Chosen Charity: [Domestic Animal Rescue & Education \(D.A.R.E Rescue\)](#)

Heidi is 13.5 years young and Cathy James' dearest friend, that one-in-a-lifetime Heart Dog. Heidi has numerous championship titles with Dogs Australia and lives to make people happy, comforting them in times of need.

Cathy's dad had extreme dementia and when he came home from the hospital for palliative care, Heidi was his constant companion.

"Heidi was unbelievable, not leaving dad's side in his last days. She plopped herself beside him and did not move, even when she got whacked by dad's hand (by accident). His hands would stop and rest on her. She calmed him. It was during COVID (lock down) and nobody could visit. Heidi was dad's constant companion and attended his funeral," said Cathy.

Sadly, Heidi has cancer and nearly died while having chemotherapy.

"Heidi is a survivor, the epitome of the classic Aussie Battler," says Cathy. "She is ballzy, stoic, headstrong, so incredibly loving and loved beyond life itself. Anyone who meets Heidi knows there's something incredibly special about her. Heidi and I live for each other. She is the dearest friend I will ever have."

"The decision (for People's Choice Award) is out of my control, but I'm thrilled for Heidi! She's a rescue that's gone to do some amazing things in the dog world but also helped her human and her dad in very difficult circumstances," said Kerry.

Pet Circle Paws-itive Change Award & Special Mentions

A bonus prize – the **Pet Circle Paws-itive Change Award** – goes to **Nessie** for her extraordinary conservation detection work to save endangered wildlife in South Australia.

Award judge and lead vet at Pet Circle, Dr Belinda Stancombe, said, "Nessie is absolutely pawsome! She's not just a canine crusader safeguarding endangered Hooded Plovers and Pygmy Blue Tongue lizards, but she is a Search and Rescue pro, tracking down missing humans and dogs, all while being the heart and soul of the volunteer team. Nessie, is the tail-wagging hero we all need and why we chose her for the Pet Circle Paws-itive Change Award."



Nessie the 'Conservation Dog Extraordinaire'

The Puppy Tales team found all the finalists and many other nominations to be amazing dogs but would like to give a **Special Mention** to finalists **Bella** and **Elkana Champ**.

"Bella's 16 years of service as a Search and Rescue dog is a phenomenal contribution. Search and Rescue is a difficult job for dog and handler and Bella has found and given closure to so many people and families," Kerry said.

"Elkana Champ is a Champ! He's had a broad range of achievements as a dog sports champion, a therapy dog and had a wonderful role in the life of his human, children, assisted living and others."

Amid exceptional entries, selecting a winner proved challenging for the Puppy Tales team, “for each Finalist is unique and makes the world a better place,” said Kerry. “We celebrate these amazing dogs who’ve been a support, best friend and true companion to their people and communities. They may not have an incredible talent, but there’s no doubt they have all changed the lives of humans. Every dog is a winner!”

Prizes and donations to charities

Winners, nominees and voters received **prizes worth more than \$10,000** including \$1,000 donation by Puppy Tales to the Winner’s preferred charity and \$250 to the People’s Choice’s nominated charity. Ten Voters in the People’s Choice Prize Draw also received a \$450 Puppy Tales Photography Gift Card.

Puppy Tales is thrilled and thankful to Pet Circle for gifting \$250 to the Winner, \$100 to the People’s Choice recipient and \$100 to the ‘Pet Circle Paws-itive Change Award’ recipient, Nessie.

You can read about the WINNERS [here](#) and other dogs selected in an incredible Finalist panel [here](#).

**** Nominations for Australian Dog of the Year 2025 are [OPEN NOW](#).**

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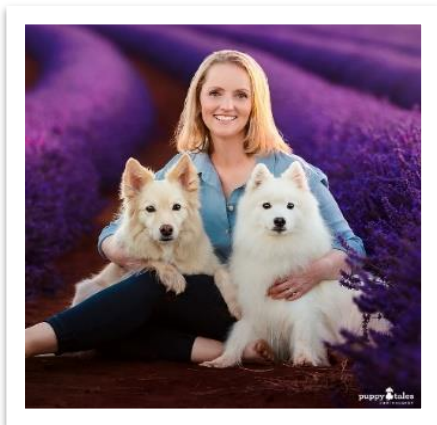
MEDIA CONTACT

Caroline Zambrano, PetJourno | petjourno@gmail.com | 0403 550 730

Kerry Martin, Puppy Tales | kerry@puppytales.com.au | 0405 131 016

PHOTOS: www.dropbox.com/sh/v7gxi1p9dp1hc8k/AAAsYpKnd1l_EsV2LKgZCIE8a?dl=0

For interviews and additional photos of 2024 winners and finalists, please contact Caroline or Kerry.



About Kerry Martin & Puppy Tales

Photodography™ you'll adore
Pet Travel & Adventures you'll Dig

Kerry Martin of Puppy Tales considers pets very much part of the family so lives this adage to help and inspire fellow pet parents to create incredible memories of a most pawsome life together! Kerry's Melbourne-based but is often on the road throughout Australia offering her award-winning dog photography.

She's known throughout the country for her seasonal photography experiences, most notably **Snow Dogs**, and her studio-based **Project Dogalogue**. Of the many national and international photography

awards she's received over the past decade, the highlights have been Master of Photography and Australian Pet/Animal Photographer of the Year. As she travels with her own adored furry companions Keiko & Summer, Kerry writes to share her knowledge and experiences of all things dog, photography and travel.

She published [Dog Tales of Australia](#) - a 290 pages bucket list guide of dog friendly travel and destinations throughout Australia - in 2023. Kerry also creates content for the **Puppy Tales** website, a social media community of over 500,000 and other publications to promote the wonderful relationships between dogs and people. All accompanied by stunning photography!

Puppy Tales is a business for good with a mission to make a paw-sitive difference. Puppy Tales operates as carbon negative; supports many local organisations through photography, fundraising and more; and plays a part in the global community's effort to protect the planet, take action on climate change and care for animals and wildlife.

To discover more, visit <https://puppytales.com.au>