2 FACTSHEET
Food Webs and Food Chains

All living things, including you, need energy to survive which we get from food. Most plants make their own food from the sun - a process called *photosynthesis*. Animals however cannot produce their own food so have to eat other animals or plants to produce the energy they need to live. A *food chain* is a drawing that shows who-eats-what in the environment.

What is a food web?

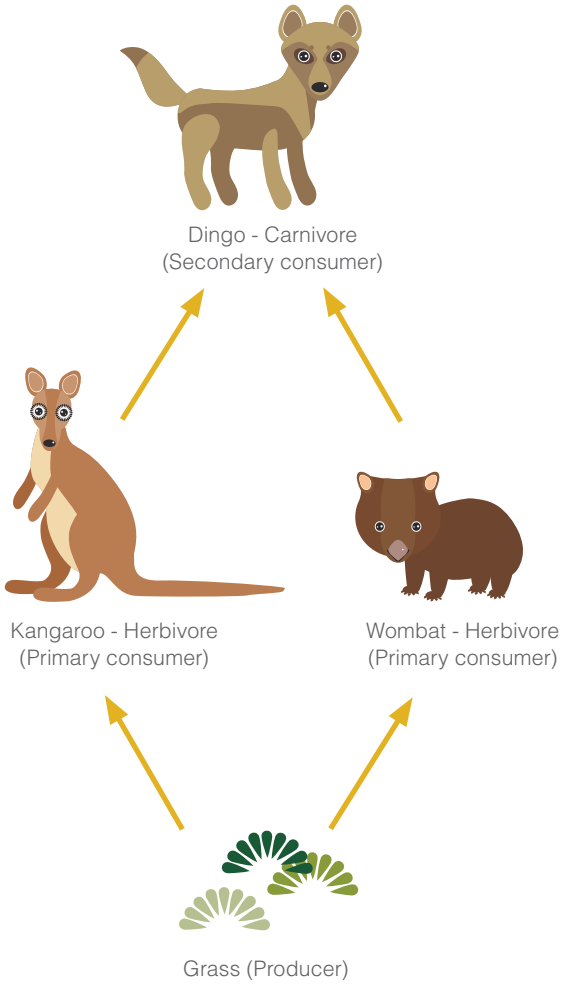
Most animals are part of more than one food chain. When connected together these food chains form a food web.

Parts of a food chain

A food chain always starts with a *producer* which is an organism that produces its own food. This is usually a green plant which uses the energy from the sun to make food. Animals are called *consumers* because they have to consume food to survive. There are three groups of consumers:

- *Herbivores* - animals that eat only plants (primary producers)
- *Carnivores* - animals that eat only other animals (carnivores that eat herbivores are called *secondary consumers*; carnivores that eat other carnivores are called *tertiary consumers*)
- *Omnivores* - animals that eat plants and animals

The final part of the food chain is the *decomposers* (bacteria and fungi) which feed on decaying matter.



Example of a simple food web

How does a food chain break?

When one of the links (species) in a food chain is no longer present (for example a species goes extinct or a feral animal takes over), the food chain breaks. Sometimes, this can cause other animals in the food chain to disappear as well and the whole ecosystem can become imbalanced or even collapse. For example, the number of dingos in Australia has been dramatically reduced due to hunting. As dingos are an apex predator (they sit right at the top of a food chain) their disappearance from certain areas has contributed to an unsustainable increase in kangaroo numbers which in some areas has resulted in grasslands being overgrazed.