

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Ms Meryl Pinque

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To:

The Animal Welfare Committee
NSW Legislative Council
Parliament House, Sydney
New South Wales 2000

Re: Public Submission – Inquiry into the Treatment of Dingoes in NSW National Parks

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to submit my strong support for the protection and proper recognition of dingoes (*Canis lupus dingo*) in New South Wales, and to urge this Committee to recommend a fundamental reform of the legal and policy frameworks that govern their management. The current treatment of dingoes — trapping, poisoning, and shooting under biosecurity pest legislation — is ecologically destructive, culturally unjust, and, as I will argue below, morally indefensible in light of what we now know about animal sentience.

1. Dingoes Are Sentient Beings with Inalienable Moral Rights

The most fundamental issue before this Inquiry is not one of pest management or agricultural policy — it is one of ethics. The scientific consensus on animal sentience is now unambiguous. Dingoes, like all mammals, possess a central nervous system, express complex emotional states, form social bonds, experience fear and pain, and demonstrate sophisticated cognitive capacities. They are not objects to be managed; they are subjects of their own lives.

Sentience — the capacity to feel, to suffer, and to have subjective experiences — is the morally relevant criterion upon which rights must be grounded. This principle, articulated by philosophers from Jeremy Bentham to Peter Singer and now increasingly reflected in modern legal frameworks around the world, leads to a clear conclusion: beings who can suffer possess an interest in not suffering, and that interest gives rise to rights that must not be arbitrarily overridden.

The dingo's sentience alone is therefore sufficient to establish that it holds fundamental, inalienable rights — including the right not to be subjected to cruel and gratuitous killing. No livestock protection interest, however economically significant, can justify the wholesale persecution of a sentient species. A policy that authorises the mass poisoning of dingoes with sodium fluoroacetate (1080), a substance that causes prolonged, agonising death, cannot be reconciled with any serious commitment to the moral standing of animals.

I urge the Committee to formally recognise dingo sentience as a foundational premise in its report, and to recommend that NSW legislation be amended to reflect this reality — including by extending explicit sentience provisions to dingoes in any forthcoming Animal Welfare Act.

2. The Legal Anomaly: Dingoes Are the Only Native Mammal Excluded from Protection

Dingoes are currently the only native mammals in New South Wales specifically exempted from the protections afforded by the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016. This exemption is not grounded in science — it is a legislative relic of agricultural lobbying that dates back to a time when dingoes were systematically misrepresented as invasive threats. This is both anomalous and indefensible.

Dingoes are a native species — they have inhabited this continent for at least 3,500 years and are deeply integrated into Australian ecosystems. Their classification as 'wild dogs' or 'pests' under biosecurity legislation is a deliberate mislabelling that obscures their true identity and has been used to justify lethal control programmes that would be unacceptable if applied to any other native mammal. This Inquiry has an opportunity to correct this injustice.

I call on the Committee to recommend the removal of dingoes from biosecurity pest lists and their inclusion under the full protections of the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016, consistent with their status as a native species.

3. Dingoes as Apex Predators: Their Ecological Role Is Irreplaceable

Beyond their moral status as sentient individuals, dingoes perform an indispensable ecological function as apex predators. A growing body of peer-reviewed research demonstrates that dingoes regulate ecosystems by naturally suppressing populations of introduced predators — particularly foxes and feral cats — which are among the leading drivers of Australia's devastating native wildlife extinction crisis.

In landscapes where dingoes are present, fox and cat activity is suppressed, allowing ground-dwelling mammals, birds, and reptiles to recover. The removal of dingoes from ecosystems through culling programmes therefore does not merely harm dingoes — it destabilises entire food webs and accelerates the decline of the very biodiversity that NSW's national parks exist to protect. Lethal control of dingoes is thus directly counterproductive to conservation objectives.

Current lethal methods — including 1080 poison baiting and trapping — are also indiscriminate. They kill non-target species, cause unnecessary suffering to the animals affected, and have consistently failed to deliver the long-term livestock protection outcomes they purport to achieve. Non-lethal alternatives — guardian animals, exclusion fencing, and guardian dogs — have been demonstrated internationally and in Australian contexts to be both effective and humane. The Committee should recommend a mandatory shift to these approaches.

4. Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Sovereignty Must Be Centred

For thousands of years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have maintained profound relationships with dingoes — relationships rooted in kinship, cultural significance, and ecological co-management. Dingoes hold totemic status across numerous language groups and are regarded as living cultural heritage, not as pests to

be eradicated. The systematic exclusion of Indigenous voices from dingo management policy is not only a failure of scientific best practice — it is a continuation of colonial dispossession.

The Minyurnai Rangers of the Bandjalang clan have demonstrated, through their groundbreaking Dingo Management Program on the Minyurnai Indigenous Protected Area, what is possible when Indigenous custodianship is combined with Western science. Their programme — tracking populations, studying diet and behaviour, and caring for dingoes on Country — is a model that should be expanded and formally integrated into NSW national parks management.

I urge the Committee to recommend that Indigenous communities be recognised as primary decision-makers in dingo management within their Country, that traditional ecological knowledge be given equal weight alongside scientific expertise in policy development, and that funding be directed to supporting Indigenous-led conservation programmes.

5. Genetic Identity: Dingoes Are Not 'Wild Dogs'

A critical issue for this Inquiry is the deliberate conflation of dingoes with 'wild dogs'. This rhetorical device has long been used to deny dingoes their species identity and to justify lethal control that the community would not otherwise tolerate. The genetic and morphological evidence clearly distinguishes dingoes from feral domestic dogs and from hybrids. Management policy must reflect this distinction.

I call on the Committee to recommend that NSW adopt a clear, science-based definition of dingoes, that population genetics be used to guide management decisions, and that dingoes be referred to and treated as the distinct native species they are — not misclassified as 'wild dogs' in legislation, policy, or communications.

6. Summary of Recommendations

I respectfully urge the Committee to recommend that the NSW Government:

1. Formally recognise dingo sentience in legislation and use this recognition as the basis for granting dingoes full legal protections as sentient native animals with inalienable interests in their own welfare;
2. Remove dingoes from biosecurity pest legislation and include them within the full scope of the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016;
3. Immediately suspend all lethal dingo management within NSW national parks, pending the development of a new, humane and evidence-based management framework;
4. Mandate the use of non-lethal livestock protection methods — including guardian animals, exclusion fencing, and targeted deterrence — in place of poisoning, trapping, and shooting;
5. Establish Indigenous communities as primary co-managers of dingoes on their Country, with dedicated funding and legislative recognition of Indigenous-led conservation programmes;

6. Adopt a science-based definition of dingoes that clearly distinguishes them from feral dogs and hybrids, and end the use of the misleading 'wild dog' classification;
7. Commission independent research into dingo population genetics and ecological function to inform future policy.

Australia prides itself on its unique natural heritage. The dingo is one of its most iconic and ecologically vital native animals. It is also a being with feelings, relationships, and a profound interest in living free from suffering. The time has come to extend to this species the legal protections it deserves — not only as a keystone of Australian ecosystems and Indigenous cultures, but as a sentient creature with the most fundamental of rights.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry and trust that its work will mark a genuine turning point in the relationship between NSW and its dingoes.

Yours sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your Address]

[City, State, Postcode]

[Email Address]