

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Re Dingoes in National Parks in NSW

Currently dingoes are the only native mammals specifically exempt from protection under the Biodiversity Conservation Act, allowing them to be trapped, poisoned and shot across New South Wales National Parks. However, this old law is not scientifically supported and does more damage to the protection of wildlife in National Parks. I would like to see an end to dingo killing within New South Wales National Parks to protect the ecological function of dingoes and support biodiversity conservation.

Current dingo management policies are largely based on outdated genetic research using only 23 genetic markers. Contemporary studies now use up to 195,000 markers and indicate that overwhelmingly, Australia's wild-living canids are dingoes, with hybridisation relatively uncommon in stable, undisturbed populations. In New South Wales, more than three-quarters of sampled wild canids showed over 93% contemporary dingo ancestry.

Research indicates that lethal control methods such as poisoning, trapping and shooting can disrupt stable dingo pack structures, increasing social instability and the likelihood of interbreeding with domestic dogs. Modern conservation science increasingly recognises that ecological function - including the role of dingoes as apex predators - is an important consideration alongside genetics when assessing wildlife populations.

Dingoes differ from domestic dogs in several important ways, including their ecological role, social structure, breeding patterns, and behaviour. Australia does not have an established continent-wide population of feral domestic dogs living independently across ecosystems, and it is now widely understood that the wild canids occupying these landscapes are dingoes performing important ecological functions.

Dingoes are Australia's only native canid and are recognised as an important apex predator and keystone species.

Dingoes regulate populations of kangaroos and wallabies, reducing grazing pressure on landscapes.

Dingoes eradicate introduced goats, reducing pressure on vegetation.

Dingoes suppress, and in some cases eradicate, foxes through territorial competition and predation easing pressure on smaller native wildlife.

Dingoes suppress introduced cats through territorial competition and predation easing pressure on smaller native wildlife.

Research suggests that stable dingo populations may suppress fox populations more effectively than poison baiting programs alone. Dingoes also contribute to the suppression of pigs, reducing pressure on landscapes. The presence of dingoes influences the behaviour and movement of herbivores and other animals, reducing pressure on vegetation communities. The removal of apex predators can destabilise ecosystems, contributing to vegetation decline, habitat degradation and increased pressure on threatened species.

Greater involvement of Cultural Custodians in decision-making and place-based management regarding dingoes in National Parks to ensure the cultural significance of dingoes is reflected in legislation and management.

Dingoes hold deep cultural significance for many Cultural Custodians across New South Wales and the wider continent. Dingoes are connected to stories, dance, art, lore, kinship systems and cultural responsibilities to Country. Many Cultural Custodians consider dingoes to be protectors, teachers and part of healthy Country. The 2023 First Nations Dingo Forum brought together 100 Traditional Owners from 20 nations across Australia and led to the development of the National First Nations Dingo Declaration. The declaration calls for a new approach centred around “Caring for Dingoes on Country” and greater involvement of Cultural Custodians in dingo management.

Oral histories and archaeological research show that Cultural Custodians buried companion dingoes, with evidence that these animals were given intentional burials consistent with ancestral or ceremonial practices.

Financial support and extension services for landholders surrounding National Parks to implement non-lethal coexistence strategies, ensuring their interests are protected and dingoes can be maintained in the environment.

Current management programs relies on lethal control methods including 1080 poison baiting, trapping and shooting. Lethal control can disrupt stable dingo family groups and pack structures. Disruption of dingo family structures may increase the likelihood of dingoes breeding with domestic dogs. Removal of dingoes causes trophic cascade.

Removal of dingoes from ecosystems leads to increases in introduced predators and herbivore pressure. Trapping of dingoes raises serious welfare concerns for the time the animal remains in the trap, unable to access food, water or shelter. Current management programs do not adequately reflect contemporary ecological science or cultural perspectives relating to dingoes. Current management of dingoes in National Parks is largely focused on agricultural protection not biodiversity

outcomes. No funding is allocated for research and development into non-lethal coexistence strategies for agricultural properties neighbouring National Parks. Many Cultural Custodians report feeling excluded from decisions relating to dingo management on their Country. Dingo management including opportunities for incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and leadership in dingo conservation in national parks.

Livestock Guardian Dogs have been proven effective at reducing or eliminating predation on livestock by dingoes. They also provide other benefits to landholders including deterring macropods (kangaroos and wallabies) from grazing paddocks, protection from foxes and protection from birds of prey.

There is widespread anecdotal evidence from landholders that donkeys are effective guardians against canid predators. There is a strong opportunity for the New South Wales Government to support more robust trials into the use of livestock guardian donkeys to support properties neighbouring National Parks.

Investment is needed into research, development and scaling of coexistence strategies in New South Wales that ensures landholder interests are protected and dingoes can be retained in the environment to play their important ecological role.