

**INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW
SOUTH WALES**

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Dingoes and their elimination: A shared trauma of loss.

Dingoes hold a significant place in the spiritual and cultural practices of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. They feature in dreamtime stories and ceremonies, on cave paintings and rock carvings

Conservationists and researchers heavily advocate for dingo protection because they act as essential apex predators. Dingoes play a vital role in regulating the ecosystem by naturally hunting invasive pests like foxes and feral cats, which in turn protects vulnerable ground-nesting native birds and small mammals

Dingoes' morphology has remained the same for the past 3,500 years, which suggests that artificial selection has never taken place. (The Dingo Debate: Origins, Behaviour and Conservation by Bradley Smith; CSIRO Publishing)

Dingoes are an apex predators, keeping natural systems in balance. They also prey on some feral species, which in turn has a major benefit for native wildlife. (Queensland Government Department of Environment and Science)

Dingoes live for around 10 years and start breeding once they reach the age of one or two. Unlike pet dogs, dingoes can only breed once a year, with litters of around four to six pups born in places like hollow logs or under rock ledges. (Queensland Government Department of Environment and Science)

Dingoes hunt introduced predators like red foxes and feral cats which directly reduces the hunting pressure on vulnerable native species.

Saving Small Mammals: Areas with active dingo populations show higher survival rates for critically endangered small mammals like bilbies, bettongs, and dunnarts.

Regulating Large Herbivores Dingoes manage the populations of large herbivores, including native kangaroos and introduced feral goats or pigs.

Vegetation Recovery: By keeping herbivore numbers in check, dingoes prevent overgrazing, which allows native plants, shrubs, and seedlings to recover mitigating overgrazing which in turn leads to improved soil health.

Case Study: The Ecological Divide of the Dingo Fence

The [Dingo Barrier Fence](#) spans over 5,600 kilometres across Australia. It is the longest continuous artificial environmental barrier in the world. Originally built in the 1880s to separate sheep-grazing zones in the south-east from wild dogs in the north and west, it has inadvertently created a massive ecological experiment.

Decades of monitoring, including 32 years of [UNSW satellite data](#), reveal stark contrasts on either side of the mesh barrier:

	Inside the Fence (No Dingoes / S-E Australia)	Outside the Fence (Dingoes Present / Arid Interior)
Herbivore Control	Kangaroo, goat, and emu populations frequently surge unchecked.	Kangaroos are kept at low, stable densities by active predation.

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Vegetation Health	Massive herbivore herds cause severe overgrazing, destroying native plant cover.	Less grazing pressure allows native seedlings, grasses, and shrubs to thrive.
Landscape & Soil	Overgrazing strips the land, leading to lower levels of soil nitrogen and phosphorus, driving erosion.	Roots from healthy plant life stabilise the soil and keep dune landscapes intact.
Invasive Mammals	Feral cats and red foxes multiply rapidly without a dominant top predator.	Dingoes hunt and exclude foxes and cats, suppressing their numbers.
Native Biodiversity	Small mammals like bilbies, numbats, and hopping mice face heavy predation and are heavily threatened.	Small native species survive better because invasive predators are suppressed.

The Conflict: Dingo Conservation vs. Livestock Farming

The ongoing tension between conservationists and the agricultural sector is one of Australia's most complex environmental debates.

The Farmers' Perspective: Loss of Livelihood

- **Livestock Predation:** Dingoes harass, maim, and kill farm livestock. While cattle are large enough to generally withstand them, sheep are highly vulnerable to catastrophic attacks.
- **Economic Strain:** A single pack can kill or critically injure dozens of sheep in one night, costing farmers thousands of dollars in lost stock and veterinary bills.
- **Psychological Distress:** Dealing with the aftermath of horrific stock attacks causes significant emotional stress for rural producers.
- **Lobbying for Control:** Many farming communities heavily rely on government-funded culling, bounties, and 1080 poison baiting to keep their lands viable.

The Ecological Perspective: Breakdown of Function

- **Flawed Pest Control:** Conservationists argue that indiscriminate lethal trapping and baiting break up stable dingo pack structures.
- **Increased Damage:** When experienced alpha dingoes are killed, younger, uncoordinated packs form. These younger dogs are less capable of hunting large wild prey (like kangaroos) and often target easier, domestic livestock instead.
- **Incentivising Slaughter:** Government bounty programs (offering up to \$100 per scalp) encourage the mass killing of genetically pure dingoes, driving regional populations to the brink of extinction.

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The Middle Ground: Coexistence and Cattle Farming

The conflict is much lower in cattle production. Many rangeland cattle graziers report by hunting feral pigs, goats, and kangaroos, dingoes eliminate the livestock's main food competitors, leaving more pasture available for the cattle.

The **Aboriginal cultural perspectives** and the National Dingo Declaration.

Aboriginal Cultural Perspectives

The relationship between First Nations peoples and the dingo spans thousands of years, deeply embedded in history, family, and law:

- **The "Boss of Country":** The dingo is viewed as an apex cultural authority. Many Indigenous groups hold that the dingo is the natural regulator or "boss" responsible for keeping ecosystems healthy and in balance.
- **Kinship and Family:** Dingoes are treated as literal family members and kin. Historic records and archaeological sites reveal that dingoes lived alongside people as companions, shared camps, protected families from malevolent spirits, and were even buried with the same rituals as humans.
- **Dreamtime and Totems:** In First Nations cosmology, dingoes are sacred creator beings who shaped the topography, carved out waterways, and mapped ancestral Songlines across the continent. They serve as vital clan totems that link people directly to their country.
- **Shared Trauma:** The declaration explicitly notes that dingoes share a parallel history with First Nations peoples, enduring a "shared experience of atrocities and journey of survival" against government-backed eradication efforts.

The National First Nations' Dingo Declaration

The [National First Nations' Dingo Declaration](#) was spearheaded by Indigenous advocacy groups, including [Dingo Culture](#) founder Sonya Takau, alongside representatives from more than 20 First Nations groups.

The declaration serves as a unified political and environmental manifesto with clear mandates: [\[1, 2\]](#)

- **An Immediate Ban on Killing:** The central directive states: *"We do not, and have never, approved the killing of dingoes. Killing dingoes is killing family."* It demands an immediate, absolute halt to government-funded lethal control—including trapping, shooting, and [1080 poison baiting](#)—calling the practice a form of "genocide" against their kin. [\[1, 2, 3, 4, 5\]](#)
- **Rejection of the Term "Wild Dog":** The declaration rejects treating dingoes under legislation meant for stray domestic or feral pests. They point out that the term "wild dog" is a deceptive label used by governments to justify slaughtering genetically pure native dingoes. [\[, 2\]](#)
- **A New Management Model:** Signatories advocate for a new framework called **"Caring for Dingoes on Country."** This merges traditional ecological knowledge with Western conservation science to focus entirely on peaceful, non-lethal coexistence with the agricultural sector. [\[, 2\]](#)

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- **Inclusion in Decision-Making:** For over a century, traditional owners have been entirely sidelined from environmental and agricultural policy regarding wild canids. The declaration invokes the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)* to demand that First Nations people have a mandatory, leading voice at the legislative table. [, [2](#)]