

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: The Hon Tim Bull

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Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Animal Welfare Committee

By Tim Bull MP – State Member for Gippsland East

Inquiry into the Treatment and Cultural and Ecological Significance of Dingoes in National Parks in New South Wales

Executive Summary

This submission supports the continued protection of dingoes in appropriate conservation landscapes while arguing that strong and effective control measures remain essential where national parks adjoin productive agricultural land. It draws on observations and experience from eastern Victoria and argues that policy must balance ecological and cultural considerations with livestock welfare, agricultural sustainability and the lived experience of farming communities.

(a) Genetic Status of Dingoes

Recent genetic research has significantly altered understanding of dingo populations in south-eastern Australia. The 2025 study led by Lachie Scarsbrook and colleagues identified widespread admixture between dingoes and European dogs, including kangaroo hounds and Australian Cattle Dogs. The study found widespread interbreeding across Australia and concluded that almost all dingoes, particularly those from south-eastern Australia, experienced admixture with European dogs. This submission considers that the evidence demonstrates extensive hybridisation throughout south-eastern Australia and puts to rest the previous assumptions of some that contemporary populations are genetically pure dingoes. Management policy should be informed by contemporary science and genetic realities. However, the point should be made, the farming community is not overly concerned with genetic percentages or indeed what these animals are called – their primary concern is that they kill stock and impact their viability and must be controlled.

(b) Legislative, Regulatory and Policy Frameworks

Management frameworks should recognise both the ecological role of dingoes and the substantial impacts that predation can impose on farming communities. Policies should support conservation outcomes in remote landscapes while maintaining strong management powers and practical control tools at the public-private land interface.

(c) Ecological Role of Dingoes

Dingoes play a role within Australian ecosystems and can contribute to ecological processes in large conservation landscapes. This submission does not advocate eradication. Rather, it supports protection of dingoes in suitable bushland and remote landscapes while recognising that targeted management is critical where populations impact agricultural enterprises.

(d) Cultural Significance for First Nations Communities

The cultural significance of dingoes to Aboriginal communities should be recognised and respected. Indigenous knowledge has an important role to play in future management. In East Gippsland, members of the Indigenous community have been employed in wild dog management programs, demonstrating that practical management and cultural knowledge can operate together. Future policies should encourage Indigenous employment, leadership and participation in monitoring, research and management programs.

(e) Impact of Current Government Policies and Programs

The experience of many farmers in eastern Victoria is that recent reductions in control capacity have contributed to increased wild dog activity. A significant concern raised by producers is the cessation of aerial baiting programs. Farmers consistently report that following the discontinuation of aerial baiting two years ago, sightings of wild dogs have increased, stock attacks have become more frequent and wild dog activity has expanded across many farming districts. Many producers believe the removal of aerial baiting has contributed to a significant increase in wild dog numbers this year. This lived experience of farmers suggests the reduction of landscape-scale control tools has coincided with increased predation pressure.

Departmental controllers reportedly remove between 400 and 500 wild dogs annually in eastern Victoria. When baiting programs are considered, a conservative estimate places total departmental removals at approximately a further 600 animals per year. Around 8,000 baits are reportedly laid annually. Evidence from landholders and departmental doggers suggests that private landholders collectively remove substantially more animals than government controllers. Applying conservative assumptions, total annual removals may exceed 1,500 animals. Yet many farmers continue to report increased sightings, increased attacks and persistent wild dog activity. This raises legitimate questions regarding lower Department population estimates and suggests further transparent population research is required.

Another important issue is reporting. Many farmers no longer report every stock loss, sighting or attack because they have lost confidence that reporting will result in meaningful management responses. Despite this apparent under-reporting, official reports of attacks

and wild dog activity have increased in many districts. This suggests the true scale of the problem may be significantly greater than government records indicate.

In relation to controls, many protection advocates argue fencing is the answer – it is not. Yes, it is a handy tool, but should only be one tool. Many farms have kilometres of fencing and one fallen branch can bring down an entire network of electric fencing. This happens far too regularly to be relied upon, especially when Departmental guidelines do not allow tree-length clearing along public private boundaries (on the public side). Protection animals can assist but again do not prevent attacks. The reality is dog numbers need controlling on the interface with private land.

Livestock losses remain a substantial economic and emotional burden on farming families. Previous estimates have placed livestock losses in Victoria at between \$10 million and \$20 million annually, with national impacts estimated at approximately \$89 million.

(f) Indigenous Knowledge and Leadership

There are opportunities to strengthen Indigenous participation in dingo management. Traditional ecological knowledge, local landscape understanding and cultural perspectives can contribute to monitoring, conservation and management outcomes. Programs that support Indigenous employment and leadership in dingo and wild dog management should be encouraged.

(g) Other Related Matters

Animal welfare discussions must recognise the welfare of both dingoes and livestock. Significant public attention is often directed towards the welfare impacts of control measures, but less attention is given to the suffering experienced by livestock subjected to predation. Farmers regularly report severe injuries to sheep and calves, including prolonged suffering before death. A balanced animal welfare framework must acknowledge these impacts and be aware that there is considerably increased stock suffering without controls.

The strongest case for active management exists at the interface between public land and productive farmland. The evidence from eastern Victoria suggests that effective control programs remain essential to protect livestock, support farming families and maintain confidence in broader conservation objectives.

Recommendations

1. Maintain strong wild dog and dingo control programs at the public-private land interface.
2. Investigate the reinstatement or implementation of aerial baiting programs where appropriate and supported by evidence.
3. Continue protection of animals in suitable remote conservation landscapes.

4. Commission transparent and independent population monitoring and research.
5. Ensure policy settings reflect contemporary genetic research regarding hybridisation.
6. Recognise livestock welfare impacts as a central consideration in management decisions.
7. Expand Indigenous participation, employment and leadership opportunities in dingo management.
8. Improve reporting systems and rebuild farmer confidence in government response mechanisms.
9. Support landholders through practical tools including baiting, trapping, exclusion fencing and coordinated control programs.

Conclusion

Dingoes have ecological and cultural significance and should continue to form part of Australia's natural environment. However, practical management remains essential where populations threaten livestock, animal welfare and the viability of farming enterprises. The evidence from eastern Victoria supports continued protection in suitable conservation landscapes in the deeper bush, combined with strong, targeted control measures on the farming interface. Effective management is not a choice between conservation and agriculture. It requires both.

I would be happy to appear at any hearings if required.



Brodrribb River primary producer Ian Webb is demanding urgent state action and the return of the wild dog bounty after tracking local stock losses totalling thousands of dollars.

Farmer bills Parks Victoria

East Gippsland's burgeoning wild dog population has come too close for comfort for Brodrribb River farmer Ian Webb, who has taken the extraordinary step of billing the State Government for stock losses.

Fed up with persistent attacks on his livestock, Mr Webb last week presented a \$4500 invoice to the Orbost office of Parks Victoria. The bill accounts for 21 lambs killed, a mauled ewe and a highly stressed ewe that subsequently aborted her lamb.

Alongside the invoice, Mr Webb submitted

a formal statutory declaration detailing the incidents, backed by photographic evidence of the predators.

Among the evidence is a photograph of a massive yellow wild dog shot on the morning of May 22, following a raid on May 18-19 where a pack slaughtered 20 lambs. Local shooters reportedly waited through the night to down the animal.

"After this attack I locked up the sheep overnight and some of the dogs got within 200 metres of the house looking for the sheep," Mr Webb stated in his statutory declaration.

Further photographic evidence shows another two wild dogs shot on the property on March 28.

Mr Webb warned the crisis will continue to escalate across the region without urgent intervention.

"This situation will just get worse and worse," Mr Webb said.

"The dogs are breeding up, they need more staff, more trappers out in the Park. The wild dog bounty should be still on."

The Brodrribb River incursions reflect a wider problem across East Gippsland, with

producers in Glenaladale and Swifts Creek also reporting significant wild dog activity.

Mr Webb believes the population boom is being directly sustained by current public land management practices.

"I don't blame them, it's not the wild dogs' fault, is it? I blame Parks for feeding the dogs and letting the numbers breed up," he said.

"Parks are the ones shooting horses and deer and leaving them in the bush. Everything shot should be shifted – either carted out or buried."

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VFF applauds sensible shift on firearm limits

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) has welcomed the Victorian Government's decision not to proceed with a cap on firearm numbers for primary producers, describing it as a sensible and practical outcome for regional farmers who use firearms as an agricultural tool of trade.

VFF acting president Peter Star said the decision recognised the realities of farming and the legitimate role firearms play in daily agricultural businesses across Victoria. He noted that Victorian farmers use firearms as an essential tool for pest animal control, livestock protection, and maintaining leading animal welfare and biosecurity standards. The decision not to introduce an arbitrary cap on firearm numbers is a sensible one that acknowledges those

operational needs.

Mr Star said the VFF had worked throughout the review process to ensure farmers and regional communities had a strong voice in discussions around the proposed reforms. He stated the VFF was the only organisation directly representing farmers during consultation on the rapid review, making it a point that any reforms must recognise the unique needs of agriculture and regional Victoria.

While the VFF fully supports measures that strengthen community safety and keep firearms out of the wrong hands, Mr Star emphasised that changes must not place unreasonable costs, red tape, or administrative burdens on legitimate firearm users.

Farmers understand the importance of responsible firearm ownership and

maintaining strong safety standards, and the industry fully backs the need to keep the community safe. However, any new requirements around licensing, storage, training, or compliance must remain practical, proportionate, and workable for people living and working in rural areas.

According to the VFF, important questions still remain around reclassification, ongoing competency requirements, licensing costs, and how some of the review's recommendations will continue engaging with the government to ensure farmers remain part of the conversation and that future reforms are developed with genuine consultation, rather than just being lumped on regional communities.

Testing times for farm dams

Why dam repairs often fail is a critical question for East Gippsland farmers currently looking to secure their water storage capacity.

According to Agriculture Victoria land management extension officer Clem Sturm-fels, dam repairs are often high-risk and expensive, and they should only be undertaken when the cause of the failure and the repair options are thoroughly understood.

Mr Sturm-fels advises that repairs should only be attempted on larger, well-constructed dams. Understanding the dam's history, including who built it, what equipment was used, and how it has performed over time, is essential before any work begins on the property.

Poor construction, unsuitable materials, inadequate compaction, and soil contamination are among the most common causes of dam failure. While poor maintenance can contribute to the issue, it is rarely the primary factor. Diagnosing the exact cause can be complex, requiring landholders to determine whether the leak is through the wall or the floor, and whether it is isolated or widespread. Thorough inspections should ideally be carried out across winter, spring, and summer.

Where possible, landholders should inspect the dam bank for seepage, subsidence, cracks, or tunnels, and check the waterline for whirlpools or surface turbulence. Examining downstream areas for soft ground or lush vegetation can also indicate seepage. Landholders can use a steel probe or crowbar to test soil firmness in suspect areas, and watch for unusual signs such as bright yellow or very clear water, which may indicate tunnelling or unsuitable soil. Monitoring and photographing the site regularly will track changes in water levels, and careful examinations should be made of any breach in the dam wall for signs of unsuitable materials like sand, gravel, or topsoil.

Soil testing is a crucial part of any repair effort, and samples should be taken from the failure site, surrounding areas, and potential borrow pits. Basic soil assessments, including texture, aggregate stability, and shrinkage, can be undertaken by landholders using simple guidelines available on the Agriculture Victoria website.

Repair options depend heavily on the location, cause, and severity of the failure. Solutions may include reworking existing materials, sourcing suitable material nearby,

or using additives like lime, gypsum, bentonite, or specialised products such as sealants or membranes. Expert advice should always be sought before using manufactured products, as locally sourced materials are often more effective.

Dam repair works usually involve excavating the site for safe machinery access, preparing the foundations to optimise bonding, and ensuring repair materials are moist and placed in layers not exceeding 100 millimetres. Each layer must be compacted with multiple passes of a padfoot roller, ensuring the total depth and width of repair materials exceed 300 millimetres, with final slopes shaped to a maximum gradient of 3:1.

Repairing dams also presents significant health and safety risks, including unstable soil, steep slopes, machinery hazards, and exposure to dust. All works should be carried out by qualified and experienced personnel with safety protocols and reliable emergency communication in place. Permits or licences may also be required, and landholders are encouraged to contact their local council planning officer and regional water authority for guidance before commencing works.



Local farmers are increasingly relying on prominent gate signage to warn the community as wild dog packs venture closer to regional properties and family homes.

Farmer slams public land management for sustaining wild dog numbers

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According to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) website, the Victorian Deer Control Program maintains that culling leftovers do not drive wild dog numbers.

The department's official guidelines state that evidence suggests wild dogs are specialist hunters preferring freshly killed food, making them unlikely to be attracted by older carcasses. DEECA asserts that deer control remains unlikely to provide a regular or reliable enough food source to sustain population growth.

However, Mr Webb strongly disputed the department's position, noting he has witnessed dog numbers build into packs of up to four in his immediate area.

"We don't really want to bait, we don't want to kill the natives like the quolls and the potoroos," he said, adding that local wallaby numbers appeared to have plummeted.

"I have two dogs of my own. I work them, I tie them up and I feed them. There are dogs in the Park, they're feeding them and then they're killing my sheep. The only difference is I tie

my dogs up."

The proximity of the apex predators has also raised safety concerns within the tight-knit Brodribb River settlement, where the sound of nighttime howling has become regular. Mr Webb noted a recent incident where local children yabbing in the area fled after spotting four wild dogs tracking behind them.

"These dogs are 300 metres from the three or four houses around there. You don't need them stalking kids. Who will take the responsibility if a kid gets killed?" Mr Webb said.

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