

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

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Inquiry into Dingo Management in NSW National Parks

To the NSW Legislative Council Animal Welfare Committee,

I am writing a formal submission regarding the current Inquiry into Dingo Management in New South Wales National Parks.

As an Australian conservationist and nature refuge landowner I make a concerted effort to read published scientific literature pertaining to dingoes and not rely on social media for my (mis)information. I've penned some of my major points below as to why dingoes **should not be given protection within National Parks** and each of these points is backed by published scientific literature.

A 'naturalised' animal is very different to 'native' and dingoes do not fit any legitimate criteria to be considered native to the Australian continent. The arbitrary date of their presence in Australia before 1788 means nothing on an evolutionary time scale. Taxonomists clearly agree dingoes are a breed of dog, *Canis lupus familiaris*, albeit an older breed of dog compared to the many breeds we know today, but current legislation should not be changed to allow an introduced apex placental predator to roam entirely wild, unchecked and protected within Australia's national park networks. Nor do I support recent publications aiming to reclassify them as a distinct species (*Canis dingo* or *Canis lupus dingo*). Extensive taxonomic, reproductive, and genetic studies over many decades continue to support them as a *breed of dog*, and the recent, highly vocal social media push for distinct species status is without rigorous scientific basis or an understanding of the internationally recognised rules for taxonomy and nomenclature.

As a private landowner, I regularly witness the profoundly negative damage introduced canids inflict upon vulnerable, truly native Australian species. No-one disputes the fact that dingoes primarily eat native mammals. It is crucial to remember that native Australian mammals have no evolutionary history of dealing with canids. Dingoes are *introduced* predators that do not "replace" extinct marsupial predators, instead, they likely caused the extinction of these unique animals on mainland Australia shortly after their arrival with humans as domesticated companions. If their arrival made two top level predators extinct, imagine the negative impact they have on the prey of those extinct predators. Quite simply they are annihilating them. As a placental animal, dingo hunting strategies and breeding capabilities are highly advanced compared to native marsupials, making them an additional threat to a continent already grappling with the world's current worst rate of mammal extinction, drastically changing environments, human population growth and impacts of other invasive species.

Furthermore, the argument that dingoes provide a positive ecological benefit by controlling foxes and cats has been heavily challenged by long-term ecological studies. The trophic cascade/mesopredator release arguments have long been shown to be bottom-up (ie climate driven) in Australia, rather than apex predator-driven (top-down). Long term prey/diet studies indicate dingoes have a negative impact on Australian native species, particularly vulnerable/threatened species with small home ranges and limited mobility. They don't eat cats, so the argument that they suppress cat numbers by eating the same prey is an idiotic, circular argument if your passion is protecting the native wildlife *both* species are eating. There is slightly more evidence dingoes have an impact on fox numbers, but this is another introduced canid, so the argument is still problematic for native wildlife conservation.

The push to recognise dingoes as a distinct species or elevate their protection is heavily biased and disconnected from reality and indicates a lack of understanding of accepted species concepts. That same research group recently published a spate of population-level studies and tried to apply their conclusions to species-level decisions (eg pancreatic amylase gene study - an analogy would be stating celiac or gluten-free humans are distinct species from non-celiac humans) and misrepresented their results on social media alongside each publication. Under the most widely recognized biological concept, their ability to easily and readily produce fertile offspring with domestic and other feral dog breeds remains the strongest argument against this major taxonomic change, but is certainly not the only one. As a descendent of dog breeds domesticated over and

over by humans along their entire migrational route from their Grey Wolf starting point then moving through Asia, the name *Canis lupus familiaris* firmly stands. Furthermore, robust genetic research (such as studies sampling 3,600x dogs Australia-wide) shows massive levels of breeding between dingoes and other dog breeds, contrary to the smaller, less rigorous SNP study the pro-dingo camp is currently promoting as fact. The SNP study was significantly biased and flawed in sampling design with only 300 dingo samples taken and these 300 samples were the purest dingo populations that research group could find, so the study question and subsequent conclusions in the paper are very different to what is being promoted on social media. Sure they used lots of SNP's (FYI SNP's used to be referred to as 'junk' DNA), but if the sampling is inherently biased then the results clearly are too. All Australian dingoes can be traced back to one female dog and the Australian dingo population is extremely inbred with a high mutational load due to this inbreeding. This is what these low-level population studies indicate, certainly not a species-level distinction. Breeding with modern European lineages of dog is potentially saving this breed from it's mutations. Estimates of the breed being 10,000-18,000years old are genetic bottlenecks that occurred long before their arrival in Australia as is evidenced by no dingoes or dingo bones found in Tasmania and the presence of both the Tasmanian Tiger (now extinct due to humans) and Tasmanian Devil.

The theory that dingoes have been completely free-living on the Australian continent since their arrival with humans is also not realistic. It's well documented that before British colonisation dingoes lived successfully alongside First Nations Peoples since their arrival ~3,300yrs ago with Asian seafarers. Culturally they quickly became highly prized possessions that often indicated rank or social importance, particularly for women. That all changed 250 - 50 years ago depending on geographic location and 'settlement' dates, when indigenous peoples were forcibly moved off Country into missions and dingoes were left to fend completely for themselves for the first time. Dingo impacts on native Australian wildlife have been profound in that time, and not in a positive way as indicated by the long-term studies. Dingoes are a danger to human life and K'gari, Qld remains one of the more publicly known controversial locations due to negative human interactions with dingoes, and this will increase as human visitation increases and dingo populations continue to expand. This same problem applies to all national parks where dingoes are afforded protections, as without appropriate management the numbers of this introduced apex predator continue to grow and thus negative human-dingo interactions will also increase.

Current dingo sanctuary facilities and pro-dingo research groups should focus on conserving dingoes as the breed of dog they are rather than continuing the misguided concept of "re-wilding", releasing and protecting them erroneously in the wild. Perhaps, moving forward, these privately run dingo sanctuaries might foster links between First Nations Peoples and their dogs?

I urge the committee to maintain practical, evidence-based management strategies that protect true Australian native wildlife that evolved here over tens of millions of years in complete isolation and exist nowhere else on the planet, rather than granting special protections to an introduced apex canid predator that our native animals have no adaptations for.

Sincerely,