

**Submission
No 72**

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Date Received: 26 June 2026

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Dingo Management in National Parks in New South Wales

Supporting landholders adjacent to national parks through investment in livestock guardian dogs and extension services

Summary of Key Points

- Landholders adjacent to national parks face real impacts from predation, including animal welfare impacts, business losses and pressure on producer wellbeing.
- On our property, lethal control did not provide reliable protection for sheep and lambs in the areas most exposed to predator pressure.
- A properly managed livestock guardian dog system has transformed our operation and allowed areas of the property to return to productive use.
- Livestock guardian dogs are not a quick fix. They require suitable dogs, careful bonding, secure fencing, practical management and long-term oversight.
- Government support should include practical education, demonstration sites, experienced mentors, funding for establishment costs, and ongoing extension support for producers where livestock guardian dogs are suitable.

Terms of Reference Addressed

This submission primarily addresses the terms of reference relating to current government policies and programs for dingo management in national parks, practical dingo management options, and related matters affecting landholders adjacent to national parks.

I do not seek to speak on behalf of First Nations communities or to make scientific claims about the genetic status of dingoes. I acknowledge that dingoes have ecological and cultural significance and that Indigenous knowledge and leadership should be central to conservation policy.

My submission focuses on a practical landholder experience: how livestock predation affects animal welfare, business viability and producer wellbeing, and how greater investment in livestock guardian dogs, supporting infrastructure and extension services could reduce livestock losses while also reducing reliance on broad-scale lethal control.

About My Experience

My name is Wayne Wayte, and I am the Station Manager of Ballandean Station, a 12,000-acre mixed sheep and cattle enterprise near Stanthorpe in southern Queensland. We run Dorper sheep, carrying up to 1,500 head at any one time. Thanks to the success of our guardian dog program, which has dramatically reduced stock losses, we now produce and sell our own award-winning lamb brand, Sundown Lamb.

Although my enterprise is located in southern Queensland, the issues described in this submission are directly relevant to NSW landholders operating beside national parks and conservation areas. The practical challenge is the same: livestock producers can carry significant costs from predator pressure near protected landscapes, while current support systems often focus more on lethal control than prevention and practical livestock protection systems.

Approximately 35 kilometres of the western boundary of Ballandean Station adjoins Sundown National Park, with Girraween National Park and Roberts Range also located nearby. As a result, we experience significant predation pressure from dingoes and other predators including foxes, pigs and eagles.

Landholders adjacent to national parks face real impacts from predation. Those impacts can affect productivity, profitability, animal welfare and the long-term viability of farming enterprises. These concerns should never be dismissed.

At the same time, I believe there is value in having practical discussions about the full range of tools available to producers. Different properties face different circumstances, and what works in one landscape may not work in another. For some producers, traditional control measures may remain an important part of managing predation. My experience has been that livestock guardian dogs can also play an essential role.

I understand firsthand the challenges faced by landholders operating alongside national parks. Predation can have serious economic, animal welfare and mental health impacts on farming families. Historically, approximately 4,000 acres of our property remained largely unused for more than 50 years because predator pressure made livestock production unviable. That is about one-third of the property. We tried all methods of lethal control to manage this issue, but it never made a significant difference.

I am making this submission because I believe governments need to do more to support landholders who bear the costs and risks associated with managing livestock near national parks. My experience has shown that livestock guardian dogs are an effective livestock protection system, but producers need practical support, funding and extension services to successfully adopt these approaches.

The Reality We Faced

In 2017 and 2018, our sheep enterprise suffered catastrophic losses.

Lamb survival rates sat at approximately 2 per cent. Losses were driven by predation from dingoes or wild dogs, foxes, feral pigs and birds of prey. The impact on the business was severe.

Like many producers, we invested considerable time and resources into lethal predator control. Despite these efforts, losses continued. The situation became financially unsustainable and placed significant stress on everyone involved in managing the enterprise.

The core issue was simple: lambs were vulnerable, and our existing management systems were not providing adequate protection during the period when they needed it most.

Changing Our Approach

In 2018, we began looking at the problem differently.

We stopped asking, "how can we remove predators?" and started asking, "how can we remove predator opportunity?"

This led us to livestock guardian dogs, specifically Maremma's.

The objective was straightforward: reduce opportunities for predation and improve livestock protection.

What appealed to me about Maremmas was their natural ability to bond with livestock, remain with the mob and actively deter predators through their presence. They are calm, territorial animals that work continuously with stock and provide protection where it is needed most.

However, one of the most important lessons I have learned is that livestock guardian dogs are not a quick fix. Success depends on ensuring the right system around them.

Building a Working System

Using guardian dogs is an ancient practice that has been used by land managers to protect livestock for thousands of years.

The effectiveness of livestock guardian dogs depends on selecting suitable animals, having appropriate infrastructure and maintaining strong management practices.

We use working-line Maremma's from proven livestock-guarding parents. Puppies are raised with livestock from an early age and undergo a structured bonding process. Bonding is critical. In my experience, it is the single biggest factor determining success or failure.

The dogs must identify livestock as their family and their responsibility. Poor bonding, excessive human interaction or inadequate supervision can compromise outcomes.

Appropriate infrastructure is equally important. Guardian dogs rely on secure fencing, appropriate paddock design, dedicated bonding areas and management systems that keep them with the livestock they are protecting. Dogs do not replace infrastructure. They rely upon it.

Over time we have expanded our program:

Year	Number of guardian dogs
2020-21	2
2022	5
2023	8
2024	10
2025	14
2026	15

By 2026, we had 15 guardian dogs protecting livestock, including along our national park boundaries.

We also use trail cameras extensively to monitor predator activity and better understand what is occurring across the property. The predator pressure has not changed, our system has.

Results

The first thing we noticed was that we stopped finding dead lambs every morning. The sheep became calmer and more settled. The dogs were consistently present where they were needed, and we were no longer operating in a constant state of reaction.

Over time, the results became measurable. After experiencing two consecutive years in 2017 and 2018 with approximately 2% lamb survival, our current system now achieves approximately 130% lamb survival.

We have only experienced losses to dingoes once in the six years we have had our dogs with our sheep. This was in a particular situation last year where lack of pasture due to drought meant we had too few Maremmas to cover all our flocks. We took a calculated risk which did not pay off and we lost four ewes.

Overall, I cannot state too strongly how positive having guardian dogs on the property has been. Areas of the property that were previously difficult to utilise have been brought back into production. Investments in genetics, nutrition and animal husbandry are now delivering returns because livestock are surviving long enough to realise those benefits.

Importantly, the dogs did not increase lambing percentages on their own. They created the conditions that allowed every other aspect of good livestock management to work.

Lessons Learned

Guardian dogs are highly effective when managed correctly, but they require commitment and ongoing oversight.

Not every dog succeeds. Problems such as roaming, poor bonding, over-assertiveness and interactions with neighbouring properties can occur. These issues require early intervention and active management.

One of the most important lessons from our experience is that success depends on maintaining the entire system.

Research and Practical Evidence

While this submission is based mainly on my own experience, there is also research and industry evidence supporting the need for practical prevention tools and better support for producers.

ABARES estimates that dingoes and wild dogs cost Australia's agricultural sector up to \$302 million per year, with stock losses being the primary impact.

Australian research by van Bommel and Johnson found that livestock guardian dogs can remain an effective predator control method with long-term use. The same research also found that some producers experience difficulties with training and management, which can lead to failure of the method and limit uptake.

The 2024 National Livestock Guardian Animal Forum, hosted by the National Wild Dog Action Plan, also identified that greater support systems are needed to help producers implement and maintain livestock guardian animals. Practical costs discussed at the forum made it clear that livestock guardian dogs require more than an upfront purchase. Successful adoption also depends on ongoing investment in management, husbandry, bonding infrastructure, fencing, monitoring and practical support.

This matches my own experience. Livestock guardian dogs can work extremely well, but they need to be treated as a whole system, not just as dogs placed in a paddock.

What Landholders Need

I believe many producers adjacent to national parks would benefit from livestock guardian dog systems. Relying on lethal control alone, where dingoes remain in the landscape, is often not sustainable. However, significant barriers exist to widespread uptake.

The biggest challenge is not necessarily willingness. It is access to practical knowledge, support and funding. If governments want to support landholders living alongside national parks, greater investment is needed in extension services and livestock protection programs.

To my knowledge, there is no targeted, accessible and ongoing government program that supports livestock producers to establish livestock guardian dog systems, including dog selection, bonding infrastructure, mentoring and long-term troubleshooting. The main support available to producers is still directed toward lethal control. As flagged above, this did not work for our property and our business.

Recommendation 1: Invest in Producer Education and Extension Services

Many producers have never seen a successful livestock guardian dog program operating on a commercial property.

Governments should support:

- Producer workshops and field days.
- Demonstration sites on working farms.

- Peer-to-peer learning opportunities.
- Training in dog selection, bonding and management.
- Practical information on integrating guardian dogs into existing enterprises.

The most effective learning occurs when producers can see successful systems operating under real-world conditions.

Recommendation 2: Provide Practical On-Farm Support

Many challenges arise during establishment and the first few years of implementation.

Producers need access to:

- Experienced mentors.
- Bonding and training advice.
- Troubleshooting support.
- Local extension officers with practical knowledge of guardian dog systems.

Early support can significantly improve long-term success and reduce costly mistakes.

Recommendation 3: Establish Targeted Funding Programs

Guardian dog systems require upfront investment.

Funding should assist producers with:

- Purchasing suitable livestock guardian dogs.
- Bonding infrastructure.
- Holding paddocks and supporting infrastructure.
- Fencing upgrades where needed to keep dogs with livestock and reduce neighbour issues.
- Monitoring equipment such as trail cameras or GPS tracking collars where appropriate.
- Establishment costs during the transition period.

Support programs should recognise that effective livestock protection requires investment in the entire system, not simply the dogs themselves.

Recommendation 4: Support Long-Term Adoption

Guardian dog programs take years to establish and refine. Governments should provide long-term support that allows producers to build sustainable livestock protection systems rather than relying solely on short-term measures.

Investing in prevention can reduce livestock losses, improve producer confidence and strengthen the long-term viability of farming enterprises located adjacent to national parks.

Recommendation 5: Establish a Practical Pilot Program

I recommend that the NSW Government consider a targeted pilot program for suitable landholders adjoining national parks and conservation areas.

A practical pilot could include:

- Demonstration properties where producers can see working livestock guardian dog systems in real conditions.
- Mentoring from experienced livestock guardian dog users.
- Funding assistance for dogs, bonding yards, fencing and monitoring equipment.

- Extension support delivered over several years, rather than a one-off information session.
- Evaluation based on stock losses, lamb survival, animal welfare outcomes, producer confidence, dog welfare and changes in reliance on lethal control.

This would allow government to test and measure a practical prevention-based approach while still recognising that different landscapes and enterprises require different tools.

Conclusion

Landholders bordering national parks face unique challenges and often carry a disproportionate share of the costs associated with predators in the landscape.

My own experience demonstrates the scale of these challenges. At one point, predator pressure had reduced lamb survival to approximately 2% and rendered large areas of our property unviable for livestock production. Lethal control on and adjacent to our property did not work to protect our stock from predation.

Through investment in livestock guardian dogs, we have transformed our operation. Today, we run 15 guardian dogs along our national park boundaries and achieve approximately 130% lamb marking survival.

Livestock guardian dogs will not suit every property. However, they are a proven option that deserves greater support.

If governments are serious about supporting landholders adjacent to national parks, they should invest in practical solutions that help producers protect their livestock. Funding for livestock guardian dogs, supporting infrastructure and dedicated extension services would help more producers assess and adopt these systems where appropriate, reducing losses and improving the resilience of farming businesses.

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