

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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I wish to make a submission to encourage and to help inform a revamped legislative framework for the protection and management of dingoes in NSW. I am a biologist and ecologist with a PhD and 40 years experience as an evidence-based research scientist with a considerable publication record in the fields of ecology and human health. I have also worked in close cooperation with indigenous groups within the broader Bundjalung Nation on a range of issues.

The following are my recommendations for that legislation and points for consideration when drafting it and implementing it to achieve maximum efficacy for all concerned. They are all based on sound evidence from multiple sources.

We must immediately end dingo killing within New South Wales National Parks to protect the ecological function dingoes serve in biodiversity conservation.

1. Recent developments in dingo genetics research highlight the inadequacy of current management frameworks. The genetic status of dingoes must be understood and the distinction between dingoes and dogs reflected in new legislation.

- Current dingo management policies are largely based on outdated genetic research using only 23 genetic markers.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. It is now widely understood that the wild canids occupying Australian landscapes are dingoes with behaviours and family structures that match the important ecological functions they perform in sustaining the long-term resilience and health of their environments. This new evidence-based view is vastly different to the hitherto naive view that canids in our natural systems are simply domestic dogs gone wild and forming packs of destructive random killers that are a curse to be eliminated.

2. Dingoes must be recognised as Australia's apex predator and their role in maintaining healthy ecosystems within National Parks must be understood as critical to maintaining a healthy, balanced ecosystem.

- 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.

3. There must be 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.

The cultural importance of dingoes to First Nations communities, including their role in lore, kinship, Songlines, storytelling and Caring for Country practices must be preserved, protected and encouraged as a primary focus for indigenous education of future generations. It is essential that support of Cultural Custodians and their connection to dingo is reflected in the legislative framework. As such, the National First Nations Dingo Declaration, written by Traditional Owners to document the strong cultural perspective on dingoes, should also be a cornerstone of any new legislative framework relating to dingoes.

- 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.

4. There must be adequate financial support for the new legislation framework and extension services for landholders surrounding National Parks to implement non-lethal coexistence strategies to ensure their interests are protected and dingo populations are maintained in the environment. Changes to dingo management within National Parks may create concern or uncertainty for neighbouring landholders in relation to predation on farmed animals. Government must therefore support the development, accessibility, and broader adoption of effective non-lethal predator deterrents.

- Longstanding lethal control measures have not eliminated the risk of predation on farmed animals, with some studies finding broad-scale 1080 baiting of dingoes could exacerbate the risk of predation on calves.

- There is currently no extension services to support landholders to implement non-lethal predator deterrent strategies in New South Wales. Funding currently utilised for broad-scale 1080 baiting of dingoes and trapping and shooting in National Parks could be re-directed to support neighbouring landholders with coexistence extension services.

- 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.

Thank you for providing this opportunity to contribute to what could well be the most advanced legislative framework for dingo conservation and management in our nation. I wish you well in that endeavour.