

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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I make this submission as a Cultural Custodian with connections to both Barkindji and Malyangapa peoples and Countries.

While Barkindji and Malyangapa are distinct Nations with their own histories, cultural practices and Countries, both maintain cultural connections to dingoes and share responsibilities to care for Country and the species that belong to it.

My submission reflects my understanding, experiences and cultural responsibilities across both Barkindji and Malyangapa Country. This is particularly important because this Inquiry concerns the management of dingoes across New South Wales National Parks and is not limited to any single Nation or landscape.

For Aboriginal people, Country is not simply land. Country is a living system that includes our waterways, plants, animals, ancestors, stories and cultural obligations. Dingoes are part of that system. They belong to Country and have done so for countless generations.

Cultural Significance of Dingoes

For both Barkindji and Malyangapa peoples, dingoes are more than animals. They are part of our cultural landscape and our understanding of healthy Country.

Dingoes have long held important cultural, spiritual and practical roles. They feature in stories, knowledge systems and relationships that have existed for generations. While the specific knowledge and traditions may differ between Nations, there is a shared understanding that dingoes are native animals with cultural significance and a rightful place on Country.

Our responsibilities as Cultural Custodians include respecting and caring for the species that belong to Country. Those responsibilities do not end because government policy changes or because a species is classified differently under legislation.

It is therefore difficult to reconcile the treatment of dingoes as pests when cultural and historical evidence demonstrates that Aboriginal people lived alongside dingoes, cared for them and respected them.

Garli and the Relationship Between People and Dingoes

My perspective on this issue is informed not only by cultural knowledge but also through my direct involvement in the recovery and exhumation of the ancient dingo burial known as Garli on the Baaka (Darling River).

The Garli burial, dated to approximately one thousand years ago, provides extraordinary evidence of the relationship between Aboriginal people and dingoes. The dingo was deliberately buried with care and respect, and evidence shows that people continued to return to the burial place over many generations.

As a Barkindji Cultural Custodian involved in that work, I witnessed firsthand the significance of this discovery and what it tells us about the relationship our ancestors held with dingoes.

The Garli burial demonstrates that dingoes were not treated as pests by our ancestors. They were treated with care, dignity and respect.

Garli is evidence that dingoes were not simply tolerated on Country. They were valued. They were remembered. They were mourned.

When I hear dingoes described as pests or “wild dogs”, I think about Garli and the care that was shown to that animal nearly one thousand years ago on the banks of the Baaka.

The descendants of those who buried Garli are still here today. We continue to carry cultural responsibilities to Country and to the species that belong to it. Those responsibilities should be recognised and respected in decisions about dingo management.

The Loss of Dingoes from Country

While dingoes have always held cultural significance for Barkindji and Malyangapa people, it is important to acknowledge that across parts of our region they are no longer present in the way they once were.

The relationship that existed between Aboriginal people and dingoes for thousands of years has been disrupted.

Many people today have grown up hearing dingoes described as pests rather than understanding the place they once held within Aboriginal communities. As a result, an important cultural relationship has been diminished.

This loss is not only about the absence of an animal from the landscape. It is also about the loss of connection, knowledge and understanding that comes when culturally significant species disappear from Country.

The evidence from Garli reminds us that our ancestors had a very different relationship with dingoes. It is important that this history is recognised when decisions are made about their future management.

Concerns About Current Management

I am concerned by the continued poisoning, trapping and shooting of dingoes within National Parks.

For Aboriginal people, National Parks are not empty landscapes. They are cultural landscapes containing the stories, heritage and responsibilities of Traditional Owners.

The treatment of dingoes within these areas should reflect their cultural significance as well as their environmental importance.

Too often, decisions about species management occur without meaningful involvement of the Cultural Custodians whose families have maintained relationships with these landscapes for thousands of years.

The descendants of those who cared for Country before the establishment of National Parks should have a genuine role in decisions affecting culturally significant species.

The archaeological evidence from Garli demonstrates that nearly one thousand years ago Aboriginal people were caring for dingoes on what is now National Park estate. Today, the descendants of those same people often have little influence over decisions regarding the management of dingoes on that Country.

This should change.

Recommendations

I respectfully recommend that the Inquiry:

1. Recognise dingoes as culturally significant native animals.
2. Remove dingoes from the definition of “wild dog” in New South Wales legislation and policy.
3. Ensure that the cultural significance of dingoes is formally recognised within National Park management frameworks.
4. Require meaningful consultation and involvement of Cultural Custodians in all decisions relating to dingo management on Country.
5. Support Indigenous-led and co-management approaches to dingo conservation and management.
6. Recognise archaeological, cultural and historical evidence, including the Garli burial on the Baaka, as demonstrating the longstanding relationship between Aboriginal people and dingoes.
7. Increase opportunities for Cultural Custodians to contribute knowledge, monitoring and management of dingoes within National Parks.
8. Support management approaches that respect culture, Country and the ongoing responsibilities of Traditional Owners.

Conclusion

This Inquiry presents an important opportunity to ensure that the management of dingoes better reflects both cultural knowledge and respect for Country.

For me, this issue is not simply about wildlife management. It is about recognising relationships that have existed between Aboriginal people, dingoes and Country for countless generations.

The story of Garli reminds us that dingoes were valued, respected and cared for by our ancestors. As the descendants of those ancestors, we continue to carry responsibilities to protect and speak for the species that belong to our Countries.

I ask the Committee to ensure that the cultural significance of dingoes, and the voices of Cultural Custodians, are properly recognised in future legislation, policy and management across New South Wales National Parks.

Respectfully submitted,

David Doyle

Barkindji and Malyangapa Cultural Custodian