Submission No 80

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Submission to the Animal Welfare Committee Inquiry into the Treatment and Cultural and Ecological Significance of Dingoes in National Parks in New South Wales

I am writing to express my strong support for full legislative protection of dingoes in New South Wales (NSW). The continued exclusion of dingoes from the protections afforded by the Biodiversity. Conservation. Act. 867❷ is inconsistent with contemporary ecological science, animal welfare principles and the cultural significance of dingoes to First Nations peoples.

This inquiry provides an important opportunity to review the current management of dingoes in National Parks and to ensure that policy settings reflect modern scientific understanding of their ecological role, genetic status and importance to healthy ecosystems. It should also consider the significant animal welfare concerns associated with current management practices, including the widespread use of 1080 poison baiting, trapping and shooting.

Dingoes are Australia's apex terrestrial predator and play a critical role in maintaining ecosystem balance by regulating herbivore and introduced predator populations. Contemporary genetic research increasingly demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of wild-living canids in Australia remain dingoes and that current management frameworks are often based on outdated assumptions regarding hybridisation.

Current government policies continue to treat dingoes primarily as pest animals rather than as a native species of ecological and cultural importance. As a result, lethal control programs continue across National Parks despite growing evidence that such practices can disrupt stable family groups, undermine ecological function and produce unintended environmental consequences.

The cultural significance of dingoes to First Nations peoples must also be recognised and respected. Many Cultural Custodians maintain deep and ongoing relationships with dingoes through lore, kinship systems, storytelling, ceremony, and Caring for Country practices. Future management frameworks should provide greater opportunities for Indigenous leadership, co-management and the incorporation of Traditional Knowledge into conservation decision making.

The evidence presented to this inquiry demonstrates a compelling case for reform. Dingoes should be recognised and managed as a native wildlife species of ecological and cultural significance rather than primarily as a pest animal. Greater investment should be directed towards non-lethal coexistence measures for neighbouring landholders,

including livestock guardian animals, extension services and research into effective predator deterrents.

Dingoes are sentient animals, and the continued use of lethal control methods, including 1080 poisoning, trapping and shooting raises serious animal welfare concerns. These practices are increasingly difficult to justify in light of contemporary scientific evidence, ecological research and animal welfare considerations. I respectfully urge the Committee to recommend full legislative protection for dingoes in NSW National Parks and a transition away from harmful lethal control practices towards evidence-based, ethical and ecologically responsible management approaches.

Suggested amendments throughout the submission

(a) Genetic status of dingoes

- 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 NSW, more than three-quarters of sampled wild canids showed over 93 per cent 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. Australia does not have an established continent-wide population of feral domestic dogs living independently across ecosystems, and it is now widely understood that the wild canids occupying these landscapes are dingoes performing important ecological functions.

(b) Legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks

- In NSW, the term "wild dog" is an umbrella term used to collectively refer to dingoes, domestic dogs and hybrids. There is no distinction between roaming or stray dogs and dingoes under current legislation.

- Dingoes are the only native mammal specifically exempt from protections under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 867❷, allowing lethal control across National Parks.

- Dingoes, under the term "wild dog", are classified as priority pest animals under Regional Strategic Pest Animal Management Plans developed by Local Land Services.

- The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service undertakes dingo, or "wild dog", control on public conservation land in order to meet its General Biosecurity Duty under the Biosecurity Act 867❶ and align with the priorities set out in the NSW Wild Dog Management Strategy.

- Information obtained under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 866❺ revealed that more than 1.5 million 1080 poison baits targeting dingoes were deployed by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service between 2020 and 2025.

- Current policy settings continue to manage dingoes within broad pest management frameworks despite contemporary ecological and genetic research recognising dingoes as an ecologically important native species.

(c) Ecological role of dingoes in National Parks

- 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 can significantly reduce populations of 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 feral 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.

(e) Impact of current government policies and programs

- Current management programs rely on lethal control methods including 1080 poison baiting, trapping and shooting.

- Lethal control can disrupt stable dingo family groups and pack structures.

- Disruption of dingo family structures may increase the likelihood of dingoes breeding with domestic dogs.

- The removal of dingoes can contribute to trophic cascades and broader ecosystem disruption.

- The removal of dingoes from ecosystems can lead to increases in introduced predators and herbivore pressure.

- Trapping of dingoes raises serious welfare concerns due to the time animals may remain confined without access to food, water or shelter.

- Current management programs do not adequately reflect contemporary ecological science or cultural perspectives relating to dingoes.

- Current management of dingoes in National Parks is largely focused on agricultural protection rather than biodiversity outcomes.

- There are currently limited extension services available to support landholders to implement non-lethal predator deterrent strategies in NSW.

- Many Cultural Custodians report feeling excluded from decisions relating to dingo management on their Country.

(g) Any other related matters

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

- There are currently limited extension services available to support landholders in implementing non-lethal predator deterrent strategies in NSW. Funding currently utilised for broad-scale 1080 baiting, trapping and shooting programs in National Parks could instead support neighbouring landholders through coexistence and extension services.

- Livestock guardian dogs have been proven effective at reducing or eliminating predation on livestock by dingoes. They can also provide additional benefits, including reducing grazing pressure from macropods and protecting livestock from foxes and birds of prey.

- There is widespread anecdotal evidence from landholders that donkeys can be effective guardians against canid predators. There is a strong opportunity for the NSW Government to support more robust trials into the use of livestock guardian donkeys on properties neighbouring National Parks.

- Investment is needed in the research, development and scaling of coexistence strategies in NSW that protect landholder interests while allowing dingoes to remain in the environment and perform their important ecological role.