

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: NSW Farmers Association

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NSW Farmers submission to
the inquiry into Dingoes in national parks in
New South Wales

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About NSW Farmers

NSW Farmers is Australia's largest state farming organisation and advocates for issues such as the environment, biosecurity, water, animal welfare, economics, trade, workforce, and rural affairs. Agriculture is crucial, employing more than 75,000 people in NSW and the ACT, and contributing more than \$24 billion to the economy.

Our goal is to reach \$30 billion in output by 2030 by supporting stronger farming businesses. We ensure genuine farmer voices shape policies, and we provide specialist advice, along with valuable member benefits.

1. Introduction

NSW Farmers Association (NSW Farmers) represents farmers across New South Wales, including many operating in regions with significant and persistent wild dog and dingo pressures. Due to the inbreeding of species, the wild dog is an agreed term encompassing the dingo. For these members, the management of wild dogs is not an abstract environmental issue; it is a matter of farm viability, community resilience, and personal safety and wellbeing. Livestock predation by wild dogs remains one of the most significant unmanaged risks to agricultural production in parts of the state and along its borders, particularly in the south-east where interaction with the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and Victoria is most pronounced.

Wild dogs eat first and foremost, wild animals. There is of course no evidence that they will prefer or select to eat feral animals as a preference and assist in reducing kangaroos and pigs and deer in National Parks. They like to kill livestock as a reaction to their behaviours and that is why they will maim and not eat them, and leave the stock to suffer significantly. Inside National Parks they will be eating the possums, bandicoot's, echidnas, lizards, snakes, ground dwelling birds, frogs and insects. Given that National Parks have been established generally in areas to protect habitat if endangered species this is literally undoing the good work if those species are not protected. Many critically endangered species that would quickly and easily go extinct if another APEX predator was introduced, allowed to thrive as a protected animal. With the expansion of National Parks underway in NSW the losses of endangered species by protecting wild dogs will undermine the NSW threatened species program.

The Association supports evidence-based, locally driven pest management consistent with the NSW Farmers Policy Book and longstanding advocacy positions that emphasise the need for coordinated, tenure-neutral control. However, recent developments in policy settings, particularly in the ACT, have created uncertainty and risk undermining decades of collaborative management efforts across jurisdictions.

This submission outlines the primary concerns of NSW Farmers regarding wild dogs in NSW and the ACT. Also in Lower Western of NSW is affected by the Victorian Governments decision to stop baiting in the Far North West in March 2024.

It draws on existing NSW Farmers positions, internal discussions, and current policy frameworks to identify key issues and propose practical, achievable reforms.

2. The Nature of the Problem

Wild dogs, including dingoes, feral domestic dogs, and hybrids, are widely recognised as a major vertebrate pest in NSW. They prey on livestock, spread disease, and cause significant economic and emotional harm to landholders.



The impacts are multi-dimensional. Predation leads directly to stock losses, including sheep, goats, and calves, and can result in substantial financial losses for farm businesses. These losses are not limited to the immediate value of animals killed but extend to reduced breeding rates, disruption of production systems, and long-term changes in enterprise viability. In areas of sustained wild dog pressure, producers are forced to shift away from small stock enterprises completely, altering regional agricultural patterns and reducing enterprise diversity and economic choices.

In addition to financial impacts, wild dog attacks impose severe psychological stress on landholders. The experience of repeatedly finding injured or maimed animals, often in distressing circumstances, has well-documented mental health consequences. This emotional burden is compounded by the reality that effective control is beyond the capacity of individual landholders, requiring coordinated, landscape-scale action.

3. The Importance of Coordinated, Nil-Tenure Management

NSW Farmers strongly supports the “nil tenure” approach to wild dog management, which has underpinned successful programs across south-east NSW for more than two decades. This approach recognises that wild dogs do not respect property or jurisdictional boundaries and therefore must be managed collaboratively across all land tenures, including private land, national parks, state forests, and adjacent jurisdictions.

Historically, fragmented and inconsistent control efforts resulted in ineffective management and poor relationships between land managers. The development of coordinated wild dog working groups, bringing together government agencies and private landholders, addressed these issues by establishing shared plans, aligned control activities, and collective ownership of outcomes.

These working groups have delivered demonstrable benefits, including significant reductions in stock losses and improved cooperation across sectors. The nil tenure model is now embedded in national and state strategies, including the National Wild Dog Action Plan and the NSW Wild Dog Management Strategy.

Critically, this approach depends on consistency across jurisdictions. Where one jurisdiction adopts a different management framework or reduces its control efforts, the effectiveness of coordinated programs is seriously undermined, with immediate consequences for neighbouring landholders.

The elimination of pests such as wild dogs must be balanced with the impacts that they have on native species. Wild dogs also impact natural environments by preying on a wide variety of native fauna and are considered a known or potential threat to endangered or vulnerable native mammal, reptile, and bird species. They carry pathogens and parasites that can have negative impacts on native species, such as macropods, severely limiting their lifespans and reproductive fitness.

Control of the wild dogs can be effective by use of Sodium fluoroacetate (1080) that is widely used in Australia for the control of wild dogs and foxes. Although there is no specific antidote once a lethal dose has been absorbed, the poison has an important advantage in Australian conditions: it is relatively selective. Many native species, including quolls and several other marsupials, have evolved a comparatively high tolerance to fluoroacetate because the compound occurs naturally in some



Australian plants. By carefully calibrating the amount of 1080 used in meat baits, pest species such as wild dogs and foxes, which are far more susceptible to the toxin, can be effectively targeted while reducing the risk to many native animals.

Concerns are sometimes raised about the apparent humaneness of death from 1080 because poisoned animals may exhibit paddling movements, muscle spasms and low-level vocalisations. However, published research indicates that these outward signs do not necessarily reflect conscious suffering. As fluoroacetate disrupts cellular energy production by blocking the citric acid (Krebs) cycle, brain function rapidly deteriorates, leading to loss of awareness and responsiveness before death. Reports of accidental human poisonings in which patients have survived also suggest that affected individuals typically have no memory of the period during which severe neurological signs occurred. While no poison can be regarded as ideal, the available evidence indicates that the visible convulsive activity associated with 1080 poisoning is likely to occur after consciousness has been substantially impaired, meaning the external appearance may overstate the level of suffering experienced by the animal.

4. Cross-Border Challenges

The most significant emerging issue for NSW Farmers is the divergence in wild dog policy between NSW and the ACT. Internal NSW Farmers communications highlight the seriousness of this issue, noting that decisions by the ACT Government have the potential to “undermine the agreed nil tenure approach to wild dog control” and have “catastrophic” consequences for adjoining livestock producers.

Recent policy developments in the ACT, including proposals to formally recognise dingoes as a distinct native species, have generated significant concern among NSW landholders. While the ACT Government has indicated that control programs will continue, the reclassification of dingoes introduces a critical uncertainty around the future extent and nature of control measures.

Farmers in border areas fear that increased protections for wild dogs will lead to reduced management intensity over time, particularly in conservation areas such as Namadgi National Park. Given the mobility of wild dogs, any reduction in control effort in the ACT will result in increased and persistent pressure on adjacent NSW properties.

As at June 13 the Victorian Government has announced that due to the predation on neighbouring properties to the Big Desert Wilderness Park they are going to subsidise a 70 Km exclusion fence for neighbours who have suffered \$3 million in losses. The Upper Western (particularly around White Cliffs) already has a substantial wild dog problem in and out of National Parks where production of \$1.3 billion in agricultural commodities and 95% native vegetation is threatened. These are clear demonstrations of areas where neighbouring lands are impacted severely by misguided decisions to foster the breeding and survival of wild dogs.

SA Govt has invested \$55 m since 2021 to reintroduce fencing and support livestock operations due to predation from dogs. That government also recently signed an agreement with NSW to continue the



dog fence on that side at a cost of \$290m. Due to the functionality of the fence it would enable baiting programs on both sides of the fence, including the National Parks, to reduce the dog numbers.

This concern is not then theoretical. Historical experience demonstrates that even small changes in management intensity can lead to rapid increases in wild dog populations and associated impacts on livestock. The risk is therefore that policy divergence creates a “weak link” in the management system, allowing wild dogs to persist and disperse into areas where control is otherwise effective.

5. Inconsistent Classification and Policy Objectives

A further issue is the inconsistent classification of dingoes and wild dogs between jurisdictions. In NSW, wild dogs are defined broadly to include dingoes, feral domestic dogs, and hybrids, and are managed as a pest species where they cause harm.

In contrast, the ACT is moving towards recognising dingoes as a distinct native species with ecological and cultural significance. NSW Farmers strongly disagrees with this recognition and the introduction of dual classifications creates practical challenges for management.

First, it complicates communication and coordination between agencies and landholders. Different definitions lead to different management objectives and regulatory frameworks, reducing clarity and increasing the risk of conflict.

Second, it creates ambiguity regarding control responsibilities. Under NSW law, landholders have a general biosecurity duty to manage wild dogs and minimise their impacts. If neighbouring jurisdictions adopt different classifications or priorities, it becomes unclear how these duties are to be fulfilled in a coordinated manner.

Third, it risks prioritising conservation objectives over the protection of agricultural assets without adequate consideration of the resulting impacts on farm businesses and community safety.

6. Impact on Biosecurity Responsibilities

NSW Farmers notes that wild dog management is a core component of the state’s biosecurity framework. The Biosecurity Act 2015 imposes a general duty on landholders and public agencies to prevent, minimise, or eliminate biosecurity risks, including those posed by wild dogs.

Effective biosecurity management requires consistent and coordinated action across all land tenures. Where this does not occur, the burden of control is shifted disproportionately onto individual landholders, who often lack the resources to manage the risk effectively.

The divergence in policy settings between NSW and the ACT therefore represents a potential failure to meet biosecurity obligations at a landscape scale. This is particularly concerning in regions where public land, including national parks, forms a significant proportion of the landscape and acts as a reservoir for wild dog populations.



7. Economic and Social Impacts on Farmers

The economic impacts of wild dog predation are well established. In NSW alone, wild dog predation has been estimated to cost agricultural producers many millions of dollars annually in lost production, in addition to the substantial costs of control. The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences estimates wild dogs cost Australia's agricultural sector up to \$302 million per year, primarily due to stock losses.

These impacts are not evenly distributed; they are concentrated in specific regions, particularly along the Great Dividing Range and in areas adjacent to large tracts of public land such as in the western division. In these regions, wild dog pressure can be so intense that it effectively prevents certain types of farming, particularly sheep and goat production.

The social impacts are equally significant. As noted above, wild dog attacks cause emotional distress and mental health challenges for landholders. This is exacerbated by the reality that government policy decisions are contributing to the problem by reducing the effectiveness of control programs.

NSW Farmers also notes the broader community impacts, including reduced economic activity, loss of employment, and declining population in affected regions. These outcomes are inconsistent with the goals of regional development and undermine the long-term sustainability of rural communities.

8. Lack of Consultation and Governance Concerns

A recurring concern raised by NSW Farmers members is the lack of effective consultation in policy development. Internal NSW Farmers material highlights that decisions affecting wild dog management have in some cases been made without adequate engagement with established wild dog working groups or affected communities.

This is particularly problematic given the importance of local knowledge and cooperation in effective pest management. Wild dog working groups were established precisely to provide a mechanism for community input and coordinated action. Bypassing these structures undermines both the legitimacy and effectiveness of policy decisions.

NSW Farmers therefore emphasises that any changes to wild dog management policies must involve full and transparent consultation with affected stakeholders, including landholders, local land services, and existing working groups.



9. The Role of Public Land Management and Wild Dog fence

Public land, including national parks and reserves, plays a critical role in wild dog management. These areas often provide habitat and refuge for wild dog populations, particularly in rugged or inaccessible terrain.

NSW policy recognises this and requires public land managers to undertake control activities to minimise impacts on neighbouring properties. However, the effectiveness of this approach depends on the consistency and intensity of control efforts.

Where public land managers reduce or alter their control programs, whether due to policy changes or resource constraints, the impacts are immediately felt by adjacent landholders. This reinforces the need for clear, enforceable obligations on all land managers to participate in coordinated control programs.

Recent research from the University of Adelaide's Australian Centre for Ancient DNA (ACAD) has been widely cited in support of stronger protections for "dingoes" across Australia. However, a closer examination of the findings reveals that the study in fact undermines key assumptions used to justify blanket conservation approaches and raises serious concerns about the implications or the reality protection for non-existent "pure bred dingoes".

The Wild Dog fence has been a vital part of protecting stock from dogs in the North west of NSW. The significant cost, and significant contribution from farmers across the fence line will be wasted if wild dogs become immune from management. The recent purchases of National Parks along the fence would be a haven for the species, where they are already in numbers, and literally wipe out stock as an income source in those regions.

10. Challenging the purity of dingo genetics

The study found that modern dingoes are, on average, approximately 88 per cent genetically dingo, with around 12 per cent domestic dog ancestry. While this has been interpreted by some advocates as evidence that dingoes remain "mostly pure," the more important conclusion is that true genetic purity is rare and variable across landscapes. In some regions, levels of domestic dog introgression rise as high as 28 per cent. This fundamentally challenges the notion that a clearly defined, biologically "pure" dingo population exists that can be easily distinguished from hybridised wild dogs for policy purposes.

The collapse of the "pure dingo" basis for protection

The Adelaide University research is particularly significant because it used ancient DNA samples from pre-European dingoes as a baseline, demonstrating that even animals previously classified as pure contain measurable dog ancestry. Crucially, the researchers themselves acknowledged that there is no scientific consensus on what level of genetic ancestry constitutes a "pure" dingo, and that any such threshold is ultimately a policy decision rather than a biological one.



This has profound implications. Many current conservation arguments rely on the premise that protecting dingoes is necessary to preserve a distinct native species at risk of genetic dilution. However, if hybridisation is already widespread and historically embedded, then the concept of protecting a clearly defined “species” becomes highly uncertain. In practical terms, it means that policies designed to protect dingoes will inevitably extend protections to animals with varying and sometimes significant levels of domestic dog genetics.

For farmers, this distinction is not academic. From a livestock management perspective, there is no meaningful difference between a dingo and a dingo–dog hybrid in terms of behaviour, predation risk, or impact on production systems. Both are capable of coordinated hunting, surplus killing, and targeting vulnerable stock such as lambs and calves. Policy frameworks that attempt to draw fine genetic distinctions risk creating unworkable regulatory settings that hinder effective control while offering no practical reduction in livestock losses.

Increased protection risks protecting the problem

A further implication of the research is that animals currently classified as “wild dogs” will in fact be high-percentage dingoes. This has been used to argue that lethal control programs are inadvertently targeting protected native animals. However, from an agricultural standpoint, this interpretation is problematic.

Whether an animal is 70 per cent, 88 per cent, or 98 per cent dingo is irrelevant to the outcome on farm. What matters is its impact on livestock. Broadscale protection measures that restrict control activities risk increasing predator pressure in already marginal production systems, particularly in sheep-producing regions of New South Wales and Victoria where hybridisation levels are highest.

The Adelaide study itself shows that genetic composition varies significantly by region, with southeastern Australia—where the bulk of intensive agriculture occurs—showing some of the highest levels of admixture. This is precisely where the risks to livestock are most acute. A one-size-fits-all conservation approach that elevates protection across all landscapes fails to account for these regional differences and imposes disproportionate costs on producers operating in high-conflict zones.

Misalignment between ecological theory and farm reality

Proponents of dingo protection often argue that dingoes provide ecosystem services, such as suppressing kangaroo and feral predator populations. While these effects will occur under certain conditions, the Adelaide University research reinforces that dingo populations are neither uniform nor pristine, and their ecological role is highly context-dependent.

In mixed farming landscapes, where livestock are present and natural prey bases may be variable, dingoes and hybrids are more likely to shift predation toward domestic animals. The presence of even low levels of dog ancestry will further influence behaviour, including reduced wariness of humans and greater adaptability to modified environments. Despite this, current conservation narratives often assume that dingoes will function as stable apex predators delivering net ecological benefits, without adequately accounting for these behavioural realities.



Moreover, recent genomic studies have suggested that wild dingo populations are more intact than previously thought, challenging earlier claims of widespread hybridisation. While this finding has been used to support stronger protections, it also highlights a key contradiction: if dingoes are both widespread and resilient, the urgency for strict protection diminishes, particularly where it conflicts with agricultural productivity and national food security.

Legal and operational uncertainty for farmers

The absence of a clear genetic definition of a dingo creates significant legal ambiguity. Farmers and land managers require clear, enforceable rules regarding when and how they can control pest animals. However, if identification depends on complex and impractical genetic testing, compliance becomes unworkable.

In practice, decisions must be made in real time, often in response to active predation events. Introducing regulatory frameworks that hinge on uncertain or retrospective classification risks delaying responses, increasing stock losses, and exposing producers to compliance risk. It also places an unreasonable burden on producers to distinguish between protected and unprotected animals in the field—something that even geneticists acknowledge cannot be done visually with reliability.

A more pragmatic approach

The Adelaide University research ultimately supports a more cautious and pragmatic approach to dingo policy. Rather than reinforcing calls for blanket protection, it underscores the need to:

- Recognise that hybridisation blurs any clear boundary between dingoes and wild dogs
- Accept that genetic purity is not a practical or meaningful basis for management decisions
- Prioritise impact-based management, focusing on the actual harm caused to livestock and livelihoods

For agricultural stakeholders, the priority must remain the protection of stock, farm income, and regional economies. This requires maintaining access to effective, flexible control tools, including coordinated baiting, trapping, and exclusion fencing, particularly in high-risk areas.

The University of Adelaide study does not provide a strong scientific foundation for expanding dingo protections. Instead, it highlights the complexity and variability of dingo genetics and exposes the weaknesses of policies based on simplistic notions of purity. In doing so, it reinforces a key point: management frameworks must be grounded in real-world outcomes, not abstract genetic thresholds.

10. Recommendations

NSW Farmers proposes the following key reforms:

First, governments must reaffirm their commitment to the nil tenure approach and ensure that it is applied consistently across all jurisdictions, including the ACT. This requires formal agreements between NSW and the ACT to maintain coordinated control programs and aligned policy settings.

Second, any changes to the classification or management of dingoes must not reduce the effectiveness of existing control measures. Where conservation objectives are pursued, they must be balanced with the need to protect agricultural production and community wellbeing.

Third, there must be strengthened coordination between NSW and ACT agencies, including the establishment of joint management frameworks and shared accountability for outcomes.

Fourth, governments must ensure that public land managers meet their biosecurity obligations and actively participate in coordinated control programs.

Fifth, there must be improved consultation processes, with a formal requirement to engage with wild dog working groups and affected communities before any policy changes are implemented.

Finally, NSW Farmers reiterates the importance of compensation mechanisms for landholders affected by wild dog predation, particularly where impacts arise from public land or policy decisions.

11. Conclusion

The management of wild dogs in NSW and the ACT is a complex issue requiring careful balancing of ecological, cultural, and economic considerations. However, for NSW Farmers members, the priority is clear: effective, coordinated control that protects livestock and supports the viability of farm businesses.

The success of the nil tenure approach demonstrates that collaborative, landscape-scale management can deliver positive outcomes. However, this success is fragile and depends on consistent policy settings and strong cooperation between jurisdictions.

Recent developments in the ACT risk undermining this approach, creating uncertainty and increasing the burden on NSW landholders. NSW Farmers therefore calls on all levels of government to work together to ensure that wild dog management remains coordinated, effective, and responsive to the needs of rural communities