Submission No 135

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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(a) the genetic status of dingoes, the distinction between dingoes and dogs and recent research into the genetic profile of NSW dingoes Submissions could examine recent developments in dingo genetics research and how current management frameworks do not reflect contemporary science. Contributors may wish to discuss hybridisation, ecological function, the impact of lethal control on dingo family stability, and the distinction between dingoes and domestic dogs. Current dingo management policies are largely based on outdated genetic research using only 23 genetic markers.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. 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) the legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks governing the management of dingoes in New South Wales in national parks Submissions could examine how dingoes are classified and managed under existing legislation and policy frameworks in New South Wales, including whether current approaches appropriately recognise dingoes as ecologically important wildlife. In New South Wales, 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 2016, 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 undertake dingo ('wild-dog') control on public conservation land in order to meet its 'General Biosecurity Duty' under the Biosecurity Act 2015 to manage pest animals, and align with the priorities set out in the New South Wales Wild Dog Management Strategy. Information obtained under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 revealed that more than 1.5 million 1080 poison baits targeting dingoes were deployed by New South Wales Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) 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) the 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 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. (d) the cultural significance of dingoes for First Nations communities 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. (e) the impact of current government policies and programs for the management of dingoes in National Parks Submissions could examine the ecological, genetic, cultural and animal welfare impacts associated with current dingo management programs in New South Wales National Parks. Current management programs relies 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. Removal of dingoes causes tropic cascade. Removal of dingoes from ecosystems leads to increases in introduced predators and herbivore pressure. Trapping of dingoes raises serious welfare concerns for the time the animal remains in the trap, unable to access 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 not biodiversity outcomes. No funding is allocated for research and development into non-lethal coexistence strategies for agricultural properties neighbouring National Parks. Many Cultural Custodians report feeling excluded from decisions relating to dingo management on their Country. (f) dingo management including opportunities for incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and leadership in dingo conservation in national parks Submissions could support opportunities for greater involvement of Cultural Custodians in dingo management and conservation across New South Wales National Parks. First Nations peoples have cared for dingoes and Country for thousands of years, maintaining deep, ongoing relationships that continue to support healthy landscapes and biodiversity outcomes that benefit all Australians. Indigenous knowledge systems hold detailed, place-based understanding of dingo behaviour, ecology, and their role in broader ecosystem function, complementing and strengthening western scientific approaches. Across New South Wales, Indigenous ranger groups are increasingly leading monitoring and management programs for dingoes on

Country, providing important on-ground insights into populations and behaviour. This leadership is particularly significant given existing gaps in comprehensive, statewide data on wild dingo populations. Cultural Custodians are increasingly advocating for Indigenous-led approaches to dingo conservation and management, including expanded roles in National Park governance and decision-making. Strengthening the role of Cultural Custodians in decision-making processes would improve cultural, ecological, and conservation outcomes, with flow-on benefits for ecosystem health and biodiversity. Co-management approaches offer a practical framework to integrate Indigenous knowledge systems with western science in National Parks management, improving both governance and on-ground effectiveness. The principles outlined in the National First Nations Dingo Declaration provide a relevant foundation to inform future policy development and support more inclusive and effective dingo management approaches. (g) any other related matters. 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.