

**Submission
No 179**

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Mrs Kaite Saunders

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

To the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this important inquiry.

I strongly support a significant reform of dingo management in New South Wales National Parks. Contemporary scientific research increasingly demonstrates that dingoes are not simply “wild dogs” to be managed as pests, but ecologically important native predators with a vital role in Australian ecosystems. Dingoes also hold profound cultural significance for many First Nations peoples.

I respectfully ask the Committee to recommend:

- An end to the routine killing of dingoes within New South Wales National Parks, recognising their ecological function and importance to biodiversity conservation.
- Greater involvement of Cultural Custodians in decision-making and place-based dingo management within National Parks, so that the cultural significance of dingoes is appropriately reflected in legislation, policy and management.
- Financial support, practical assistance and extension services for landholders surrounding National Parks to implement effective non-lethal coexistence strategies,

protecting livestock and livelihoods while maintaining dingoes in the environment.

- Reform of legislation and policy to clearly distinguish dingoes from roaming, stray and domestic dogs and to reflect contemporary genetic and ecological science.

(a) The genetic status of dingoes and the distinction between dingoes and dogs

Current dingo management frameworks have been heavily influenced by outdated understandings of dingo genetics. Earlier research relied on a very small number of genetic markers, while contemporary studies can examine vastly greater numbers of markers and provide a much more detailed picture of dingo ancestry.

Recent research indicates that the overwhelming majority of Australia's wild-living canids are dingoes, with hybridisation considerably less widespread than previously assumed, particularly in stable and undisturbed populations. Research in New South Wales has found that more than three-quarters of sampled wild canids had greater than 93 per cent contemporary dingo ancestry.

This evidence raises serious concerns about the continued use of the broad term "wild dog", which can obscure the identity and conservation significance of dingoes.

Dingoes are also distinct from domestic dogs in important ecological and behavioural respects, including their social organisation, breeding patterns and role within Australian ecosystems. Australia does not have an established continent-wide population of feral domestic dogs

independently occupying ecosystems in the way the term “wild dog” can imply.

Lethal control through poisoning, trapping and shooting may also disrupt stable dingo family groups. The breakdown of social structures can contribute to instability and may increase opportunities for interbreeding with domestic dogs. Protecting stable dingo populations may therefore be important not only for ecological reasons, but also for maintaining population integrity.

Management should be informed by contemporary genetic science and ecological function rather than outdated assumptions about widespread hybridisation.

(b) Legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks governing dingoes in New South Wales National Parks

The current legislative and policy framework does not adequately recognise the dingo as ecologically important native wildlife.

In New South Wales, the term “wild dog” is used as an umbrella term encompassing dingoes, domestic dogs and hybrids. This lack of distinction allows dingoes to be managed primarily through pest-control frameworks rather than according to their ecological and cultural significance.

Dingoes are uniquely excluded from certain protections otherwise afforded to native mammals under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. They are also managed under regional pest-management frameworks and subject to control measures associated with biosecurity obligations.

The scale of lethal control occurring on public conservation land is deeply concerning. Information obtained under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* has reportedly shown that more than 1.5 million 1080 poison baits targeting dingoes or so-called “wild dogs” were deployed by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service between 2020 and 2025.

National Parks should be places where native species and ecological processes are protected. The routine lethal control of an apex predator within protected conservation areas deserves urgent reconsideration.

Legislation and policy should be updated to distinguish dingoes from domestic dogs and to recognise dingoes as native wildlife with important ecological and cultural values.

(c) The ecological role of dingoes in National Parks

Dingoes are Australia’s only native canid and an important apex predator. Their presence can influence entire ecosystems.

Dingoes can help regulate populations and behaviour of large herbivores such as kangaroos and wallabies, potentially reducing excessive grazing pressure. They can also prey upon introduced animals including goats and pigs and may suppress introduced predators such as foxes and cats through competition, territorial behaviour and predation.

These interactions can have significant flow-on effects for vegetation communities and native wildlife. Research

suggests that stable dingo populations may, in some circumstances, suppress fox populations more effectively than poison-baiting programs alone.

The ecological importance of dingoes should therefore be considered at an ecosystem level. Removing apex predators can create unintended consequences, including changes to prey populations, predator relationships, vegetation and habitat condition.

Rather than treating dingoes solely as animals requiring control, National Parks should prioritise maintaining stable, functioning dingo populations and carefully evaluate the ecological consequences of lethal management.

(d) The cultural significance of dingoes for First Nations communities

I acknowledge that it is for Cultural Custodians themselves to speak about their relationships with dingoes and Country. However, I strongly support ensuring that their voices, knowledge and authority are central to future dingo policy and management.

Dingoes hold deep cultural significance for many First Nations communities and are connected with lore, kinship, stories, Songlines, dance, art and responsibilities for Caring for Country.

The 2023 First Nations Dingo Forum brought together Traditional Owners from many nations and contributed to the development of the National First Nations Dingo Declaration. The Declaration calls for a new approach centred on “Caring for Dingoes on Country” and for greater

involvement of Cultural Custodians in decisions affecting dingoes.

The Committee should listen directly to Cultural Custodians and ensure that First Nations knowledge, cultural responsibilities and place-based approaches are meaningfully incorporated into legislation, policy and on-ground management.

Supporting coexistence with landholders

Reforming dingo management in National Parks must also recognise the legitimate concerns of neighbouring landholders and livestock producers.

Ending routine lethal control within National Parks should be accompanied by practical and financial support for landholders to adopt non-lethal coexistence measures. Depending on local circumstances, these may include improved fencing, guardian animals, changes to husbandry practices, deterrents and other evidence-based approaches.

Landholders should not be expected to bear the financial burden of a transition toward coexistence alone.

Government funding, extension services, training and locally appropriate support should form part of any reform.

A collaborative approach can better protect livestock and livelihoods while allowing dingoes to continue performing their ecological role within protected landscapes.

Conclusion

The way dingoes are managed in New South Wales has not kept pace with contemporary genetic research, ecological

science or growing recognition of their cultural significance.

I respectfully urge the Committee to recommend a fundamental shift away from the routine lethal control of dingoes in National Parks and toward a model based on conservation, coexistence, contemporary science and genuine involvement of Cultural Custodians.

In particular, I ask the Committee to recommend:

1. An end to routine dingo killing within New South Wales National Parks.
2. Formal recognition of dingoes as ecologically important native wildlife, distinct from roaming and domestic dogs.
3. Reform of legislation and policy to reflect contemporary genetic and ecological research.
4. Meaningful involvement of Cultural Custodians in decision-making and place-based dingo management.
5. Government funding and practical support for neighbouring landholders to implement effective non-lethal coexistence strategies.
6. Greater transparency, monitoring and independent evaluation of dingo management and lethal control programs on public conservation land.

Protecting stable dingo populations within National Parks is an opportunity to better protect biodiversity, respect cultural connections to Country and develop more effective and humane approaches to coexistence.

Thank you for considering my submission.