

**INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW
SOUTH WALES**

Name: Name suppressed

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Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Animal Welfare Committee

Inquiry into Dingoes in National Parks in New South Wales

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Executive Summary

This submission strongly supports the protection and conservation of dingoes in New South Wales National Parks. Contemporary scientific research demonstrates that dingoes are Australia's native apex predator and play a critical role in maintaining healthy ecosystems. Dingoes also hold deep cultural significance for many First Nations peoples and are an important part of Australia's natural heritage.

Current management frameworks continue to treat dingoes primarily as pest animals through broad 'wild dog' classifications and extensive lethal control programs. These approaches do not reflect contemporary ecological science, genetic research, animal welfare considerations, or Indigenous perspectives. Reform is needed to recognise dingoes as a protected native species and to prioritise biodiversity conservation, Indigenous leadership, and coexistence strategies.

Recommendations

1. Recognise dingoes as a native species of ecological significance and remove their exclusion from protections under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016.
2. Replace the broad 'wild dog' classification with management frameworks that distinguish dingoes from domestic dogs.
3. Phase out broad-scale lethal control programs in National Parks, including routine poison baiting, trapping, and shooting.
4. Prioritise biodiversity conservation outcomes in all dingo management decisions within National Parks.
5. Establish formal Indigenous co-management arrangements and increase Indigenous leadership in dingo conservation and monitoring programs.
6. Invest in research, extension services, and financial support for non-lethal coexistence measures for neighbouring landholders.
7. Ensure future dingo management policies are informed by contemporary ecological and genetic science.

(a) Genetic status of dingoes

- Contemporary genetic research shows that more than three-quarters of sampled wild canids in New South Wales possess over 93% contemporary dingo ancestry.
- Dingoes are distinct from domestic dogs in their breeding behaviour, social organisation, ecological function, and general behaviour.
- Ecological function should be considered alongside genetics when assessing dingo populations.
- Lethal control programs disrupt stable family groups and increase the likelihood of hybridisation by destabilising populations.
- Management frameworks should reflect contemporary science and recognise the ecological importance of wild dingo populations.

(b) Legislative, regulatory, and policy frameworks

- Existing legislation does not recognise dingoes as a native apex predator.
- The umbrella term ‘wild dog’ groups dingoes, hybrids, and domestic dogs together, creating inappropriate management outcomes.
- Dingoes are uniquely excluded from protections available to other native mammals under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016.
- Current policy settings prioritise pest animal management objectives over biodiversity conservation outcomes.
- Large-scale lethal control programs continue within National Parks despite growing evidence of ecological harm.
- Legislative reform should:
 - Recognise dingoes as a native species deserving protection.
 - Distinguish dingoes from domestic dogs in management frameworks.
 - Prioritise biodiversity conservation outcomes within National Parks.
 - Discontinue reliance on broad-scale lethal control measures.

(c) Ecological role of dingoes

- Dingoes are Australia’s only native canid and function as an apex predator and keystone species.
- Dingoes help regulate kangaroo and wallaby populations, reducing grazing pressure on vegetation.
- Dingoes contribute to the control of feral goats and pigs.
- Reduced numbers of invasive predators can improve outcomes for threatened native wildlife.
- Dingos presence influences herbivore behaviour and movement, helping prevent habitat degradation.
- Removal of apex predators can trigger a ripple effect that destabilise ecosystems.
- Protecting dingoes should be recognised as an important biodiversity conservation strategy.

(d) Cultural significance for First Nations communities

- Dingoes hold deep cultural significance for many First Nations peoples across New South Wales and Australia. They feature in stories, Songlines, kinship systems, ceremony, art, and Caring for Country practices.
- Many Cultural Custodians regard dingoes as protectors, teachers, and an essential component of healthy Country.
- The National First Nations Dingo Declaration provides an important framework for understanding Indigenous perspectives on dingo conservation.
- Cultural knowledge and relationships with dingoes should be respected and incorporated into future management approaches.
- Cultural Custodians should be genuine partners in decisions affecting dingoes on their Country.

(e) Impact of current government policies, and programs

- Current management relies heavily on 1080 poison baiting, trapping, and shooting which raise significant animal welfare concerns.

- Lethal control disrupts stable dingo family groups and social structures.
- The removal of dingoes can contribute to ecological imbalance and increases in invasive predators.
- Existing programs focus primarily on agricultural protection objectives rather than biodiversity outcomes within National Parks.
- Many Cultural Custodians report inadequate involvement in decisions relating to dingo management.
- Current management programs must be reviewed to ensure they align with contemporary science, animal welfare principles, and cultural perspectives.

(f) Indigenous knowledge and leadership

- Indigenous knowledge systems provide valuable place-based understanding of dingo ecology and ecosystem function.
- First Nations peoples have maintained relationships with dingoes and Country for thousands of years.
- Indigenous ranger groups are increasingly contributing valuable monitoring and conservation outcomes.
- Greater Indigenous leadership would strengthen both conservation and cultural outcomes.
- Opportunities include:
 - Co-management of National Parks.
 - Indigenous-led dingo monitoring programs.
 - Formal participation in policy development and decision-making.
 - Expanded support for Indigenous ranger programs.
 - Incorporation of principles contained in the National First Nations Dingo Declaration.
 - Integrating Indigenous knowledge with western science which would offer a practical and effective approach to future dingo conservation.

(g) Other related matters

- Decades of lethal control have not eliminated livestock losses and have, in some circumstances, increase predation risks through disruption of stable dingo social structures.
- Much greater investment is needed in non-lethal coexistence measures that protect both livestock and dingoes.
- Effective approaches include:
 - Livestock guardian dogs.
 - Improved fencing and husbandry practices.
 - Guardian animals such as donkeys.
 - Education and extension services for landholders.
- Funding currently directed towards broad-scale lethal control should be redirected towards research, trials, and implementing coexistence strategies.
- Long-term coexistence approaches provide a more sustainable balance between biodiversity conservation and agricultural interests.

Conclusion

This inquiry provides an opportunity to modernise dingo management in New South Wales. Dingoes must be recognised and protected as a native apex predator of ecological and cultural significance rather than managed primarily as a pest species. Reforming current policy settings to remove reliance on lethal control, strengthen Indigenous leadership, and support coexistence measures will deliver lasting benefits for biodiversity, animal welfare, and the long-term health of New South Wales ecosystems.

References

National First Nations Dingo Declaration (2023).

Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 (NSW).

Biosecurity Act 2015 (NSW).

NSW Wild Dog Management Strategy.

Research by Cairns, Newsome, Wallach, Smith and colleagues on dingo genetics, ecology and conservation.