

**Submission
No 207**

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Ms Ruby Hardie

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Dear Animal Welfare Committee

Dingoes are the ONLY native animal in NSW that is NOT protected under the Biodiversity Conservation Act. They are shot, trapped, and poisoned. Experts have warned that the NSW government's 1080 poison program could wipe out dingoes entirely. Dingoes are confident, intelligent, sentient feeling animals with strong family bonds. They do **NOT** deserve to be persecuted where they have been falsely mislabelled by the Government and landholders as 'wild dogs'. They are not, as this intentional incorrect labelling has been used by the NSW Government to justify the eradication of this native wildlife. This is unacceptable practice by the NSW Government to act on a lie so as to serve the interests of landholders. The persecution of the Dingo to protect farmer's interests is totally unacceptable especially when it is native wildlife.

There are more humane ways to protect the farmer's assets than attacking violently the Dingo as the 'scapegoat' in their loss of farm animals. This mistake urgently needs to be rectified and the Dingo classified as an Australian dog species. They have been persecuted relentlessly and killed. It's time that this atrocity stop to align with a modern, compassionate society that is actually based on the truth. Dingoes are culturally and ecologically significant to First Nation Peoples and Country. They are Australia's only terrestrial apex predator -native wildlife that serves a vital function to keep populations of kangaroos in check and introduced non- native wildlife that are classed as the real 'pests'- rabbits, foxes, wild pigs. We need the Dingo protected to serve their role of keeping the Australian ecosystems balanced. This orchestrated slaughter of our dingoes will continue this imbalance in nature that will only get worse. These feral animals need to be controlled naturally to protect the farmer's assets, and the Dingo can serve this function if the persecution of this species stops immediately. Dingoes **MUST** been recognised as native wildlife and protected under the **NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act**.

These issues will be raised in my submission according to the terms of reference set in the Inquiry, that clearly shows the unjustified treatment and persecution of dingoes in the state's national parks. I strongly urge the NSW Legislative Council Animal Welfare Committee to recognise the important role Dingoes have in maintaining a healthy natural balance in our environment and end their wrongful persecution.

Terms of Reference

(a) the genetic status of dingoes, the distinction between dingoes and dogs and recent research into the genetic profile of NSW dingoes

Dingoes have an important ecological function to perform to maintain healthy ecosystems. Lethal control on dingo families negatively impacts their stability as a family unit. Dingoes are NOT domestic dogs living in the wild, they are native dogs that have been here for thousands of years.

- 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. In New South Wales, more than three-quarters of sampled wild canids showed over 93% contemporary dingo ancestry, that shows that hybridisation relatively uncommon because several **biological and ecological barriers** reduce the likelihood of such events. Without frequent encounters, the opportunity for hybridisation is minimal.
- Ancient DNA studies show that **modern dingoes derive little genomic ancestry from post-colonial hybridisation** with domestic dogs. Dingo population structure was in place **BEFORE** European colonisation. ***This suggests that in the absence of human disturbance, hybridisation has been rare and not a major driver of dingo genetics.*** Dingoes are solitary or pair-bonded predators with strong territoriality different to wild feral dogs. In undisturbed environments, **territorial defence and mate choice** further reduce the chance of mating with unrelated canids.
- The opportunity for **hybridisation is further diminished** as Australia does not have an established continent-wide population of feral domestic dogs living independently across ecosystems, therefore the **hybridisation theory has NOT been proved**.
- Lethal control methods such as poisoning, trapping and shooting can disrupt stable dingo pack structures, increasing social instability. The Government is accountable for this action in permitting the trapping,

shooting and poisoning of our native dog- effectively our native wildlife. This Government will be directly responsible for the extinction of our only native dog that was here with First Nations People before colonisation. Shameful behaviour to approve the legal killing and culling of native wildlife like our native dog and the commercial and non -commercial slaughter of our kangaroos and macropods.

- Dingoes and domestic dogs gone wild display notable differences- 1. Social structures- dingoes have stable, family-based packs whereas domestic dogs that have turned wild have opportunistic groupings and will often be on their own 2. breeding patterns- dingoes only breed annually once a year versus multiple breeding cycles in domestic dogs 3. Hunting Behaviours- co-operative hunting behaviour patterns, and territoriality and wild-adapted behaviours are displayed by Dingoes as opposed to 'wild dogs' who function on their own and are not territorial. Stark differences between the two.
- The great majority of wild canids killed in Australia are totally or largely from dingo genetic stock. Industry and some government bodies have in recent years **deliberately** stopped calling the animals that are killed 'dingoes', instead labelling them as 'wild dogs', probably to justify their killing of Dingoes that ARE native wildlife. ***This is an intentional misrepresentation of the truth, and something the government MUST correct otherwise their credibility is already called into question by the community*** -something that will become apparent in this submission process. Hiding the real truth, First Nations People's input and current science-based data to continue the extermination of our wild native Indigenous dog is deceitful. Staying with a government Policy that does NOT align with the science and hides the truth to support the farming industry IS morally wrong. This Government is eroding away any trust the public has in them to manage this issue ethically. The Government must END the targeted government policy to kill our Dingoes in NSW national parks by NPWS. This action MUST end to save this native species from extinction. It also must be made illegal for farmers and landholders to kill Dingoes.

(b) the legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks governing the management of dingoes in NSW national parks

Dingoes must be correctly classified based on the current up to date science, that defines them as wild-living canids in Australia. They therefore MUST be managed under policy frameworks in NSW and approaches that recognise dingoes as ecologically important native wildlife. Grouping all dogs together as 'wild dogs' is incorrect terminology as Dingoes, domestic stray dogs and feral dogs are all different.

- Based on the updated genetic research there MUST be a clear distinction between roaming /stray dogs and dingoes under the current legislation. They are **not** the same, and the 2 groups MUST be clearly clarified in government policy as being different and completely distinct species based on recent genetic studies. This MUST be corrected and defined properly in government policy. Hiding the truth, making excuses and arguments that do not correlate with the most recent science will not be acceptable behaviour from the public. Be truthful and you will find that the community will accept that mistakes are made. This government must stop this persecution of Dingoes, and end the targeted killing programs in our national parks, correct the government policy and make it illegal for landholders and farmers to kill Dingoes. Any government action MUST be based on truth and the most recent scientific research.
- The incorrect classification of Dingoes permits their lethal inhumane control in national parks and by landholders themselves. They are also considered to be a pest. How can a Dingo that has been here for 4000 years before colonisation be a 'pest' when this term predominately refers to introduced animals that are NOT native wildlife- e.g. the fox. The NSW Government is strongly advised to correct this major error in Government policy. Therefore as the Dingo is NOT a pest, but native wildlife, it should and MUST be recognised that it is NOT a biosecurity risk that warrants extermination. Pest animals do NOT include native wildlife.
- The NSW Government is strongly advised to clearly clarify the difference between wild dogs and our native dog the Dingo, and stop using these terms interchangeably in government policy. They are two different species. The government must refer to the recent scientific data and the differences (breeding patterns, social structures and behaviours) between dingoes that are native dogs and wild feral dogs. They must use up to date genetic information to differentiate that dingoes are **wild canids and NOT wild dogs, or feral domestic dogs or hybrid descendants**.

(c) the ecological role of dingoes in National Parks

Dingoes have an ecological importance as apex predators and their role in maintaining healthy ecosystems within National Parks.

- Dingoes are Australia's only 'native canid' and are recognised as an important apex predator and keystone species. There is evidence that dingoes significantly reduce the level of unmanaged grazing by feral (rabbits) and native herbivores (kangaroos). Therefore they keep nature in balance and actually work to support the interests of farmers to maintain sufficient grazing land for their own stock/farm animals. Dingoes also regulate naturally populations of kangaroos and wallabies, reducing grazing pressure on landscapes.
- Dingoes help governments manage feral species. The example of feral goats managed by Dingoes in the southern rangelands of Western Australia has shown that dingoes reduced the pressure on vegetation and the natural environment caused by huge numbers of goats grazing on the vegetation with estimated reductions in goat populations from 1 million in 2005 to 150,000 in 2011. In six years the population of goats declined by 850,000. The Dingo is an effective Apex predator that keeps feral animals in check. The Dingo is not a 'pest' animal but has wrongfully been mislabelled by the NSW Government. Feral animals can do much damage to our landscape. Native animals work together to improve nature like our bats that are ecological seed dispersers, kangaroos that leave footprints that fill with water from rainfall that leads to seed germination that supports nature to recover. All native animals are intrinsically connected to serve nature and its restoration, when not interfered with by man.
- Dingoes suppress introduced cats and introduced foxes through territorial competition and direct predation, easing pressure on smaller native wildlife to enable them to survive. Dingoes also contribute to the suppression of pigs, also reducing pressure on landscapes.
- The removal of apex predators can destabilise ecosystems, contributing to vegetation decline by pests like rabbits and goats, habitat degradation and increased pressure on threatened species.

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

There is a cultural importance of dingoes to First Nations communities, including their role in lore, kinship, Songlines, storytelling and Caring for Country practices. Cultural Custodians have a connection to dingo. The National First Nations Dingo Declaration, which was written by Traditional Owners outlines a strong cultural perspective on dingoes. This declaration opposes the cruel targeting by killing, poisoning, and trapping of dingoes. The presence of the Dingo ensures healthy ecosystems. Using the term 'wild dog' is a complete misrepresentation of the Dingo simply to justify their killing. These actions disrespect First Nations Peoples' culture. Many Cultural Custodians report feeling excluded from decisions relating to dingo management on their Country. Current Dingo management programs in NSW do **not** reflect First Nations Peoples important and valued cultural perspectives relating to dingoes. This must be corrected and readdressed by the government to show inclusiveness, value and respect towards Cultural Custodians- after all they know how to care for Country, as nature was in balance for thousands of years. This balance has been disturbed by the agriculture industry and the state government. They are responsible for the poor health of Country through their incorrect policies on Dingo management in NSW along with other destructive practices like increased fossil fuel project approvals, extensive animal agriculture that causes increased deforestation and land clearing and industrialised logging.

(e) the impact of current government policies and programs for the management of dingoes in National Parks

There are ecological, genetic, cultural and animal welfare impacts associated with current dingo management programs in New South Wales National Parks. The management of Dingoes is cruel and unnecessary.

Current management programs relies on lethal control methods that disrupts stable dingo family groups and pack structures.

- Dingo management is the inhumane removal of Dingoes in the environment that causes a chain reaction that occurs when an apex predator- the dingo is removed or heavily controlled. This is termed **trophic cascade**. By suppressing dingo numbers, you trigger a "domino effect" of unintended consequences down the food web, resulting in exploding populations of smaller predators and herbivores, which ultimately damages vegetation and soil. By removing Dingoes you also increase the populations of the introduced predators like foxes and the large herbivores (like kangaroos and wallabies). When their primary natural predator is gone this leads to severe **overgrazing**, which strips the landscape of native vegetation and degrades soil quality.
- Dingoes naturally suppress mid-sized predators (mesopredators) like foxes and feral cats. When dingo populations drop, the number of foxes and cats spikes—a phenomenon known as **mesopredator release**. These smaller predators then heavily hunt native small mammals, rodents, and marsupials, many of which play crucial roles in digging and aerating the soil
- This is what this inhumane and cruel assault on our Dingo has caused in the natural environment, a complete natural imbalance because the Dingo has been wrongly referred to as a 'pest' and are mislabelled again as a 'wild dog'. They are NOT and have never been a 'pest' nor a 'wild dog'. A convenient incorrect labelling of 'wild dog' to justify that they are a 'pest' to give farmers, landholders and the government any excuse to slaughter them. This is ethically wrong and MUST be corrected. Respect First Nations Peoples and their connection to the Dingo who has lived in Country for thousands of years. Domestic dogs who have gone wild or feral have existed for a little over 200 years maximum. There is no similarity between the two, yet the NSW Government and landholders use this term interchangeably to refer to the Dingo as a 'wild dog'. It is time to rectify this mistake and restore proper natural balance in our environment. This balance has been disturbed by the NSW Government because their current management programs fail to reflect contemporary ecological science.
- Instead the current management of dingoes in National Parks is largely focused on agricultural protection not biodiversity outcomes. The government is urged to readjust their focus.
- Trapping of dingoes raises serious welfare concerns for the time the animal remains in the trap, unable to access food, water or shelter. This is cruel and inhumane and I am vehemently opposed to this animal cruelty. NPWS do NOT arrive in a timely manner to spare the Dingo of this incredible pain- some languishing for days. Totally unacceptable. Where is your compassion? Killing the Dingo is not only wrong but the methods used through trapping and poisoning is absolutely disgustingly cruel at the extreme level. 1080 baiting is an odourless poison disrupting cellular energy production, that causes unconsciousness and death. Dingoes are highly susceptible to this poison, making 1080 effective at killing them, but it is a non-discriminatory poison that can impact native wildlife and domestic pets. This is why most people in NSW are opposed to this poison and are beginning to actively campaign to have it banned in their own local government area -Northern Beaches Council, Campbelltown City Council, Blue Mountains City Council have banned 1080. This issue is gaining momentum to ban this poison. I strongly urge that this poison be banned completely in all state managed lands such as our national parks under NPWS. Just because 1080 poison is still permitted under NSW law does **NOT** mean it is right- it means that the NSW law is wrong!
- No funding is allocated for research and development into **non-lethal coexistence strategies** for agricultural properties that neighbour National Parks. This shows a reluctance by the government to explore more humane ways to address this issue and keep up to date with current science-based solutions. It also shows the government's priority is the agriculture industry over nature. It would be refreshing for this government to just once put nature and its native wildlife (the Dingo) above the greedy interests of agriculture. Otherwise, the Dingo will disappear completely, which will permanently cause an increased ripple effect in nature that will negatively impact further its natural balance, that will lead to increased feral animals, more declines of native wildlife, the erosion of water and soil health that will affect agriculture anyway. Businesses and industry need a healthy nature to effectively operate.

(f) dingo management including opportunities for incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and leadership in dingo conservation

Greater involvement of Cultural Custodians in dingo management and conservation across New South Wales National Parks is strongly encouraged.

- 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. First Nations Peoples knowledge and involvement should be encouraged by the government.
- 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. With this understanding the Dingo's role in a healthy ecosystem can be promoted more so that feral animal populations are controlled by the Dingoes' presence, resulting in smaller native animals having better chances to survive in the wild because feral animal numbers have been reduced.
- Across NSW, Indigenous ranger groups are increasingly leading and monitoring 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. A shared responsibility between NPWS and Cultural Custodians would produce better results for the environment, for dingoes and for native wildlife. Co-management approaches offer a practical framework to integrate Indigenous knowledge systems with western science in National Parks management. The community want to see more liaising and co-operation between these 2 groups.
- Strengthening the role of Cultural Custodians in decision-making processes would improve cultural, ecological, and conservation outcomes.
- 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.

(g) any other related matters.

Changes to dingo management within National Parks may create concern or uncertainty for neighbouring landholders in relation to predation on farmed animals. The Government must support the development, accessibility, and broader adoption of effective non-lethal predator deterrents through knowledge sharing and information with the farming community.

- Longstanding lethal control measures have not eliminated the risk of predation on farmed animals.
- There is currently no extension services to support landholders to implement **non-lethal predator deterrent strategies** in NSW. Funding is currently utilised for broad-scale 1080 baiting of dingoes and trapping and shooting them in National Parks, and should be instead re-directed to support neighbouring landholders with knowledge and usage of **effective non-lethal predator deterrents**. These include 'Livestock Guardian Dogs' that are used in Europe successfully to keep farm animals safe from predators and deterring macropods from over-grazing in paddocks, and also protecting smaller native wildlife from foxes.
- Donkeys are effective guardians for farm animals. There is a strong opportunity for the NSW 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 NSW that ensures landholder interests are protected, and dingoes can be retained naturally in the environment to play their important ecological role and function to re-establish a better balance in nature where dingoes control feral animal populations naturally that helps to support smaller native wildlife with a reduced risk of predation by these feral animals.

In conclusion, we must value the life of dingoes and their function in the wild to eradicate introduced non-native animals. They are an important part of a healthy ecosystem as apex predators. NSW communities are very concerned about the rapid decline of this species due to the government's wrong stand on this issue, and the wrongful labelling of dingoes as 'pests' or 'wild dogs' - a title given to them by the landholder and farmer who are protecting their financial interests, so they have conveniently labelled this native dog as a 'pest.' This gives them the right to set cruel traps to catch the dingo. I am very concerned that this mislabelling could mean the extinction of a native animal. ***It is very important that NSW decision makers demonstrate an ethical responsibility to address this mis-labelling and remove it and accept through science professionals that the dingo is in fact an Australian native animal deserving of protection now NOT vilification to protect the interest of landholders.*** Decision-makers MUST consider growing community concerns, and their ethical responsibility alongside technical assessments that value the dingo as an important part of nature in NSW that should and must be protected under the NSW **Biodiversity Conservation Act**.

I support the following **recommendations**

1. An end to dingo killing within NSW National Parks to protect the ecological function of dingoes and support biodiversity conservation.
2. Dingoes are the only native mammals specifically exempt from protection under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act*, allowing them to be legally trapped, poisoned and shot across NSW National Parks. They must be recognised as Australian dogs that have lived here for 4,000 years and be protected under this Act.
3. Greater involvement of Cultural Custodians in decision-making and place-based management regarding dingoes in National Parks is needed to ensure the cultural significance of dingoes is reflected in legislation and management. This is a priority.
4. Financial support and extension services for landholders surrounding National Parks to implement non-lethal coexistence strategies, ensuring their interests are protected and dingoes can be maintained in the environment.
5. I care about how Australia treats animals and its native wildlife. What happens to dingoes in NSW matters to all of us, regardless of where we live. I strongly urge the committee to recommend that dingoes be given full legislative protection and that lethal management methods be replaced with humane, non-lethal alternatives. Their persecution under the law is wrong- therefore the law is wrong and must be changed.

Thank you for reading my submission.