

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Hello Dingo

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To:

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Formal Submission: Inquiry into Dingoes in National Parks in New South Wales

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Reference:
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Executive Summary

The legislative and operational structures currently governing wild canine management in New South Wales fail to reflect contemporary genetic data and modern ecological science. By utilizing the catch-all classification of "wild dogs," current frameworks obscure the state-sanctioned eradication of a native apex predator on public lands. Furthermore, current systems utilize substantial public taxpayer revenue to underwrite private biosecurity measures, while leaving significant gaps in companion animal regulations that facilitate domestic canine straying. This submission provides an independent, evidence-based critique of current policies and offers a constructive framework for non-lethal mitigation, regulatory equity, and ecological restoration.

1. About Hello Dingo and Our Perspective

Hello Dingo is an established environmental conservation and education initiative based in New South Wales. Our organization delivers community programs, hands-on learning experiences, and educational presentations across primary and secondary schools. Through our daily interactions with the public, educators, and school groups, we consistently observe a profound disconnect between statutory land management terms and the public's understanding of native ecology. Our educational work underpins the core philosophy of this submission: that sustainable environmental policy cannot coexist with deliberately ambiguous terminology or outdated scientific assumptions.

2. Deconstructing the "Wild Dog" Classification for Public Transparency

The term "wild dog" as implemented under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* serves as an administrative umbrella that groups dingoes, domestic strays, and hybrids into a single pest category. This lack of legal and linguistic distinction creates significant policy problems:

- **Public Misdirection:** Aggregating all wild canines under a single label prevents the public from understanding the true nature of wildlife management within conservation areas. When control programs are implemented in National Parks, communities are frequently under the impression that the targets are strictly abandoned domestic pets or feral strays.
- **Signage Reform:** True civic transparency requires an immediate overhaul of public communication strategies. We propose that all official documentation, management plans, and—critically—**public park signage** be updated to explicitly state the presence of the dingo.

Proposed Standard: Replacing generic "Wild Dog Baiting" signs with transparent signage such as "**Dingo and Wild Dog Management Area**" ensures that park users, landholders, and the broader community are fully informed that a native apex predator is the primary subject of state management actions.

3. The Empirical Science of Dingo Genetics

For decades, lethal management strategies have been justified by the assumption that the wild canine population across the eastern seaboard is heavily compromised by domestic dog hybridization. Modern genomic analysis has disproven this premise.

- **The Transition to Genome-Wide Testing:** Traditional logic relied heavily on limited microsatellite DNA testing, which frequently misclassified pure or high-ancestry dingoes as hybrids. Comprehensive research led by Dr. Kylie Cairns and the Centre for Ecosystem Science at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) utilizes advanced single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) technologies to map the entire canine genome.
- **High Genetic Ancestry:** The findings demonstrate that the vast majority of wild canines sampled in the natural environments of New South Wales are genetically pure dingoes or possess exceptionally high dingo ancestry (Cairns et al., 2023). Feral domestic dogs do not form self-sustaining, independent populations in these wilderness areas.
- **Taxonomic Clarity:** The peer-reviewed data establishes that the animals targeted by broadscale control programs are biologically functional dingoes executing their natural evolutionary roles, rather than invasive domestic populations (Cairns et al., 2023).

4. The Ecological Value of the Apex Predator

As Australia's primary terrestrial apex predator, the dingo regulates ecosystems through complex trophic cascades. The removal or suppression of this species directly destabilizes native biodiversity.

- **Mesopredator Suppression:** Intact dingo populations naturally restrict the density and alter the behavior of introduced mesopredators—specifically red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) and feral cats (*Felis catus*). Research indicates that

in environments where dingoes are actively present, predation pressure on vulnerable native mammals, ground-nesting birds, and reptiles drops significantly, providing a crucial buffer against extinction (Letnic et al., 2011).

- **Invasive Pest and Herbivore Regulation:** Dingoes provide essential landscape stabilization by preying upon and dispersing overabundant feral herbivores, such as feral goats and wild pigs, alongside native grazing species like kangaroos (Letnic et al., 2011). Unchecked grazing leads to intense landscape degradation, topsoil erosion, and the destruction of the understory vegetation required by small native fauna (Morris & Letnic, 2017).
- **The Destabilization Loop:** Indiscriminate lethal control programs (such as broadscale baiting) fracture the complex social structure of dingo packs. When experienced alpha pairs are removed, the remaining pack dynamics collapse. This frequently leads to increased reproductive rates among younger, less experienced individuals and erratic hunting patterns, which paradoxically increases the likelihood of canines venturing onto agricultural boundaries for easily accessible prey.

5. Reforming the Companion Animals Act to Protect Dingo Populations

While the state infrastructure heavily penalizes the dingo for hybridization, current companion animal regulations actively facilitate the domestic straying that drives it. Under the current framework of the *Companion Animals Act 1998*, working dogs on rural properties and canines kept in the Western Division are granted extensive exemptions regarding standard registration fees and mandatory microchipping enforcement. This legislative disparity directly impacts wild dingo populations:

- **The Farm-Gate Source:** The existing exemptions create structural gaps in domestic animal traceability. Unregistered, unchipped, and frequently un-desexed working or hunting breeds that escape or stray beyond property boundaries face little to no administrative accountability.
- **Driving Introgression:** When these domestic animals wander into adjacent public lands and National Parks where dingo pack structures have been fractured by baiting, they interbreed with the remaining dingo populations, directly causing the domestic dog introgression the government seeks to eliminate.

Our Proposed Solution: The NSW Government must eliminate all geographical and vocational exemptions within the *Companion Animals Act 1998*. Every domestic dog within New South Wales—regardless of whether it is a working agricultural dog, a remote western property dog, or an urban pet—must be subject to the exact same strict mandates for microchipping, desexing (unless registered with a recognized breeding authority), and permanent state database registration. Accountability must be uniform across all postcodes to halt domestic genetic leakage at the source.

6. Economic Accountability in State Biosecurity Expenditure

A significant volume of public taxpayer funding is directed annually through Local Land Services (LLS) and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to underwrite broadscale poisoning, trapping, and aerial eradication programs. This framework represents a substantial public subsidy directed toward managing the biosecurity overheads of private, commercial livestock enterprises. It is fiscally counterproductive to deploy millions of taxpayer dollars to systematically dismantle the ecological stability of public conservation assets for private commercial insulation—particularly when these lethal interventions have been shown to exacerbate stock loss cycles over the long term. Public capital is far better spent transitioning agricultural boundaries toward permanent, self-sustaining management models.

7. Cultural Kinship and First Nations Custodianship

The dingo holds an irreplaceable position within First Nations culture, history, Dreaming stories, and kinship systems across New South Wales. For millennia, the dingo has been understood not as an economic adversary or a biological pest, but as a deeply respected companion, a protector, and a cultural totem. The ongoing deployment of non-selective lethal agents, such as 1080 poison, across public conservation landscapes directly disrupts the cultural heritage and traditional relationships of Aboriginal communities with their Country. Dingo management within our National Parks must explicitly step away from colonial pastoral models and move toward joint-custodianship frameworks that respect and elevate the leadership of Indigenous Rangers and Cultural Knowledge Holders.

8. Structural and Actionable Recommendations

Hello Dingo urges the Animal Welfare Committee to consider the following distinct policy changes:

Within the National Parks Estate:

1. **Transition Away from Broadscale Poisoning:** Phase out the un-targeted aerial and ground deployment of 1080 poison inside National Park boundaries to protect the social and genetic stability of native canine packs.
2. **Harmonized Environmental Protection:** Review the statutory mechanisms within the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* to guarantee that dingoes within public conservation zones are treated as a protected native species rather than biosecurity pests.
3. **Indigenous Joint-Management:** Ensure that all future canine management protocols within the national parks estate require formal consultation, co-design, and approval from Traditional Owners and Indigenous land managers.

On Adjacent Agricultural Boundaries (Non-Lethal Coexistence):

1. **Reallocate Public Funds to Coexistence Grants:** Pivot state funding away from chemical eradication programs and rechannel those taxpayer resources into a dedicated **Agricultural Coexistence Grant Scheme** for landholders bordering public lands.
2. **Support for Livestock Guardian Programs:** Provide financial assistance and regional training for the integration of specialized Livestock Guardian Animals (such as Maremma sheepdogs, Anatolian shepherds, and donkeys), which have a globally proven track record of actively protecting stock without lethal environmental impacts.
3. **Subsidize Smart Infrastructure:** Invest public resources in upgrading protective infrastructure, including predator-deterrent electric fencing, exclusion boundaries, and secure night-penning yards for highly vulnerable young stock during lambing and calving seasons.
4. **Enforce Total Companion Animal Traceability:** Amend the *Companion Animals Act 1998* to completely remove microchipping and registration exemptions for rural and working dogs, establishing a rigorous, state-wide framework of owner accountability to prevent domestic straying.

Conclusion

The existing "wild dog" management model is a legacy system that no longer aligns with modern genetic science, economic transparency, or ecological health. Hello Dingo advocates for a shift toward a mature, scientifically grounded framework where the state rigorously enforces domestic animal accountability while respecting the foundational role of our native apex predator.

We thank the Committee for their time, leadership, and detailed investigation into this vital ecological matter, and we welcome the opportunity to speak further at the upcoming public hearings.

Sincerely,

Robert Eldridge

Founder & Operator

The Hello Dingo Team

Wildlife Conservation & Education

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