**Submission No 221**

# INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

**Organisation:** WWF-Australia

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# SUBMISSION

JULY 2026

# A SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

WWF-Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Inquiry into dingoes in national parks in New South Wales (NSW). As part of the WWF International Network, the world's largest independent conservation organisation, WWF-Australia brings extensive experience in biodiversity conservation, threatened species recovery, human-wildlife coexistence, landscape restoration, protected area management and First Nations-led Caring for Country initiatives. We work with governments, scientists, conservation organisations, private landholders, First Nations organisations and local communities to protect and restore species and ecosystems of high ecological and cultural value.

WWF-Australia recognises dingoes as native wildlife, important apex predators and species of immense cultural significance. Our current engagement with this species has been shaped primarily through partnerships with First Nations communities across Australia, where dingoes have consistently been identified as important to healthy Country, cultural continuity and biocultural approaches to land management.

WWF-Australia considers that this Inquiry provides an important opportunity to review the legislative, policy and management frameworks governing dingoes in NSW national parks. In particular, the Inquiry provides an opportunity to evaluate whether current approaches are consistent with contemporary scientific evidence, the biodiversity conservation objectives of national parks, and the rights, interests and aspirations of First Nations people and community.

This submission highlights contemporary genetic evidence demonstrating that most wild-living canids in NSW, including within national parks, retain high levels of dingo ancestry; the ecological role dingoes can play in maintaining ecosystem function; and the cultural significance of dingoes to many First Nations communities. It also considers the implications of current management frameworks, and opportunities to strengthen First Nations leadership, and integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems and evidence-based decision-making, in dingo conservation and management within NSW national parks.

WWF-Australia supports future approaches that recognise dingoes as native wildlife and culturally significant species, facilitate human-dingo coexistence, strengthen First Nations leadership and participation, and align management within NSW national parks with contemporary scientific evidence, Indigenous Knowledge Systems and biodiversity conservation objectives.

This submission follows the Terms of Reference established for the Inquiry into dingoes in national parks in NSW. Detailed recommendations relevant to each Term of Reference are provided throughout the submission and summarised in **Appendix A**. WWF-Australia thanks the Committee for considering this submission and would welcome the opportunity to provide further information or evidence to assist the Inquiry.

## 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

In NSW, dingoes are often grouped with feral domestic dogs and dingo-dog hybrids under the broad management category "wild dogs". This approach in part reflects longstanding concerns regarding hybridisation between dingoes and domestic dogs, together with ongoing debate surrounding the taxonomy, classification and conservation status of dingoes (e.g. Jackson et al. 2021; Smith et al. 2019; Cairns et al. 2025). However, recent genomic research has substantially improved understanding of the genetic status of dingoes and the extent of hybridisation within wild populations. These studies demonstrate that dingoes represent a distinct evolutionary lineage that is genetically distinguishable from modern domestic dogs and that most wild-living canids across Australia, including within NSW national parks, retain high levels of dingo ancestry (Cairns et al. 2023; Cairns et al. 2025; Souilmi & Ravishankar 2026).

Recent research has also identified low genetic diversity and elevated inbreeding in some south-eastern Australian dingo populations, with sustained lethal control and population fragmentation likely contributing to declining genetic health (Miller et al. 2024; Scarsbrook et al. 2025). These findings highlight the importance of considering the genetic diversity, connectivity and long-term viability of dingo populations when developing management approaches for conservation lands, including national parks.

WWF-Australia considers that legislation, policy and management frameworks should be aligned with contemporary genetic evidence by clearly distinguishing dingoes from domestic dogs. Management frameworks should recognise that many of the canids managed within NSW national parks retain high levels of dingo ancestry and should further consider the implications of any management actions on the long-term genetic health and viability of dingo populations.

**WWF Recommendation:** *Ensure legislation, policy and management frameworks reflect contemporary genetic evidence by clearly distinguishing between dingoes and domestic dogs in NSW national parks. Management decisions should recognise that most wild-living canids in NSW, including within national parks, retain high levels of dingo ancestry and should consider the long-term genetic health and viability of dingo populations.*

## Terms of Reference b)

## The legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks governing the management of dingoes in NSW in national parks

Current legislation and policies create significant inconsistencies in the way dingoes are recognised and managed in NSW national parks. Dingoes are recognised as native wildlife under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 (NSW)*, yet they are explicitly excluded from the protections afforded to other native species under Schedule 5 of the Act. At the same time, dingoes continue to be managed through pest and biosecurity frameworks, including the *NSW Wild Dog Management Strategy* (NSW DPI 2022) and obligations under the *Biosecurity Act 2015 (NSW)*.

A key contributor to these inconsistencies is the continued use of the term “wild dog” in legislation, policy, management plans and public communications. This term groups dingoes, domestic dogs and dingo-dog hybrids into a single management category, despite contemporary genetic research demonstrating that most wild-living canids in NSW, including within national parks, retain high levels of dingo ancestry (see Terms of Reference a for further discussion and references). The use of this terminology makes it unclear

whether management actions are directed at a native species, or at a feral domestic dog, reducing transparency and complicating informed discussion about management objectives and outcomes.

These inconsistencies are particularly significant within the NSW national park estate. The *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NSW)* requires reserved lands to be managed to conserve biodiversity, maintain ecological processes, protect cultural heritage and integrate natural and cultural values. However, the continued use of broad “wild dog” terminology can make it difficult to clearly assess how management decisions relating to dingoes contribute to these objectives. This ambiguity may also reduce transparency and informed public and Traditional Owner engagement in management decisions, given that most people are unaware that "wild dog" control programs include dingoes and that attitudes towards dingoes differ substantially from attitudes towards animals described as "wild dogs" (Van Eeden et al. 2021). Greater clarity in terminology would assist stakeholders to better understand, evaluate and participate in informed discussions about dingo management in NSW national parks.

WWF-Australia considers that the Inquiry provides an important opportunity to improve policy coherence and transparency in dingo management. Future legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks should provide a consistent approach to recognising and managing dingoes within NSW national parks and be aligned with contemporary scientific evidence, biodiversity conservation objectives, and the rights, interests and knowledge of First Nations people.

**WWF Recommendation:** *Review and align legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks governing dingoes in NSW national parks to ensure management is consistent with biodiversity conservation objectives, contemporary science, and the rights, interests and knowledge of First Nations people.*

**WWF Recommendation:** *Replace the use of the term "wild dog" in legislation, policy and management frameworks with terminology that clearly distinguishes dingoes and domestic dogs, improving transparency and supporting evidence-based management.*

## Terms of Reference c)

## The ecological role of dingoes in national parks

Dingoes are Australia’s largest terrestrial predator and play an important ecological role in maintaining the structure, function and resilience of many Australian ecosystems. Their ecological importance has long been recognised within Indigenous Knowledge Systems and is increasingly supported by contemporary ecological research. This research demonstrates that, as apex predators, dingoes influence ecosystems through predation, competition with other predators, and behavioural effects on prey species, with flow-on effects for vegetation, native fauna and broader ecosystem processes (Letnic et al. 2011; Glen et al. 2007).

For example, dingoes can influence populations of invasive predators such as red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) and feral cats (*Felis catus*), both of which are major threats to native wildlife. Research has linked dingo presence with changes in the abundance, activity and behaviour of these smaller predators, suggesting dingoes can contribute to the natural suppression of invasive species and support native species persistence (Letnic et al. 2011; Hunter & Letnic 2022). Dingoes can also influence herbivore populations and behaviour, including kangaroos and introduced species such as rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), potentially reducing grazing pressure and improving vegetation condition, ground cover and habitat availability for smaller native species (Letnic et al. 2011; Glen et al. 2007). Although these relationships are context-dependent and vary across ecosystems, they demonstrate that dingoes can play a key role in regulating ecological interactions and supporting ecosystem function.

The ecological role of dingoes is a particularly important consideration in NSW national parks, where management decisions can influence both the conservation status of the species and the ecological functions it performs. Management actions that substantially reduce dingo populations (i.e. lethal control) may have consequences beyond the individual animals removed, including changes to predator-prey dynamics, invasive species regulation, social structure and broader ecosystem function (Wallach et al. 2009; Letnic et al. 2011; Leo et al. 2019).

WWF-Australia considers that dingo management can be complex, particularly where national parks adjoin agricultural land or where there are site-specific risks to threatened species (Allen & Fleming 2012; Glen et al. 2007; Fleming et al. 2012). However, management interventions within national parks should be proportionate, evidence-based and clearly justified against conservation objectives and contemporary ecological knowledge. The ecological role of dingoes should be explicitly considered when evaluating management actions within these protected areas.

**WWF Recommendation:** *Recognise and incorporate the ecological role of dingoes in NSW national parks. Management decisions should explicitly consider the contribution of dingoes to biodiversity conservation, ecological processes and ecosystem function, and assess the potential ecological consequences of population suppression when evaluating management interventions.*

## Terms of Reference d)

## The cultural significance of dingoes for First Nations communities

For many First Nations people, dingoes are not simply animals; they embody Country, spirit, song, and life. They feature prominently in Dreaming stories, ceremonies, and songlines, and are recognised as family or kin, guardians, and land managers on Country, as well as living cultural heritage 'artefacts' (Blake and Jones 2024; Girringun 2023). Historically, dingoes were companions in hunting, protectors of camps, and were even buried alongside humans (Koungoulos et al. 2023), reflecting the depth of these relationships. Their behaviour was read as part of a broader system of biocultural stewardship, where humans and dingoes worked together to maintain balance in the landscape.

The significance of dingoes to First Nations people was highlighted recently through the 2023 First Nations Dingo Forum, hosted by Girringun Aboriginal Corporation with support from WWF-Australia and other partners. The forum brought together more than 100 First Nations representatives from over 20 language groups from across Australia to discuss the cultural significance of dingoes and the challenges surrounding their management. The forum culminated in the *National First Nations Dingo Declaration*, which called for stronger recognition of First Nations rights, interests and knowledge in decisions affecting dingoes and affirmed their importance to Country, culture and community identity (Girringun 2023).

Similar conversations have continued within NSW through initiatives such as the Ngugum (Dingo) Project on Bundjalung Country (UNSW 2025). This initiative builds on Minyumai Land Holding Aboriginal Corporation's work caring for Ngugum across the Minyumai Indigenous Protected Area and neighbouring Bundjalung National Park. It brought together Aboriginal community organisations from across northern NSW with researchers, local councils, WWF-Australia and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service to discuss the cultural and ecological significance of Ngugum and its future on Country. Participants emphasised the importance of greater First Nations involvement in decisions affecting the species and advocated for approaches that better recognise cultural values, local knowledge and coexistence with Ngugum.

For many First Nations communities, decisions affecting dingoes in national parks extend beyond simple wildlife management. They raise broader considerations relating to cultural heritage, cultural responsibilities, self-determination and the role of First Nations people in caring for Country. These considerations are particularly relevant where decisions affect culturally significant species or landscapes that hold ongoing cultural, spiritual and community importance. WWF-Australia considers that legislation, policy and management relating to dingoes in NSW national parks should appropriately recognise these cultural values and responsibilities and ensure First Nations people are meaningfully considered in decisions affecting the species.

**WWF Recommendation:** *Ensure legislation, policy and management relating to dingoes in NSW national parks appropriately recognise First Nations cultural values, responsibilities to Country, and the significance of dingoes to First Nations communities.*

## Terms of Reference e)

## Impact of current government policies and programs for the management of dingoes in national parks

Current government policies and programs have significant implications for dingoes in NSW national parks. Broad-scale lethal control, including aerial and ground baiting with 1080, remains an important component of dingo management under existing wild dog management programs in NSW (NSW DPI 2022). These programs occur within NSW national parks, landscapes that are managed to conserve biodiversity, maintain ecological processes and protect cultural values.

Current management approaches may have implications for the genetic health and long-term viability of dingo populations. Contemporary genetic research has identified low genetic diversity and elevated inbreeding in some south-eastern Australian populations, with sustained lethal control and population fragmentation likely contributing to declining genetic health. Repeated population suppression may also affect social structure and population connectivity, with potential implications for long-term population viability (see Terms of Reference a for further discussion and references).

The ecological consequences of repeated dingo suppression are also an important consideration. Dingoes can influence populations of invasive predators, as well as overabundant herbivores such as kangaroos and rabbits, and their removal may alter predator-prey dynamics and broader ecosystem processes. Evidence from a range of Australian ecosystems suggests that reductions in dingo abundance can be associated with increased activity or abundance of invasive predators, changes in herbivore pressure and broader ecological change, with potential implications for biodiversity outcomes (see Terms of Reference c for further discussion and references).

Current management programs may also have cultural implications. For many First Nations communities, dingoes are culturally significant beings connected to Country, identity, cultural knowledge and responsibilities for caring for Country. Management actions affecting dingoes may therefore have implications that extend beyond wildlife management and can influence matters of cultural responsibility, cultural continuity and self-determination (see Terms of Reference d for further discussion and references).

WWF-Australia recognises that management interventions affecting dingoes may be necessary in some circumstances, such as where there are demonstrated risks to livestock, public safety or threatened species. WWF-Australia also recognises that some programs targeting invasive predators, particularly red foxes and feral cats, have the potential to affect dingoes as a non-target species. In these cases, efforts should be

made to minimise impacts, including collateral impacts, on dingoes and ensure management methods are appropriately targeted, monitored and evaluated within NSW national parks. Management actions should be proportionate, evidence-based and clearly aligned with conservation objectives and First Nations cultural values, with non-lethal approaches prioritised wherever feasible.

WWF-Australia considers that the genetic, ecological and cultural issues outlined above highlight the need for a more integrated and transparent approach to dingo management in NSW national parks. Future policies and programs should balance biodiversity conservation, cultural values, coexistence objectives and the management of site-specific risks, while minimising non-target impacts on dingoes and ensuring management outcomes are monitored and evaluated. Increased investment in the development, trial and adoption of effective non-lethal management approaches could also support both conservation outcomes and neighbouring landholders.

**WWF Recommendation:** *Develop an inclusive NSW national parks dingo management framework that integrates contemporary genetic and ecological science, biodiversity conservation objectives, First Nations cultural values and knowledge, and the needs of neighbouring landholders. The framework should support transparent, evidence-based decision-making, prioritise non-lethal approaches wherever feasible, minimise unintended impacts on dingoes and other non-target species, and provide a consistent approach to evaluating the genetic, ecological, cultural and conservation outcomes of management actions.*

## Terms of Reference f)

## Dingo Management and Opportunities for Incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge and Leadership

One of the most significant opportunities arising from this Inquiry is to strengthen First Nations leadership in decisions affecting dingoes in NSW national parks. There is growing recognition that Indigenous-led land and sea management can deliver positive outcomes for biodiversity conservation while supporting cultural continuity, self-determination and the maintenance of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Indigenous Protected Areas and Indigenous ranger programs have become important components of Australia's conservation estate and have demonstrated the value of combining Indigenous Knowledge Systems with contemporary science to support healthy Country and effective environmental stewardship (Ross et al. 2009; Garnett et al. 2018).

For many First Nations communities, knowledge relating to dingoes has been developed through long-term relationships with Country and continues to inform contemporary Caring for Country practices. Indigenous Knowledge can provide valuable insights into local ecology, species interactions, landscape change and the cultural values associated with dingoes, complementing contemporary scientific approaches (see Terms of Reference d for further discussion and references).

Across Australia, First Nations organisations are increasingly leading dingo conservation, monitoring, stewardship and cultural knowledge sharing initiatives. Through partnerships with Indigenous-led organisations including Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation in Western Australia, Girringun Aboriginal Corporation and Dingo Culture in Queensland, and Minyumai Land Holding Aboriginal Corporation in NSW, WWF-Australia has seen first-hand the value of approaches that bring together Indigenous Knowledge Systems, community priorities and contemporary monitoring techniques to build understanding of dingoes and their role on Country.

In NSW specifically, this has been demonstrated through Minyumai's Ngugum (dingo) monitoring and engagement activities. Supported by WWF-Australia and other partners, this work has brought together First Nations community members from across Bundjalung Country, researchers, local government and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service to monitor Ngugum using camera traps and scat surveys, share knowledge and discuss the future of the species on Country. These activities have demonstrated how Indigenous Knowledge Systems and contemporary science can be brought together to strengthen understanding of dingoes while supporting community-led conversations about conservation, management and cultural values. Workshops and engagement activities associated with the Ngugum project have also highlighted a strong desire among First Nations community members to play a more active role in decisions affecting culturally significant species and landscapes (UNSW 2025).

These experiences highlight the potential for a stronger inclusive partnership approach to dingo conservation in NSW national parks. Future frameworks should create clear opportunities for Traditional Owners and First Nations organisations to participate in planning, monitoring, research, implementation and evaluation. This could include support for Indigenous ranger-led monitoring programs, co-designed research and management initiatives, cultural knowledge protocols, and formal mechanisms for First Nations involvement in decisions affecting dingoes and other culturally significant species.

WWF-Australia considers that strengthening First Nations leadership would not only improve cultural recognition and support self-determination but also contribute to better conservation outcomes. Indigenous Knowledge and contemporary ecological science are complementary knowledge systems, and bringing them together will support more informed, place-based and effective approaches to managing dingoes within the NSW national parks estate.

**WWF Recommendation:** *Ensure management relating to dingoes in NSW national parks appropriately recognises First Nations cultural values, responsibilities to Country and the significance of dingoes to First Nations communities, and provides meaningful opportunities for First Nations leadership in decisions affecting culturally significant species.*

**WWF Recommendation:** *Invest in long-term Indigenous ranger-led monitoring and knowledge-sharing programs that combine Indigenous Knowledge Systems and contemporary science to inform dingo conservation and management within NSW national parks.*

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## Appendix A: Summary Recommendations, as included in the detail of this submission, to the NSW Legislative Council: Animal Welfare Committee

WWF-Australia recommends that the Committee consider the following actions against the Inquiry’s Terms of Reference.

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| Terms of Reference: That the Animal Welfare Committee inquire into and report on the treatment and the cultural and ecological significance of dingoes in national parks in NSW, and in particular:<br><br>a) the genetic status of dingoes, the distinction between dingoes and dogs and recent research into the genetic profile of NSW dingoes |
| **WWF Recommendation:** Ensure legislation, policy and management frameworks reflect contemporary genetic evidence by clearly distinguishing between dingoes and domestic dogs in NSW national parks. Management decisions should recognise that most wild-living canids in NSW, including within national parks, retain high levels of dingo ancestry and should consider the long-term genetic health and viability of dingo populations. |
| b) the legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks governing the management of dingoes in NSW in national parks |
| **WWF Recommendation:** Review and align legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks governing dingoes in NSW national parks to ensure management is consistent with biodiversity conservation objectives, contemporary science, and the rights, interests and knowledge of First Nations people.<br><br>**WWF Recommendation:** Replace the use of the term "wild dog" in legislation, policy and management frameworks with terminology that clearly distinguishes dingoes and domestic dogs, improving transparency and supporting evidence-based management. |
| c) the ecological role of dingoes in national parks |
| **WWF Recommendation:** Recognise and incorporate the ecological role of dingoes in NSW national parks. Management decisions should explicitly consider the contribution of dingoes to biodiversity conservation, ecological processes and ecosystem function, and assess the potential ecological consequences of population suppression when evaluating management interventions. |
| d) the cultural significance of dingoes for First Nations communities |

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| **WWF Recommendation:** Ensure legislation, policy and management relating to dingoes in NSW national parks appropriately recognise First Nations cultural values, responsibilities to Country, and the significance of dingoes to First Nations communities. |
| e) the impact of current government policies and programs for the management of dingoes in national parks |
| **WWF Recommendation:** Develop an inclusive NSW national parks dingo management framework that integrates contemporary genetic and ecological science, biodiversity conservation objectives, First Nations cultural values and knowledge, and the needs of neighbouring landholders. The framework should support transparent, evidence-based decision-making, prioritise non-lethal approaches wherever feasible, minimise unintended impacts on dingoes and other non-target species, and provide a consistent approach to evaluating the genetic, ecological, cultural and conservation outcomes of management actions. |
| f) dingo management including opportunities for incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and leadership in dingo conservation in national parks |
| **WWF Recommendation:** Ensure management relating to dingoes in NSW national parks appropriately recognises First Nations cultural values, responsibilities to Country and the significance of dingoes to First Nations communities, and provides meaningful opportunities for First Nations leadership in decisions affecting culturally significant species.<br><br>**WWF Recommendation:** Invest in long-term Indigenous ranger-led monitoring and knowledge-sharing programs that combine Indigenous Knowledge Systems and contemporary science to inform dingo conservation and management within NSW national parks. |

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