

**Submission
No 236**

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Mr Stuart Bell

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Inquiry into dingoes in national parks in New South Wales

Submission by Stuart Bell

I have owned, resided on and managed a cattle property in the Tenterfield Shire for 26 years. This property neighbours the Maryland National Park. Both the park and my property contain highly important environments that are essential to the future of a range of endangered and threatened native species.

Both Mowamba (my property) and Maryland National Park have been listed in the National Spotted-tail Recovery plan as both key research and stronghold populations. The park is home to the most northerly population of Common Wombat in Australia. There are healthy populations of Rufous Bettongs, Giant Gliders, Koalas, Squirrel and Sugar Gliders, Brush-tailed Phascogales and dingoes.

This dingo population has been DNA tested in the neighbouring Maryland National Park by NPWS officers and found to be 96-98% pure. They are a long-standing and stable population in these forests.

Over the 26 years that I have resided in and managed the environment of my property I have seen, possibly four foxes and probably the same number of feral cats. Their sighting is a rare occurrence. Pig populations come into the area but they are very transient, as are deer (both red and fallow). There could not be considered to be any permanent populations of either deer or feral pigs within the forests of Mowamba or Maryland National Park. Given the nature of the environment it would be considered highly unusual that these feral animals have not permanently colonised these forests. Our observations and research across Australia indicates that dingoes have played a key role in the suppression of these feral pests.

Additionally, the number of native species (particularly small mammals) that reside in these forest is both unusual and not replicated close by. The main difference in these forests compared to some other areas is that there is a healthy and socially settled population of dingoes.

When we first arrived, we were active participants in 1080 programs. Over time, due to data collected through preg-testing combined with close checking of numbers of calves both marked and then weaned as well as the observation of the behaviour of our cattle (cows remaining unperturbed when dingoes came close to planted calves) we started to understand that native dogs were not the threat to our herd that we were led to believe.

Through research and anecdotal observations made over the years, we also started to understand the critical part played by dingoes in keeping our environment free from feral pests. This in turn has kept our forest ecosystems healthy and diverse. I have seen evidence of both half-grown kittens (that were dumped along our road) and fox cubs being systematically mauled by an apex predator. The only predator within the forest environment that are capable of this are dingoes.

We have come to understand that a key part of keeping the biodiversity of the forests under our management healthy (a clear and stated part of our management plan) is stopping the persecution of our population of dingoes. For this to have any real effect we need this persecution to be stopped both on land we manage as well as the public land next door.

It is our belief that the Maryland National Park has always played and continues to play a key roll in keeping our local population of native dogs stable. This social stability plays a key role in the behaviour of these dogs that protects our livestock and the environment generally. This social stability is relentlessly undermined by the baiting practises carried out in the Maryland National Park by NPWS.

As such we have been in regular contact with NPWS officers about their baiting program within the park. These communicatuions relate to the following issues:

- We have asked them to draw up baiting plans that keep baits away from our boundary to minimise the effect of their baiting program on our protected habitat and our work dogs.
- The rules set out by the NPWS in regards to park baiting indicate that NPWS have offset areas within all parks that they are baiting to provide protection for native dog populations. These offset areas are not baited. This appears to be an attempt by NPWS to green wash their baiting protocols by saying that yes they wanted to kill native dogs but just not all of them. Our particular issue with this protocol, in regard to the baiting of Maryland National Park, is the fact that the size of the offset areas outlined in NPWS protocols are greater than the entire area of Maryland National Park. If NPWS were in fact following their own protocols then baiting should have been prohibited within this small park. Yet baiting continued relentlessly.
- Given that NPWS have stated that their baiting program has always been a response to neighbour concerns I asked NPWS for copies of complaints sent to them by neighbours of the park.
- There are neighbours of Maryland National Park that were never contacted before baiting (a breech of NSW baiting rules). We contacted NPWS to ask if they could undertake comprehensive notifications in line with their obligations.

I have never received an answer to any of my queries.

Given that the main aim of NPWS is to protect the biodiversity of the land under their management, with particular emphasis on the protection of native wildlife, it is hard to justify the continued persecution of this native apex predator. Given their proven role in the stabilisation and health of the environment, the policies of NPWS are even harder to understand. The extraordinary loss of biodiversity and life across my region, my country and my world is of absolutely critical importance to us all. It seems completely unjustifiable that people who are paid by the citizen's of NSW to protect this biodiversity are at the forefront of destroying one of the critical tools in protecting it. Furthermore, given the example of Maryland National Park, the manner in which baiting is carried out and the communications between parks and their neighbours regarding baiting is patently inadequate.