

**Submission
No 239**

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Ms Lucia Smith

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Dear Animal Welfare Committee,

The NSW Legislative Council's Animal Welfare Committee, has launched an inquiry into the management and cultural and ecological significance of dingoes in National Parks in NSW. This is a significant opportunity to put dingo protection on the parliamentary record.

Historically, dingoes have faced cruel and unnecessary persecution in Australia. Modern science and cultural awareness recognises their ecological value and their true status as a totem of indigenous culture and an icon of the Australian bush.

Examining the genetic status of Dingoes in NSW and the differences with 'wild dogs' that are feral animals will determine whether they are Australian dogs that deserve protection like any of our native wildlife or whether they are 'wild dogs' or 'pests.' Industry lobbying by landholders and farmers has strongly influenced previous governments to be biased in their decision making to support the agriculture industry, rather than consider that this is an Australian Dog species. So sanctioned legal eradication of a native dog species has resulted, based on minimal research undertaken that clearly shows dingoes have an important and valuable function in nature. I strongly encourage the NSW Government to consider the fact that the Dingo is an Australian Dog and prove that it isn't instead. First Nation Peoples voices MUST be heard on this matter as well as concerned community voices. The Dingo dates back thousands of years and predates colonisation of this Country. So far for many years the only voices that have been allowed to be heard belong to the farming lobby group. Please consider other voices in this discussion.

Dingoes, Australia's only terrestrial apex predator, are specifically excluded from protection under the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act. In parallel, lethal management of dingoes, including within National Parks, is required under NSW Legislation. That does not mean that this legislation is correct.

Dingoes, in terms of Government-sanctioned lethal management, are often labelled as 'wild dogs', which directly contrasts with contemporary research that challenges such notions. They also hold significance for many First Nations communities. Many in the community including Humane World for Animals and WIRES continue to call for a shift in a focus on **coexistence with dingoes**, and for changes in government policy to enable them to be rescued and rehabilitated, and to ensure they can be directly released back into their habitat. This is what humane treatment of native wildlife looks like in action. Dingoes have been wrongly and incorrectly maligned for decades. ***They are the answer to the feral animal problem in regional NSW, as apex predators they can control these populations but only if they survive extinction.***

The inquiry will cover the genetic status of dingoes, the cultural significance of dingoes for First Nations communities, the legislative frameworks governing their management, and the impact of current government policies, including lethal control programs.

Terms of reference follow.

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

-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 NSW, 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.

-Dingoes and domestic dogs that have 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. Lethal control on dingo families negatively impacts their stability as a family unit.

-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 the deliberate killing programs of Dingoes that ARE native wildlife. ***This is a misrepresentation of the truth.*** First Nations People's input and current science-based data shows that they are Australian dogs. To continue the extermination of our wild native Indigenous dog is morally wrong. Government Policy does NOT align with the science- based evidence. 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 as above. This MUST be corrected and defined properly in government policy. Making excuses and arguments that do not correlate with the most recent scientific evidence will not be acceptable. The persecution of Dingoes must end.

-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 that were introduced AFTER colonisation - 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.***

-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 have an important ecological function to perform to maintain healthy ecosystems.

-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. The Dingo is an effective Apex predator that keeps feral animals in check. Feral animals can do much damage to our landscape. All native animals however including the dingo are intrinsically connected to serve nature and its restoration. As an example wombats dig burrows that other native animals can use for shelter especially after bushfires. Wombats are vital ecosystem engineers. Their relentless digging aerates and turns the soil, which cycles nutrients and improves water absorption.

-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 the 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.

(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 NSW 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. 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.

-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.

-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 always 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 cruel. 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 as well that can impact native wildlife and domestic pets. I strongly urge that this poison be banned completely in all state managed lands such as our national parks. 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. The decline of the Dingo will permanently cause an increased ripple effect in nature that will negatively impact further its natural balance, leading to increased feral animals, more declines of native wildlife, the erosion of water and soil health that will affect agriculture anyway.

(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 humane 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 NPWS and Cultural Custodians. Strengthening the role of Cultural Custodians in decision-making processes would improve cultural, ecological, and conservation outcomes 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.

-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**. Research into 'Livestock Guardian Dogs' that has been used extensively in Europe successfully for decades to keep farm animals safe from predators should be explored further.

-Donkeys are effective guardians for farm animals that have already been successfully used in NSW. 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. Taxpayers fund the cruel 1080 baiting programs and trapping of Dingoes in NSW- this funding should be diverted to support non-lethal deterrents instead that would have community/public support.

-What is clear is that longstanding lethal control measures have not eliminated the risk of predation on farmed animals. 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. This helps to support smaller native wildlife with a reduced risk of predation by these feral animals.

Conclusion

Dingoes deserve full protection under NSW law. I urge the committee to recommend that lethal management methods, including 1080 poisoning, trapping, and shooting, be replaced with humane, non-lethal alternatives that support coexistence with dingoes. What is happening to dingoes in NSW right now is morally and ethically wrong and must end.

As apex predators they are needed to keep other populations in check such as feral cats, rabbits, foxes and boars. Dingoes perform important ecological functions that has been disrupted because of the targeted action against them by government and farmers. They are the **ONLY** native wildlife **NOT** protected under the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016, and this ongoing failure by the NSW Government permits NPWS to cruelly target them with 1080 bait poisons that kill our native dog species. This false labelling is a very poor standard of government legislation designed to protect farmer's interests, that is leading to an increase of feral animals that given time would be controlled by our dingoes in a natural way.

I strongly 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. Greater involvement of Cultural Custodians in decision-making and place-based management regarding dingoes in National Parks to ensure the cultural significance of dingoes is reflected in legislation and management.

3. 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.
4. The NSW Government must value the contribution Dingoes can make ecologically in the wild. The Government instead of reactive cruelty methods of wiping the Dingo out, must change to be conservation-focused. The NSW's government's current approach to dingo management is out of step with modern, evidence-based wildlife management. I urge the committee to recommend that lethal practices be replaced with humane, non-lethal alternatives that allow dingoes to exist safely within our National Parks and perform the function that they have had for thousands of years in maintaining balanced ecosystems and now since colonisation controlling feral animal populations.

Thank you for considering my submission

Lucia Smith