

Submission
No 245

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Name suppressed

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To the Inquiry into Dingo Management in New South Wales
NSW Parliament

Submission: The Ecological Case for Dingo Protection in NSW Wilderness and Reserve Lands

I make this submission in a personal capacity, as a private citizen with a professional background in conservation biology. While my observations draw on more than thirty years of field experience in New South Wales, including paid government employment, the views and opinions expressed in this submission are my own and do not represent the views, findings, or official position of any government department, agency, or employer, past or present.

I am writing to add my voice, and thirty years of personal field experience in conservation biology in New South Wales, to the calls for a parliamentary inquiry into dingo management. My submission focuses specifically on the ecological consequences of dingo persecution that I have observed first-hand across the Greater Sydney region, including the Blue Mountains, Wollemi, Yengo, Kanangra-Boyd, Morton National Parks and the Woronora Plateau.

A Career Spent Watching the Bush Change

I have worked in conservation ecology in NSW for over thirty years, including extensive fieldwork in the Greater Blue Mountains. In the late 1990s and early 2000's, in the course of professional fieldwork and personal exploration, I had the opportunity to survey biodiversity across the Greater Sydney region, which gave me the good fortune to visit remote parts of Wollemi, Blue Mountains and Yengo National Parks that few people ever see.

What struck me during those surveys has stayed with me for a lifetime. In many of the areas I surveyed, for example Royal National Park and Dharawal National Park or the Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area, fox scats were everywhere. The ecosystem was visibly under strain, many species were missing, and foxes were established as the dominant predator across the landscape. In some places, pest herbivores like pigs or goats were in plague proportions.

But every so often, we would come across a place where dingoes had not been heavily baited. The clearest example was the Burratorang Valley in the Southern Blue Mountains. There, dingo packs were healthy and visible, their howls echoing off the cliff walls every night. Their scats lined the fire trails, and, almost unbelievably, there was a near-complete absence of fox scats...or any other evidence of foxes, or goats, or pigs, or deer.

That contrast was the first time I understood, from my own observations, that foxes are largely excluded where dingo populations remain intact and healthy. The Burratorang Valley showed me a genuinely functional ecosystem: predators occupying the roles they have filled for thousands of years, and the system working largely as it always had with all key ecosystem niches filled, including the key local meso-predator, the spotted-tailed quoll.

Over my career I have also taken note of old timers who have shared with me their experiences of what has changed when the dingoes were baited out. A farmer in Bullio in the 1990s shared how the pig numbers exploded after dingoes were removed, a farmer in Queensland in the 2000s shared that the Australian Brush-turkey numbers exploded when dingoes were baited around his farm. I can now watch out my window up to 19 brush-turkeys roam, and know that this is also an ecosystem out of balance. While there is no option to bring dingoes back to where I live in , there is no reason dingoes can't be managed for the conservation benefit the bring in many, many conservation reserves.

What Has Changed

Today, sadly, when I return to some of those same places where dingoes were once common and the ecosystem was thriving, I see a landscape that has been quietly hollowed out. The dingoes are no longer visible. You do not hear them, and you rarely see their scats on the roads. Instead, 1080 baiting signs hang on the gates, and in place of dingo scats marking territory, there are now hundreds of fox scats.

The bush itself is quieter. Birds are fewer and less diverse than they were twenty years ago. The foxes are having their impact, exactly as ecological theory predicts they would in the absence of a dominant native predator to suppress them. The dingoes are still there, in remnant numbers, and the system could recover if it were given the chance.

I have seen the same pattern play out in other areas I have surveyed over the decades, including the southern parts of the Woronora Plateau, where dingoes have disappeared in just the last seven years under sustained control programs.

Why This Makes No Sense in Wilderness Reserves

The greatest frustration for me, as someone who has spent decades observing these landscapes, is that I do not understand why many of these areas are being baited at all, particularly the wilderness and water catchment. We are sometimes told it is done in the name of 'biodiversity', yet I have watched biodiversity in these same places go backwards over twenty years as dingo persecution has intensified.

These are not grazing lands. There is no livestock, and visitor numbers are low. Much of this country is off-limits to the public as declared water catchment, is declared wilderness, and carries World Heritage listing. And yet, despite all of these layers of protection, it is still routinely baited for dingoes.

The Broader Ecological Picture

My own personal observations line up with what the wider ecological evidence shows. Dingoes are Australia's only native canid and function as the continent's apex land predator, yet under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 they remain the only native mammal in NSW specifically excluded from protection. In practice this means they can be killed largely

without regulation, while being classified alongside introduced pest animals under regional pest management plans.

Where dingoes are removed or suppressed, the evidence points to a consistent pattern: introduced meso-predators such as foxes and cats increase, and this in turn drives down populations of the small and medium-sized native animals, including ground-dwelling birds, that these meso-predators prey on. This is precisely what I observed in the Burragorang Valley - quieter bush, fewer birds, less diversity, as fox numbers rose in the vacuum left by dingoes.

The same pattern extends to introduced herbivores. Where dingoes have been removed across Australia, this has coincided with population explosions of animals like feral deer, pigs and goats, species that then place additional pressure on native vegetation and the habitat it provides. A landscape with a healthy dingo population is, in my experience and in the broader research, a landscape far better placed to keep these pressures in check without any human intervention at all.

My Position

It is my personal view, informed by three decades of field observation, that protecting dingoes within our reserve system, as much as is practical while still safeguarding people and livestock where they genuinely overlap, is the single greatest positive action the state of NSW could take for biodiversity conservation. Unlike most conservation interventions, this one would not require new spending. On the contrary, ending unnecessary baiting programs in wilderness, water catchment and World Heritage areas where there is no livestock to protect would save considerable public money while allowing the ecosystem to do the work itself.

I have watched the Burragorang Valley go from one of the healthiest, most functional ecosystems I have ever surveyed to a landscape increasingly dominated by foxes, quieter and poorer for it. Deep within the reserve, there is one area that remains unbaited. While I have not seen the baiting plans for the reserve, it is plainly obvious that this area, and perhaps this area alone, remains off limits. Dingoes are, in this one tiny patch, still 'Boss of Country'. There are few foxes, few pigs, no goats, no deer but plenty of native species and the ecosystem is in fantastic shape.

I would ask the inquiry to take seriously the growing body of evidence, and the accounts of people who have spent their working lives in these landscapes, that dingoes are not the threat to biodiversity they are so often assumed to be. They are, in fact, its best remaining defence.

I reiterate that this submission is made entirely in my personal capacity as a private citizen, and does not represent the views or official position of any government department, agency, or employer.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Yours sincerely,

Conservation biologist (personal submission)