

**INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW
SOUTH WALES**

Name: Name suppressed

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Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into

Dingoes in National Parks in New South Wales

Animal Welfare Committee — NSW Parliament

Submitted by:

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Introduction

I am a registered osteopath and functional medicine practitioner based in Victoria, Australia. My clinical work centres on root-cause, evidence-informed approaches to health, a philosophy that translates directly to my deep concern about the management of dingoes in NSW National Parks.

As a health and science professional, I have a particular interest in systems thinking, ecological integrity, and the relationship between landscape health and broader biodiversity outcomes. These concerns are inseparable from human health. The health of our ecosystems underpins the health of communities, and no conversation about Australia's ecological future can be considered complete without a serious, science-based reckoning with the role of the dingo.

I welcome this Inquiry as a critical opportunity to align NSW dingo management policy with contemporary science, Indigenous knowledge systems, and genuine animal welfare principles. My submission addresses Terms of Reference (a), (b), (c), (e), (f), and (g).

Term of Reference (a): Genetics and the Distinction Between Dingoes and Dogs

Current dingo management frameworks in NSW are substantially built on outdated genetic research. Earlier studies used as few as 23 genetic markers to assess hybridisation which is a methodology that is now considered scientifically inadequate. Contemporary genomic research uses up to 195,000 markers and has fundamentally revised our understanding of wild canid populations across Australia.

Key findings from current science include:

- A 2023 genetic analysis of 307 wild canid samples across Australia found no evidence of free-living domestic dog populations or active dingo-dog hybrid populations breeding independently in the wild.
- In NSW specifically, more than three-quarters of the 103 sampled wild canids demonstrated over 93% contemporary dingo ancestry.

- Recent research published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences indicates that traces of domestic dog ancestry in dingo populations often reflect historic interbreeding events rather than ongoing hybridisation.
- Dingoes with low to moderate domestic dog ancestry still retain the ecological traits and apex predator function of pure dingoes.

Importantly, dingoes are ecologically, behaviourally, and structurally distinct from domestic dogs: they breed annually (rather than multiple times per year), maintain stable territorial pack structures, and occupy apex predator roles across Australian ecosystems. Australia does not harbour an established continent-wide population of independently living feral domestic dogs. The wild canids in our landscapes are overwhelmingly dingoes performing critical ecological functions.

There is also a significant, evidence-supported concern that lethal control programs actively worsen the very hybridisation they claim to prevent. By disrupting stable dingo pack structures, poisoning and trapping create social instability that increases the likelihood of interbreeding with domestic dogs. Current policy is therefore counterproductive on its own terms.

Recommendation: NSW dingo management policy must be updated to reflect contemporary genetic science. The classification and management of wild canids should move away from outdated hybridisation thresholds and instead recognise ecological function as a primary determinant of dingo status and protection.

Term of Reference (b): Legislative, Regulatory and Policy Frameworks

The current legislative classification of dingoes in NSW is deeply inconsistent with the ecological and genetic evidence, and with the treatment of any other native mammal species in Australia.

Specific areas of concern include:

- Dingoes are the only native mammal specifically exempt from protections under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016. No other native mammal is denied this protection.
- The use of the umbrella term 'wild dog' in NSW legislation conflates dingoes, domestic dogs, and hybrids without distinction, a categorisation that is not supported by contemporary genetic science and has significant management consequences.
- Dingoes are classified as priority pest animals under Regional Strategic Pest Animal Management Plans developed by Local Land Services, framing a native apex predator as a biosecurity threat rather than an ecological asset.
- The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service deploys lethal control as a compliance measure under the Biosecurity Act 2015, despite this occurring on public conservation land where biodiversity protection, not agricultural pest management, should be the primary objective.
- Information obtained under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 revealed that more than 1.5 million 1080 poison baits targeting dingoes were deployed

by NSW Parks and Wildlife between 2020 and 2025. This scale of lethal control within conservation areas is extraordinary and deeply at odds with evidence-based conservation management.

Recommendation: The Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 should be amended to extend protection to dingoes. The 'wild dog' framing should be replaced with scientifically accurate terminology that distinguishes dingoes from domestic dogs and hybrids. Dingo management within National Parks should be removed from pest management frameworks and placed within a conservation framework consistent with their status as a native apex predator.

Term of Reference (c): The Ecological Role of Dingoes in National Parks

Dingoes are Australia's only native canid and represent one of the most ecologically significant species on the continent. Their role as an apex predator and keystone species generates cascading benefits throughout the ecosystems they inhabit, benefits that are lost when dingo populations are suppressed through lethal control.

The peer-reviewed evidence base for the ecological value of dingoes is substantial:

- Dingoes regulate populations of kangaroos and wallabies, reducing overgrazing pressure on vegetation communities and landscapes.
- Dingoes suppress and, in some ecosystems, eradicate introduced goats, reducing degradation of native vegetation.
- Dingoes suppress fox populations through territorial competition and direct predation, research suggests that stable dingo populations may achieve greater fox suppression than broad-scale 1080 baiting programs.
- Dingoes suppress feral cat populations, reducing predation pressure on small native mammals and ground-nesting birds which is a critical conservation benefit given that feral cats are among the leading causes of native mammal extinctions in Australia.
- Dingoes contribute to suppression of feral pig populations, reducing habitat disturbance and soil degradation.
- The presence of dingoes modifies the spatial behaviour and vigilance patterns of herbivores- the 'landscape of fear' effect, reducing concentrated grazing pressure even in areas where dingoes are present but herbivore numbers are not substantially reduced.
- The removal of apex predators triggers trophic cascades: vegetation communities decline, habitat degrades, and introduced predator and herbivore pressure intensifies with flow-on consequences for threatened native species.

From a systems perspective, the dingo is not merely one component of the ecosystem but a regulating mechanism for multiple interacting systems simultaneously. Removing this regulator does not simplify the system; it destabilises it. Current management programs in NSW National

Parks fail to account for this systemic function, and the resulting ecological costs are borne across the entire landscape.

Recommendation: The ecological function of dingoes as apex predators and keystone species must be formally recognised in NSW National Parks management frameworks. Conservation outcomes rather than agricultural pest management priorities, must guide decision-making within public conservation areas.

Term of Reference (e): The Impact of Current Government Policies and Programs

Current dingo management programs in NSW National Parks rely almost exclusively on lethal control: 1080 sodium fluoroacetate poison baiting, trapping, and shooting. These methods raise serious concerns across multiple domains: ecological, genetic, cultural, and animal welfare.

Ecological and genetic impacts:

- Lethal control disrupts stable dingo family structures and territorial pack organisation. In the absence of intact pack structures, territorial vacuums are filled by dispersing individuals and domestic dogs, potentially increasing rather than decreasing hybridisation.
- The removal of dingoes triggers trophic cascades, leading to increased pressure from introduced predators and herbivores, precisely the outcome that management programs should be seeking to prevent.
- Broad-scale 1080 baiting within National Parks is not targeted at specific individuals causing confirmed livestock losses; it is a landscape-level intervention with documented negative consequences for non-target native species.

Animal welfare concerns:

- 1080 baiting causes prolonged suffering. Sodium fluoroacetate inhibits cellular energy production and causes a distressing, extended death involving convulsions and cardiac arrest.
- Trapping raises acute welfare concerns: trapped animals may remain immobilised for extended periods without access to food, water or shelter, and are subject to significant physiological stress and injury.

Policy and governance concerns:

- Current programs are oriented primarily toward agricultural protection rather than biodiversity outcomes, despite operating within public conservation areas.
- No funding is directed toward research and development of non-lethal coexistence strategies for landholders neighbouring National Parks.
- Many Cultural Custodians report feeling excluded from decisions regarding dingo management on their Country which is a fundamental failure of process and of the government's obligations under frameworks supporting Indigenous engagement.

Recommendation: A review of the efficacy and ecological impact of current lethal control programs within NSW National Parks should be undertaken as a matter of priority. Population-level lethal control within conservation areas should cease, and investment redirected toward non-lethal coexistence strategies and Indigenous co-management frameworks.

Term of Reference (f): Indigenous Knowledge and Leadership in Dingo Conservation

First Nations peoples have maintained deep, living relationships with dingoes across Australia for tens of thousands of years. This is both historical and an ongoing stewardship relationship that has actively supported healthy landscapes and biodiversity outcomes that benefit all Australians.

Indigenous knowledge systems hold detailed, place-based understanding of dingo behaviour, ecology, and their role in broader ecosystem function. This knowledge is not a supplement to western scientific approaches, it is a parallel and often deeper framework of understanding that complements and strengthens scientific methods when the two are brought into respectful dialogue.

Relevant considerations for the Committee include:

- Indigenous ranger groups across NSW are increasingly leading on-ground monitoring and management programs for dingoes on Country, providing critical insights into population dynamics and behaviour that fill gaps in existing statewide data.
- Cultural Custodians are advocating for Indigenous-led approaches to dingo conservation and management, including expanded roles in National Park governance and decision-making.
- The 2023 First Nations Dingo Forum brought together 100 Traditional Owners from 20 nations and led to the development of the National First Nations Dingo Declaration: a document that calls for a new approach centred on 'Caring for Dingoes on Country' and greater Cultural Custodian involvement in management decisions.
- Oral histories and archaeological research confirm that Cultural Custodians maintained companion relationships with dingoes and provided them with intentional ceremonial burials, reflecting a depth of cultural connection that has no equivalent in contemporary pest management frameworks.

Co-management approaches offer a practical and governance-sound framework to integrate Indigenous knowledge systems with western science in National Parks management, improving both the quality of decision-making and on-ground conservation effectiveness. The principles outlined in the National First Nations Dingo Declaration provide an appropriate foundation for future policy development.

Recommendation: Cultural Custodians should be given formal, meaningful roles in dingo management decision-making within NSW National Parks. Co-management frameworks should be resourced and implemented as a core element of future dingo conservation policy, informed by the National First Nations Dingo Declaration.

Term of Reference (g): Non-Lethal Coexistence Strategies for Neighbouring Landholders

I recognise that neighbouring landholders hold legitimate and longstanding concerns about the risk of dingo predation on farmed animals. These concerns deserve serious policy attention. However, the evidence strongly suggests that the current approach using broad-scale lethal control, has not resolved these concerns and may in some instances exacerbate them.

Research has found that broad-scale 1080 baiting of dingoes can increase the risk of predation on calves by disrupting territorial pack structures that otherwise keep unfamiliar canids and dispersing individuals out of an area. A policy that destabilises the very animals it seeks to control is not delivering on its stated objectives.

Effective, evidence-based alternatives exist and deserve substantially greater investment:

- Livestock Guardian Dogs have been demonstrated in peer-reviewed literature and PestSmart trials to significantly reduce or eliminate dingo predation on livestock, while providing additional benefits including deterrence of macropods, protection from foxes, and protection from birds of prey.
- Livestock guardian donkeys have a strong body of anecdotal evidence from NSW landholders supporting their effectiveness as canid deterrents, and there is a clear opportunity for the NSW Government to invest in robust, well-designed trials of this approach.
- Exclusion fencing, shed lambing, and behavioural modification of livestock management practices all represent non-lethal approaches with documented efficacy in reducing predation risk.

Critically, there is currently no extension service in NSW to support landholders neighbouring National Parks to access and implement non-lethal coexistence strategies. Funding currently allocated to broad-scale baiting, trapping, and shooting within National Parks could be redirected to support landholders with practical coexistence extension services, research, and infrastructure, delivering protection for both livestock and dingoes.

Recommendation: The NSW Government should establish a funded non-lethal predator coexistence extension service for landholders neighbouring National Parks, with investment directed toward Livestock Guardian Dog programs, guardian donkey trials, and other evidence-based strategies. This approach would protect landholder interests while enabling dingoes to fulfil their ecological role in the surrounding landscape.

Summary of Recommendations

- Update NSW dingo management policy to reflect contemporary genetic science, recognising ecological function alongside genetics when assessing dingo populations and their status.

- Amend the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 to extend protections to dingoes, removing the current exemption that permits lethal control within National Parks.
- Replace the 'wild dog' legislative category with terminology that accurately distinguishes dingoes from domestic dogs and hybrids.
- Remove dingo management in National Parks from biosecurity and pest management frameworks and place it within a conservation and biodiversity management framework.
- End population-level lethal dingo control programs within NSW National Parks.
- Establish formal, resourced co-management frameworks with Cultural Custodians for dingo management and conservation in NSW National Parks, informed by the National First Nations Dingo Declaration.
- Establish a funded non-lethal predator coexistence extension service for landholders neighbouring National Parks, investing in Livestock Guardian Dog programs, guardian donkey trials, and other evidence-based coexistence strategies.

I commend the Animal Welfare Committee for undertaking this Inquiry, and I urge the Committee to recommend a policy framework that reflects the best available science, honours the knowledge and leadership of Cultural Custodians, and delivers genuine protection for dingoes as an ecologically irreplaceable part of Australia's living landscape.

Osteopath / Functional Medicine Practitioner

4 July 2026