

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Public Service Association of NSW

Date Received: 16 July 2026



SUBMISSIONS

SUBMISSION CONCERNING DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES



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About the PSA CPSU NSW

The Public Service Association and Professional Officers Association Amalgamated Union of NSW (PSA) and the Community and Public Sector Union (SPSF Group) NSW Branch (CPSU) together form PSA CPSU NSW (the '*Association*'). The Association is the primary representative body for a wide range of workers across the New South Wales public sector, with a membership of over 41,000. This includes members employed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), who have direct operational responsibility for land and pest management.

The Association acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters, and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. The Association's Sydney office is located on the lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. We honour their custodianship and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

Table of Contents

About the PSA CPSU NSW	2
Executive Summary	3
1. Current Legislative and Policy Framework for Dingo Management.....	5
2. Role of Control Measures, Including 1080	7
3. Position of PSA Members.....	9
4. Policy Risks and Inquiry Context	12
Recommendation	13
Endnotes	14

Executive Summary

This submission is made by PSA CPSU NSW in response to the NSW Legislative Council Animal Welfare Committee Inquiry into dingoes in national parks in New South Wales. This submission solely addresses point (e) of the Terms of Reference, namely: "The impact of current government policies and programs for the management of dingoes in national parks"

The Association recognises the ecological significance of dingoes (which hereafter also includes hybrids and any wild dog) and acknowledges concerns regarding their conservation, genetic integrity and cultural importance. However, PSA members believe these considerations can and must continue to be addressed within existing management frameworks rather than through restrictions on effective pest control tools.

The Association's **position** is that:

- Land management agencies, including NPWS, must continue to meet their obligations under the Biosecurity Act 2015 and the NSW Dingo Management Strategy.
- Dingoes (including dingoes and hybrids) present a well-established risk to livestock and are appropriately identified as a priority pest species in regional pest management plans, but only for asset protection.
- Control measures, including the **use of 1080 baiting, remain a completely necessary and highly effective component of this framework and the control of foxes.**

The Association supports a balanced, evidence-based approach to dingo management that targets control where risks to assets are highest (particularly along park boundaries adjoining agricultural land); maintains ecological function in natural areas; and enables NPWS staff to employ a full suite of management tools.

"PSA members in NPWS are acutely aware of the considerable interest in dingo conservation, including concerns about their genetic integrity and preserving their ecological roles." - PSA Member

The Association is **concerned** that this inquiry may lead to proposals that restrict effective pest management tools, in particular the use of 1080 baiting, which would undermine both biodiversity protection and agricultural outcomes.

The Association **recommends** that existing legislative and policy frameworks for dingo management are maintained to ensure that NPWS retains operational flexibility in control methods, including the continued use of 1080 baiting.

Policy and programs for dingo management

Dingoes contribute to biodiversity conservation and ecosystem functioning across Australian landscapes, reinforcing the need for management approaches that consider both ecological values and operational requirements.¹² They are an essential predator in native ecological systems and play an important role in biodiversity. The Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act classifies the dingo as a native animal. In NSW they are not considered wildlife and have no protection. In the Northern Territory, Queensland and Victoria, dingoes are managed as protected wildlife in national parks and conservation areas, but they're unprotected on private land. The fact that dingoes are treated differently across Australian jurisdictions demonstrates that dingo management involves complex policy choices rather than a universally accepted management model.

Dingoes (including dingoes and their hybrids) can impose significant costs on livestock producers. However, dingoes provide ecological benefits through their role as apex predators, demonstrating why management decisions must account for both conservation and agricultural considerations.³

It is important to acknowledge that dingoes have significant cultural value to First Nations people and in some places Aboriginal people protect the dingo as a part of their culture as dingoes are skin/totem/family. A PSA member noted:

"I recently met an Anaiwan Elder who explained he would do whatever he had to do to protect a dingo."

In the 2023 National First Nations Dingo Declaration, there is a distinct advocacy for a different model: caring for Dingoes on Country.⁴ This model sees Dingo **recognised in legislation** as a culturally significant and protected native species. This model must use traditional knowledge, and evidence-based practice, focusing on peaceful co-existence between Dingoes and all stakeholders. This brings together cultural and western knowledges.

Research has identified ongoing disagreement among experts regarding dingo taxonomy, ecological impacts, conservation priorities and appropriate management responses, highlighting the complexity of the policy issues being considered by this Inquiry.⁵

Evidence from the scientific literature demonstrates that dingo management on public lands, including national parks, has long involved balancing biodiversity conservation objectives with the need to manage impacts on livestock (and, hence, the economic impacts on neighbouring landholders), requiring policy frameworks capable of accommodating both outcomes or managing stock losses due to predation.^{1,2}

Thus, the importance of understanding this issue from the perspective of those directly involved is imperative. **Their experiences, such as those from PSA members, inform the best practice** that can help maintain dingoes' biodiversity roles yet limit the impact of dingo or dingo disruptions in human environments.

1. Current Legislative and Policy Framework for Dingo Management

All public land management agencies in New South Wales, including NPWS, are required to meet obligations under the Biosecurity Act 2015 (NSW) and the supporting regulatory frameworks. The NSW Wild Dog Management Strategy (WDMS) establishes a clear definition of dingoes as all wild-living dogs, including dingoes, feral dogs and hybrids.⁶

- Under this framework:
 - Dingoes are managed as a priority pest animal due to their impact on livestock, particularly sheep production
 - Regional Strategic Pest Animal Management Plans give effect to this approach at a local scale
 - An important principle of any Wild Dog Management Plan (WDMP) is that resources need to be targeted to those areas and those times where the likelihood of reducing impacts is the greatest.
 - Control is not required to be undertaken in more remote areas, allowing dingoes to maintain their ecological role.

This framework already reflects the considerations in the inquiry's terms of reference, including:

- ecological role of dingoes; and
- effectiveness of current government management programs

One issue with the strategy is that it ignores roaming (stray) domestic dogs which may also pose a significant threat to livestock, other pets and humans in peri-urban areas. Those dogs are more typically managed under the framework of the Companion Animals Act.

The current dingo management framework already incorporates consideration of dingo conservation and it has demonstrated success in dingo management. Under the former *Local Land Services (Dingoes) Pest Control Order 2015*, dingo management plans on public lands were required to address both dingo control and the conservation of dingoes in New South Wales through locally developed WDMPs.⁷ While the WDMS is publicly available the but the local WDMPs are generally not centrally published on a single website.⁶ They are often developed and maintained at the regional level by Local Land Services, Wild Dog Management Groups, or through regional pest animal management arrangements.

NSW National Park Service members have outlined the success of the former framework of the *Local Land Services (Dingoes) Pest Control Order 2015*.⁷

"On these lands, commonly referred to as 'dingo conservation areas', the general destruction obligation was met through implementation of a Wild Dog Management Plan which addressed both dingo control and conservation of dingoes."

PSA members reflect on the effectiveness of the existing framework in a dual and balanced approach to pest management and preserving dingoes' ecological role to demonstrate the current situation. However, while the Regional Pest Management Strategies identify dingo control under the general heading of 'Asset protection', the entries against that heading are broader than what is required for protecting stock. Further, it makes no mention of maintaining the ecological function of dingoes that is correlated with a reduction in other feral animal populations (e.g. cats and foxes).

"Both the NSW Dingo Management Strategy and National Dingo Action Plan promote a balance between managing dingoes in areas where they have negative impacts and preserving dingoes' ecological roles in designated conservation areas."

"Also, the plans which are clear that baiting would not occur in the heart of a park (e.g. Oxley Wild Rivers NP) turned out to be meaningless in the face of pressure from government and NPWS executives to do that baiting - they simply ignore the plan!"

While these plans are being implemented, there is still a lack of coherency regarding their implementation in specific districts with plans not being easily accessible, or accessible at all according to PSA members as outlined below.

"However, greater public awareness of how this is put into action would be achieved if the district-level Wild Dog Management Plans were published and made available to all landholders within the district. I've certainly never seen the one for my district."
 " - PSA Member on the existing frameworks.

"One of the issues I have is that the old 2015 Pest Control Order was clearer than the current framework that the general destruction order did not apply in those parks (but, instead, subject to a wild dog management plan, and we often took the lead in preparing that plan). The current planning framework is not as clear on this point and the district Wild Dog Management Plans are not available."

The research in this area supports what is being experienced by PSA members. Research indicates that conservation and management objectives are not inherently incompatible, and that effective management frameworks can incorporate both species conservation outcomes and practical responses to local impacts where required.^{1,5}

The current policy incorporates the research conducted on livestock predation which demonstrates that predation risk is influenced by local ecological conditions, prey availability, landscape characteristics and seasonal factors, suggesting that management approaches must retain sufficient flexibility to respond to site-specific circumstances.⁸

Experts have identified that uncertainty remains regarding several key aspects of dingo ecology, management and conservation. In circumstances where evidence remains contested, significant policy change should be accompanied by careful evaluation of operational, environmental and social consequences.⁵ Therefore it is reliant on the first hand experience of those in the field to inform best practice.

Recommendation

1. Maintain the current legislative and policy framework for dingo management, including obligations under the Biosecurity Act 2015.
2. Continue the implementation of the NSW Dingo Management Strategy and Regional Pest Animal Management Plans.

2. Role of Control Measures, Including 1080

The scientific literature indicates no single predator management technique is universally effective across all environments, and management outcomes are often dependent on local conditions and the objectives being pursued. Effective management generally relies on combining multiple approaches and adapting them to local ecological conditions and operational requirements.⁸

Regional pest management plans recognise effective pest animal management requires coordinated action across land tenures and ownership boundaries. The North Coast Regional Strategic Pest Animal Management Plan states government agencies, landholders and communities share responsibility for managing pest animals and that coordinated action improves effectiveness while reducing costs and effort.⁹

The same plan identifies dingoes as a priority species requiring asset-based protection and recognises the continuing need for coordinated management across public and private lands.⁹ This coordinated approach involves utilising staff insights that are directly involved in these issues and have firsthand knowledge and experience that positions them as unofficial experts in this field.

Dingo control in and around national parks is undertaken using a range of methods, including strategic 1080 baiting; trapping; and targeted shooting where required. These measures are primarily focused on park boundaries adjoining agricultural land and areas with identified risks to livestock or threatened species. Continued baiting with 1080 plays a **critical role** because:

- it is effective at landscape scale;
- it supports coordinated 'whole-of-landscape' management with neighbouring landholders; and
- it helps maintain NPWS credibility and cooperation with stakeholders.

Further, baiting as a control program also contributes to **biodiversity protection**, including:

- reducing predation pressure on threatened species such as koalas and brush-tailed rock-wallabies;
- evidence from scat analysis indicates predation on native fauna.

The research to support 1080 baiting is overwhelmingly positive and supports its continued use as it is **effective, targeted, environmentally safe and humane**.

Effective

A long-term NSW study by Ballard et al. (2020) of 132 GPS-collared dingoes found that aerial 1080 baiting at 40 baits per kilometre resulted in 90.6% mortality of exposed dingoes, demonstrating that 1080 can be highly effective at reducing dingo populations in areas where impacts on livestock and biodiversity are occurring.¹⁰

Targeted

As a poison, 1080 is more lethal to canids (dogs and foxes) than other mammals, including all marsupials, as well as birds and reptiles. This means that the level of poison in baits can be adjusted to be lethal to dogs or foxes, and not cause non-target kills. Further, 1080 degrades in moist conditions (including in the guts of poisoned dogs), doesn't persist in the environment and is biodegradable, ensuring it doesn't impact the environment.

Further, all unexposed collared dogs survived, showing that 1080 can be highly effective when applied at appropriate rates in targeted baiting zones.¹⁰ This study reinforces that 1080 baiting is not only effective, but that aerial 1080 programs operate as targeted area-based control rather than indiscriminate landscape removal.

The NSW NPWS Environmental Risk Assessment states that dingo baiting is generally focused on areas near livestock production and not generally undertaken in parts of NPWS estate away from livestock production areas, allowing dingoes to fulfil the natural ecological role of dingoes in those locations.¹¹

Environmental safety

NSW NPWS states that 1080 is highly soluble and biodegradable, breaking down in soil and carcasses, and that many Australian native animals have higher tolerance to 1080 than introduced predators because fluoroacetate occurs naturally in 82 species of Australian plants such as *Acacia georginae* (gidgee) and *Gastrolobium spp.* (heart leaf poison bush).¹² The use of 1080 at doses targeting canids is not associated with secondary poisoning of scavengers or other animals.

Humane

1080 is a regulated lethal control method assessed within national humaneness frameworks. Rather than claiming it is inherently humane, PestSmart links 1080 dingo baiting to the Sharp and Saunders humaneness assessment model used to compare pest control methods. This model which compares pest control techniques using standardised animal welfare criteria including the severity and duration of impacts on target animals and risks to non-target species.¹³

NPWS does not undertake dingo management in isolation. Existing biosecurity and pest management frameworks emphasise shared responsibility between public land managers, private landholders, Local Land Services and communities. These arrangements recognise that pest animals move across tenure boundaries and require coordinated responses to achieve effective outcomes.^{1,8,9}

Research into livestock predation management suggests that removing management tools before proven alternatives are available may reduce the capacity of land managers to respond effectively to local risks. This supports retaining a range of management options while continuing to evaluate and improve approaches.^{3,8} Hence, removal of 1080 before fully establishing other means of management is not advised or recommended by research.

Recommendation

3. Ensure that dingo conservation objectives continue to be balanced with pest management requirements in high-risk areas.
4. Retain access to a full suite of control measures, including 1080 baiting.
5. Reject any proposal to ban or restrict 1080 poison for dingo control.

3. Position of PSA Members

PSA members working in NPWS broadly support the continued use of 1080 as part of an integrated pest management framework.

- Members' views are informed by:
 - operational experience in managing dingo and fox impacts;
 - the need to protect both agricultural assets and native wildlife; and

- the importance of maintaining cooperative relationships with landholders.

PSA members are acutely aware of the considerable public interest in dingo conservation, including concerns regarding ecological function and genetic integrity. They are essential for managing everyday relationships that ensure the best practice is enacted. Therefore, their expertise and first-hand experiences must be considered in dingo management which is further emphasised in the PSA member quote below.

"The relationships that individual NPWS staff sustain with neighbours - especially those where dingo or wild dog impacts can be devastating - is critical to achieving a balanced approach to managing populations."

Members note that substantial work by NPWS staff contributed to the identification of numerous parks and reserves that were formerly managed as dingo conservation areas under Schedule 2 of the Dingo Pest Control Order. Within these areas, WDMP, prepared by NPWS staff, addressed both dingo control and dingo conservation objectives.

"Considerable work and effort by PSA members resulted in the identification of many NPWS parks and reserves in Schedule 2 of the Dingo Pest Control Order." - PSA Member on the essential role they play in addressing this issue.

The role of staff involved in dingo management is critical for conservation and pest management efforts to succeed. As previously outlined, this issue requires a tailored approach depending on the geographical region and this tailoring is best conducted by experts in those areas. NSW NPWS staff, including our members, are the key link in these areas and their knowledge on implementation measures is vital. Below is a case study that outlines the impact of staff's involvement in successful protection outcomes for livestock and for dingoes.

CASE STUDY: Oxley Wild Rivers National Park Management

In some parks, including Oxley Wild Rivers National Park, the statutory plan of management supports the policy position of the Dingo Management Framework to focus control activities on park boundaries. This occurs in combination with some sections of the park boundary coinciding with the New England dog fence, which separated the sheep-grazing areas on the Northern Tablelands from the steeper 'fall country' where cattle were grazed.

"Plans of management for some parks (e.g. Oxley Wild Rivers National Parks) also clearly identified that dingo control would only be carried out on the boundary of the park, to protect the

parks' dingo populations from hybridisation and to address the need to protect stock on neighbouring lands from predation.

"However, there is often pressure from local politicians and even the agency's executive to ignore the plans and to bait as much of the park as possible."

CASE STUDY: Neighbours using Maremma Sheepdogs

While the general focus of NPWS baiting is along park boundaries, this needs to be site-specific and targeted. Some park neighbours utilise livestock guardian dogs, mostly Maremma sheepdogs. These require an investment in training, handling and care and must be protected during baiting operations as they can be adversely affected the 1080 baits. This supports the need for community-led control programs on the edges of national parks.

The impact of the current framework's effectiveness is not in question and it is rather through community vigilance and action that further management may be achieved.

PSA members are grounded firmly in the belief that the banning or restricting of 1080 would not be an effective management method.

- Restricting or banning 1080 would:
 - significantly reduce the effectiveness of dingo control programs;
 - undermine cross-tenure pest management; and
 - increase conflict between public land managers and rural stakeholders.
- The Association is concerned that proposals to ban 1080, whether direct or indirect, would weaken an evidence-based management system.

Research indicates that the economic, ecological and social impacts of dingo management are often difficult to quantify with certainty, supporting a cautious and evidence-based approach to policy reform.³ Studies examining expert perspectives on dingo management have identified substantial disagreement regarding ecological impacts and management approaches, suggesting that policy responses should avoid assuming a single universally accepted solution exists.⁵

Studies further indicate that disagreements about whether dingoes should primarily be managed as conservation assets or pest animals remain unresolved among experts. These findings support the retention of flexible management frameworks that can respond to local circumstances rather than adopting rigid state-wide approaches.⁵

Recommendation

6. Support NPWS staff to undertake coordinated, cross-tenure pest management with landholders.

4. Policy Risks and Inquiry Context

There are numerous risks that PSA members have raised in relation to 1080 baiting management. These include threats to person, online abuse and doxing. There are a number of anti 1080 pages and groups, and increased public debate on 1080 use heightens this risk. Below outlines some specific examples of such risk.

CASE STUDY: Worker Safety and Threats to NPWS Staff During 1080 Operations

PSA members have raised concerns regarding threats and intimidation directed at staff involved in lawful dingo management activities.

In September 2023, NPWS staff were involved in a police response after a threatening package linked to opposition to an aerial 1080 baiting program was left at NPWS. An internal Safety Alert stated that *“a threat of possible harm was associated with opening the box”* and that *“The Demand Notice was in opposition to our Aerial 1080 Program.”* NSW Police investigated the incident and staff were advised to exercise caution when engaging with members of the public opposed to 1080 baiting. This incident demonstrates that debates surrounding dingo management can create genuine workplace health and safety risks for frontline NPWS employees carrying out lawful pest management operations. The PSA submits that worker safety must remain a key consideration in any changes to dingo management policy.

Note: The location of the incident has been redacted due to staffs concerns for safety.

Research has identified competing social values, differing stakeholder expectations and conflicting views regarding conservation and pest management as significant contributors to ongoing conflict surrounding dingo management in Australia.⁵ It also highlights the need to consider implementation and worker safety impacts when evaluating future policy reform before implementing, regardless of the management method.^{5,14}

The polarised nature of public debate surrounding dingo management can create operational pressures for staff responsible for implementing lawful management programs, reinforcing the importance of supporting and protecting frontline workers.⁵ Examining expert disagreement on dingo policy found conflict is often driven not simply by scientific evidence, but by competing values, terminology, interpretations of risk and differing views about the

purpose of dingo management. This suggests that policy reform should proceed cautiously and be informed by a diversity of expertise rather than assuming consensus exists across the scientific community.⁵

Successful predator management depends on understanding how predators interact with local landscapes, prey species and human activities. This highlights the importance of retaining field-based monitoring, local ecological knowledge and the operational expertise of NPWS staff when making management decisions.^{1,8}

Recommendation

7. Prior to any policy change implementations, there should be consideration of the potential impact to stakeholders involved, including safety and management responsibility.

Recommendations

Future dingo management policy should be informed by monitoring, scientific evidence and local operational knowledge, ensuring that management decisions remain responsive to changing ecological conditions and community needs.^{1,8}

Any transition should be supported by evidence demonstrating their effectiveness across relevant operational contexts and should not remove existing management tools before suitable alternatives are available and properly resourced.^{3,8}

Our recommendations are:

1. Maintain the current legislative and policy framework for dingo management, including obligations under the Biosecurity Act 2015.
2. Continue the implementation of the NSW Dingo Management Strategy and Regional Pest Animal Management Plans.
3. Ensure that dingo conservation objectives continue to be balanced with pest management requirements in high-risk areas.
4. Retain access to a full suite of control measures, including 1080 baiting.
5. Reject any proposal to ban or restrict 1080 poison for dingo control.
6. Support NPWS staff to undertake coordinated, cross-tenure pest management with landholders.
7. Prior to any policy change implementations, there should be consideration of the potential impact to stakeholders involved, including safety and management responsibility.

Endnotes

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