

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

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Inquiry into dingos in national parks New South Wales

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I grew up on a sheep farm in the shadows of Mount Pallerang which now sits in the Tallaganda National Park. I spent most of my early years fishing, hunting, bike and horse riding across farms, national parks and state forests near my home. In my early years and well into my teens I never saw a dingo, never heard a dingo and to be honest, other than hearing about some stock depredation forty kilometers to the south of us they were one of the furthest native animals from my mind. When I was in my teens my father started to take myself and my brother's fishing in the snowy mountains and it was at this time that I had my first encounters with dingos. When I got my driver's license these encounters increased as I wandered further afield for both work and my preferred past times of hunting and flyfishing. Throughout the late 90s and the first decade of the 2000s I rarely saw what many would consider to be a true dingo most of the animals I saw varied considerably in both body shape and color from an animal we baited on a property I was working on which bordered the Deua National Park which you would swear had some sort of mastiff or dane heritage through to dogs up on the Nungar plane which resembled white golden retrievers through to a small dog that used to come into camp in Kosci and try to lick the pans which would have been lucky to have been 10 kilos and almost pure black. One night on the Bobeyan road near Mount Clear (Namadji NP) I nearly hit a dog that more closely resembled a rather hairy wolf than a dingo and when I encountered dogs on the edge of the Mogo State Forest you would have sworn that these animals were German Shepherd. From time to time though I did see dogs that many would think were predominantly dingo and some that you would have sworn where you're typical Australian dingos.

Over the last few years my partner and I borrowed money against the house, made an informal lease with a family member and started farming sheep. We do okay out of this enterprise but I don't own the land and my only asset in this business is my animals. It has been unfortunate for me that around about the same time wild dogs have started preying on livestock on properties within several kilometers of me. This is the first time that these animals have been on these properties in anyone's living memory. Around the same time my partner who manages her mother's property at Mogo on the south coast of New South Wales spotted what was clearly wild dogs on their farm which retreated into the Mogo State Forest. Within two days a calf was dead and I found a heifer who had gone down in a depression while carving with dog prints around her. Her nose had been chewed off and the calf's face and tongue had been chewed out as she was giving birth. By the time I found that heifer the calf was already decaying while she laid there still alive. I came across her with my three-year-old daughter at the time and to say that it was a horrendous site for her to see would be an understatement. Lately I have had calls from friends and acquaintances who understood that I could trap, having trapped pigs, rabbits, foxes, and cats throughout my life and now I have had to learn to trap dogs. I have never seen dog

numbers like this on the south coast or the Southern tablelands in my lifetime. They are becoming so common that I and others have started seeing them on the highway. You can tell that they are wild by the fact that they are eating road kill and when you stop the car to take a picture they quickly retreat back into the national parks that border the Kings and Princes Highway.

The genetic status of dingoes, the distinction between dingoes and dogs and recent research into the genetic profile of NSW dingoes

There have been recent studies released which look closely at the genetic makeup of the wild canines in Australia. These studies completely upended the theories around wild dog heritage and advocacy groups immediately neglected a large body of science in favour of a new paper which was yet to be replicated. There were several concerning aspects of this research and how quickly it became fact for many people. Both the media and most pro dingo groups started spruiking that the canines living wild in the Australian bush are purebred dingoes when the research quite clearly pointed to hybridisation in many areas of Australia. The other concerning part was the lack of critique of the paper. The methodology seemed to have a major flaw in that the baseline used for determining dingo ancestry was modern dingos who were identified as pure through "known parentage". Given that European dogs were introduced to this country over 200 years ago this is clearly problematic. The only true way to find a baseline for purity is to find pre European samples and more recent studies have done exactly that. The more recent research using pre-colonial samples shows that most of the samples had significant European dog ancestry. Both these papers though show that there are some pure populations left in remote parts of Australia and it almost seems like there has been zero focus on these with all the focus then directed towards the hybridized populations and trying to stack them up as pure and protect them. Why you would allow a hybrid animal to exist on the landscape as a proxy for its distantly pure ancestor to the detriment of other native wildlife makes the mind boggle. Now this research has pointed out that hybridisation does exist in their samples. There have been articles published making the argument of function over form which is the argument that activists make when they realize they can't prove purity. The animal which exists on the landscape now in most of NSW is not the pre colonial dingo.

The legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks governing the management of dingoes in New South Wales in national parks

I'm not well versed currently in the regulatory and policy frameworks governing the management of dingo's inside of national parks. However any efforts to protect these animals will make control both inside and outside the parks extremely difficult. Even with its current status the wild dog seems to be increasing in numbers and range.

The ecological role of dingoes in national parks

I don't believe that those who make policy in national parks, including some that work for national parks themselves, truly realize the state of these areas. Many of them have been scorched by repeated fires and have been locked up and left to grow weeds and harbor pests. Wildlife in these areas are critically endangered and don't need another predator on the landscape to contend with.

If you stop landscape control of wild dogs you will by default prevent control of feral cats and foxes. There is little evidence to suggest that wild dogs will fill this role.

The greatest evidence that the role of wild dogs is overstated can be seen in areas of Kosciuszko and the Namadgi national parks where the wild dogs/dingos roam freely across the landscape in numbers. These areas are also home to large numbers of kangaroos, deer and pigs which overgraze and destroy the landscape despite the constant threat of predation by wild dogs dingoes.

Trophic cascade and the Yellowstone example- Wolves were reintroduced to control the overgrazing of elk. Although they were successful, new science has been released that the trophic cascade effect may have been initially overstated. This problem was unique to Yellowstone as it was essentially locked up and left to harbour the elk. The problem didn't exist outside of these areas due to state based hunting programs which controlled the elk and provided funds through a user paid system for wildlife conservation. The same result could have been achieved through other means without the negative side effects. The wolves have had negative affects on other wildlife (e.g the woodland caribou which it is driving to extinction). Those wolves now regularly prey on livestock resulting in the states in the US having to make depredation payments to livestock producers. Ecosystems mostly survive and die from the bottom up not from the top down like the trophic cascade theory suggests. The handful of examples of the trophic cascade effect being successful around the world involve the predator controlling a single problem animal. This situation does not exist in the Australian example.

The impact of current government policies and programs for the management of dingoes in national parks

Although I do acknowledge that there are programs to control dogs in national parks I don't believe they are effective enough as we are starting to see more and more dog numbers on the fringes of these areas and wild dogs turn up in spots where they have never been in living memory. One thing I will comment on though. Is the baiting program which took place to target predators after the 2020 bushfires. I noticed a significant reduction in fox and cat numbers. I generally shoot forty to sixty foxes a year where I run my sheep. Following the massive baiting program that took place for two years after the fires I started to see native animals that I never knew existed in my area. Fast forward four years and I no longer see these. I think that if you abandon baiting it could be catastrophic for wildlife. Dogs aside, it needs to continue just to control foxes and cats alone.

As for problem dogs I don't think you will ever be able to get away from trapping with the modern leg hold trap. Although it resembles the traps of yesterday we have learned a lot about design. In New South Wales we use offset jaws with rubber pads and several swivel points along the chain to prevent twisting of the leg. I have never had a fox or a dog break its leg in a trap. I will accept that it would be uncomfortable however I have caught myself on a regular basis over the years without injury. There are instances in the US where wolf researchers actually use leg hold traps to catch wolves for research purposes or relocation. They would not use these traps if they were injuring these animals.

The use of 1080, landscape control and hybridisation. - some of the recent genetic research suggests a hybridisation event occurred around the time 1080 was introduced. This is merely correlation and correlation is not causation. There is zero evidence and it ignores other important events from that era. The first being the winding back of rabbit control with strychnine thanks to the introduction of myxomatosis. This was essentially landscape control by proxy as unlike 1080 it does not readily break down in the environment and secondary baiting of dogs and other predators occurred regularly. The second being the major infrastructure programs taking place in regional NSW (i.e the Snowy Scheme). Thousands of workers lived in camps in remote areas. Many of their dogs would have been unrestrained and some may have even been left behind. It's more likely hybridisation occurred due to large numbers of both wild and domestic canines existing on the landscape together. Following this period these National Parks have been uninhabited and the areas surrounding them only sparsely inhabited by humans and their companion animals. Landscape control has continued since then using 1080, it wasn't restricted to that period. I would argue that it is opportunity not control that causes hybridisation.

Dingo management including opportunities for incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and leadership in dingo conservation in national parks

I have no issue with incorporation of indigenous knowledge in management of any kind in national parks especially if it provides jobs and opportunity.

Other related matters

The effect on primary industry and rural communities.- dog attacks have increased in recent years across the Southern Tablelands and the Monaro. There are already longstanding sheep operations that have destocked. It is destroying the sheep industry. On much of this land sheep are the most valuable commodity you can grow due to climate and soils. Winding back on dog control will destroy these enterprises, devalue the land (due to not being as profitable) and cost jobs in rural communities. If other areas of Australia are anything to go by, once the sheep are gone they will kill calves and young cattle instead. Keep in mind most farms on the eastern seaboard are close to a National Park. It doesn't just affect immediate neighbours.

To sum up I write this as a concerned farmer and outdoorsman. I have seen dozens of wild dogs in the wild and I have seen the damage they do when they encroach on farmland. I understand that people tend to relate to the wild dog but rest assured it is a wild predator and predators kill.

They are rarely selective and will take the easiest meal whether this is a lamb that's just been born or a glider that is walking along the forest floor. I urge this enquiry to put emotion aside and to please look at this from a fact based perspective that considers the lasting effects on both rural communities and native wildlife should control not continue inside of National Parks. If wild dog numbers increase in my area and I start to get attacked like my neighbours it will definitely call into question the future of my small business.

Please see attached below some photos of wild dogs taken on the immediate boundaries between farmland and the Morton National Park in some and the Deua national park in the last one.





