

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Sydney Dingo Rescue

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Submission to the Inquiry into Dingoes in National Parks in New South Wales:

Recognising and protecting dingoes as Australian wildlife with profound cultural and ecological significance.

Submitted to:

Animal Welfare Committee

Legislative Council

Parliament of New South Wales

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Summary:

Sydney Dingo Rescue submits that dingoes in New South Wales national parks should be recognised and protected as ecologically vital and culturally significant Australian wildlife. The submission identifies two urgent reforms: ending lethal control of dingoes within national parks and creating a lawful, coordinated pathway through which suitable orphaned and injured dingoes can receive temporary care and return to Country.

Contemporary research demonstrates that dingoes form a distinct evolutionary lineage (distinct from other canids). Of the NSW dingoes examined by Cairns et al., 79.6 per cent possessed more than 93 per cent dingo ancestry¹, and no first-generation hybrids or free-ranging domestic dogs were identified.² Protection should nevertheless not depend on an arbitrary ancestry threshold. Dingoes with some historical introgression/hybridisation perform the same crucial ecological role as dingoes with no evidence of hybridisation³.

As apex predators, dingoes regulate large herbivores, influence prey behaviour, suppress introduced predators, support smaller wildlife, and even affect vegetation growth and soil processes⁴. Their removal can produce trophic cascades extending across whole ecosystems⁵. National parks should therefore protect functioning dingo populations and the ecological relationships they sustain.

The present NSW framework for dingo management is internally inconsistent. Dingoes are excluded from protections afforded to other Australian mammals, and lethal control of dingoes is permitted within protected areas. Poison baiting, shooting and trapping cause death, injury and suffering, including harm to dependent pups and surviving family members⁶. These consequences are often poorly monitored and underreported.

¹Cairns, Kylie M., Mathew S. Crowther, Heidi G. Parker, Elaine A. Ostrander, and Mike Letnic. "Genome-wide variant analyses reveal new patterns of admixture and population structure in Australian dingoes." *Molecular Ecology* 32, no. 15 (2023): 4133-4150.

²Ibid

³Cairns, Kylie M. "What is a dingo—origins, hybridisation and identity." *Australian Zoologist* 41, no. 3 (2021): 322-337. Crowther, Mathew S., Kylie M. Cairns, Lily M. Van Eeden, and Mike Letnic. "Introgression does not influence the positive ecological and functional role of dingo populations." *Australian Zoologist* 41, no. 3 (2021): 338-346.

⁴Fisher, Adrian G., Charlotte H. Mills, Mitchell Lyons, William K. Cornwell, and Mike Letnic. "Remote sensing of trophic cascades: multi-temporal landsat imagery reveals vegetation change driven by the removal of an apex predator." *Landscape Ecology* 36, no. 5 (2021): 1341-1358.

⁵Wallach, Arian D., Anthony H. Dekker, Miguel Lurgi, Jose M. Montoya, Damien A. Fordham, and Euan G. Ritchie. "Trophic cascades in 3D: network analysis reveals how apex predators structure ecosystems." *Methods in Ecology and Evolution* 8, no. 1 (2017): 135-142.

⁶Jackson-Martin, Charlie. "Finding Sanctuary: Australian Foxes and Dingoes and the challenges of rescue." PhD diss., University of Wollongong, 2021.

Sydney Dingo Rescue's records demonstrate the consequences of current policy. Between 2020 and 2025, the organisation received an average of 63 requests each year concerning approximately 800 pups and had capacity to assist only 92. 31 pups who entered its care were found in or near NSW national parks. Once removed from Country, dingoes currently have no established release pathway and may face lifelong captivity. Their complex behavioural and welfare needs place substantial responsibilities on rescue organisations, veterinary clinics, local councils and other caregivers. Rehoming is a necessary harm-reduction measure under present conditions, but it is not a substitute for protecting dingoes and returning dingoes to Country.

The removal and killing of dingoes also have profound cultural consequences. The submission supports statutory recognition of that significance and First Nations leadership in all decisions affecting dingoes in national parks.

Sydney Dingo Rescue recommends statutory protection for dingoes; an end to lethal control in national parks; independent auditing and ecological monitoring; investment in non-lethal coexistence; regulation of capture and private captivity/ownership; a statewide response protocol for orphaned and injured dingoes; a funded return-to-Country program; government responsibility for care costs created by its actions; transparent reporting; and properly resourced First Nations-led conservation.

Introduction

Sydney Dingo Rescue welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Animal Welfare Committee's inquiry into dingoes in national parks in New South Wales. We would also be happy to provide evidence and testimony at all relevant public hearings pertaining to this inquiry.

This inquiry provides an important opportunity to reconsider how dingoes are understood, classified and managed in New South Wales national parks. Contemporary genetic research, ecological evidence and First Nations Culture and knowledge all challenge policies that continue to treat dingoes principally as "pests" or animals to be controlled. Dingoes are part of our Australian wildlife, important ecological participants and culturally significant beings who have been present in Australia for thousands of years.

National parks can and should provide meaningful protection for wildlife and promote biodiversity. The continued use of lethal control within these protected areas, for dingoes and other animals, raises serious questions about whether present legislation, policy and management practices are consistent with those purposes. It also raises concerns about animal welfare, the disruption to and/or collapse of

ecosystems (trophic cascades), and the exclusion of First Nations people from decisions affecting culturally significant kin (dingoes and other wildlife).

This submission draws together Sydney Dingo Rescue's practical experience with dingoes, relevant scientific research, the current NSW legislative and policy framework, and the National First Nations' Dingo Declaration, to put forward a series of recommendations to this inquiry.

It is our position that the New South Wales Government should recognise and protect dingoes as Australian wildlife of profound ecological and cultural significance. Lethal control should not be used within national parks and instead be replaced by evidence-based, culturally informed approaches to caring for Country that support more compassionate forms of coexistence with dingoes. It is also our position that wild dingoes should be treated like other Australian wildlife and as such a pathway for release should be developed for orphaned and injured wild dingoes who are currently limited to permanent captivity once removed from the wild.

Organisational background

Sydney Dingo Rescue is a registered charity that has operated since 2012. Our organisation provides rescue, specialised care, housing and veterinary support for dingoes who have been abandoned, surrendered, orphaned or placed at risk of being killed. We work predominantly with dingoes born in the wild. A small percentage of the animals in our care are also surrendered captive-bred dingoes from private homes or commercial facilities.

As an organisation, we work with councils, shelters, veterinary clinics, wildlife services and other community organisations, as well as people in rural, regional and remote communities across Australia to help dingoes. We work with dingoes who have been orphaned, hit by cars, shot, poisoned or injured in some other way. Almost all the wild dingoes that enter our care do so because of an injury caused, directly or indirectly, by humans.

This work has given Sydney Dingo Rescue extensive practical experience of dingo behaviour, social and environmental needs, health, welfare, and long-term care. It has also provided us with direct insight into the devastating consequences of misunderstanding dingoes, applying inappropriate classifications, and the use of lethal control methods.

Sydney Dingo Rescue's experience is particularly relevant to this inquiry because policies governing wild, free-living dingoes do not end at National Park boundaries. Management decisions, particularly the use of lethal control methods often result in orphaned young and injured dingo pups, disrupted social groups and dingoes entering council impound facilities, vet clinics and private rescue centres.

Rescue organisations are often left to respond to these consequences without having any role in the policies that created them. While animal rescues like Sydney Dingo Rescue can protect and care for individual dingoes on a small scale, this is no substitute for the widespread protection needed for stable, free-living dingo populations on Country.

Sydney Dingo Rescue is based on Gundungurra Country, which encompasses the greater Blue Mountains and Southern Highlands region. The local dingoes, or *Mirrigang*, hold profound cultural and ecological significance in our area, as in most of New South Wales⁷. As an organisation we recognise the broader cultural authority expressed through the National First Nations' Dingo Declaration, developed and signed by representatives from more than 20 First Nations groups in 2023. The Declaration describes dingoes as family, culturally significant beings and “Boss of Country”⁸. It calls for dingoes to be recognised in legislation as culturally significant and protected native wildlife, and for Traditional Custodians to participate directly in decisions affecting dingo management. Sydney Dingo Rescue does not seek to speak on behalf of Traditional Custodians. Rather, this submission supports the Declaration’s call for First Nations voices, rights and knowledge to be embedded directly in New South Wales policy and legislation that directly affects dingoes and other Australian wildlife.

Our contribution to this inquiry is grounded in more than a decade of specialist rescue experience working with dingoes and a commitment to a future in which dingoes can remain protected on Country.

1 Dingoes are genetically distinct and ecologically important.

The following section responds to term of reference (a), concerning the genetic status of dingoes, their distinction from domesticated canids and recent research into the genetic profile of NSW populations. It also responds to term of reference (c), concerning the ecological role of dingoes in national parks.

Genetic status and distinctiveness

Dingoes are genetically, behaviourally and ecologically distinct from domestic dogs. They are not simply free-living representatives of a domesticated population. Dingoes form their own

⁷Ngununggula Dingo Project, <https://ngununggula.com/program/dingo-project>

⁸ National First Nations' Dingo Declaration, (2023)

evolutionary lineage; they possess unique behaviours and have developed novel biological and physiological adaptations to the harsh Australian environment over thousands of years.

Contemporary scientific research has found evidence of natural selection in genes associated with digestion and metabolism, neurodevelopment, sensory processing and reproduction, consistent with adaptation to life in Australian environments⁹. Dingoes generally have one oestrus cycle each year (whereas domestic dogs have two) and display cooperative parental care¹⁰. They also exhibit anatomical differences compared to both domestic dogs, wolves and other canines including larger carnassial and canine teeth, larger auditory bullae¹¹, and a larger brain relative to body size¹². The combined genetic, physiological, reproductive, anatomical and behavioural evidence demonstrates an evolutionary trajectory shaped by thousands of years of natural selection rather than human-directed breeding (as in domestic dogs)¹³.

Recent genome-wide research in dingo genetics and hybridisation also provides a substantially more reliable picture than earlier studies based on small numbers of genetic markers. Cairns et al. analysed more than 195,000 genetic variants and identified at least five distinct dingo population clusters across Australia. This demonstrates that dingoes possess their own population structure and geographically significant genetic diversity.¹⁴

The NSW findings are particularly relevant to this inquiry. Of the 103 NSW dingoes included in the Cairns et al study: 62.1 per cent had more than 99 per cent dingo ancestry, a further 17.5 per cent had more than 93 per cent dingo ancestry. Collectively, 79.6 per cent had more than 93 per cent dingo ancestry¹⁵. No first-generation hybrids or free-ranging domesticated canids were identified in the NSW sample.

Earlier methods relying on a limited number of markers tended to overestimate admixture/hybridisation with domestic dogs. Those estimates helped create a widespread perception that genetically distinctive dingoes had become rare in eastern Australia. Contemporary scientific research does not support that perception.

⁹Zhang, Shao-jie, Guo-Dong Wang, Pengcheng Ma, Liang-liang Zhang, Ting-Ting Yin, Yan-hu Liu, Newton O. Otecko et al. "Genomic regions under selection in the feralization of the dingoes." *Nature Communications* 11, no. 1 (2020): 671.

¹⁰ Smith, Bradley. "2 Biology and Behaviour of the Dingo." In *The Dingo Debate*, pp. 25-55. CSIRO Publishing, 2015.

¹¹ Corbett, L.K. 2001a. Conservation status of the dingo. In 'A symposium on the dingo.' (Eds. CR Dickman and D Lunney) pp. 10-19. (Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales: Sydney)

¹²Norris, R., B. Smith, M. Henneberg, and T. Lucas. "Brain size/body weight in the dingo (*Canis dingo*): comparisons with domestic and wild canids." (2018).

¹³ Zhang, et al. "Genomic regions under selection" (2020)

¹⁴ Cairns, et al. "Genome-wide variant analyses" (2023)

¹⁵ Ibid

These findings have direct implications for NSW policy. Management programs cannot reliably distinguish dingoes from other canids. In practice, such programs are overwhelmingly likely to target and kill dingoes.

Regardless of debates about dingo ‘purity’, ecological value should be assessed by how dingoes live and interact within an ecosystem, not by an abstract measure of ancestry. Free-living, wild dingoes with some genetic introgression/historical hybridisation with domestic dogs, can (and do) fill the same ecological niche as other dingoes. They retain the social organisation, territorial behaviour, hunting practices and competitive relationships through which they regulate large herbivores such as kangaroos, influence prey behaviour and suppress introduced predators. Research has found that introgression/hybridisation does not diminish these ecological functions¹⁶. The appropriate ecological management unit is therefore the free-living population, including the stable family groups and relationships through which these functions are maintained. Dingo protection should not depend on an individual satisfying an arbitrary ancestry threshold. Introgression/hybridisation does not erase dingoes’ ecological function, welfare interests, or cultural significance. NSW policy should recognise and protect ecologically functional dingo populations without dividing individuals into administratively convenient categories based on perceived genetic ‘purity’.

Ecological role in national parks

Dingoes have been present in Australia for thousands of years and have become deeply integrated into Australian ecosystems. They are Australia’s largest terrestrial predator.

As apex predators and a keystone species¹⁷ for many ecosystems, dingoes can influence ecosystems through both direct and indirect relationships. These include:

- Regulating the abundance and behaviour of herbivores (in particular large macropods such as kangaroos)¹⁸.
- Competing with and suppressing introduced predators (in particular foxes and cats)¹⁹

¹⁶ Crowther, Mathew S., Kylie M. Cairns, Lily M. Van Eeden, and Mike Letnic. "Introgression does not influence the positive ecological and functional role of dingo populations." *Australian Zoologist* 41, no. 3 (2021): 338-346.

¹⁷ Cairns, Kylie M. "What is a dingo—origins, hybridisation and identity." *Australian Zoologist* 41, no. 3 (2021): 322-337.

¹⁸ Fisher, et al. "Remote sensing of trophic cascades" (2021)

Smith, Matt S., Adrian G. Fisher, Graeme Finlayson, and Mike Letnic. "Remote sensing reveals that wild herbivores limit senescent vegetation accumulation on dryland conservation reserves." *Ecological Applications* 36, no. 3 (2026): e70239.

¹⁹ Letnic, Mike, Euan G. Ritchie, and Christopher R. Dickman. "Top predators as biodiversity regulators: the dingo *Canis lupus dingo* as a case study." *Biological Reviews* 87, no. 2 (2012): 390-413.

- Influencing where prey species forage and shelter²⁰
- Affecting/increasing the survival rates of smaller native animals (including several threatened and endangered species)²¹
- Contributing to changes in vegetation and soil processes²²
- Removing carrion and participating in nutrient cycling²³

The strength and direction of these effects can vary between environments. This variation means that dingo ecology should be studied through long-term, place-based monitoring. It does not justify removing dingoes from protected ecosystems before the consequences are properly understood.

National parks are especially important because they provide core habitat in which natural ecological processes should be maintained. Removing an apex predator from these areas can affect not only the individuals killed, but also family-group stability, territorial behaviour, prey relationships and broader ecosystem function. Removing dingoes can destabilise ecosystems and lead to trophic cascades and ecosystem collapse²⁴.

The genetic and ecological evidence leads to the same conclusion: dingoes in NSW national parks should be treated as genetically distinctive, ecologically functional wild populations. Their routine killing and lack of protection is inconsistent with contemporary research and with the intended purposes of national parks.

2 Lethal control of dingoes must end in national parks

This section responds to term of reference (b), concerning the legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks governing dingo management in NSW national parks, and term of reference (e), concerning the impacts of current government policies and programs.

Contradictory framework

NSW legislation places dingoes in a contradictory position. The legislation and regulations that currently govern dingo management are internally inconsistent and at times contradictory.

²⁰ Johnson, Christopher N., Joanne L. Isaac, and Diana O. Fisher. "Rarity of a top predator triggers continent-wide collapse of mammal prey: dingoes and marsupials in Australia." *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 274, no. 1608 (2006): 341.

²¹ Letnic, Mike, Lynn Baker, and Brad Nesbitt. "Ecologically functional landscapes and the role of dingoes as trophic regulators in south-eastern Australia and other habitats." *Ecological Management & Restoration* 14, no. 2 (2013): 101-105.

²² Fisher, et al. "Remote sensing of trophic cascades" (2021)

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Wallach, et al. "Trophic cascades in 3D" (2017)

In New South Wales, the term “wild dog” is often used in legislation and policy to collectively refer to dingoes, domestic dogs and dingo-dog hybrids. There is no distinction under current legislation.

It is well established in the global scientific community that dingoes are a genetically distinct and ecologically important part of our Australian Wildlife. Furthermore, there is a growing push from First Nations people to recognise the dingo as culturally significant and sacred²⁵.

The **National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974** clearly states that the objectives of national parks are “the conservation of nature”, including “ecosystems and ecosystem processes” and “biological diversity”, as well as “fostering public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of nature and cultural heritage”.

Yet the current legislative framework in New South Wales allows dingoes, an ecologically and culturally significant animal, to be poisoned, shot, trapped and killed within national parks. These frameworks and management practices do not reflect the goals of the Act, nor do they account for contemporary science or respect the deep cultural significance of dingoes to First Nations communities.

The **Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016** compounds this inconsistency. Schedule 5 excludes dingoes from the general protection afforded to other native Australian mammals. This exclusion is difficult to reconcile with contemporary genetic research, and the ecological role of dingoes in Australian ecosystems.

The **Biosecurity Act 2015** does not require dingoes to be eradicated. Section 22 establishes a general duty to prevent, eliminate or minimise a known biosecurity risk so far as is reasonably practicable. This is a risk-management obligation, not an automatic requirement. Yet this act is often used and cited to enforce dingo management and lethal dingo control measures.

The New South Wales government allows extensive lethal control of dingoes to occur across our national parks, principally to reduce the impact of dingo predation on neighbouring livestock producers. The result is that dingoes living within protected ecosystems may be killed because of risks arising outside those ecosystems.

This approach treats the presence of dingoes as a problem to be removed rather than identifying impacts and addressing those impacts at their source. It also transfers the environmental, cultural and

²⁵ National First Nations' Dingo Declaration, (2023)

welfare costs of livestock protection into national parks at the expense of biodiversity and fragile ecosystems.

The existing framework already permits a different approach. Risks to livestock for example can be addressed through nonlethal measures on adjoining land and at carefully identified boundaries. These measures could include appropriate predator-proof fencing or cluster fencing, removal of attractants, protection of vulnerable livestock during lambing/calving, guardian animals, deterrents and monitoring.

Impacts of current policies and programs

Death, injury and suffering

Poison baiting is designed to kill dingoes who consume a bait, irrespective of whether an individual has caused a demonstrated impact. The most common poison used to kill dingoes in NSW national parks is 1080 poison. It is dropped from the air by helicopter or placed on or in the ground in a food. 1080 interferes with a critical energy-producing and metabolic process in all animals and is therefore non-selective and indiscriminate²⁶. Dingoes, and indeed any animal that consumes 1080, die a slow and painful death. A systematic review of sodium fluoroacetate (1080) concluded that the toxin is inhumane, noting the potential for distress, pain and periods of awareness during poisoning²⁷. Furthermore, 1080 is both indiscriminate and lethal, with no viable antidote. Studies show that 1080 poison can be lethal to at least to many other species of Australian wildlife, of particular concern are three threaten species known to be susceptible to baiting being the spotted-tailed quoll, eastern quoll and brush-tailed phascogalea²⁸. The World Health Organisation considers 1080 poison a Class 1a pesticide "Extremely Hazardous"²⁹. Information obtained under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 showed that over 1.5 million 1080 poison baits targeting dingoes were deployed by New South Wales Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) between 2020 and 2025³⁰.

While 1080 poison is almost always lethal, shooting and trapping create the risk of wounding and prolonged suffering where death is neither immediate nor humane. Shooting causes rapid

²⁶ Goh, C. S. S., D. R. Hodgson, S. M. Fearnside, J. Heller, and N. Malikides. "Sodium monofluoroacetate (Compound 1080) poisoning in dogs." *Australian Veterinary Journal* 83, no. 8 (2005): 474-479.

²⁷ Sherley, Miranda. (2017). Is sodium fluoroacetate (1080) a humane poison?. *Animal Welfare*. 16. 449-458. 10.1017/S096272860002738X.

²⁸ Glen, A. S., Matthew N. Gentle, and C. R. Dickman. "Non-target impacts of poison baiting for predator control in Australia." *Mammal review* 37, no. 3 (2007): 191-205.

²⁹ World Health Organization. *The WHO recommended classification of pesticides by hazard and guidelines to classification 2019*. World Health Organization, 2020.

³⁰ <https://www.defendthewild.org/dingo-inquiry-nsw>

unconsciousness and death only when a bullet accurately strikes the brain or other vital organs. An inaccurate shot or shot from a long distance, may leave a dingo wounded and able to escape, resulting in prolonged suffering, disability and delayed death. SDR has cared for dingoes with severe injuries caused by non-lethal bullet wounds, including one dingo (Sammy) who was shot in the mouth who suffered a detached retina from the impact as well as wounds to her jaw, teeth, tongue and the roof of her mouth and sinuses, which contained bullet fragments/lead shrapnel. Another dingo (Rio) came to SDR for treatment after being shot in the leg, the bullet shattered her elbow joint which required two orthopaedic surgeries and ultimately required the joint to be fused with a metal plate.

Padded-jaw, 'soft-jaw' or 'soft-catch' foot-hold traps may reduce some injuries compared with unpadded traps, but they do not eliminate suffering. These devices clamp and restrain a dingo by a limb until the trap is inspected, causing pain, fear and distress. Struggling can result in swelling, lacerations, dislocations, fractures, damage to teeth and gums, or injury from chewing the trapped limb. Captured dingoes may also experience exposure, dehydration, shock and capture myopathy. Standard procedures require trapped dingoes to be shot while still restrained, meaning they may endure many hours of confinement before being killed. SDR treated a dingo (Nes) who had been found by a MOP in a leg hold trap and who suffered severe crush injuries to his front paw. His veterinary assessment showed damage to the skin, tendons, muscle and vasculature from lack of blood supply and his injuries required surgical debridement, IV antibiotics and weeks of careful dressing changes and wound care.

These impacts are particularly difficult to monitor when operations take place across large or inaccessible areas. An assessment based only on the number of animals killed does not capture injuries, dependent young, family-group disruption or effects on surviving dingoes. For every dingo we are able to help at SDR there are undoubtedly thousands more wild dingoes whose suffering goes unnoticed and unreported.

Orphaning and disruption of family groups

Dingoes live in related, socially structured and territorial family groups³¹. Young dingoes depend on parental and wider family care during a critical developmental period and can remain dependent for four months or longer³².

When breeding adults or other family members are killed, the consequences can extend beyond the targeted individual. Dependent young (pups) may be left without food, protection or the opportunity

³¹ Smith, "The Dingo Debate" (2015)

³² Brumm, Adam. "Dingoes and domestication." *Archaeology in Oceania* 56, no. 1 (2021): 17-31.

to learn essential social and survival behaviours. Surviving adults may alter their movement, social relationships and territorial behaviour. This can consequently lead to increased negative interactions between dingoes and livestock or humans³³. Family-level consequences of lethal control on dingoes rarely receive the attention they deserve, despite the huge impact on survivors in particular pups, juveniles and subadult dingoes.

Trophic cascades following dingo removal

A trophic cascade occurs when the removal of an apex predator causes changes across several levels of an ecosystem. When dingoes are removed, populations and behaviour of prey and competing predators may change. These effects can extend to vegetation, soil condition and habitat for other wildlife³⁴.

Research by Fisher et al. compared areas with and without dingoes using 32 years of satellite imagery from either side of the infamous “Wild Dog” Fence. Vegetation in areas where dingoes were rare showed poorer long-term growth and a weaker response to rainfall. The researchers linked this difference partly to increased kangaroo populations and greater grazing pressure following dingo removal. The effects were extensive enough to be visible in satellite imagery.³⁵

Reduced vegetation diminishes food, shelter and breeding habitat for smaller mammals, birds, reptiles and invertebrates. It can also affect soil protection, water retention, carbon storage and even bush fires. Other Australian studies have associated dingo suppression with changes in introduced-predator activity, herbivore abundance, vegetation structure and small-wildlife communities³⁶.

Ecological responses will vary between environments. Nevertheless, research studies demonstrate that removing dingoes can produce substantial, long-term effects extending far beyond the individuals killed.

National parks should conserve functioning ecological relationships, not merely individual species. Maintaining stable dingo populations allows their ecological role as a keystone species to continue. Lethal control of dingoes risks ecological changes that may ultimately be irreversible.

³³ Lennox, Rowena. *Dingo bold: the life and death of K'gari dingoes*. Sydney University Press, 2021.

³⁴ Fisher, et al "Remote sensing of trophic cascades" (2021)

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Letnic, et al. "Top predators as biodiversity regulators" (2012)

3 Orphaned and injured dingoes from national parks.

This section responds to term of reference (b), concerning the legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks governing dingo management in NSW national parks, and term of reference (e), concerning the impacts of current government policies and programs.

Removal from Country and permanent captivity

The impacts of lethal control extend beyond the dingoes who are directly killed. When adult family members are poisoned, shot or trapped, dependent pups may be left orphaned, while injured survivors may require urgent rescue and veterinary treatment. Once these dingoes are removed from Country, the absence of a lawful and coordinated release pathway means that rescue becomes permanent captivity rather than temporary care. This section documents the scale of this problem, its lifelong consequences for dingoes, and the substantial responsibility transferred to rescue organisations and individual caregivers.

Orphan dingoes

Orphaned or injured dingoes who are found alive may be transferred to rescue care. Over a five-year period from 2020 to 2025 SDR operational records show that Sydney Dingo Rescue received an average of 63 requests annually (via phone, social media or email) from members of the public (MOP), veterinary clinics, local council impound centres and rangers, wildlife services/charities and other private animal rescue organisations asking for assistance with wild dingo pups, largely presumed to be orphans³⁷. These calls pertained to approximately 800 dingo pups. SDR only had the space and resources to assist 92 of these dingoes (in addition to the private surrenders and adult dingoes we take on each year). At least 31 pups that we know of, during this time, that came into SDR care were found in, or bordering NSW national parks (Liddy, Bailey, Dale, Odesa, Kyoto, Abbie, Kobe, Tina, Mae, Bushi, Leto, Nemi, Pollux, Darwin, Ned, Dani, Maggie, Vali, Nat, Cass, Astrid, Artemis, Zeus, Tilly, Ru, Monty, Sylvie, Les, Wombat, Taz and Gaia). These pups often arrived covered in parasites, severely underweight, and starving from having been on their own for several days or weeks after losing their families. They had been left to fend for themselves without parents or a steady food supply.

Dingo pups “Dale”, “Odesa”, “Kyoto”, “Abbie”, “Kobe”, “Tina”, “Mae” were found by a worker in a New South Wales national park on the mid-north coast, at four weeks old with their dead mother in

³⁷ It is not always possible to establish with 100% certainty that a dingo pup found by a member of the public is an orphan, however SDR procedure dictates that we try our best to never remove healthy dingo pups with adult dingoes caring for them from the wild. We encourage MOPs to use trail cameras, observation, body scoring and other techniques to establish if a dingo pup needs help or is not being cared for/fed by adult dingoes.

2023. The worker had heard crying and subsequently located the bloated body of a deceased dingo and seven pups. During a phone conversation with SDR volunteers he explained that policy dictated he should kill the pups, but he couldn't bring himself to do it. He also confirmed 1080 poison baits were being used in the area at the time. Had he not stumbled across these dingo pups, they would have almost certainly suffered a painful and prolonged death from starvation or predation by other animals. The parks worker has asked to remain anonymous for fear of retribution or losing his employment.

In another example in 2020 dingo pup "Astrid" was found scavenging for food with another dingo pup (both aged approximately sixteen weeks old) at the edge of a National Park in Blue Mountains area near holiday rental accommodation. One of the staff noticed the extremely malnourished pups looking for food. Both pups were also suffering from severe sarcoptic mange. Staff at the accommodation confirmed 1080 baiting was taking place in the nearby national park. They described regularly seeing a family of dingoes previously but noted that for several weeks there had been no adults and only the two pups remained. It was their belief that the adult dingoes and other pups in the litter had most likely been poisoned. The two remaining pups were skittish and difficult to get close to despite their poor body condition and worsening health. After a week of careful observation, the decision was made to assist the staff in setting cage traps to try and help bring the pups into care for treatment. Sadly, one pup then disappeared. When Astrid was trapped, she had a body score of one out of ten, indicating that she was extremely emaciated. She required immediate veterinary care and took several months to recover. These are two of many examples of the suffering we witness firsthand because of the lethal control of dingoes in NSW national parks.

Captive for life

Once dingoes such as injured and orphaned pups are removed from the wild, NSW presently has no established lawful and coordinated pathway for treatment and return to Country. Legal restrictions (in every state including NSW) and the absence of a coordinated release program mean they will spend the rest of their lives in captivity. In NSW, no permit is required to keep dingoes or dingo-hybrids in captivity³⁸.

To SDR's knowledge, as of July 2026 there are presently only five rescue organisations in Australia that specialise in dingoes. Most wildlife rescue organisations do not have the facilities or capacity to work with dingoes since they require lifetime care and cannot be released. A small number of domestic animal rescue organisations in NSW do assist dingoes on a case-by-case basis, but behavioural differences between dingoes and domestic dogs make this extremely difficult.

³⁸ NSW Wild Dog Management Strategy, 2022–2027

Sydney Dingo Rescue has direct experience of the specialist facilities, enclosures, veterinary treatment, behavioural knowledge and lifelong resources required to care for dingoes removed from the wild. Wild dingoes, whether they grow up from a young age in captivity not, are behaviourally distinct from domestic-bred AKA captive-bred dingoes. All SDR dingoes are desexed (in the absence of a legal release program), but we have experience working with both captive bred dingoes (surrendered into our care) and wild-born rescue dingoes.

Behavioural differences of note while living in captivity include; higher prey drive, propensity for extreme timidity, anxiety and fear of novel stimuli (including but not limited to loud noises, strangers, vehicles, strong smells, flashing lights and moving objects), increased likelihood of reactivity toward other dingoes, dogs, humans, and other animals, extreme desire to escape (by climbing, digging and chewing), tendencies toward destructive behaviours such as digging and chewing, and a strong need for consistency and routine. All these traits, while likely crucial for survival in the wild, are antithetical to living an easy, stress-free life in captivity and yet this is the only option for orphaned and injured dingoes once they are removed from the wild.

This problem is compounded by the absence of effective controls on the private acquisition of dingoes. A member of the public may remove a dingo from the wild, while no specialist permit, competency assessment, enclosure inspection or demonstrated capacity for lifelong care is required before attempting to keep them as a private companion animal AKA “pet”. This regulatory gap can result in unsuitable captivity, escape, abandonment and surrender, creating substantial consequences for local councils, veterinary clinics, rescue and rehoming organisations and surrounding communities. These organisations may then be expected to capture, handle, treat, impound or find lifelong placement for dingoes whose complex needs often exceed available resources. Because return to Country is not permitted, an ill-informed decision to remove a dingo can become an irreversible sentence of lifelong captivity, with the practical and financial consequences transferred to community organisations and public services.

Rehoming programs

Against this backdrop of permanent captivity for orphaned and injured dingoes, and an overwhelming number of dingoes in need of help, SDR currently runs a dingo rehoming program, which is briefly explained below for context. Sydney Dingo Rescue’s rehoming program is not presented as an ideal solution or as a substitute for protecting dingoes on Country. Rather, the program is a necessary harm-reduction response within a legal system that currently offers no release pathway.

Desexed rescue dingoes are placed only with carefully assessed caregivers following multiple introductions, enclosure and fencing checks, education about dingo behaviour, and consideration of

existing animals and family relationships. While a small number of SDR rescue dingoes are rehomed to zoos and wildlife parks, the demand is small and cannot account for the number of homes required.

Sydney Dingo Rescue provides ongoing advice, practical support and a lifetime return guarantee. All of which are necessary for the program to work, given the behavioural difficulties met by carers when attempting to keep wild-born dingoes in captivity. Even with these support systems it is difficult to find carers willing and able to provide a suitable home for dingoes. SDR rehomes only around twenty wild-born rescue dingoes on average each year (and around ten captive-bred rescue dingoes).

SDR acknowledges that rehoming dingoes is an ethically fraught practice. It does not end captivity; it may require the separation of larger family groups and it leaves dingoes subject to continuing human control. However, where return to Country is prohibited and sanctuary capacity is finite, a carefully selected home can provide greater individual attention, exercise, enrichment and stable social relationships, while creating space for another injured or orphaned dingo who may otherwise be killed.

Rehoming is therefore the best available outcome within an inadequate system. However, it is not the outcome SDR would choose if safe and legally authorised return to Country were possible.

In summary, captivity for dingoes poses many ethical limitations³⁹. It cannot and should not be treated as a substitute for protecting free-living, wild dingo populations. Rescue organisations like SDR can protect and save some individual dingoes from immediate suffering and death, but even the best care in captivity cannot restore freedom, participation in a natural family group, ecological function or connection to Country.

The current statewide strategy on “wild dog” AKA dingo management contains no dedicated protocol for identifying and responding to orphaned young or injured survivors. Nor does the framework clearly assign responsibility for veterinary care, family reunification, return to Country or lifetime costs where government action results in permanent captivity. These consequences are instead shifted to community organisations with finite capacity and charitable resources.

Cultural impacts

The removal of dingoes from Country also has cultural consequences. The National First Nations' Dingo Declaration states that dingoes are considered kin and are sacred⁴⁰. The declaration calls for an

³⁹ Jackson-Martin (2020)

⁴⁰National First Nations' Dingo Declaration, (2023)

end to lethal control. Current policies permit culturally significant beings to be killed without requiring First Nations authorisation or leadership in the decision-making process. This is unacceptable.

These impacts are particularly serious within national parks, which remain living Country and places of continuing cultural responsibility. The Dingo Declaration calls for a model of caring for dingoes on Country, combining traditional knowledge with contemporary evidence and directly involving Traditional Custodians in every decision that affects dingoes. Lethal control within national parks undermines these obligations by removing culturally significant kin from Country and excluding First Nations communities from decisions about their care and protection. Dingo management in national parks must therefore be led by, or developed in genuine partnership with, the relevant Traditional Custodians in each region or community.

Recommendations

Sydney Dingo Rescue recommends that the NSW Government adopt the following reforms, organised according to the inquiry's terms of reference.

Term of reference (a): Genetic status and distinctiveness

1. Recognise dingoes as a distinct species.

NSW legislation, policy and operational guidance should recognise dingoes as genetically, behaviourally, physiologically and ecologically distinct from domestic dogs and other canines.

2. Remove genetic 'purity' thresholds.

Protection should not depend on appearance, ancestry percentages or perceived genetic 'purity'. Free-living wild dingo populations should be protected according to their ecological function, social organisation, welfare interests and cultural significance, including where historical hybridisation or introgression with domestic dogs is present.

Term of reference (b): Legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks

3. Provide dingoes with statutory protection.

Schedule 5 of the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* should be amended to remove the exclusion of dingoes from the protections afforded to other Australian mammals.

4. Establish a dingo-specific legal framework.

NSW legislation and policy should cease subsuming dingoes within broad pest-animal classifications and instead provide management objectives, definitions and protections that reflect their distinct status. This framework should include the development of a pathway to re-release for suitable dingoes to return to Country within national parks.

5. Clarify the application of the general biosecurity duty.

The presence of dingoes should not, by itself, be treated as a biosecurity risk requiring control. Any response should be based on evidence of a specific impact and should prioritise measures directed at that impact.

6. Legally prohibit lethal control within national parks. Poison baiting, shooting, trapping and other lethal methods targeting dingoes should not be permitted in NSW national parks.

7. Prevent lethal operations outside parks from affecting protected populations.

Management undertaken on adjoining land should not extend into national parks or destabilise dingo family groups living within them.

8. Regulate removal from the wild and private ownership.

Unauthorised capture and removal of free-living dingoes should be prohibited throughout NSW. Removing dingoes from the wild should be limited to cases where an animal has been identified as injured, orphaned or at risk by an approved animal welfare organisation, wildlife rescue group or other authorised person.

Keeping of a dingo by private individuals in captivity should require a specialist permit (similar to the existing Victorian permit system), demonstrated competency, enclosure inspection and a plan for lifelong care. Appropriate exemptions should apply to authorised rescue, veterinary treatment, and return to Country.

Term of reference (c): Ecological role in national parks

9. Protect stable family groups and territories.

Dingo conservation should be directed towards wild, free-living dingoes, in particular maintaining stable family groups, social relationships and territorial structures.

- 10. Replace lethal control with non-lethal coexistence measures.** Government support should be directed towards appropriate predator-proof fencing, livestock protection during vulnerable periods, guardian animals, removal of attractants, deterrents and monitoring on land adjoining national parks. Compensation schemes for stock losses should also be explored.
- 11. Establish long-term ecological monitoring.** Independent, place-based monitoring should be put in place for dingo populations within national parks. Results should be publicly reported and used to guide future policy.
- 12. Recognise national parks as ecological refuges.** National parks should provide secure habitat in which dingoes can fulfil their ecological role without persecution.

Terms of reference (d) and (f): Cultural significance, Indigenous knowledge and leadership

- 13. Give statutory recognition to the cultural significance of dingoes.** NSW legislation and policy should recognise dingoes as culturally significant beings and incorporate the principles expressed in the National First Nations' Dingo Declaration.
- 14. Place Traditional Custodians in decision-making roles.** Dingo policy and management in each national park should be developed with the leadership and informed agreement of the relevant Traditional Custodians.
- 15. Fund First Nations-led conservation.** The NSW Government should provide ongoing funding for Indigenous ranger programs, cultural monitoring, research and other locally determined approaches to caring for dingoes on Country.
- 16. Include cultural consequences in government assessments.** Any proposed activity affecting dingoes or their family groups should require a cultural impact assessment developed with the relevant Traditional Custodians.

Term of reference (e): Impacts of current government policies and programs

- 17. Immediately suspend lethal control while reforms are developed.**

Poison baiting, shooting and trapping targeting dingoes within national parks should cease pending legislative reform and the introduction of non-lethal management plans and policies.

18. Conduct an independent audit of past and current operations.

This audit should disclose the locations, timing and scale of poison baiting, shooting and trapping within national parks; the number of dingoes known or estimated to have been killed or injured; effects on dependent young and family groups; non-target deaths; and the ecological, welfare and cultural consequences of these programs.

19. Introduce a statewide response protocol for orphaned and injured dingoes.

The protocol should assign responsibility for assessment, monitoring, family reunification, veterinary treatment, temporary specialist care and most importantly return to Country. National Parks and Wildlife staff, Indigenous Rangers, local councils, veterinary clinics and rescue organisations should receive training, funding and support to implement such a program.

20. Create a lawful return-to-Country pathway.

The NSW Government should establish and fund a program allowing suitable orphaned and injured dingoes to be returned following treatment. The program should be developed with Traditional Custodians, specialist veterinarians, dingo rescue organisations, National Parks and Wildlife Service personnel and independent ecological experts.

21. Make return to Country the preferred outcome.

Decisions should prioritise dingo family reunification and release wherever these outcomes are safe and appropriate. Permanent captivity should be considered only where an individual cannot reasonably survive following release.

22. Accept responsibility for government-created care costs.

Where government action causes a dingo to be injured, orphaned or permanently removed from Country, the responsible agency should fund veterinary treatment, and specialist care at a suitable rescue facility.

Term of reference (g): Other related matters

23. Fund specialist rescue capacity during the transition.

Until an effective return-to-Country program is operating, the NSW Government should provide direct funding to specialist organisations caring for orphaned and injured dingoes.

24. Create a central reporting system.

NSW should record reports of orphaned, injured, captured and displaced dingoes, including where they were found, the suspected cause, assistance provided and their eventual outcome. Deidentified data should be publicly reported each year.

25. Provide training and clear public guidance.

Councils, rangers, veterinary professionals, rescue organisations and communities should receive government funded information and support about wild dingo behaviour to help identify when intervention is necessary in an attempt to avoid unnecessary removal from the wild/Country.

26. Evaluate reform through transparent reporting.

The NSW Government should report annually on the implementation of these recommendations, including reductions in lethal control, investment in coexistence measures, outcomes for orphaned and injured dingoes, return-to-Country outcomes and First Nations participation in decision-making.

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