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INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Dingo Advisory Council

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Introduction

The Dingo Advisory Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into dingo management in National Parks in New South Wales. The Dingo Advisory Council is an independent, non-government advisory body that provides evidence-based advice, practical guidance and educational resources to governments, landholders and other stakeholders on dingo management and livestock protection. Our council is made up of a broad spectrum of stakeholders with complementary expertise regarding dingoes and dingo management. The council's members are as follows:

- Dr. Linda van Bommel - Research Fellow, University of Tasmania; specialist in livestock guardian animals and non-lethal predator management; author of the *Best Practice Manual for the Use of Livestock Guardian Dogs*.
- Scott Mitchell - Pest management practitioner with experience across Queensland, New South Wales and the Northern Territory.
- Sonya Grant - The National First Nations Dingo Coordinator and cultural representative.
- Angus Emmont - Former cattle producer from Queensland's Channel Country with practical experience managing livestock in landscapes where dingoes are retained.
- Dr. Daniel Hunter - Ecosystem biologist and wildlife cinematographer who has extensively observed dingo behaviour in the field.
- Zeph Thomson - Canine behavioural expert who has worked extensively with wild-born and captive-bred dingoes, as well as domesticated dogs.

The Dingo Advisory Council was established after identifying a need for greater access to practical information on the full range of available approaches to dingo-livestock conflict management. While considerable extension support exists for conventional control methods, information and support relating to preventative and non-lethal approaches is comparatively limited. DAC aims to improve access to evidence-based information so that landholders and decision-makers can select management approaches appropriate to their circumstances.

Livestock predation remains a significant issue for many producers despite the range of management approaches currently employed. This highlights the importance of continuing to

evaluate and improve management strategies, and to ensure that landholders have access to the full suite of tools that have demonstrated effectiveness under different production systems.

DAC considers that effective support for neighbouring landholders is an essential component of reducing dingo-livestock conflict, regardless of any changes to dingo management within National Parks. Ensuring producers have access to appropriate advice, extension services and practical preventative livestock protection tools will help reduce livestock losses, support informed decision-making and contribute to more effective landscape-scale management. If dingo management in parks does change, having these extension services available would help address producer concerns about predation risk and support them to manage their enterprises with confidence.

Management in Multi-use Landscapes

The management of dingoes within New South Wales National Parks occurs within a broader landscape context. National Parks provide important habitat for a range of wildlife, including dingoes, but they exist alongside working agricultural landscapes. As a naturally wide-ranging species, dingoes can move across these landscapes irrespective of tenure boundaries.

It is at this interface that ecological, cultural and agricultural values intersect. Preventative livestock protection measures provide a practical management approach that can balance biodiversity conservation, animal welfare, cultural values and livestock protection, ensuring the needs of all stakeholders are considered.

Because dingoes can move between protected areas and grazing land, decisions about management within National Parks and livestock protection on adjoining properties are connected and should be part of an integrated landscape approach. Supporting adjoining landholders to implement effective preventative livestock protection measures offers a practical pathway to reduce livestock predation while remaining compatible with the objectives of the National Park system.

For this reason, DAC considers that any discussion of dingo management within National Parks is inseparable from the question of how adjoining producers are supported to manage livestock predation risk. Effective long-term management will depend not only on the decisions made within protected areas, but also on ensuring landholders have access to practical, evidence-based tools that reduce livestock predation.

The Knowledge-Implementation Gap

Australia possesses substantial expertise in predator ecology and non-lethal livestock protection, including livestock guardian animal implementation. This expertise is distributed across researchers, experienced producers and specialist practitioners. However, unlike the well-established extension pathways for conventional control, it is not consistently reaching

landholders making day-to-day decisions - particularly those operating adjacent to National Parks, where dingo presence is more likely.

This gap persists despite clear evidence that preventative measures can be highly effective. Producers using livestock guardian animals have substantially reduced - and in some instances largely eliminated - livestock predation on their properties (van Bommel & Johnson, 2012; van Bommel, 2010). These results show what is achievable, yet they are not shared in ways that allow other landholders to learn from them.

As a result, many producers must assess and implement preventative livestock protection strategies independently, without structured guidance or ongoing technical support. DAC considers this gap between available knowledge and on-ground implementation to be one of the most significant barriers to effective preventative livestock protection.

From Reactive Management to Preventative Measures

Current government and industry-funded approaches to dingo-livestock conflict are largely reactive. DAC frequently hears from producers who have active lethal control programs operating in their region yet continue to experience livestock predation.

While this may prompt discussions about increasing lethal control, it is important to recognise that no single management approach can eliminate predation risk entirely. Short of removing dingoes from the landscape altogether, lethal control alone cannot prevent livestock-predator interactions. This is precisely why preventative measures make an important contribution to more robust and reliable livestock protection.

DAC therefore considers preventative livestock protection measures to be a key component of managing dingo-livestock conflict. Preventative approaches focus on reducing opportunities for livestock predation before losses occur - addressing the circumstances that lead to conflict rather than responding after losses have already occurred. These approaches improve livestock welfare, reduce uncertainty for producers and can reduce reliance on lethal control.

The success of these measures depends largely on landholder capacity and support to implement them effectively. Currently, there are no dedicated government-funded programs or extension services available to ensure landholders have access to the practical knowledge and implementation support required.

DAC considers that government support should focus on establishing these support systems at the interface of National Parks and agricultural land, where ecological, cultural and agricultural values intersect.

Preventative Livestock Protection: Guardian Animals

Preventative livestock protection encompasses a range of measures - including guardian animals, strategic grazing and flock management, adjusting the timing of calving and lambing to reduce the exposure of vulnerable young stock, and management of carcasses and other attractants that can draw predators toward livestock. Effective protection typically combines several of these measures, matched to the enterprise, landscape and level of predator pressure on each property. The following sections describe livestock guardian dogs and livestock guardian donkeys as two well-established examples of guardian animal use. They are presented to illustrate the kind of preventative approach the Council recommends supporting, not as a complete account of the available toolkit.

Establishing guardian animals typically involves a higher upfront investment and an establishment period before they are fully effective. Once working, however, ongoing costs are relatively modest, and well-managed guardian animals can provide protection over many years - making them a cost-effective option over the life of the animal. A further advantage of guardian animals is that, once established, they provide continuous protection: they remain with the stock day and night, giving producers greater confidence that livestock are protected at all times.

Livestock Guardian Dogs

Livestock guardian dogs are one of the most established and widely studied preventative livestock protection tools used globally. They have been used for centuries across Europe, Asia, Africa and North America to protect livestock from large predators. In Australia, guardian dogs are used successfully across a wide range of enterprises and scales - from smaller mixed-farming operations to large, extensively managed rangeland properties. They are used in sheep, goat, alpaca, cattle and poultry enterprises, including in areas where dingoes are more commonly encountered.

Beyond dingoes, livestock guardian dogs commonly provide protection against a range of other threats to livestock, including foxes, feral pigs and birds of prey such as wedge-tailed eagles, and can also deter kangaroos from grazing paddocks, reducing competition for pasture. The value of a guardian dog to a producer is therefore often not limited to dingo predation alone.

Livestock guardian dogs differ fundamentally from herding dogs. They are raised with livestock from an early age and form strong social bonds with the animals they are intended to protect. Once bonded, they remain with livestock throughout their working lives, providing continuous protection.

Their protective function operates through three main mechanisms:

1. **Territorial presence**. Guardian dogs establish and maintain a territory around livestock through scent marking and constant presence. This can discourage predators from entering occupied areas.
2. **Behavioural deterrence**. Barking, patrolling and surveillance alter predator behaviour and reduce the likelihood of approach or attack.
3. **Direct intervention**. If necessary, guardian dogs will actively confront predators to protect livestock. However, in most situations, territorial and behavioural deterrence eliminate the need for direct confrontation.

While livestock guardian dogs have demonstrated effectiveness across a range of Australian agricultural systems, their success is highly dependent on implementation. Key factors influencing outcomes include:

- appropriate breed and temperament selection;
- sourcing from experienced and reputable breeders;
- early-life bonding with livestock;
- suitable fencing and containment infrastructure;
- property-specific management planning;
- ongoing training and supervision during development;
- appropriate veterinary care and nutrition.

Livestock guardian dogs typically require 12-24 months to reach full working reliability. During this establishment period, producers would benefit significantly from access to experienced guidance. This would include advice on bonding practices, behavioural development, containment strategies and integration into existing livestock systems. Where such support is not available, producers may experience avoidable difficulties during implementation, which can influence perceptions of effectiveness.

DAC considers that improved access to extension services and mentoring at the National Park interface would significantly enhance the uptake and success of livestock guardian dog programs.

Livestock Guardian Donkeys

Livestock guardian donkeys are a further preventative livestock protection tool that is increasingly utilised in Australian agricultural systems. While the Australian evidence base for guardian donkeys is less developed than for guardian dogs, producer experience indicates they can provide effective protection in appropriate contexts. Donkeys exhibit natural behavioural traits that make them suitable for certain livestock protection contexts, including territorial awareness, strong vigilance and responsive defensive behaviour toward unfamiliar animals.

When appropriately managed, guardian donkeys contribute to livestock protection through:

- vocalisations that deter predators and alert livestock and producers;
- territorial defence of grazing areas;

- physical deterrence of potential predators;
- integration into grazing systems alongside livestock.

Guardian donkeys have been used successfully in a range of international contexts and are becoming more popular in Australian grazing systems to reduce livestock predation. There is strong potential for repurposing suitable feral donkeys into working guardian animals, contributing to both animal welfare and livestock protection outcomes.

As with livestock guardian dogs, successful implementation depends on appropriate selection, handling and introduction. Not all donkeys are suitable for livestock protection roles: temperament, handling history and management practices are critical factors in determining suitability. Producers therefore benefit from access to experienced guidance when considering guardian donkeys, including advice on selection, integration with livestock and ongoing management.

DAC considers livestock guardian donkeys to be a valuable complementary option within broader preventative livestock protection systems, particularly for landholders operating adjacent to National Parks seeking flexible, low-input protection.

Building Capability at the National Park Interface

A consistent theme identified by DAC is that producer confidence plays a central role in the successful adoption of preventative livestock protection measures. Many landholders adjoining National Parks have limited opportunities to observe successful livestock protection measures in operation or engage directly with experienced practitioners. This can make it difficult to assess the suitability of different approaches or to distinguish an implementation problem from a genuine limitation of the method itself.

DAC considers that practical, peer-to-peer learning opportunities are essential for improving adoption and success rates.

These may include:

- demonstration properties located in or near the National Park interface;
- on-farm mentoring programs delivered by experienced practitioners;
- field days and producer-to-producer learning opportunities;
- long-term technical support during establishment phases;
- integration of existing expertise into accessible extension services.

Strengthening these forms of support would assist landholders in making informed decisions and improve the likelihood of successful implementation. DAC considers that such investment would directly support better management outcomes at the interface between New South Wales National Parks and surrounding agricultural land - serving the ecological, cultural and agricultural values that meet there.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Dingo Advisory Council recognises that decisions on dingo management within New South Wales National Parks are a matter for the Government, and that changes to current management arrangements are likely to create uncertainty and concern for neighbouring landholders. Regardless of any changes made, DAC considers effective support for these landholders - through preventative livestock protection measures - to be essential in addressing dingo-livestock conflict.

To that end, DAC recommends that the New South Wales Government:

1. Recognise preventative livestock protection as a core component of dingo management at the National Park interface, so that landholders have access to the full suite of effective tools.
2. Establish accessible, government-funded extension and technical support focused on preventative and non-lethal measures at the park-agriculture interface, addressing the current gap between available expertise and on-ground implementation.
3. Invest in practical, peer-to-peer capability building - including demonstration properties, on-farm mentoring, field days and long-term technical support during the establishment phase of preventative systems.
4. Ensure that any changes to dingo management within National Parks are accompanied by corresponding support for adjoining producers, so that landholders have the confidence, knowledge and practical tools to manage livestock predation risk effectively.
5. Support a range of measures matched to enterprise, landscape and predator pressure.

DAC also emphasises that the benefits of preventative livestock protection do not depend on any particular management decision. Whether or not arrangements within National Parks change, producers with access to these measures stand to experience fewer livestock losses and greater confidence in managing predation risk. Investment in producer support is therefore worthwhile in its own right.

DAC would welcome the opportunity to provide further advice to the inquiry and to assist in the development of practical support measures at the National Park interface.

References

van Bommel, L., & Johnson, C. N. (2012). Good dog! Using livestock guardian dogs to protect livestock from predators in Australia's extensive grazing systems. *Wildlife Research*, *39*(3), 220-229.

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