

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Bourke Shire Council

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Bourke Shire Council NSW Legislative Council Animal Welfare Committee Submission

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Introduction

Bourke Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the NSW Legislative Council Animal Welfare Committee's Inquiry into Dingoes in National Parks in New South Wales. Council represents a large remote area of north-western New South Wales where livestock production remains a cornerstone of the regional economy and community wellbeing. The coexistence of conservation objectives and agricultural productivity has long required practical, evidence-based management approaches that recognise both the ecological significance of dingoes and the legitimate need to protect livestock and rural livelihoods.

Council's submission focuses primarily on:

- The impact of current government policies and programs for the management of dingoes in national parks.
 - Legislative and policy frameworks governing dingo management.
 - The importance of integrated pest animal management across all land tenures.
 - The consequences of reducing or restricting effective control measures in national parks.
 - The relationship between dingo management and broader wild dog exclusion initiatives, including the cancellation of the NSW Border Wild Dog Fence Extension Project.
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The Need for Balanced Dingo Management

Bourke Shire Council acknowledges that dingoes have ecological and cultural significance within Australia and that stable dingo populations may contribute positively to ecosystem function in some circumstances.

Council further acknowledges the cultural significance of dingoes to First Nations communities and supports meaningful engagement with Aboriginal communities regarding dingo conservation and land management.

However, any examination of dingo conservation within national parks must also recognise the substantial impacts that unmanaged or increasing wild dog populations can have on neighbouring livestock enterprises and rural communities.

The reality for producers in western New South Wales is that wild dog attacks frequently result in:

- Severe animal welfare impacts on sheep and goats.
- Significant livestock losses.
- Reduced flock and herd productivity.
- Increased management and operational costs.
- Serious mental health impacts on farming families.
- Reduced confidence to invest in agricultural enterprises.

These impacts are often amplified during drought periods when both livestock and predator pressures increase.

Importance of Integrated Management Across Land Tenures

Council strongly supports the long-standing principle of coordinated wild dog management on a "nil-tenure" basis.

Wild dogs and dingoes do not recognise property boundaries. Effective management therefore requires cooperation between:

- National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS);
- Local Land Services;
- Private landholders;
- Local government;
- Pest management groups; and
- Aboriginal land managers.

Council wishes to highlight the important work undertaken by the Wanaaring Pest Management Group, which coordinates dingo and wild dog control programs over approximately **2.83 million hectares**.

Importantly, approximately **18 per cent of this management area is now under National Parks and Wildlife Service ownership**.

National Parks have been an active and responsible participant in coordinated baiting programs throughout the region. Their participation is not only consistent with their obligations under the Biosecurity Act but also recognises the significant consequences that uncontrolled wild dog populations can have for neighbouring landholders.

This collaborative approach has historically delivered practical outcomes while maintaining the long-term presence of dingoes across the landscape.

Concerns Regarding Restrictions on Baiting in National Parks

Council is concerned by proposals or policy positions that could significantly restrict the use of baiting as a management tool within national parks.

While baiting may be unnecessary in some conservation areas where livestock interactions are limited, such restrictions would have serious unintended consequences in western New South Wales.

The western division contains extensive national park estates that share boundaries with grazing properties reliant upon sheep and goat production.

The Wanaaring Pest Management Group advises that:

- Stable dingo populations may provide ecological benefits.
- Dingo populations can become destabilised under certain circumstances, including drought conditions, hybridisation, and periods of high pup survival.
- Changes to pack structures can increase livestock predation risks.
- Integrated management responses require access to a range of control tools, including baiting.

Removing access to baiting would significantly reduce the ability of NPWS to respond rapidly and effectively when predation events occur.

Council believes that baiting should remain available as one component of a broader integrated pest management framework, alongside trapping, exclusion fencing, monitoring, community engagement and adaptive management practices.

Historical Coexistence of Agriculture and Dingoes

Sheep and goat grazing has occurred throughout the Bourke and Wanaaring districts for more than 160 years.

During that time:

- Dingoes have not become extinct.
- Livestock industries have remained economically viable.
- Communities have adapted through practical management measures.
- Coordinated control programs have moderated impacts while allowing dingo populations to persist.

This history demonstrates that responsible management and conservation are not mutually exclusive objectives.

Council submits that the most successful model has been one that seeks balance rather than absolutes.

Economic and Social Impacts on Rural Communities

The Inquiry should carefully consider the consequences of dingo management policies on remote and regional communities.

Wild dog attacks frequently involve:

- Severe injuries to sheep and goats.
- Extensive stock losses.
- Significant economic damage to individual enterprises.

In many cases livestock are mauled but not consumed, resulting in extensive suffering and substantial animal welfare concerns.

Landholders in western New South Wales often manage properties spanning thousands of hectares. It is not uncommon for producers to discover multiple livestock losses following predation events.

Beyond the financial impacts, these attacks place substantial emotional strain on farming families who may already be facing drought, labour shortages and economic uncertainty.

Any policy changes that reduce the effectiveness of current management programs must fully account for these social, emotional and economic consequences.

NSW Border Wild Dog Fence Extension Project

Council also wishes to draw the Committee's attention to the NSW Government's decision to discontinue the NSW Border Wild Dog Fence Extension Project.

The former NSW Government committed \$37.5 million in 2019 towards extending wild dog exclusion fencing along sections of the NSW borders adjoining Queensland and South Australia.

While progress has occurred along parts of the South Australian border, limited advancement has been achieved along the NSW–Queensland border, despite years of consultation, planning and stakeholder engagement.

Bourke Shire Council remains deeply concerned that the decision to discontinue the project:

- Removes a critical long-term management tool.
- Undermines confidence in government commitments.
- Weakens regional biosecurity outcomes.
- Increases reliance upon other control mechanisms.
- Places greater pressure on NPWS and landholders to manage cross-border incursions.

Council considers exclusion fencing and coordinated baiting programs to be complementary rather than competing management tools.

The cancellation of the border fence project increases the importance of retaining effective management options within national parks.

Recommendations

Bourke Shire Council respectfully recommends that the Committee:

Recommendation 1

Recognise the significant economic, social and animal welfare impacts of wild dog predation on neighbouring rural communities when considering dingo management within national parks.

Recommendation 2

Support continued integrated pest animal management across all land tenures, including active participation by National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Recommendation 3

Recommend that baiting remain available as a legitimate management tool within national parks where livestock predation risks exist and where supported by evidence-based management plans.

Recommendation 4

Encourage adaptive management approaches that balance ecological, cultural, conservation and agricultural objectives rather than adopting blanket prohibitions on management tools.

Recommendation 5

Support stronger collaboration between government agencies, Aboriginal communities, Local Land Services, pest management groups and neighbouring landholders.

Recommendation 6

Recognise the value of exclusion fencing and recommend that the NSW Government reconsider options for progressing the NSW Border Wild Dog Fence Extension Project or alternative long-term exclusion measures.

Recommendation 7

Ensure future dingo management policy reflects the unique circumstances of western New South Wales, where large national park estates exist adjacent to extensive sheep and goat grazing enterprises.

Conclusion

Bourke Shire Council supports a balanced and evidence-based approach to dingo management that recognises the ecological and cultural significance of dingoes while also protecting rural livelihoods, animal welfare and regional economies.

The experience of western New South Wales demonstrates that coordinated management programs involving National Parks, Local Land Services, pest management groups and landholders can successfully balance these interests.

Accordingly, Council urges the Committee to support continued integrated management approaches, retain access to effective control tools including baiting where necessary, and ensure that future policy settings properly acknowledge the realities faced by remote border communities.

Submitted on behalf of Bourke Shire Council.