

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
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The New South Wales Government should amend all policies, laws and strategies in the following way:

- (i) The definition of 'wild dog' should be changed to 'feral dog' and should only include domestic dogs (*canis familiaris*) living in the wild, but not dingoes.
- (ii) The management of 'feral dogs' and dingoes should not include any lethal controls.
- (iii) The dingo should be recognized as a separate species from the domestic dog and should be given protection and conservation status.

While it is acknowledged that the terms of reference are limited to dingoes in national parks in New South Wales, the protection and conservation of dingoes should extend across the entire state of New South Wales.

This submission refers to a number of important recent studies (listed below) that have been undertaken in relation to dingoes. All policies, laws and strategies that impact dingoes should be based on studies using modern, scientific, evidence-based research, not outdated research or long-standing beliefs concerning dingoes. If necessary, it is incumbent on the NSW government to undertake further scientific research in relation to dingoes in NSW similar to the studies referred to in this submission.

Genetic status

Dingoes are already classified as a native species federally and in most states, including NSW, based on their presence in Australia prior to 1400AD. They are Australia's only native canid.

Dingoes are classified as 'wild dogs', which is defined as 'any dog living in the wild, including feral dogs, dingoes and their hybrids.' However, although dingoes live in the wild, they are not the same species as domestic feral dogs.

New scientific, evidence-based research (Cairns et al) in 2025 has concluded that dingoes meet scientifically determined criteria (Jackson et al in 2021) that supports them being considered a species or subspecies distinct from domestic dogs (*canis familiaris*) and should have a discrete nomenclature, either *canis dingo* as a species, or *canis lupus dingo* as a subspecies.

This conclusion is supported by the recent genetic studies using the latest, cutting-edge genetic testing methods on a large sample, that confirm the dingo's genome is structurally distinct from domestic dogs. (Field, Ballard et al in 2022 and Weeks et al in 2025)

Classifying dingoes as 'wild dogs' and not properly recognizing them as being a separate species to the feral domestic dog, is inconsistent with, and deliberately negates their identity as native Australian wildlife, removing their ecological and cultural significance. Moreover, it incorrectly targets dingoes for lethal control.

On the other hand, accepting that dingoes are a separate species (*canis dingo*) or at the very least, a separate subspecies (*canis lupus dingo*), allows the NSW government to acknowledge the dingo's wild lineage separate from domestic dogs (*canis familiaris*) and to differentiate between the two species in laws, policies aimed at control, protection and conservation.

The government's policies, laws and management strategy has been based in the past on outdated DNA studies and beliefs that concluded there were few 'pure' dingoes in the wild and the erroneous belief that hybridization (cross breeding) between dingoes and domestic dogs is widespread. This has justified the management of dingoes by lethal methods.

However, recent research (Weeks et al in 2025) indicates that there is little evidence of contemporary hybridization between domestic dogs and dingoes across Australia. It has been found that feral dogs (that is, domesticated dogs that have ended up in the wild for various reasons) make up just 0.6% of canids in the wild. The remainder are 'pure' dingoes, debunking the previously held view that 'pure' dingoes are virtually extinct.

Further, it has been argued that action to manage populations by lethal means, especially laying or dropping poison baits during dingo breeding season, is counterproductive, because it encourages hybridization due to the shortage of dingo females during the short annual window of seasonal breeding for dingoes, and disrupts established, dominant dingo pack hierarchies causing younger dingoes to be far more likely to breed with female feral dogs.

It would therefore seem that any hybridization that does occur, which has been proven to be much rarer than previously thought, is potentially accelerated by the lethal controls used. It can be argued, therefore, that the removal of lethal controls should diminish the risk of hybridization.

The NSW government needs to ensure that current policies, laws and strategies reflect the most up-to-date scientific evidence in relation to the genus classification of the dingo.

Ecological importance

The dingo replaced the thylacine as Australia's apex land predator when Australian pastoralists drove the thylacine to extinction. The dingo has assumed an important role in the ecosystem by suppressing the many introduced pests (foxes, feral cats, deer, pigs, goats, rabbits), thus providing vital 'umbrella' protection for small-to-medium native mammals, birds and reptiles. Dingoes are also known to hunt the weak, sick, old and very young of even larger feral species like horses, donkeys and camels.

The dingo prevents overgrazing of pastures by keeping the numbers of kangaroos and wallabies (and even deer and goats) sustainable. This in turn restores natural habitats. They have done this successfully for thousands of years.

It is time for the NSW government to recognize the important ecological role played by the dingo in the conservation of our environment and eco-system.

Dingoes vs Livestock

Whilst it is possible that dingoes, as opportunistic hunters, may be responsible for killing some livestock – mainly sheep and young calves – when that livestock grazes in their territory, a recent study in Victoria (Mason and Ritchie in 2025) of predator scat to determine what they eat, has shown that sheep and cattle make up less than 2% of dingoes' diet, and that their main food is native wildlife, such as kangaroos and wallabies. The authors even cautioned that these scat studies do not reveal whether the dingo actually killed the livestock or just scavenged it.

Based on the Victorian study referred to above, it is plausible to conclude that the number of attacks on livestock can be attributed mainly to predators other than dingoes – namely, foxes, feral domesticated dogs and possibly, the rare few hybrids that exist in the wild.

The NSW government must balance the need for agricultural protection with the need for protection and conservation of the dingo, a native species.

Cultural significance

The Dingo plays a culturally significant role for many First Nations peoples that the government's current laws, policies and strategies neither recognize nor respect.

The Dingo is deeply sacred to First Nations people – 'a cultural icon'. They have long distinguished between dingoes and domestic dogs, and advocate that Dingoes should not be treated as domestic dogs.

Therefore, they do not support the use of the term 'wild dog' in relation to Dingoes, which they believe diminishes and deliberately misrepresents the Dingo in order to justify its killing, thereby disregarding and disrespecting their culture.

They 'do not, and have never approved the killing of Dingoes', advocating that 'lethal control should never be an option' and should be stopped immediately. They propose that the Dingo be recognized and protected in legislation, and they advocate for a management model of 'peaceful co-existence between Dingoes and all stakeholders.' (*The National First Nations' Dingo Declaration* September 2023).

It is time for the NSW government to recognise and respect the culture of First Nations peoples in relation to the role of the Dingo.

Controls

Apart from any other considerations, in the 21st century, we as a modern country, must surely have evolved to the point where we can accept that all the lethal control methods used in the current management of 'wild dogs' are inherently cruel and inhumane and should be discontinued on this basis alone.

Moreover, it is clear that lethal controls are not working in preventing livestock losses by 'wild dogs'. As argued above, lethal controls can even be counterproductive in accelerating hybridization between dingoes and feral domesticated dogs. The current rare incidence of hybrids, but mainly feral domesticated dogs and foxes, are far more likely than dingoes to be the predators upon livestock.

There is the added problem with the use of lethal controls, such as baiting and trapping, that non-target native animals and birds are being killed, especially where baits are dropped from the air.

The case for continuing these ineffective, cruel, inhumane and misguided lethal control methods is especially specious given the existence and ready availability of non-lethal alternatives.

Finally, it is rural landholders who must take responsibility for the feral domestic dog problem that leads to livestock losses.

As a matter of urgency and priority, the government needs to introduce education programs and regulatory safeguards to ensure that rural landholders are more responsible as domestic dog owners than they currently are. For example, they need to neuter their working and other domestic dogs, ensure adequate containment and control of their dogs on their properties, and stop abandoning their unwanted dogs in the bush.

In addition to significantly reducing the number of feral domestic dogs in the wild and consequently reducing livestock losses, such action by landholders and the government would have the added benefit of reducing, and hopefully eliminating, the risk of hybridization between domestic dogs and dingoes, thus ensuring the protection and conservation of the dingo species.

The dingo, which has existed in this country for thousands of years, should not have to pay any longer for the irresponsible and negligent actions or inaction of rural landholders.

Extinction

Australia already has one of the worst extinction records in the world.

Since European colonization in 1788, more than 100 native species endemic to Australia have been formally recorded as extinct. (Threatened Species Recovery Hub)

Recent scientific research suggests the true number of extinctions could even be much higher. Moreover, there are more than 2,100 species listed as threatened with extinction.

Of the 34 mammal species that have been determined as being extinct (representing about 10% of Australia's endemic mammals) the most infamous is the thylacine, also known as the Tasmanian Tiger, which was an apex predator like the dingo, and was mistakenly blamed for livestock losses, had bounties placed on it, and was hunted to extinction by European settlers. Now, scientists are pursuing 'de-extinction' of the thylacine, that is, they are trying to recreate the species through DNA sequencing of its closest living relative, the fat-tailed dunnart.

With the treatment of the dingo as a discrete species or subspecies, the NSW government is now able to differentiate between dingoes and domestic dogs in respect of its laws, policies and strategies. As it is already accepted that the dingo is a native mammal, it is now well and truly the time for the NSW government to recognize that the appropriate management of the dingo species should be protection and preservation, not destruction and extinction.

Unless there are changes to the way in which all governments in Australia, but particularly in New South Wales, perceive and 'manage' dingoes, we may see a time when the dingo is listed as a threatened animal species like in parts of Victoria. Worse, there is a real chance that the dingo will go the way of the thylacine.

The biggest threat to the dingo is the most dangerous animal in the world – us.

References

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Weeks et al *Evolution Letters* Vol 9 Issue 1 Feb 2025
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