

**Submission
No 298**

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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To The Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission.

I urge the Committee to ensure that future dingo policy is informed by contemporary ecological science, animal welfare principles and transparency with the Australian public. Australia is incredibly fortunate to still have a functioning apex predator. Rather than continuing to view dingoes primarily as pests to be eradicated, we should recognise their ecological importance and manage them in a way that reflects the best available scientific evidence.

Dingoes are an integral part of Australia's ecosystems

Dingoes have lived in Australia for thousands of years and are widely recognised by ecologists as Australia's apex terrestrial predator. Like wolves in North America and large predators elsewhere in the world, dingoes help regulate ecosystems by influencing herbivore populations and suppressing mesopredators such as foxes and feral cats. Their presence contributes to healthier, more resilient ecosystems and can benefit native biodiversity.

Australian scientists have undertaken decades of research demonstrating the ecological importance of dingoes. Researchers including Dr Kylie Cairns, Professor Mike Letnic, Professor Euan Ritchie, Professor Thomas Newsome, Professor Chris Dickman, Professor Chris Johnson and Professor Dale Nimmo have fundamentally advanced our understanding of dingo ecology, genetics and conservation.

Their collective research shows that conserving functional dingo populations is not simply about protecting one species—it is about protecting the health and resilience of entire ecosystems.

As Letnic, Ritchie and Dickman concluded in their landmark review:

"Restoring and maintaining the ecological function of top predators is a critical global imperative."

Groundbreaking genetic research has changed what we know

One of the most significant scientific advances in recent years has been the genetic research led by Dr Kylie Cairns and colleagues.

For decades, wildlife management has largely operated under the assumption that most free-ranging "wild dogs" were hybrids between dingoes and domestic dogs. This assumption has influenced legislation, management programs and public messaging.

However, using modern whole-genome sequencing techniques, Dr Cairns and her colleagues demonstrated that previous estimates of hybridisation had been substantially overstated. Their

research found that **the overwhelming majority of free-ranging canids sampled across Australia are genetically dingoes**, with relatively little recent domestic dog ancestry. The research also identified several genetically distinct regional dingo populations, highlighting the importance of conserving this unique Australian predator.

These findings have profound implications for wildlife management.

If the overwhelming majority of animals being poisoned, trapped and shot under "wild dog" control programs are in fact dingoes, then government policy should acknowledge this openly.

We should use honest and accurate terminology

The continued use of the term **"wild dog"** concerns me deeply.

The public is often left with the impression that introduced feral dogs are the primary animals being controlled. In reality, modern genetic evidence demonstrates that dingoes comprise the vast majority of these populations.

Language matters.

If dingoes are being targeted, then government agencies should say so.

Using the term "wild dog" obscures the fact that Australia's apex predator is routinely subjected to aerial baiting, ground baiting, trapping and shooting. I believe many members of the public would feel differently about these programs if they understood that native dingoes—not simply feral dogs—are the primary animals affected.

Transparent terminology is fundamental to informed public debate and evidence-based policy.

The continued use of 1080 raises serious animal welfare concerns

The widespread use of sodium fluoroacetate (1080) is deeply concerning from an animal welfare perspective.

Animals poisoned with 1080 can experience prolonged suffering before death, including severe distress, convulsions, respiratory failure and loss of coordination. Regardless of one's position on predator management, wildlife should not be subjected to unnecessary suffering where more humane alternatives are available.

It is also concerning that 1080 has been prohibited or heavily restricted in many other countries because of animal welfare concerns, yet remains widely used across Australia.

I believe NSW has an opportunity to lead the country by reviewing whether continued reliance on this poison reflects modern community expectations for humane wildlife management.

Indiscriminate lethal control can undermine ecosystem health

Research has shown that indiscriminate killing of dingoes disrupts stable family groups.

Dingoes are highly social animals that live in organised packs. Removing breeding adults can fragment these groups, increase dispersal of younger animals and alter breeding dynamics.

Ironically, research suggests that disrupting stable packs may actually increase livestock conflict in some situations by replacing established territorial groups with younger, less stable animals.

Broad-scale lethal control therefore has the potential to undermine both ecological outcomes and livestock management objectives.

Coexistence deserves greater investment

Many Australian landholders successfully reduce livestock losses through guardian animals, improved fencing, better husbandry practices and other non-lethal management techniques.

These approaches deserve greater government investment and support.

Protecting agricultural livelihoods and conserving dingoes should not be viewed as mutually exclusive goals. Where conflicts occur, management should be targeted, evidence-based and proportionate rather than relying on broad-scale suppression of an ecologically important predator.

Conclusion

Australia is privileged to retain a native apex predator that continues to perform an essential ecological role.

The science has advanced considerably over the past two decades. We now understand far more about the ecological importance of dingoes, their social behaviour and, thanks to the groundbreaking genetic research led by Dr Kylie Cairns, the true identity of the animals currently labelled as "wild dogs."

Our policies should evolve accordingly.

I respectfully ask the Committee to:

- Recognise the ecological importance of dingoes in New South Wales.
- Ensure government agencies use accurate and transparent terminology by identifying dingoes as dingoes, rather than broadly referring to them as "wild dogs."
- Review the continued use of 1080 in light of contemporary animal welfare evidence and international practice.
- Prioritise management approaches that maintain stable dingo populations where possible, rather than indiscriminate broad-scale culling.
- Increase investment in coexistence strategies, including guardian animals, fencing and other non-lethal livestock protection methods.
- Ensure future dingo policy is guided by the best available ecological and genetic science.

Thank you for considering my submission. I hope this inquiry represents an opportunity for New South Wales to adopt a modern, evidence-based approach that recognises dingoes not as pests, but as an irreplaceable component of Australia's natural heritage and the healthy functioning of our ecosystems.

References

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