Submission No 316

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 17 July 2026

To the Hon Emma Hurst MLC
Committee Chair
NSW Legislative Council
Animal Welfare Committee

Re: Submission regarding the treatment and cultural/ecological significance of dingoes in New South Wales National Parks

Dear Chair,

Introduction and background
My name is . I am an ecologist based in Queensland with extensive knowledge and experience in dingo ecology, wildlife conservation and management, natural resource management and ecological restoration.

Reason for supporting the inquiry
I strongly support this inquiry into the treatment of dingoes in New South Wales. No ecosystem can function effectively without apex predators, whether marine or terrestrial. Dingoes are recognised as a native species and are Australia's only land-based apex predator, yet they continue to be subjected to cruel and unethical lethal control practices, including poisoning, trapping and shooting.
A significant body of research shows that lethal control has harmful effects on Australia's unique wildlife communities and fragile ecosystems. The current management of dingoes in New South Wales National Parks, and more broadly across Australia, is not adequately informed by contemporary science and is not fit for purpose. In my view, it reflects cultural conditioning, colonial attitudes, outdated information and vested interests. Dr Bradley Smith's paper Unlocking Lethal Dingo Management in Australia (2023) provides important insight into the psychological factors influencing lethal dingo management.

Evidence-based and culturally informed policy
Government policy must be evidence based. The science regarding the ecological importance of dingoes can no longer be ignored. If the New South Wales Government is genuinely committed to reconciliation, the wishes and knowledge of First Nations peoples must also be respected and incorporated into future dingo conservation and management policy. In this regard, I refer the Committee to the *National First Nations Dingo Declaration*.

Professional experience and observations
I currently work in the private land conservation sector, where I provide technical advice and extension services to landholders. Through regular fauna monitoring surveys, I have observed lower small mammal and reptile diversity on properties with higher fox and cat presence and an absence of dingoes.
Many private landholders I work with do not support lethal control of dingoes. Instead, they have chosen to coexist with dingoes and adopt non-lethal measures such as guardian donkeys, Maremmas, dog-proof and/or electric fencing, rotational grazing and improved animal husbandry practices.

Landholder experience and non-lethal coexistence
In my personal life, I spent many years living and working on a large cattle farm in Queensland. Although dingoes were present in the landscape, we never experienced negative interactions between dingoes and livestock.

From an ecological perspective, this is not surprising. Dingoes are not physically or morphologically suited to preying on large, hooved introduced animals such as cattle. When left to function in stable family groups, dingoes will generally prefer native prey.
I do not dispute that, as top-order predators, dingoes can and do come into conflict with livestock, particularly sheep and goats. However, effective non-lethal methods exist and have been used for thousands of years across many different continents and cultures. This creates an important opportunity for the New South Wales Government to move away from lethal control and invest in practical resources that help landholders adopt non-lethal management tools.
Such an approach would support positive environmental, social and cultural outcomes while protecting both biodiversity and livelihoods. Dingoes should not be killed simply because they are present; farming occurs in dingo territory, not the other way around.

Please find below supporting information relating to the terms of reference for this inquiry.

(a) Genetic status of dingoes, the distinction between dingoes and dogs, and recent research into the genetic profile of NSW dingoes

Recent developments in dingo genetics research demonstrate that current management frameworks do not reflect contemporary science. Earlier assumptions about widespread hybridisation have been overstated. Current research indicates that lethal control can place existing dingo populations at risk by increasing inbreeding, destabilising family groups, heightening conflict with primary producers, and contributing to local population decline or extinction.

From an ecological perspective, genetics are important, but the primary focus should be the ecological role dingoes perform in the environment. This function does not disappear because an individual dingo has, for example, 65% rather than 90% dingo ancestry. Coat colour also does not determine or reliably predict genetic ancestry, as demonstrated by genetic samples taken from Alpine dingoes in New South Wales. This issue is discussed further in the article *Dingoes and 'wild dog' myth threatening native species*.

- Earlier genetic research on Australia's wild canids relied on only 23 genetic markers and heavily influenced many dingo management policies that remain in place today.
- Contemporary genetic research now uses thousands of markers and has significantly changed scientific understanding of wild canids in Australia.
- Recent studies indicate that overwhelmingly, wild-living canids in Australia are dingoes, with recent interbreeding between dingoes and domestic dogs considered uncommon.
- A 2023 genetic analysis of 307 wild canid samples across Australia found no evidence of free-living domestic dogs or active dingo-dog hybrid populations.
- In New South Wales, 103 wild canid samples were analysed, with more than three-quarters showing over 93% contemporary dingo ancestry.
- Research suggests that traces of domestic dog ancestry in wild dingo populations are often the result of historic rather than recent interbreeding events.
- Dingoes with low to moderate levels of dog ancestry still retain the ecological traits and ecosystem function of dingoes, including their role as apex predators.

- Poisoning, trapping, and shooting can destabilise dingo family groups and territorial structure, potentially increasing the likelihood of breeding with domestic dogs.
- Modern conservation science increasingly recognises ecological function alongside genetics when assessing wildlife populations and management approaches.
- Australia does not have an established continent-wide population of feral domestic dogs independently occupying ecosystems across the landscape.
- Debate around "genetic purity" has played a significant role in dingo management policy, despite evolving conservation science increasingly recognising the importance of ecological function and population stability.
- Dingoes and domestic dogs differ in several key respects, including:
    - ecological role (apex predator in Australian ecosystems versus human-associated domestic species)
    - social structure (stable, family-based packs versus more opportunistic groupings in domestic dogs)
    - breeding patterns (typically annual breeding in dingoes versus multiple breeding cycles in domestic dogs)
    - behaviour and ecology (cooperative hunting, territoriality and wild-adapted behaviours in dingoes)

(b) Legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks governing the management of dingoes in New South Wales National Parks

Current legislative and policy frameworks in New South Wales do not appropriately recognise dingoes as ecologically important native wildlife. Instead, dingoes are commonly managed through broad pest animal frameworks that obscure their ecological role and cultural significance.

- In New South Wales, the term "wild dog" is an umbrella term used to collectively refer to dingoes, domestic dogs and hybrids. There is no distinction between roaming or stray dogs and dingoes under current legislation.
- Dingoes are the only native mammal specifically exempt from protections under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, allowing lethal control across National Parks.
- Dingoes (under the term 'wild dog') are classified as priority pest animals under Regional Strategic Pest Animal Management Plans developed by Local Land Services.
- The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service undertake dingo ('wild-dog') control on public conservation land in order to meet its 'General Biosecurity Duty' under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* to manage pest animals, and align with the priorities set out in the New South Wales Wild Dog Management Strategy.
- Information obtained under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 revealed that more than 1.5 million 1080 poison baits targeting dingoes were deployed by New South Wales Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) between 2020 and 2025.

- Current policy settings continue to manage dingoes within broad pest management frameworks despite contemporary ecological and genetic research recognising dingoes as an ecologically important native species.

(c) Ecological role of dingoes in National Parks

A substantial body of published research demonstrates the ecological importance of dingoes as apex predators and their role in maintaining healthy ecosystems within National Parks. Stable dingo populations can help regulate herbivores and introduced predators, reduce pressure on vegetation, and support broader biodiversity outcomes.

- Dingoes are Australia's only native canid and are recognised as an important apex predator and keystone species.
- Dingoes regulate populations of kangaroos and wallabies, reducing grazing pressure on landscapes.
- Dingoes eradicate introduced goats, reducing pressure on vegetation.
- Dingoes suppress, and in some cases eradicate, foxes through territorial competition and predation easing pressure on smaller native wildlife.
- Dingoes suppress introduced cats through territorial competition and predation easing pressure on smaller native wildlife.
- Research suggests that stable dingo populations may suppress fox populations more effectively than poison baiting programs alone.
- Dingoes also contribute to the suppression of pigs, reducing pressure on landscapes.
- The presence of dingoes influences the behaviour and movement of herbivores and other animals, reducing pressure on vegetation communities.
- The removal of apex predators can destabilise ecosystems, contributing to vegetation decline, habitat degradation and increased pressure on threatened species.

(d) Cultural significance of dingoes for First Nations communities

The cultural importance of dingoes to First Nations communities cannot be ignored. Dingoes hold significance in lore, kinship, Songlines, storytelling and Caring for Country practices.

While conducting dingo research on K'gari and working with a Butchulla Elder, I was told that the way dingoes are killed and treated as a nuisance in their own homeland reflects the way his people were treated. That observation has stayed with me and remains highly relevant to this inquiry.

I was also privileged to attend the National First Nations Dingo Conference in Cairns in September 2023. A key outcome of that conference was the National First Nations Dingo Declaration, written by Traditional Owners to support government bodies and other stakeholders in developing a deeper cultural understanding of dingoes.

- Dingoes hold deep cultural significance for many Cultural Custodians across New South Wales and the wider continent.

- Dingoes are connected to stories, dance, art, lore, kinship systems and cultural responsibilities to Country.
- Many Cultural Custodians consider dingoes to be protectors, teachers and part of healthy Country.
- The 2023 First Nations Dingo Forum brought together 100 Traditional Owners from 20 nations across Australia and led to the development of the National First Nations Dingo Declaration.
- The declaration calls for a new approach centred around "Caring for Dingoes on Country" and greater involvement of Cultural Custodians in dingo management.
- Oral histories and archaeological research show that Cultural Custodians buried companion dingoes, with evidence that these animals were given intentional burials consistent with ancestral or ceremonial practices.

(e) Impact of current government policies and programs for the management of dingoes in National Parks

The ecological, genetic, cultural and animal welfare impacts of current dingo management programs in New South Wales National Parks are significant. Having worked with both wild and captive dingoes, I understand them to be intelligent, social and sentient animals capable of experiencing pain, fear and distress as a result of government-sanctioned lethal control.

After personally witnessing the traumatic effects of 1080 poison on an animal, I strongly believe that if more stakeholders understood and witnessed the suffering caused by poisoning and trapping, they would not support the current lethal control measures. The Coalition Against 1080 Poison provides further information and resources that should be considered by all stakeholders involved in decisions about 1080 use.

Poison baits, including 1080, can be taken by non-target native wildlife such as wedge-tailed eagles, lace monitors and other species. There is no reliable or effective way to fully track these impacts, including secondary poisoning. In my view, no poison should be used on native wildlife, including PAPP and other poisons promoted by some as more 'humane' alternatives.

I have also witnessed the impacts of leg-hold traps maiming dingoes and other wildlife. For example, a young dingo pup in North Queensland was euthanised earlier this year after losing one of its legs and suffering from infection. Other animals, including brush turkeys, lace monitors and small mammal species, can also be injured or killed by trapping, with many incidents likely going unseen and under-reported.

Wildlife management must reflect contemporary animal welfare standards and ethical best practice. It should value and respect the lives and wellbeing of Australian wildlife. Given that the primary purpose of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service is to protect wildlife, habitats, native biodiversity and Aboriginal cultural heritage across more than 890 protected areas, the lethal control of dingoes in National Parks is inconsistent with the purpose of that agency.

- Current management programs rely on lethal control methods, including 1080 poison baiting, trapping and shooting.
- Lethal control can disrupt stable dingo family groups and pack structures.

- Disruption of dingo family structures may increase the likelihood of dingoes breeding with domestic dogs.
- Removal of dingoes can cause trophic cascades.
- Removal of dingoes from ecosystems leads to increases in introduced predators and herbivore pressure.
- Trapping of dingoes raises serious welfare concerns for the time the animal remains in the trap, unable to access food, water or shelter.
- Current management programs do not adequately reflect contemporary ecological science or cultural perspectives relating to dingoes.
- Current management of dingoes in National Parks is largely focused on agricultural protection, not biodiversity outcomes.
- No funding is allocated for research and development into non-lethal coexistence strategies for agricultural properties neighbouring National Parks.
- Many Cultural Custodians report feeling excluded from decisions relating to dingo management on their Country.

(f) Dingo management, including opportunities for Indigenous knowledge and leadership in dingo conservation in National Parks

As a State Government body, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service has an obligation to support greater involvement of Cultural Custodians in dingo management and conservation across New South Wales National Parks. Indigenous knowledge and leadership should be central to future policy, governance and on-ground management.

- First Nations peoples have cared for dingoes and Country for thousands of years, maintaining deep, ongoing relationships that continue to support healthy landscapes and biodiversity outcomes that benefit all Australians.
- Indigenous knowledge systems hold detailed, place-based understanding of dingo behaviour, ecology, and their role in broader ecosystem function, complementing and strengthening western scientific approaches.
- Across New South Wales, Indigenous ranger groups are increasingly leading monitoring and management programs for dingoes on Country, providing important on-ground insights into populations and behaviour.
- This leadership is particularly significant given existing gaps in comprehensive, statewide data on wild dingo populations.
- Cultural Custodians are increasingly advocating for Indigenous-led approaches to dingo conservation and management, including expanded roles in National Park governance and decision-making.
- Strengthening the role of Cultural Custodians in decision-making processes would improve cultural, ecological, and conservation outcomes, with flow-on benefits for ecosystem health and biodiversity.

- Co-management approaches offer a practical framework to integrate Indigenous knowledge systems with western science in National Parks management, improving both governance and on-ground effectiveness.
- The principles outlined in the National First Nations Dingo Declaration provide a relevant foundation to inform future policy development and support more inclusive and effective dingo management approaches.

(g) Other related matters

I understand and acknowledge that changes to dingo management within National Parks may create concern or uncertainty for neighbouring landholders, particularly regarding predation on farmed animals. These concerns should be addressed through practical support, not continued reliance on broad-scale lethal control.

The Government should support the development, accessibility and broader adoption of effective non-lethal predator deterrents. This could include landholder workshops, field days, expert presentations, grants, trials and other extension services.

The Landholders for Dingoes website provides access to research, landholder case studies and observations about the benefits of retaining dingoes in the landscape, both for the environment and for cattle production. The Predator Smart Farming Guide, developed by Humane Society International, is another valuable resource that should be considered in relation to these matters.

- Longstanding lethal control measures have not eliminated the risk of predation on farmed animals, with some studies finding broad-scale 1080 baiting of dingoes could exacerbate the risk of predation on calves.
- There are currently no extension services to support landholders to implement non-lethal predator deterrent strategies in New South Wales. Funding currently used for broad-scale 1080 baiting, trapping and shooting of dingoes in National Parks could be redirected to support neighbouring landholders through coexistence extension services.
- Livestock guardian dogs have been proven effective at reducing or eliminating predation on livestock by dingoes. They also provide other benefits to landholders, including deterring macropods from grazing paddocks and protecting livestock from foxes and birds of prey.
- There is widespread anecdotal evidence from landholders that donkeys are effective guardians against canid predators. There is a strong opportunity for the New South Wales Government to support more robust trials into the use of livestock guardian donkeys to support properties neighbouring National Parks.
- Investment is needed in research, development and scaling of coexistence strategies in New South Wales to ensure landholder interests are protected while dingoes are retained in the environment to perform their important ecological role.

In summary, current dingo management in New South Wales National Parks does not adequately reflect contemporary ecological science, animal welfare standards, genetic research or the cultural significance of dingoes to First Nations peoples. Dingoes are native apex predators with an important role in maintaining healthy ecosystems, yet they continue

to be managed through outdated pest animal frameworks and subjected to lethal control. A new approach is needed: one that protects dingoes within National Parks, respects Cultural Custodians and their knowledge, and supports neighbouring landholders to adopt practical, non-lethal coexistence strategies.

I request that the following recommendations be included in the Committee's final report.

1. An **end to dingo killing within New South Wales National Parks** to protect the ecological function of dingoes and support biodiversity conservation.
2. **Greater involvement of Cultural Custodians in decision-making and place-based management** regarding dingoes in National Parks to ensure the cultural significance of dingoes is reflected in legislation and management.
3. **Financial support and extension services for landholders surrounding National Parks** to implement non-lethal coexistence strategies, ensuring their interests are protected and dingoes can be maintained in the environment.

Yours sincerely,

17th July 2026