

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Wilderness Society

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Wilderness Society Submission to the Inquiry into Dingoes in National Parks in New South Wales

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About the Wilderness Society

The Wilderness Society is an independent, community-based, not-for-profit environmental advocacy organisation. Our vision is to transform Australia into a society that protects, respects and connects with the natural world that sustains us. We are committed to protecting, promoting and restoring wilderness across the continent for the survival and ongoing evolution of life on Earth. From community activism to national campaigns, we seek to give nature a voice to support the life that supports us all. We are powered by more than 150,000 supporters from all walks of life.

Overview

This submission is made in response to The NSW Legislative Council's Animal Welfare Committee (the Committee)'s request for feedback regarding its inquiry into dingoes in national parks in New South Wales. Information and resources provided by Defend the Wild, an organisation dedicated to safeguarding Australia's unique wildlife and their habitats, were used to develop this submission. We thank Defend the Wild for their invaluable work in this space. This submission addresses each of the inquiry's terms of reference:

- a) the genetic status of dingoes, the distinction between dingoes and dogs and recent research into the genetic profile of NSW dingoes;
- b) the legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks governing the management of dingoes in New South Wales in national parks;
- c) the ecological role of dingoes in national parks;
- d) the cultural significance of dingoes for First Nations communities;
- e) the impact of current government policies and programs for the management of dingoes in national parks;
- f) dingo management including opportunities for incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and leadership in dingo conservation in national parks, and

g) any other related matters.

Recommendations

The Wilderness Society puts forward the following recommendations to the Committee:

- **An end to dingo killing within New South Wales National Parks** to protect the ecological function of dingoes and support biodiversity conservation.
- **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.
- **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.

The genetic status of dingoes, the distinction between dingoes and dogs, and recent research into the genetic profile of NSW dingoes

Current dingo management policies are largely based on outdated genetic research using only 23 genetic markers. Contemporary studies now use up to 195,000 markers and indicate that overwhelmingly, Australia's wild-living canids are dingoes,¹ with feral dogs and first generation hybrids to be extremely rare, making up less than 1% of the population.²

In New South Wales, more than three-quarters of sampled wild canids showed over 93% contemporary dingo ancestry.³ It is important to note that all dingoes, including those with low-moderate levels of dog ancestry, fulfil an important ecological function in national parks. Modern conservation science increasingly recognises that ecological function, including the role of dingoes as apex predators, is an important consideration alongside genetics when assessing wildlife populations.

¹ Cairns, K. M., Crowther, M. S., Parker, H. G., Ostrander, E. A., & Letnic, M. (2023). Genome-wide variant analyses reveal new patterns of admixture and population structure in Australian dingoes. *Molecular Ecology*, 32(15), 4133–4150. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mec.16998>

² Cairns, K. M., Crowther, M. S., Nesbitt, B., & Letnic, M. (2021). The myth of wild dogs in Australia: are there any out there? *Australian Mammalogy*, 44(1), 67–75. <https://doi.org/10.1071/am20055>

³ Cairns, K. M., Crowther, M. S., Parker, H. G., Ostrander, E. A., & Letnic, M. (2023). Genome-wide variant analyses reveal new patterns of admixture and population structure in Australian dingoes. *Molecular Ecology*, 32(15), 4133–4150. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mec.16998>

Research indicates that lethal control methods such as poisoning, trapping and shooting can disrupt stable dingo pack structures, increasing social instability and the likelihood of interbreeding with domestic dogs. Dingoes differ from domestic dogs in several important ways, including their ecological role, social structure, breeding patterns, and behaviour.

Australia does not have an established continent-wide population of feral domestic dogs living independently across ecosystems, and it is now widely understood that the wild canids occupying these landscapes are dingoes performing important ecological functions.

The legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks governing the management of dingoes in New South Wales in national parks

There is no distinction between roaming or stray dogs and dingoes under current legislation. In New South Wales, the term “wild dog” is an umbrella term used to collectively refer to dingoes, domestic dogs and hybrids. A term which research undertaken by the University of Adelaide describes as completely inappropriate when encompassing the management of these separate canid groups.⁴

Dingoes are the only native mammal specifically exempt from protections under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, allowing lethal control across National Parks. They 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 undertakes 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.

⁴ Ravishankar, S., Nguyen, N. C., Taufik, L., Michielsen, N. M., Bergström, A., Tobler, R., Fordham, D., Brüniche-Olsen, A., Rahbek, C., Llamas, B., & Souilmi, Y. (2026). Paleogenomics-Informed inferences of European dog admixture enables scalable dingo conservation. *Conservation Letters*, 19(3).
<https://doi.org/10.1111/con4.70052>

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.

The ecological role of dingoes in national parks

As apex predators, dingoes play a critical role in maintaining healthy ecosystems within national parks. The removal of an apex predator can lead to ecosystem destabilisation, by contributing to vegetation decline, habitat degradation, and increased pressure on threatened species.⁵

Dingoes are a keystone species that regulate populations of kangaroos and wallabies, reducing grazing pressure on landscapes and leading to major economic and ecological benefits to pastoralists.⁶

Through territorial competition and predation, dingoes can regulate and even eradicate populations of invasive species, such as feral goats, pigs, cats, and foxes. This eases pressure on landscapes and smaller native species.

Feral goats are recognised as a significant environmental threat across Australia, with populations estimated in the millions. Through intensive grazing and browsing, feral goats can reduce native plant diversity, prevent vegetation regeneration, contribute to soil erosion and compete with native wildlife for essential resources. Evidence from Australian landscapes demonstrates that intact dingo populations can naturally suppress and, in some cases, eradicate feral goat populations.

Furthermore, research suggests that stable dingo populations may suppress fox populations more effectively than poison baiting programs alone.⁷ Other studies have demonstrated that where dingo populations are high, red fox activity is reduced, particularly within the centre of the dingo's geographic range.⁸ Removing dingoes from national parks can therefore undermine biodiversity conservation outcomes by allowing populations of introduced mesopredators to increase.

⁵ Fisher, A. G., Mills, C. H., Lyons, M., Cornwell, W. K., & Letnic, M. (2021). Remote sensing of trophic cascades: multi-temporal landsat imagery reveals vegetation change driven by the removal of an apex predator. *Landscape Ecology*, 36(5), 1341–1358. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10980-021-01206-w>

⁶ Campbell, G., Emmott, A., Pollock, D., & Traill, B. J. (2022). Can dingoes increase graziers' profits and help maintain Australia's rangelands? *The Rangeland Journal*, 44(3), 129–135. <https://doi.org/10.1071/rj22002>

⁷ Hunter, D. O., & Letnic, M. (2022). Dingoes have greater suppressive effect on fox populations than poisoning campaigns. *Australian Mammalogy*, 44(3), 387–396. <https://doi.org/10.1071/am21036>

⁸ Newsome, T. M., Greenville, A. C., Ćirović, D., Dickman, C. R., Johnson, C. N., Krofel, M., Letnic, M., Ripple, W. J., Ritchie, E. G., Stoyanov, S., & Wirsing, A. J. (2017). Top predators constrain mesopredator distributions. *Nature Communications*, 8(1), 15469. <https://doi.org/10.1038/ncomms15469>

These examples demonstrate the ecological role dingoes can play in regulating introduced species and maintaining landscape balance. Rather than viewing dingoes only through the lens of conflict, recognising their role as natural ecosystem regulators provides an opportunity to incorporate native predators into broader biodiversity conservation strategies.

The cultural significance of dingoes for First Nations communities

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

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.⁹

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](#). This declaration calls for a new approach centred around “Caring for Dingoes on Country” and greater involvement of Cultural Custodians in dingo management.

The impact of current government policies and programs for the management of dingoes in national parks

Current dingo management programs rely on lethal control methods, including 1080 poison baiting, trapping and shooting. These methods can disrupt stable dingo family groups and pack structures, which may increase the likelihood of dingoes breeding with domestic dogs.

Removal of dingoes causes trophic cascade, an ecological phenomenon caused by the addition or removal of a top predator which causes dramatic changes in ecosystem structure and nutrient cycling, affecting the entire food chain. Trophic cascade in

⁹ Archaeologists, Barkindji custodians excavate dingo burial. (2023, October 23). The University of Sydney. <https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2023/10/23/archaeologists--barkindji-custodians-excavate-dingo-burial.html>

Australian ecosystems can lead to increases in invasive predators (including foxes and cats) and herbivore pressure from both native species (kangaroos, wallabies), as well as invasive species (goats, pigs).

Trapping of dingoes also raises serious welfare concerns for the time the animal remains in the trap, unable to access food, water or shelter.

Current management programs are largely focussed on agricultural protection, not biodiversity outcomes, and do not adequately reflect contemporary ecological science or cultural perspectives relating to dingoes. Currently, no funding is allocated for research and development into non-lethal coexistence strategies for agricultural properties neighbouring National Parks.

Despite the close cultural connection between dingoes and many First Nations groups, many Cultural Custodians report feeling excluded from decisions relating to dingo management on their Country.

Dingo management including opportunities for incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and leadership in dingo conservation in national parks

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.

Other related matters: alternatives to lethal control

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.¹⁰

There are currently no extension services to support landholders to implement non-lethal predator deterrent strategies in New South Wales. Funding currently utilised for broad-scale 1080 baiting of dingoes and trapping and shooting in National Parks could be re-directed to support neighbouring landholders with coexistence extension services.

Livestock guardian dogs have been proven effective at reducing or eliminating predation on livestock by dingoes.¹¹ They also provide other benefits to landholders including deterring macropods (kangaroos and wallabies) from grazing paddocks, protection from foxes and protection from birds of prey.

There is widespread anecdotal evidence from landholders that donkeys are effective guardians against canid predators.^{12,13,14} 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 into research, development and scaling of coexistence strategies in New South Wales that ensures landholder interests are protected and dingoes can be retained in the environment to play their important ecological role.

¹⁰ <https://era.dpi.qld.gov.au/id/eprint/4062/1/AN12356.pdf>

¹¹ <https://pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/06/Guardian-Dogs-web.pdf>

¹² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-08-19/donkeys-to-protect-stock-in-nsw/102741256>

¹³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2019-04-23/donkey-guardians-protect-herd-from-wild-dogs/11018666>

¹⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/jun/22/kicks-like-a-mule-trained-donkeys-deployed-to-protect-sheep-from-wild-dogs-on-nsw-farm>