

**Submission
No 363**

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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

NSW Legislative Council Animal Welfare Committee

I welcome this Inquiry and make this submission in support of stronger, more consistent protection for dingoes in NSW national parks. My submission addresses the classification of dingoes as ‘wild dogs’, their cultural and ecological significance, comparative interstate experience, the opportunity this Inquiry presents for genuine Indigenous leadership in management, and the case for legislative reform.

1. The ‘wild dog’ classification obscures rather than reflects the genetic reality

In NSW, dingoes are managed under the umbrella term ‘wild dog’, a category that also includes feral domestic dogs and dingo–dog hybrids. This is not a neutral administrative label: it is the mechanism by which large numbers of dingoes are legally trapped, baited and shot under the Biosecurity Act 2015, without individual assessment of ancestry. Government estimates that the great majority of NSW ‘wild dogs’ are hybrids are contested by independent genetic research. Studies led by UNSW and the University of Adelaide, together with DNA testing conducted in the neighbouring ACT (Namadgi National Park, 2024–25), have repeatedly found much higher rates of pure or predominantly dingo ancestry in populations classified administratively as ‘wild dogs’ than the pest framework assumes.

The practical effect is that an animal’s legal protection depends on a classification that is contested, difficult to apply without laboratory testing, and consistently applied in the direction of least protection. The Committee should treat the ‘wild dog’ label with caution and recommend that management decisions be grounded in the best available genetic evidence rather than a default assumption of hybridisation.

2. Dingoes hold a dual significance that current policy fails to reflect

Dingoes occupy a unique dual role that no other species in the NSW national park estate holds. As apex predators, they exert top-down ecological control that suppresses mesopredators (particularly foxes and feral cats) and helps regulate populations of introduced herbivores such as goats, pigs and rabbits — with flow-on benefits for native species that these pressures would otherwise harm. As highly intelligent, socially complex animals, they also hold deep and continuing cultural significance for First Nations communities across NSW.

A management framework that treats dingoes purely as a biosecurity risk captures neither of these roles. Ecological management and cultural recognition should not be treated as competing considerations to be traded off against agricultural interests at the park boundary — they point in the same direction, toward recognising dingoes as a species that belongs in, and is owed protection within, the NSW national park system.

3. Interstate experience shows protection is workable

NSW is an outlier in the strength of protection it affords dingoes relative to other jurisdictions. Victoria has protected dingoes as a threatened species under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 and the Wildlife Act 1975 since 2008. Rather than blanket lethal control, Victoria applies a narrowly defined ‘unprotection zone’ in the state’s east, within which landholders may seek authorisation for lethal control only where non-lethal options have been exhausted; outside that zone, dingoes are protected. This framework has now operated for several years and demonstrates that legislative protection and credible livestock protection measures are not mutually exclusive.

The ACT is moving in the same direction: following DNA testing that found Namadgi National Park’s dingo population to be genetically pure, with no hybridisation, the ACT Government has committed to reclassifying dingoes as a protected native species under the Nature Conservation Act 2014 and delisting them as a pest. I note for completeness that this reform is not yet complete — the ACT continues to permit limited lethal control in defined zones while its Controlled Native Species Plan is finalised, and this transitional arrangement has drawn criticism from conservation groups. I raise the ACT not as a finished model but as evidence that even a jurisdiction bordering NSW’s own sheep and cattle country has judged legislative reclassification to be the right direction of travel.

4. This Inquiry is an opportunity to build Indigenous leadership into management from the outset

The Committee’s terms of reference already recognise the cultural significance of dingoes to First Nations communities

and the opportunity to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and leadership into management. Dingo management is a particularly well-suited test case for this, precisely because it is not yet locked into an entrenched regulatory architecture in the way that, for example, fire or water management often is.

Retrofitting genuine Indigenous authority into an existing management system tends to be slow and structurally difficult, because governance roles, funding lines and decision rights are already allocated elsewhere. A new statutory protection clause for dingoes offers a rare chance to avoid that pitfall by designing Indigenous knowledge and leadership into the framework from first principles — for example, through co-designed management plans, formal roles for Traditional Owners in decisions affecting dingo populations in national parks, and recognition of cultural knowledge as a category of evidence on equal footing with Western ecological science. I encourage the Committee to treat this as a design opportunity rather than a consultation add-on.

5. Current policy is neither humane nor evidence-led, and legislative reform is needed

Dingoes are currently the only native mammal specifically excluded from protection under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016, and are instead listed as a priority pest under the Biosecurity Act 2015. This was a framework built for genuine agricultural pests, not for a native apex predator with recognised ecological and cultural value. The result is routine use of 1080 poison baiting, trapping and shooting, methods that cause significant animal suffering and disrupt stable dingo family groups and pack structures, with knock-on ecological effects.

This settling of policy toward the interests of a narrow set of agricultural and grazing stakeholders, at the expense of ecological management, animal welfare and First Nations cultural interests, is not a neutral or inevitable outcome. It is a choice reflected in which Act a species is managed under. I recommend that the Committee support extending Biodiversity Conservation Act protection to dingoes in national parks, consistent with the treatment of every other native mammal in NSW, with any residual livestock protection measures addressed through targeted, evidence-based provisions of the kind Victoria has applied — rather than a blanket pest listing that captures the entire species by default.

Conclusion

I urge the Committee to recommend that dingoes in NSW national parks be managed on the basis of the best available genetic evidence, recognised for both their ecological and cultural significance, brought under the protection of the Biodiversity Conservation Act, and managed through a framework designed from the outset around Indigenous knowledge and leadership. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry.

Kind regards and best wishes,
Mark Gibbons