

**Submission
No 376**

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Mr Ray Stephens

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Submission to the NSW Animal Welfare Committee Inquiry on Dingoes

From: Ray Stephens **Date:** 20 July 2026

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Animal Welfare Committee's inquiry into the treatment and the cultural and ecological significance of dingoes in New South Wales National Parks. I welcome this review and strongly support a modernised, evidence-based approach to dingo management that reflects contemporary science, ecological understanding, and the cultural perspectives of First Nations communities.

This submission addresses the Terms of Reference and provides recommendations for consideration in the Committee's final report.

Recommendations

- **End lethal dingo control within NSW National Parks** to protect ecological function and biodiversity.
- **Recognise dingoes as native wildlife**, not "wild dogs," within legislation and policy.
- **Embed Cultural Custodian involvement** in decision-making and place-based management.
- **Provide financial and extension support to landholders** to implement non-lethal coexistence strategies.
- **Prioritise ecological function and pack stability** in all management frameworks.

(a) Genetic Status of Dingoes and Distinction from Domestic Dogs

Contemporary genetic research demonstrates that dingoes are overwhelmingly the dominant wild-living canid in NSW. Modern studies using up to 195,000 genetic markers show that more than three-quarters of sampled wild canids in NSW possess over 93% dingo ancestry. This contrasts sharply with outdated research using only 23 markers, which still underpins current management frameworks.

Key points:

- Hybridisation is **relatively uncommon** in stable, undisturbed dingo populations.
- Lethal control disrupts pack structures, increasing instability and the likelihood of interbreeding with domestic dogs.

- Dingoes differ from domestic dogs in ecological role, behaviour, breeding patterns, and social structure.
- Australia does not have a continent-wide population of feral domestic dogs; wild-living canids are dingoes performing essential ecological functions.

Recommendation: NSW policy should reflect contemporary genetic science and recognise dingoes as native wildlife.

(b) Legislative, Regulatory and Policy Frameworks

Current NSW legislation does not distinguish between dingoes and domestic dogs. Under the term “wild dog,” dingoes are exempt from protection under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 and are managed as pest animals.

Key concerns:

- Dingoes are the **only native mammal** specifically excluded from protection under the Act.
- NPWS deployed **over 1.5 million 1080 baits** between 2020–2025 targeting dingoes.
- Current frameworks prioritise pest management over ecological and cultural significance.
- The “wild dog” classification obscures the native status of dingoes and undermines conservation outcomes.

Recommendation: Reform legislation to recognise dingoes as native wildlife and ensure management frameworks reflect ecological and cultural importance.

(c) Ecological Role of Dingoes in National Parks

Dingoes are Australia’s apex predator and a keystone species. Their presence supports ecosystem stability and biodiversity conservation.

Evidence-based ecological functions:

- **Regulate kangaroo and wallaby populations**, reducing grazing pressure.
- **Suppress goats**, reducing vegetation damage.
- **Suppress foxes** through territorial competition and predation.
- **Suppress feral cats**, easing pressure on small native wildlife.
- **Suppress pigs**, reducing landscape degradation.
- **Influence herbivore behaviour**, reducing overgrazing and supporting vegetation recovery.

- **Maintain ecosystem stability**—removal of apex predators contributes to habitat decline and increased pressure on threatened species.

Research suggests stable dingo populations suppress foxes more effectively than poison baiting programs alone.

Recommendation: Recognise dingoes as essential apex predators and prioritise non-lethal management that maintains pack stability and ecological function.

(d) Cultural Significance of Dingoes for First Nations Communities

Dingoes hold deep cultural significance for many Cultural Custodians across NSW and Australia.

Key cultural considerations:

- Dingoes are connected to **stories, dance, art, lore, kinship systems, and cultural responsibilities to Country**.
- Many Cultural Custodians view dingoes as **protectors, teachers, and integral to healthy Country**.
- The **2023 First Nations Dingo Forum** brought together 100 Traditional Owners from 20 nations, resulting in the **National First Nations Dingo Declaration**, calling for “Caring for Dingoes on Country.”
- Archaeological evidence shows dingoes were intentionally buried, reflecting ceremonial or ancestral significance.

This submission acknowledges these perspectives with respect, without speaking on behalf of First Nations communities.

Recommendation: Ensure Cultural Custodians have meaningful involvement in dingo management, policy development, and place-based decision-making.

Conclusion

Dingoes are genetically distinct, ecologically vital, and culturally significant. Current NSW management frameworks do not reflect contemporary science or cultural perspectives and rely heavily on lethal control methods that undermine ecosystem stability.

I urge the Committee to consider reforms that:

- End lethal dingo control in National Parks.
- Recognise dingoes as native wildlife.
- Support coexistence strategies for landholders.

- Embed Cultural Custodian leadership in management decisions.
- Prioritise ecological function and pack stability.

These changes would align NSW with modern conservation science, cultural respect, and long-term biodiversity outcomes.