

**Submission
No 377**

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Ms Angel Newcombe

Date Received: 20 July 2026

Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Animal Welfare Committee Inquiry into the Treatment and Cultural and Ecological Significance of Dingoes in National Parks in New South Wales

Author: Angel Newcombe

Date: 20 July 2026

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Animal Welfare Committee Inquiry into the treatment and cultural and ecological significance of dingoes in National Parks in New South Wales.

I am a resident of Lithgow, New South Wales, and have firsthand experience working with dingoes at Secret Creek Sanctuary in Lithgow. During my time there, I was involved in the daily care of dingoes and had the opportunity to closely observe their behaviour, social interactions and responses to both their environment and the people caring for them.

Those experiences gave me a profound appreciation for dingoes as a unique native species that is fundamentally different from domestic dogs. They also reinforced the importance of managing dingoes according to contemporary scientific evidence rather than outdated perceptions.

This submission focuses on the current understanding of dingo genetics, the distinction between dingoes and domestic dogs, the ecological role of dingoes within National Parks, and their cultural significance for First Nations peoples.

(a) The genetic status of dingoes, the distinction between dingoes and dogs,

and recent research into the genetic profile of NSW dingoes

For many years, dingo management policies across Australia have relied upon genetic studies that examined only 23 genetic markers. These studies significantly influenced legislation and management practices despite the limited technology available at the time.

Modern genomic research has transformed our understanding of Australia's wild canids. Contemporary studies now analyse tens of thousands—and in some cases almost 200,000—genetic markers, providing a much more accurate picture of ancestry and population structure.

Recent research demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of Australia's wild-living canids are dingoes rather than free-living domestic dogs.

A nationwide genomic study published in 2023 examined 307 wild canids from across Australia and found no evidence of established populations of feral domestic dogs or widespread active hybrid populations occupying Australia's ecosystems.

Importantly, the New South Wales samples demonstrated particularly high dingo ancestry. More than three-quarters of sampled animals possessed greater than 93% contemporary dingo ancestry.

These findings suggest that historical concerns regarding extensive hybridisation have been substantially overstated within current management frameworks.

Where traces of domestic dog ancestry are detected, current research suggests these largely represent historic introgression rather than ongoing interbreeding.

Modern conservation biology increasingly recognises that ecological function should be considered alongside genetics. Dingoes with relatively small amounts of historical domestic dog ancestry continue to behave, reproduce and function ecologically as dingoes.

An excessive focus on “genetic purity” risks overlooking the ecological role these animals perform within Australian ecosystems.

Distinction between dingoes and domestic dogs

Scientific research consistently demonstrates that dingoes differ from domestic dogs in important biological and behavioural ways.

These include:

- Annual breeding cycles rather than multiple breeding cycles each year.

- Stable family-based pack structures centred around a breeding pair.
- Strong territorial behaviour.
- Cooperative hunting strategies.
- Greater wariness of humans.
- Ecological adaptation to Australia's landscapes over thousands of years.
- Their role as Australia's apex terrestrial predator.

These differences distinguish dingoes from domestic dogs both behaviourally and ecologically.

Personal observations from working with dingoes

My experience working at Secret Creek Sanctuary reinforced many of these scientific findings.

The dingoes displayed remarkable intelligence. They were highly observant and appeared to assess situations before reacting. They quickly recognised regular carers, responded differently to unfamiliar people, and showed an impressive ability to learn through observation.

They were naturally inquisitive, regularly investigating new scents, enrichment items and changes within their enclosure. However, this curiosity was consistently balanced by caution. Rather than immediately approaching unfamiliar objects or people, they typically observed first, assessed potential risk, and only approached when they felt comfortable.

This combination of curiosity and caution was strikingly different from the behaviour commonly seen in domestic dogs.

Their social relationships were equally impressive. They communicated through subtle body language and appeared highly aware of each other's behaviour. Their interactions reflected stable family relationships rather than loose social groupings.

Working closely with dingoes made it very apparent that they are not simply "wild dogs". They possess behavioural characteristics, social organisation and instincts that reflect their long evolutionary history as Australia's native apex predator.

Lethal control and population stability

Current research indicates that poisoning, trapping and shooting can have unintended ecological consequences.

Stable dingo packs typically consist of a breeding pair and their offspring from multiple years. These family groups maintain territories and regulate breeding within the pack.

Removing breeding adults through lethal control can fragment these family groups, resulting in increased dispersal by younger animals, altered territorial boundaries and social instability.

Research suggests that this disruption may actually increase opportunities for interbreeding with domestic dogs.

Ironically, management strategies designed to minimise hybridisation may contribute to the very process they seek to prevent.

Protecting stable family groups is likely to provide better long-term ecological outcomes than continual population disruption.

(c) The ecological role of dingoes in National Parks

Dingoes are Australia's only native canid and fulfil the ecological role of apex predator and keystone species.

Healthy dingo populations help regulate herbivore populations, including kangaroos and wallabies, reducing excessive grazing pressure on native vegetation.

They also suppress populations of invasive species including foxes, feral cats, goats and pigs through predation and territorial exclusion.

This benefits biodiversity by reducing predation pressure on smaller native mammals, reptiles and birds while limiting environmental degradation caused by introduced herbivores.

Research indicates that stable dingo populations may suppress fox populations more effectively than poison baiting programs alone.

The presence of dingoes also alters the behaviour of prey species. Herbivores change where and when they forage in response to predator presence, reducing concentrated grazing and allowing vegetation communities to recover.

Removing apex predators from ecosystems can trigger trophic cascades that contribute to vegetation decline, habitat degradation and biodiversity loss.

For these reasons, maintaining healthy dingo populations within National Parks should be recognised as a critical component of ecosystem conservation.

(d) The cultural significance of dingoes for First Nations communities

Dingoes have deep cultural significance for many Aboriginal nations throughout Australia.

For thousands of years they have featured in Dreaming stories, kinship systems, cultural practices and traditional ecological knowledge. Many First Nations communities recognise dingoes not simply as wildlife but as important cultural beings connected to Country.

Traditional ecological knowledge reflects a sophisticated understanding of the role dingoes play in maintaining healthy ecosystems.

Future dingo management should therefore include meaningful consultation with Traditional Owners and recognise Indigenous knowledge as an important complement to contemporary ecological science.

Recommendations

I respectfully recommend that the Committee consider the following reforms:

1. Update New South Wales dingo management policies to reflect contemporary genomic research rather than outdated studies using limited genetic markers.
 2. Recognise ecological function alongside genetics when assessing dingo populations.
 3. Reduce reliance on broad-scale lethal control within National Parks where stable dingo populations exist.
 4. Prioritise management approaches that maintain intact family groups and natural pack structures.
 5. Recognise dingoes as Australia's native apex predator and a keystone species essential for healthy ecosystems.
 6. Incorporate the latest ecological and behavioural science into future management frameworks.
 7. Increase investment in long-term monitoring using contemporary genomic techniques.
 8. Ensure meaningful consultation with First Nations communities regarding dingo conservation and management.
 9. Shift the policy focus from maintaining unrealistic notions of "genetic purity" towards conserving ecologically functional dingo populations.
-

Conclusion

Scientific understanding of dingoes has changed dramatically over the past two decades. Contemporary genomic research, ecological studies and behavioural science consistently demonstrate that Australia's wild-living canids are overwhelmingly dingoes performing the ecological role of an apex predator.

My firsthand experience working with dingoes at Secret Creek Sanctuary reinforced these findings. Observing their intelligence, structured social behaviour, cautious nature and inquisitive personalities demonstrated that they are fundamentally different from domestic dogs and deserve to be recognised and managed as Australia's unique native canid.

I believe New South Wales has an opportunity to adopt evidence-based policies that reflect current science, protect ecosystem function, respect the cultural significance of dingoes to First Nations peoples, and ensure the long-term conservation of this iconic native species.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Angel Newcombe

20 July 2026

Suggested References

- Cairns, K. M., et al. (2023). Contemporary genomic analysis of Australian wild canids.
- Smith, B. P. (2015). *The Dingo Debate*.
- Letnic, M., Crowther, M. S., Wallach, A. D., & Ripple, W. J. Research on dingoes as apex predators and trophic cascades.
- Australian Mammal Society. Position Statement on Dingoes.
- IUCN Canid Specialist Group. Guidance on wild canid conservation.
- Fleming, P. J. S., et al. Research on dingo ecology and management.