

**Submission
No 378**

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Introduction

I, Maree Scoble, submit this document to the Animal Welfare Committee to address the urgent need for reform in the management of dingoes (*Canis dingo*) within New South Wales (NSW) National Parks.

Dingoes are ecologically vital apex predators and hold profound cultural significance for Indigenous Australian communities. However, current management practices in NSW continue to rely on outdated science, misclassification, and harmful lethal control measures that undermine biodiversity conservation, ecological integrity, and animal welfare.

This submission provides evidence-based recommendations to ensure dingoes are protected, managed, and respected as the native species they are. It addresses the Terms of Reference (ToR) set out by the committee.

Recommendations for the Committee

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.

Supporting Evidence and Details

(a) 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Current dingo management policies are largely based on outdated genetic research using only 23 genetic markers.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, with hybridisation relatively

uncommon in stable, undisturbed populations. In New South Wales, more than three-quarters of sampled wild canids showed over 93% contemporary dingo ancestry.

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. 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.

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.

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

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. 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.

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) The ecological role of dingoes in National Parks

Dingoes are Australia's only native canid and are recognised as an important apex predator and keystone species.

- The presence of dingoes influences the behaviour and movement of herbivores and other animals, reducing pressure on vegetation communities.
- 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 removal of apex predators can destabilise ecosystems, contributing to vegetation decline, habitat degradation, and increased pressure on threatened species.

d) 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.

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) The impact of current government policies and programs for the management of dingoes in National Parks

Current management programs rely on lethal control methods, including 1080 poison baiting, trapping, and shooting. These methods:

- Disrupt stable dingo family groups and pack structures.
- Increase the likelihood of dingoes breeding with domestic dogs.
- Cause trophic cascades, leading to increases in introduced predators and herbivore pressure.
- Raise serious welfare concerns, particularly for animals caught in traps without access to food, water, or shelter.

Current management programs do not adequately reflect contemporary ecological science or cultural perspectives relating to dingoes. They are largely focused on agricultural protection rather than biodiversity outcomes, and 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 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 support healthy landscapes and biodiversity outcomes. 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. 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: Supporting landholders to coexist with dingoes

Changes to dingo management within National Parks may create concern for neighbouring landholders regarding predation on farmed animals. The Government can support the development, accessibility, and broader adoption of effective non-lethal predator deterrents by:

1. Redirecting funding currently used for broad-scale 1080 baiting of dingoes and trapping and shooting in National Parks to support neighbouring landholders with coexistence extension services.
2. Promoting proven non-lethal strategies, such as:
 - Livestock Guardian Dogs, which have been proven effective at reducing or eliminating predation on livestock by dingoes. They also deter macropods (kangaroos and wallabies) from grazing paddocks, protect from foxes, and protect from birds of prey.
 - Livestock Guardian Donkeys, for which there is widespread anecdotal evidence of effectiveness against canid predators. There is a strong opportunity for the NSW Government to support more robust trials into their use on properties neighbouring National Parks.
3. Investing in research, development, and scaling of coexistence strategies in New South Wales to ensure landholder interests are protected and dingoes can be retained in the environment to play their important ecological role.

There is currently no extension service to support landholders in implementing non-lethal predator deterrent strategies in New South Wales.

Conclusion

The current management of dingoes in NSW National Parks is scientifically outdated, ecologically harmful, and culturally insensitive. To reverse these trends, the committee must:

1. End lethal control in National Parks.
2. Recognise dingoes as native wildlife in legislation.
3. Empower Indigenous leadership in dingo management.
4. Redirect funding from lethal control to non-lethal coexistence strategies.
5. Invest in research and extension services to support landholders.

By adopting these recommendations, the committee can help restore the ecological balance of NSW's National Parks and honour the cultural significance of dingoes for First Nations peoples.

Next Steps

I urge the committee to:

- Publicly acknowledge the ecological and cultural value of dingoes.
- Engage with Indigenous communities, scientists, and landholders to develop a new dingo management framework.
- Publish a clear timeline for implementing reforms.
- Ensure transparency in data collection and reporting on dingo populations and control measures.

I am available to provide further evidence, participate in public hearings, or collaborate on developing culturally appropriate, ecologically sound, and landholder-focused dingo management strategies.

Maree Scoble