

**INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW
SOUTH WALES**

Name: Name suppressed

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Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Animal Welfare Committee

Inquiry into Dingoes in National Parks in New South Wales

This submission is made in a personal capacity and does not represent the views of any current or former employer or affiliated organisation. I am a veterinarian with more than 30 years' experience working across livestock production, wildlife health, natural resource management, agricultural extension and applied research. My work has focused on improving outcomes at the interface of animal health, environmental stewardship and agricultural production, consistent with the principles of One Health. Throughout my career I have worked with producers, researchers, government agencies and conservation practitioners to develop practical, evidence-based solutions to complex natural resource management challenges.

Overview

Effective public policy begins with clearly defining the problem it seeks to address.

The key proposals covered in this submission are:

1. The conservation of dingoes within National Parks and the management of livestock conflict at the agricultural interface should not be treated as the same policy issue.
2. National Parks exist to conserve biodiversity and ecological processes. Therefore, any policy and practices applied in these areas should seek to achieve that purpose. That calls for the cessation of all forms of lethal management of dingoes within National Parks.
3. Policy and management strategies should be adapted to ensure the ecological function of dingoes is in fact supported and protected.
4. Policy objectives should be supported by contemporary science, Traditional Ecological Knowledge and the involvement of Cultural Custodians in place-based research and action.
5. Landholders' concerns regarding the potential for stock losses due to predation from apex predators should be acknowledged, and support, including financial, should be provided to landholders and rural communities to research, implement, monitor and adapt non-lethal coexistence strategies to achieve the most effective outcomes for both conservation and agriculture.

National Parks should be managed for conservation outcomes

The primary purpose of National Parks is the conservation of native biodiversity and ecological processes. Decisions affecting dingoes within protected areas should therefore be assessed against clearly defined conservation outcomes.

Recent genomic research demonstrates that free-ranging canids across south-eastern Australia retain predominantly dingo genetic ancestry. This challenges earlier assumptions of widespread hybridization with domestic or feral dogs. Dingoes are one of Australia's apex terrestrial predators and play an important ecological role in our unique environment - the magnitude of which varies between landscapes. However, the evidence broadly supports their ecological significance and the need for long-term protection, conservation and monitoring, rather than the application of policy based on assumption that population reduction improves

ecosystem health.

Where scientific uncertainty exists around any of the issues raised associated with dingo populations, further work and concurrent adaptive management is required to ensure decision making is evidence based.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge strengthens evidence-based policy

First Nations led stewardship and research should be actively supported and recognised, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge applied alongside and concurrent to the exploration and application of contemporary science. Traditional Ecological Knowledge represents a legitimate evidence base developed through long-term observation, stewardship and adaptation.

Policy development processes should also move beyond consultation - towards genuine partnership with Traditional Owners. First Nations people should lead setting management objectives, co-designing research, monitoring ecological outcomes and evaluating management effectiveness.

Livestock conflict should be managed at the agricultural interface

Livestock predation is a genuine issue for some producers and should not be minimised in cases where there is evidence for this. However, evidence of livestock conflict at an agricultural/National Park interface does not, in itself, justify population management of dingoes within National Parks. As the management challenges occur where conservation landscapes intersect with agricultural production, policy development should focus on preventing conflict at these interfaces rather than reducing native predator populations within protected areas.

Investment should prioritise practical, non-lethal approaches including improved husbandry, livestock guardian animals and strategic grazing management together with professional support to help producers and their communities to investigate and understand the nature and extent of livestock conflict and design tailored, evidence based, sustainable co-existence strategies. The outcomes from these strategies should be evaluated through, for example, measurable reductions in livestock losses and improvements in animal welfare and producer confidence, not by the number of dingoes removed or killed.

Better evidence leads to better policy

The available evidence on this issue broadly supports an adaptive management framework founded on transparent monitoring and continuous improvement. Government programs should measure ecological integrity, livestock outcomes, animal welfare, economic impacts and community confidence, and publicly report those outcomes.

Policy should be based on evidence and evolve as evidence improves and understanding progresses. Continued investment in independent research, long-term monitoring and producer and community support and engagement will provide greater long-term benefit than practices that are based on assumptions, anecdote or historical practice.

Recommendations

- Distinguish conservation objectives within National Parks from livestock management objectives at the agricultural interface.

- Manage dingoes within National Parks in accordance with the conservation purpose of those protected areas.
- Base policy on the best available evidence, including contemporary scientific research and Traditional Ecological Knowledge, applied concurrently
- Prioritise practical, non-lethal approaches to preventing livestock conflict.
- Adopt adaptive management supported by long-term ecological monitoring and transparent evaluation.
- Support genuine partnerships with Traditional Owners through co-design of research, monitoring and stewardship.
- Increase investment in agricultural extension, demonstration and producer support for coexistence.

Closing Remarks

This Inquiry presents an opportunity to improve policy by distinguishing conservation from conflict management. Protecting biodiversity within National Parks and supporting resilient agricultural enterprises are complementary but distinct public objectives to be addressed through clear policy, robust evidence, genuine partnerships with Traditional Owners and practical support for landholders.

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