Submission No 396

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Inquiry into the Management of Dingoes in National Parks in New South Wales

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Stewardship of an Evolving Landscape

Australia has never been a static landscape. Over millions of years it has been shaped by shifting climates, changing rivers, fire, drought, flood and the ongoing evolution of plants, animals and ecological communities. Long before European settlement, Aboriginal peoples actively cared for Country through land management practices that influenced vegetation, wildlife and ecological processes across the continent.

European settlement introduced another period of profound change. Agriculture, pastoralism, roads, fencing, artificial watering points, altered fire regimes, introduced species and expanding regional communities have reshaped many Australian landscapes. These changes have delivered significant social and economic benefits through food and fibre production and regional development, while also contributing to biodiversity loss and altered ecological processes that continue to challenge land managers.

These changes cannot simply be undone. The central question for modern conservation is not how to recreate an Australia that existed two centuries ago, but how to responsibly steward the landscapes we have inherited while improving their ecological condition for future generations.

As Australia's population grows, the need for healthy natural systems becomes increasingly important. Equally, society depends on productive agricultural landscapes that provide food, fibre and livelihoods. These responsibilities should not be viewed as competing priorities—they are fundamentally interconnected. Healthy soils, reliable water, functioning ecosystems and productive landscapes all underpin Australia's future.

Conservation without food security is unsustainable. Agricultural production without healthy ecosystems cannot endure. Good public policy must recognise that both are essential public goods.

Stewardship is therefore not about choosing between conservation and production. It is about recognising that the long-term health of Australia's landscapes depends on achieving both. Decisions that improve one objective while unnecessarily

compromising another should be questioned. The strongest outcomes are those that support biodiversity, productive agriculture and resilient regional communities together.

More than 200 years of European settlement have fundamentally altered ecological processes across much of Australia. The distribution of water, vegetation, fire, native wildlife and introduced species has changed, often permanently. These changes vary enormously across the continent. While some landscapes remain relatively intact, others have been extensively modified by agriculture, infrastructure, invasive species and changing land use.

Recognising this reality does not weaken our responsibility to conserve biodiversity. It strengthens it. Conservation today must be adaptive, evidence based and focused on measurable outcomes rather than assumptions about restoring historical ecological conditions that may no longer be achievable.

My perspective has been shaped by living and working across some of Australia's most diverse landscapes. I grew up in the productive agricultural country of South Australia's Riverland, spent more than five years within the relatively intact Indigenous Protected Areas of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands and central Australian desert landscapes, and for the past twenty-five years have lived and worked in the pastoral rangelands of western New South Wales.

These landscapes are remarkably different. They differ in climate, soils, rainfall, vegetation, biodiversity, cultural history and land use. They have also experienced very different levels of human modification. This experience has reinforced a simple lesson: different Country behaves differently.

For that reason, good conservation decisions are rarely made through lived experience alone, nor through science in isolation. They are made when practical knowledge, careful observation and the best available evidence are considered together.

Throughout this submission, I draw upon three complementary knowledge systems:

- Aboriginal cultural knowledge developed through thousands of years of caring for Country;
- contemporary ecological science; and
- the practical knowledge of people who continue to live and work within these landscapes every day.

Each offers valuable insights. None provides every answer on its own. Bringing these perspectives together is more likely to produce enduring conservation outcomes than relying exclusively on any single source of knowledge.

The Western Division of New South Wales presents a particularly challenging conservation environment. It is characterised by highly variable rainfall, prolonged

drought, episodic flooding, vast distances and landscapes that support Aboriginal cultural values, National Parks, pastoral enterprises, tourism and regional communities. It is also a landscape where introduced species, artificial water points, altered fire regimes and changing land use have fundamentally reshaped ecological processes.

The management approaches that may be appropriate in the forests, coastal ranges or tablelands of eastern New South Wales cannot automatically be assumed to be appropriate across the rangelands of the west. Effective conservation requires flexibility, regional understanding and policies that respond to the landscapes they are intended to manage.

This submission considers the management of dingoes within that broader framework.

It acknowledges that dingoes have evolved to become Australia's native apex predator and that they perform important ecological functions within many Australian ecosystems. However, understanding their ecological role does not automatically determine how they should be managed.

Instead, this submission asks a more fundamental question:

Has changing the management of dingoes within western New South Wales National Parks been demonstrated to improve the biodiversity outcomes those parks were established to achieve?

In my view, that question should be answered not through ideology, nor through blanket policies applied across vastly different landscapes, but through careful consideration of evidence, practical experience and measurable conservation outcomes.

This submission is therefore built upon several guiding principles.

- Conservation is stewardship of the landscape we manage today.
- You cannot manage one part of a landscape without affecting the rest.
- Once we alter a landscape, we also inherit the responsibility to manage it.
- Management should be guided by the health and resilience of the whole landscape, not by the needs or values of any single species in isolation.
- The purpose of National Parks is to conserve biodiversity, not to maximise or minimise individual species.
- Good conservation policy should be judged by what management achieves, not simply by what a species is.
- Conservation should be measured by healthier ecosystems, recovering threatened species and resilient landscapes.

- Good stewardship draws upon Aboriginal knowledge, contemporary science and practical land management experience together.

These principles form the foundation of the observations and recommendations that follow.

What Are National Parks Trying to Achieve?

Before considering the role of dingoes within National Parks, we must first ask a more fundamental question: **what are National Parks trying to achieve?**

This inquiry is ultimately about more than the management of a single species. It is about how conservation should be delivered across the landscapes of western New South Wales. Understanding the role of dingoes is important, but it should not overshadow the broader purpose for which National Parks exist.

The purpose of National Parks is not to maximise or minimise any individual species. Their purpose is to conserve biodiversity, recover threatened species, protect ecological communities, conserve Aboriginal cultural heritage and maintain healthy, functioning ecosystems for future generations.

Success should therefore be judged by measurable conservation outcomes rather than the abundance of any single species. Conservation is not an end in itself. It is the means by which biodiversity, ecological resilience and landscape health are sustained over the long term.

Throughout western New South Wales, the NSW Government has consistently justified the expansion of the National Park estate on these broader conservation objectives. Whether through protecting internationally significant wetlands, recovering threatened species, conserving endangered ecological communities or strengthening landscape resilience, the emphasis has remained remarkably consistent: conserving biodiversity across the landscape as a whole.

If these are the objectives for which National Parks have been acquired and continue to be managed, then they should also remain the benchmark against which any proposed changes to dingo management are assessed.

Government-Stated Objectives for Recent National Park Acquisitions

National Park	Government-stated conservation objectives
Comeroo & Cuttaburra	Protect internationally significant wetlands and habitat for threatened species including the eastern fat-tailed gecko, pink cockatoo and south-eastern hooded robin.
Brindingabba	Protect threatened native species, significant woodland ecosystems and strengthen landscape resilience.
Thurloo Downs	Protect wetlands, threatened ecological communities, Aboriginal cultural heritage and habitat supporting numerous threatened species.
Bellenbar	Protect more than eighty threatened species together with endangered ecological communities across north-western New South Wales.

When Comeroo and Cuttaburra National Parks were established, the NSW Government described the acquisitions as protecting internationally significant wetlands and important habitat for numerous threatened species. Subsequent ecological surveys identified additional threatened species within the reserves, reinforcing their biodiversity value. The emphasis was not on protecting a single species, but on conserving entire landscapes and the ecological communities they support.

Similarly, the establishment of Brindingabba National Park was promoted as securing important habitat for threatened native species while protecting significant woodland ecosystems and strengthening the resilience of western landscapes. More recently, the acquisition of Bellenbar National Park was announced as protecting more than eighty threatened species together with endangered ecological communities across north-western New South Wales. Likewise, Thurloo Downs National Park was acquired to protect nationally significant wetlands, threatened ecological communities, Aboriginal cultural heritage and habitat supporting a wide range of native wildlife.

Across each of these acquisitions, the Government's stated objectives have remained remarkably consistent: recover biodiversity, protect threatened species and improve the long-term resilience of ecosystems. These objectives should remain the benchmark against which changes to dingo management are assessed.

National Parks are often thought of as places where nature is simply left alone. In reality, modern conservation requires active management.

Across New South Wales, National Parks are actively managed to control invasive species, suppress weeds, undertake prescribed burning, restore threatened species, monitor biodiversity and protect important ecological communities. This work recognises that many Australian landscapes have been fundamentally altered and require ongoing stewardship if conservation outcomes are to be achieved.

Western New South Wales is no exception. More than 200 years of changing land use have altered water distribution, grazing pressure, fire regimes, vegetation structure and species composition across much of the landscape. These changes cannot simply be reversed by removing management. They require careful, ongoing stewardship informed by science, monitoring and practical experience. The question is therefore not whether landscapes should be managed, but **how** they should be managed to achieve the greatest long-term benefit for biodiversity.

For many threatened species in western New South Wales, predation remains one of the greatest barriers to recovery. Species such as the Greater Bilby, Brush-tailed Mulgara, Plains-wanderer, Malleefowl, Kultarr and numerous other small mammals, reptiles and ground-nesting birds remain vulnerable to predation regardless of whether the predator is introduced or native. Replacing one source of predation with another does not automatically improve conservation outcomes. What matters is whether **overall predation pressure** is reduced and threatened species are given a greater opportunity to survive, breed and recover.

This principle underpins many of Australia's most successful threatened species recovery programs. Initiatives undertaken by organisations such as Australian Wildlife Conservancy, Wild Deserts and NSW National Parks have demonstrated that reducing overall predator pressure—particularly within predator-free or predator-controlled landscapes—can deliver substantial gains in threatened species recovery. Their success is measured by recovering populations of threatened wildlife, not by the abundance of any individual predator.

Species do not exist in isolation. Every landscape is shaped by interactions between predators, prey, vegetation, climate, fire, water and human management. Changing one part of that system inevitably influences others, sometimes in unexpected ways. Good stewardship therefore requires a landscape perspective rather than focusing on any single ecological interaction.

This is particularly relevant when considering apex predators such as dingoes. Their ecological role is well recognised, but their presence alone is not evidence of successful conservation. The more important question is whether the management approach being adopted is leaving the landscape healthier than before.

Throughout this inquiry, considerable attention has been given to the ecological role of dingoes. That role is important and should be recognised. However, recognising the ecological role of a species is not the same as demonstrating that changing its management will improve conservation outcomes. That is the question that ultimately sits at the heart of this inquiry.

Has changing the management of dingoes within western New South Wales National Parks been demonstrated to improve the biodiversity outcomes those parks were established to achieve?

That question shifts the focus away from labels and towards measurable outcomes. It asks whether changing legislation, policy or management will improve biodiversity, strengthen ecosystem resilience and assist the recovery of threatened species. If these are the objectives for which National Parks exist, then these are the outcomes by which any proposed policy changes should ultimately be judged.

Rather than focusing primarily on whether wild canids are genetically "pure" dingoes, future policy should seek to answer the questions that matter most.

- What effect are wild canids having on threatened species?
- Are wild canid populations increasing, decreasing or remaining stable?
- Is overall biodiversity improving?
- Are ecological communities becoming healthier and more resilient?
- What impacts are neighbouring landholders experiencing?
- Is current management achieving the conservation outcomes National Parks were established to deliver?

These are the questions that should guide future legislation, policy and management.

Conservation should not be judged by the abundance of any individual species. It should be judged by whether management leaves the landscape healthier—through stronger biodiversity, recovering threatened species, resilient ecosystems and productive landscapes capable of supporting future generations. That, ultimately, is the benchmark against which the management of dingoes within western New South Wales National Parks should be assessed.

Has It Been Demonstrated That Changing Dingo Management Will Improve Conservation Outcomes?

The ecological role of dingoes is one of the central issues before this inquiry. There is little doubt that dingoes have evolved to become Australia's native apex predator. Contemporary ecological research has significantly improved our understanding of predator interactions, trophic relationships and the influence dingoes may have on other species.

However, the ecological role of dingoes and the policy objectives of National Parks should not be confused. Understanding the ecological function of dingoes is essential. Determining how they should be managed requires a separate question:

Has changing dingo management been demonstrated to improve the conservation outcomes National Parks were established to achieve?

That is the question this inquiry must answer.

Over the past two decades, research into dingoes and predator ecology has expanded considerably. Studies by Associate Professor Mike Letnic, Professor Thomas Newsome and others have provided evidence suggesting that dingoes may suppress fox abundance through competition and territorial exclusion under some ecological conditions and may contribute to improved persistence of some native fauna. These studies have made an important contribution to understanding predator interactions.

However, they do not demonstrate that these outcomes occur consistently across Australia's highly diverse landscapes, nor that increasing dingo abundance will necessarily improve biodiversity within western New South Wales National Parks or that modified ecosystems can sustain higher densities of an apex predator without creating unintended ecological consequences.

Other researchers, including Dr Peter Fleming, Dr Benjamin Allen and colleagues, have emphasised that predator interactions are considerably more complex than simply the presence of this species leading to a trophic cascade. Their work demonstrates that dingoes, foxes and feral cats frequently coexist across many Australian landscapes and that predator relationships are strongly influenced by rainfall, habitat productivity, prey availability, landscape modification and local ecological conditions.

The evidence for suppression of feral cats is particularly inconsistent. Some studies have reported reduced cat activity where stable dingo populations occur, while others have found little measurable effect or continued coexistence where food resources remain abundant. Likewise, while dingoes undoubtedly prey upon kangaroos and other herbivores, there remains limited evidence that contemporary dingo populations consistently regulate kangaroo numbers at a landscape scale across the highly modified environments of western New South Wales.

Rather than demonstrating a universal ecological response, the scientific literature increasingly suggests that these relationships are highly context dependent. Ecological processes observed in one landscape should not automatically be assumed to operate in another.

Another important consideration concerns the role of stable dingo pack structure. A number of researchers have proposed that the ecological benefits attributed to dingoes—including suppression of foxes, altered feral cat behaviour and regulation of larger herbivores—depend upon healthy, stable family groups occupying and defending territories over time. It has been suggested that disrupting these social structures through lethal control may reduce these ecological functions by increasing movements of individual animals, altering prey selection and reducing territorial exclusion of other predators.

This hypothesis deserves careful consideration. However, it also raises important questions that are particularly relevant to western New South Wales. Can National Parks within the Western Division realistically sustain stable dingo packs while remaining embedded within landscapes that support extensive pastoral production and where neighbouring landholders continue to meet statutory biosecurity obligations? Has it been demonstrated that the ecological conditions required for these pack structures can be consistently maintained across these landscapes?

Even if stable packs could be established, further uncertainty remains regarding prey selection. Much of the discussion surrounding trophic cascades assumes increased predation on large native herbivores such as kangaroos. Yet in many western landscapes, dingoes also have access to abundant alternative prey, including rangeland goats, sheep and other livestock on adjoining properties. Whether stable dingo packs would consistently select kangaroos in preference to these alternative prey, and whether this would produce measurable improvements in vegetation condition and biodiversity, has received comparatively little direct investigation.

These questions do not diminish the ecological importance of dingoes. Rather, they highlight the need for landscape-specific evidence before assuming that management approaches developed or observed elsewhere will necessarily produce the same conservation outcomes across western New South Wales.

More than 200 years of pastoral development have fundamentally altered water availability, fire regimes, vegetation structure, grazing pressure and the distribution of both native and introduced species. Artificial watering points, extensive fencing, altered grazing systems and changing land use have modified the ecological constraints under which predators and prey interact. Contemporary predator-prey relationships may therefore operate very differently from those that existed prior to European settlement.

There is sometimes an assumption that if we simply reduce management, ecosystems will naturally return to a previous state. In western New South Wales, that assumption is neither realistic nor supported by contemporary conservation science. The landscape has changed. Responsible stewardship requires management that reflects those changes while striving to improve biodiversity into the future.

Much of the public discussion surrounding dingoes centres on their potential role in suppressing foxes and feral cats. While this is an important area of research, it is only one part of the broader conservation picture.

Successful threatened species recovery programs across Australia demonstrate that reducing **overall predation pressure** provides the greatest opportunity for highly vulnerable species to recover. Programs delivered by Australian Wildlife Conservancy, Wild Deserts and other conservation organisations have successfully re-established species such as the Greater Bilby, Numbat and Bridled Nailtail Wallaby within predator-controlled environments. Their success is measured by recovering populations of threatened species, typically influenced by the absence or substantial reduction of predators—not by the abundance of any particular predator.

This does not mean that predator exclusion is appropriate everywhere, nor does it diminish the ecological role of dingoes. Rather, it demonstrates that conservation success should ultimately be measured by biodiversity outcomes, not assumptions about the ecological importance of any one species.

Recent advances in genomic research provide another important contribution to this discussion. Earlier studies relied on relatively small numbers of genetic markers to distinguish dingoes from hybrids. Contemporary genomic techniques now examine tens of thousands of genetic markers and have substantially improved understanding of Australia's wild canid populations, including those in New South Wales.

I strongly support the continuation and expansion of this work. However, genetics alone cannot determine conservation policy.

Understanding what these animals are is important. Understanding what effect they are having on biodiversity is even more important.

Future research should therefore extend beyond genomic analysis to include predator–mesopredator relationships, predator–prey interactions, landscape-scale ecological processes, controlled predator exclusion studies, long-term biodiversity monitoring and threatened species recovery. Equally important is ensuring that the results of this work are transparent and publicly available so future policy continues to evolve on the basis of evidence rather than assumption.

The Commonwealth Threatened Species Scientific Committee reached a similar conclusion when it considered the nomination to list the "loss of dingoes" as a Key Threatening Process under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. While acknowledging the ecological importance of dingoes and the complexity of predator interactions, the Committee concluded that the available evidence did not establish a sufficiently consistent causal relationship between reductions in dingo populations and biodiversity decline to warrant listing the process as a Key Threatening Process. This reflects the broader scientific position that ecological mechanisms may be recognised without automatically demonstrating consistent conservation outcomes across all landscapes.

Taken together, the available evidence supports a cautious and adaptive approach. There is little doubt that dingoes perform an important ecological role within many Australian ecosystems. The more important question for this inquiry, however, is whether changing their management within western New South Wales National Parks has been demonstrated to improve the biodiversity outcomes those parks were established to achieve.

In my view, that proposition has not yet been demonstrated with sufficient certainty for the landscapes of the Western Division.

The potential consequences of reducing or removing effective dingo management for neighbouring pastoral enterprises, regional communities and statutory biosecurity obligations could be significant. Before making substantial changes to legislation, policy or management practice, there should be clear, landscape-specific evidence that those changes will improve biodiversity, strengthen ecosystem resilience, assist threatened species recovery and avoid creating unacceptable environmental, social and economic consequences.

Good conservation should be based on demonstrated outcomes, not assumed outcomes.

Summary of Current Evidence

Topic	Current understanding
Fox suppression	Supported in some landscapes but not consistently demonstrated across all environments.
Feral cat suppression	Mixed and inconsistent evidence; coexistence is frequently observed.
Kangaroo regulation	Limited evidence of consistent landscape-scale regulation in western New South Wales.
Biodiversity outcomes	Strongly influenced by landscape, habitat, rainfall, prey availability and management context.
Wild canid genetics	Contemporary genomics has substantially improved understanding of wild canid ancestry.
Policy implication	Future management should be guided by landscape-specific evidence and measurable conservation outcomes rather than broad assumptions.

This inquiry provides an opportunity to strengthen the evidence base for future policy. Continued investment in ecological research, genomic monitoring and long-term biodiversity assessment should be encouraged. However, any significant change to the management of dingoes within western New South Wales National Parks should be supported by clear evidence that it will improve the conservation outcomes those parks were established to achieve.

The Legislative and Policy Framework Governing Dingo Management

The management of dingoes in New South Wales National Parks sits at the intersection of conservation, biosecurity, agriculture and public land management. It is therefore governed by several pieces of legislation and policy that recognise these sometimes competing responsibilities.

The *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* establishes the National Parks estate and requires the National Parks and Wildlife Service to conserve biodiversity, protect Aboriginal cultural heritage and manage protected areas for future generations. The *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* provides the broader framework for conserving biodiversity and threatened species across New South Wales. At the same time, the

Biosecurity Act 2015 places a General Biosecurity Duty on all land managers, including government agencies, to minimise biosecurity risks, including the impacts of pest animals where they threaten environmental, agricultural or community assets.

These legislative responsibilities are supported by policies such as the NSW Wild Dog Management Strategy and the National Wild Dog Action Plan, both of which recognise that wild dog management requires balancing conservation outcomes with the protection of livestock, neighbouring landholders and broader community interests.

Importantly, the existing legislative framework is not one-dimensional. It does not require managers to maximise dingo numbers, nor does it require their eradication. Instead, it recognises that conservation, threatened species recovery, agricultural production and biosecurity responsibilities must all be considered together when making management decisions.

In many respects, this reflects the reality of managing western New South Wales. National Parks do not exist in isolation. Wildlife, predators, fire, flood, weeds and invasive species move freely across tenure boundaries. Decisions made within National Parks influence neighbouring properties, just as activities outside parks influence conservation outcomes within them. Effective management therefore depends upon cooperation between National Parks, Aboriginal land managers, neighbouring landholders, Local Land Services and other public agencies.

Current legislation already provides considerable flexibility for adaptive management as new scientific evidence becomes available. That flexibility should continue to be used. Future improvements should be driven by better monitoring, contemporary genomic research, stronger biodiversity data and a better understanding of landscape-specific ecological processes rather than wholesale legislative or policy change based on assumptions that may not apply universally across western New South Wales.

Many submissions to this inquiry argue that reducing lethal control and providing greater protection for dingoes within National Parks will improve biodiversity by restoring the ecological function of Australia's apex predator. That proposition deserves careful consideration. However, I do not believe there is yet sufficient landscape-specific evidence to demonstrate that changing the current management approach in western New South Wales would produce better overall conservation outcomes than the existing framework.

Importantly, the consequences of making the wrong decision are not evenly distributed.

If current management continues while new evidence emerges, policies can continue to evolve through adaptive management. However, if effective management is substantially reduced and the anticipated biodiversity benefits do not occur, the consequences could include increased livestock losses, greater pressure on

neighbouring landholders, conflict between public and private land management, increased biosecurity risks and potentially greater predation on vulnerable native fauna. Those risks should not be dismissed.

Every environmental policy ultimately exists to serve both people and nature. Healthy ecosystems matter because they sustain life, but so too do healthy agricultural landscapes. Agriculture is not simply another land use competing with conservation; it is the foundation of human existence. Every meal we eat, every natural fibre we wear and every rural community we depend upon begins with productive land. Conservation and agriculture should therefore never be treated as opposing interests. A resilient future depends upon both.

Out here, conservation and agriculture are not separate worlds. One puts food on people's tables. The other protects the natural systems that make that possible. We rely on healthy country to produce food, fibre and livelihoods, just as healthy country relies on responsible management. The challenge is not deciding whether agriculture or conservation matters more. Both are essential. The challenge is finding management that allows both to continue into the future.

Every policy decision creates both benefits and costs. Good governments do not pretend otherwise. They ask whether the overall outcome leaves the environment, the community and the landscape better off than before. That is the standard I believe should be applied to any proposal to change the management of dingoes in western New South Wales.

For these reasons, I believe the current legislative and policy framework should continue to evolve through adaptive management rather than wholesale reform. Better science should improve management, not predetermine it.

I strongly support the continuation and expansion of research—not only into the genetic status of wild canids, but also into predator–mesopredator relationships, predator–prey interactions, landscape-scale ecological processes, controlled predator exclusion studies and long-term biodiversity monitoring. Future policy should be informed by measurable outcomes, including threatened species recovery, biodiversity trends, ecological resilience and the effectiveness of alternative management approaches.

Equally important is transparency.

NSW should continue contemporary genomic monitoring of wild canids within National Parks and publish regular, publicly accessible summaries that report not only genetic findings, but also:

- wild canid population trends;
- biodiversity indicators;

- threatened species recovery;
- ecological community condition;
- impacts on neighbouring landholders; and
- how these findings influence future management decisions.

Ultimately, if Parliament is asked to change the balance established by the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, the *Biosecurity Act 2015* and the NSW Wild Dog Management Strategy, then the evidence should clearly demonstrate that the proposed approach will produce better outcomes for biodiversity, threatened species, neighbouring communities and the landscape as a whole.

Only then can we be confident that policy has evolved in response to demonstrated conservation outcomes rather than well-intentioned assumptions.

Recommendations

Drawing on the matters discussed throughout this submission, I respectfully make the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1

Recognise the Contemporary Landscape

That future conservation policy for western New South Wales recognises the ecological realities of a landscape shaped by natural processes, Aboriginal stewardship and more than two centuries of European settlement, and directs management towards improving the landscape that exists today rather than attempting to recreate one that no longer exists.

Recommendation 2

Retain Biodiversity as the Primary Purpose of National Parks

That biodiversity conservation, threatened species recovery, resilient ecological communities and Aboriginal cultural heritage remain the primary objectives against which all proposed changes to dingo management, legislation and policy are assessed.

Recommendation 3

Continue Landscape-scale Stewardship

That conservation and predator management continue to be undertaken at a landscape scale, recognising that wildlife, predators, fire, weeds and ecological processes extend beyond tenure boundaries and require ongoing cooperation between National Parks,

Aboriginal land managers, neighbouring landholders, Local Land Services and other public agencies.

Recommendation 4

Recognise the Unique Character of Western New South Wales

That future conservation policy recognises the distinct environmental, climatic, social and productive characteristics of the Western Division and avoids applying uniform management approaches across landscapes with fundamentally different ecological conditions.

Recommendation 5

Continue Adaptive, Evidence-based Management

That current legislative and policy frameworks continue to support adaptive management, with decisions guided by measurable conservation outcomes, long-term ecological monitoring and the best available scientific evidence rather than fixed policy settings or ideology.

Recommendation 6

Expand Ecological Research

That the NSW Government continue to invest in landscape-specific research within western New South Wales, including:

- contemporary genomic analysis of wild canids;
- predator–mesopredator relationships;
- predator–prey interactions;
- landscape-scale ecological processes;
- controlled predator exclusion studies;
- ecosystem resilience; and
- the long-term biodiversity outcomes of alternative management approaches.

Recommendation 7

Improve Monitoring and Public Reporting

That NSW continue genomic monitoring of wild canid populations within National Parks and publish annual, publicly accessible summaries reporting on:

- wild canid genetics and population trends;
- biodiversity indicators;

- threatened species recovery;
- ecological community condition;
- impacts on neighbouring landholders; and
- how these findings influence future management decisions.

Recommendation 8

Draw Upon All Available Knowledge Systems

That future conservation policy continue to integrate Aboriginal cultural knowledge, contemporary ecological science and the practical knowledge of people who live and work within these landscapes, recognising that each contributes valuable insight into long-term stewardship and adaptive management.

Recommendation 9

Demonstrate Outcomes Before Changing Policy

That any significant changes to legislation or the management of dingoes within western New South Wales National Parks be supported by clear, landscape-specific evidence demonstrating improved biodiversity outcomes, strengthened ecosystem resilience, recovery of threatened species and acceptable environmental, social and economic consequences.

Recommendation 10

Develop a Western Division Landscape Stewardship Framework

That the NSW Government develop a **Western Division Landscape Stewardship Framework** recognising the unique ecological, climatic, cultural, social and productive characteristics of western New South Wales, providing regionally appropriate guidance for conservation, biodiversity management, pest animal management and landscape stewardship.

Together, these recommendations seek to strengthen stewardship across western New South Wales by ensuring that conservation continues to be guided by measurable outcomes, adaptive management, transparency and the long-term health and resilience of the landscape as a whole.

Conclusion

This inquiry is ultimately about more than the management of dingoes. It is about how we choose to steward the landscapes entrusted to us and how conservation should be delivered across the diverse landscapes of New South Wales.

Throughout this submission I have argued that conservation should be judged by outcomes rather than assumptions. The purpose of National Parks is not to maximise or minimise any individual species, but to conserve biodiversity, recover threatened species and build resilient ecosystems. Dingoes undoubtedly have an ecological role within many Australian landscapes. The more important question for this inquiry is whether changing their management within western New South Wales National Parks has been demonstrated to better achieve those broader conservation objectives. In my view, that has not yet been established with sufficient landscape-specific evidence.

Western New South Wales is unlike any other part of the State. More than two centuries of changing land use have fundamentally reshaped ecological processes, species distributions and the way these landscapes function. Conservation policy must acknowledge these realities. Management that may be appropriate in one part of New South Wales should not automatically be applied across the Western Division without clear evidence that it will improve biodiversity outcomes.

I believe the current legislative and policy framework already provides considerable flexibility to adapt management as new scientific knowledge emerges. Future improvements should continue to be guided by robust ecological research, contemporary genomic analysis, long-term biodiversity monitoring and transparent reporting of measurable outcomes. Better science should continue to improve management, but it should not replace the need for careful, adaptive stewardship.

Conservation and productive agriculture should never be viewed as competing interests. Healthy ecosystems sustain productive landscapes, and productive landscapes support the food, fibre and regional communities upon which society depends. Long-term stewardship relies upon maintaining both.

Good conservation should draw upon the strengths of all available knowledge systems. Aboriginal cultural knowledge, contemporary ecological science and the practical knowledge of people who continue to live and work within these landscapes each contribute valuable insights. Bringing these perspectives together is more likely to deliver enduring conservation outcomes than relying on any one source of knowledge alone.

Good conservation should always be judged by what it achieves—not simply by what it intends.

The landscapes we have inherited will never again be what they once were. Our responsibility is not to recreate the past, but to make thoughtful, evidence-based decisions that leave our landscapes healthier, more resilient and richer in biodiversity than they are today.

If future generations inherit healthier ecosystems, recovering threatened species, productive agricultural landscapes and resilient rural communities, then we can be confident we have managed this country well.

That, ultimately, is the true measure of stewardship.

Key References

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- NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. Recent media releases and acquisition statements relating to **Brindingabba, Comeroo, Cuttaburra, Thurloo Downs and Bellenbar National Parks.**
- Australian Wildlife Conservancy and UNSW Wild Deserts. Research and publications on threatened species recovery and predator-free conservation areas.