

INQUIRY INTO DINGOES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Submission on the Vital Role of First Nations Engagement in Dingo Management

Introduction

The management of dingoes in New South Wales (NSW) encompasses a multitude of complex challenges that necessitate a comprehensive and inclusive approach. A fundamental aspect of this process is the active involvement of First Nations communities, whose traditional knowledge and cultural perspectives can offer invaluable insights into sustainable dingo management practices. Additionally, implementing stringent regulations concerning the presence of domestic dogs in national parks is critical to safeguarding the genetic integrity of dingo populations and ensuring the overall ecological balance.

1. Engaging First Nations Communities

- **Cultural Significance:** The profound connection that First Nations peoples have with the land and its wildlife, particularly dingoes, is deeply embedded in their cultural heritage. This relationship provides a wealth of ecological wisdom that can significantly enhance conservation efforts. Actively consulting with First Nations communities is essential for integrating their perspectives into dingo management strategies.
- **Consultation and Leadership:** To effectively incorporate First Nations knowledge into the management framework, it is essential to engage in:
 - **Meaningful Consultations:** Establishing regular and respectful dialogues with First Nations communities to ensure their voices are heard and valued in the decision-making processes.
 - **Collaborative Efforts:** Leveraging First Nations ecological knowledge to inform contemporary conservation strategies, which can lead to more effective and culturally appropriate management practices.
 - **Supporting First Nations -Led Initiatives:** Promoting projects that highlight and celebrate the cultural significance of dingoes, thereby fostering a sense of stewardship and responsibility among community members.

2. Understanding the Genetic Status of Dingoes

- **Genetic Analysis:** A key focus of the inquiry involves analysing the genetic profile of dingoes in NSW and distinguishing them from feral dogs. Understanding the genetic status of these populations is crucial for:
 - **Identifying Hybridisation Risks:** Recognising the levels of hybridisation that may threaten the genetic integrity of wild dingo populations.

- **Developing Targeted Management Strategies:** Crafting specific conservation strategies that prioritise the preservation of pure dingo genetics, ensuring the species' long-term viability.

3. Reviewing Current Legislation

- **Legislative Examination:** The inquiry also seeks to scrutinise why dingoes are the only native mammals explicitly exempt from protection under the **Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016**. This exemption allows for practices such as:
 - **1080 Poisoning, Trapping, and Shooting:** These methods raise significant ethical and ecological concerns. A thorough assessment of the implications of this legislation is essential for developing more humane and effective management frameworks that align with conservation goals.

4. Assessing the Ecological Role of Dingoes

- **Keystone Apex Predators:** Dingoes serve a crucial function as apex predators within their ecosystems. Their presence is integral to maintaining ecological balance by:
 - **Suppressing Invasive Species:** They help control populations of invasive species such as feral cats and foxes, which pose a significant threat to native wildlife.
 - **Upholding Biodiversity:** Their role contributes to the overall health of ecosystems, ensuring that a diverse array of species can thrive. Assessing their ecological impact is vital for informing effective management practices.

5. Prohibiting Domestic Dogs in National Parks

- **Visitor Regulations:** To effectively protect dingo populations, it is imperative to enforce a ban on visitors bringing domestic dogs into national parks. This regulation is essential for several reasons:
 - **Preventing Hybridisation:** It mitigates the risk of hybridisation between dingoes and domestic dogs, which can dilute the genetic purity of wild populations.
 - **Reducing Disease Transmission:** Limiting the presence of domestic animals decreases the likelihood of disease transmission to dingoes, thereby safeguarding their health.
- **Restrictions on Pig Shooters:** Allowing pig shooters to enter national parks with their dogs poses considerable risks to dingo conservation:

- **Hybridisation Risks:** Dogs that become lost during hunting expeditions can breed with dingoes, complicating conservation efforts and endangering the genetic integrity of the species. Thus, it is vital to restrict pig shooters from bringing dogs into national parks.

6. Policies Regarding National Park Rangers and Dogs

- **Ranger Guidelines:** National Park rangers play a pivotal role in wildlife conservation. However, permitting rangers to keep personal dogs within park boundaries can undermine these efforts:
 - **Escaping Domestic Dogs:** Domestic dogs may escape and interact with wild dingoes, leading to hybridisation and genetic mixing. To maintain the integrity of dingo populations, a policy prohibiting rangers from having dogs in national parks should be considered.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the effective management of dingoes in NSW necessitates the integration of First Nations perspectives and the establishment of stringent regulations concerning domestic dogs in national parks. By valuing First Nations knowledge and implementing protective measures against the presence of domestic dogs, we can work towards a sustainable future for dingoes and the ecosystems they inhabit.

Call to Action

I strongly encourage the parliamentary inquiry to take these recommendations into serious consideration. By prioritising First Nations voices and enforcing restrictions on domestic dogs in national parks, we can ensure the preservation of dingoes and uphold the ecological balance for generations to come.