



## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

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Inquiry: Inquiry into ecosystem decline in Victoria

Hearing Date: 17 June 2021

Questions taken on notice

Directed to: Australian Dingo Foundation

### 1. Mrs McARTHUR - additional questions after the hearing

#### Question asked:

Do you have evidence to justify your assertion that dingoes do not predate sheep, despite the reported experience of livestock farmers in other parts of Australia?

#### Response:

Dingoes can and do predate on livestock (predominately sheep) however the severity of predation impacts on livestock is substantially less than lamb losses to other causes, namely exposure, starvation, dystocia and other predators, predominately foxes in regions where Dingoes have been extirpated from the landscape.<sup>1</sup> The concern is that for the miniscule livestock losses, broadscale lethal control Dingoes is not justified nor is it an effective method of protecting sheep / lambs and removing Dingoes from the landscape has detrimental impacts on ecological health and stability and hence biodiversity.

In reviewing reported livestock losses 'in other parts of Australia', it appears that predation rates by Dingoes on livestock reflects the extremely low rates experienced in Victoria. A Case Study presented by Warren Schofield, ACT Biosecurity and Rural Services at the RZSNSW Dingo Dilemma Forum (7<sup>th</sup> September 2019)<sup>2</sup> to attempt to justify broadscale lethal control of Dingoes focused on the East Monaro region, NSW. He stated that in this intensive sheep / wool growing region, where Dingoes are still present in the landscape, the predation rates **prior to** implementing intensive 'nil tenure' landscape-wide lethal control of Dingoes with public and private landholders working in collaboration, was an average of 133 sheep / lambs killed or maimed / year for years 1974 -2003. Out of a total sheep population in the region of in excess of 80,000, this represents losses of miniscule 0.166%!

### 2. Mrs McARTHUR - additional questions after the hearing

#### Question asked:

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.mla.com.au/download/finalreports?itemId=1062&fbclid=IwAR2SGMxcLYixZGviSrl0tafgcFkakgQujVXBRF\\_Fe4jU1S5DBGwPgSHPnY](https://www.mla.com.au/download/finalreports?itemId=1062&fbclid=IwAR2SGMxcLYixZGviSrl0tafgcFkakgQujVXBRF_Fe4jU1S5DBGwPgSHPnY)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rzsnsw.org.au/events/event/the-dingo-dilemma>



In the Grampians, the critically-endangered Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby has been successfully re-introduced, having previously become locally extinct. As small macropods, are they not the natural prey of dingoes? What impact do you believe the reintroduction of dingoes would have on this population?

**Response:**

*'Predator monitoring indicates that fox occupancy rates remain high in the Grampians. Foxes were detected at 85% of sites in spring 2018 compared to 73% of monitoring sites in spring 2017.'* *'The Grampians region is delivering an integrated whole-of-ecosystem predator (fox, feral cat) and herbivore (deer, rabbit, goat) management.'* Reference: Weeds and Pests on Public Land Annual Report (2018-2019)<sup>3</sup>

*'The lack of a significant response in Southern Brown Bandicoot and Long-nosed Potoroo is of concern. After 13 years of fox control, if the fox population has been reduced to levels low enough to allow for population growth in these species, it would be reasonable to expect a greater level of response.'* Reference: ARI Technical Report No.297<sup>4</sup>

*'Monitoring data from the Grampians indicates feral cats are now as abundant in the Grampians as Red Fox. This is likely a response to long-term, landscape-scale poison baiting of foxes. There is evidence from programs elsewhere that control of a single predator species (foxes) can result in an increase of other predator species (cats). The integrated control of predator species is important for effectively managing the threat of predation while supporting the re-introduction and recovery of populations of native small mammal species such as Southern Brown Bandicoots, Long-nosed Potoroos, Eastern Quolls, Spot-tailed Quolls, Eastern Barred Bandicoots and Southern Bettong that have been lost or severely depleted from the landscape. The role of native predators and how they can be supported to recover is a gap in our current understanding of these systems. Building this knowledge will support the ongoing effective management of predation pressure by both introduced and native predators.'* Reference: Greater Gariwerd Landscape Draft Plan<sup>5</sup>

*This year, Parks Victoria is aiming to expand the Grampians Ark program to include feral cats, which are being detected more frequently on the park's surveillance and monitoring cameras in many remote areas of the park. 'As the biodiversity in this area is constantly under threat from introduced animals like foxes, feral cats, deer and feral goats ...'*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0021/480450/WPPL-Annual-Report-2018-19.pdf](https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/480450/WPPL-Annual-Report-2018-19.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.ari.vic.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/word\\_doc/0022/435181/ARI-Technical-Report-297-Glenelg-Ark-2005-2018-long-term-predator-and-native-mammal-response-to-predator-control.docx](https://www.ari.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0022/435181/ARI-Technical-Report-297-Glenelg-Ark-2005-2018-long-term-predator-and-native-mammal-response-to-predator-control.docx)

<sup>5</sup> <https://engage.vic.gov.au/gariwerd-management-plan>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/news/2020/07/31/00/51/25-years-of-protecting-the-grampians>



*Dingoes don't pose the same risk to threatened species, as the smaller mammals have developed anti-predator strategies to co-exist with dingoes," he [Dr Thomas Newsome] said.<sup>7</sup>*

Dingoes provide a **net benefit** to the landscape, resulting in improved ecosystem health, stability and resilience that will directly and indirectly benefit critically-endangered species, such as Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies. Dingoes have co-existed with wallabies and other native prey species for thousands of years and as such native prey exhibit predator aversion behaviour where Dingoes are present. Conversely, native species exhibit prey naivety towards 'alien' predators making them extremely vulnerable to highly destructive foxes and feral cats. Dingoes provide 24 / 7 suppression of foxes and feral cats as well as invasive deer, rabbits and goats, resulting in a reduction in predation pressure from 'alien' predators and improved vegetation outcomes.

It is also clear that current pest control operations (including the 13 years of the Grampians Ark 1080 fox baiting program) are not effective. Dingoes will most certainly pick off the old, the weak and diseased to ensure genetic strength and resilience of their prey species, including wallabies. This is the important role they play as apex predators. Dingoes are opportunistic predators meaning they will eat the most abundant prey species within their territory so if there are a lot of rabbits around they will eat mostly rabbits.

The Australian Dingo Foundation were not stakeholders in the preparation of the 'Greater Gariwerd Draft Landscape Management Plan' however we would suggest that the proposed rewilding of dingoes could include precautionary measures to provide additional protection to any vulnerable populations of critically-endangered species, including Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies. This might include the use of guardian animals<sup>8</sup>, tracking collars for dingoes, fencing, fladry, semio-chemical barriers and / or solar powered, motion sensed deterrents.

### **3. Mrs McARTHUR - additional questions after the hearing**

#### **Question asked:**

Dingo populations living in the proximity of humans have adapted to scavenging behaviour, in Fraser Island for example. Given this, and documented if rare attacks on humans, do you accept that the introduction of dingoes to the Grampians area could prove damaging to local tourism businesses?

#### **Response:**

Consider that Fraser Island was given World Heritage status in large part due to its diverse ecosystem and unique wildlife, including dingoes. Dingoes are a tourist attraction on Fraser Island not a deterrent.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/technology/reintroducing-dingoes-can-help-manage-feral-foxes-and-cats-study-suggests-20170523-gwb8e6.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/06/Guardian-Dogs-web.pdf>



*Tourism numbers on the world's largest sand island K'gari (Fraser Island) have bounced back with visitors spending more than a quarter of a million nights in the world heritage-listed area, helping to drive the state's economic recovery.*

*'We know that visits to our national parks generate \$2.6 billion in economic activity each year – and as home to the world's largest sand island, K'gari plays a big role,' Minister Scanlon said.<sup>9</sup>*

Also:

*'Ecotourism in Yellowstone has increased since gray wolves were reintroduced to the ecosystem, boosting local economies by an estimated \$5 million per year.'<sup>10</sup>*

Dingo attacks on humans on Fraser Island have been well documented and have been overwhelmingly linked to irresponsible behaviour by visitors and/or residents, promoting massive increases in fines for feeding or interfering with dingoes on the island. Dingoes are naturally wary but curious and by nature are not vicious.

Wild dingoes are persisting in parts of Victoria in the Mallee, High Country and Far East Gippsland. There have been zero reported attacks in these areas by dingoes on humans in spite of hundreds of thousands of campers, hunters and hikers visiting these areas every year. Attacks on humans by dingoes over the course of 240 years of European inhabitation right across Australia could be counted on two hands. In reality, people are by far more likely to be maimed or killed by a pet dog than to be attacked by a dingo in the wild.

*The Australian Companion Animal Council Inc. has estimated that more than 100,000 persons in Australia are attacked by dogs each year, with an estimated 12,000–14,000 individuals requiring hospital treatment for dog bite injuries, and around 10% of those being hospitalised each year.<sup>11</sup>*

Any dingo rewilding projects need to include education to ensure responsible human behaviour in dingo territory. This is a human management issue and not a dingo management issue.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/92175>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.yellowstonepark.com/news/gray-wolves-increase-tourism-in-yellowstone-national-park/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1753-6405.12630>



#### 4. Mrs McARTHUR - additional questions after the hearing

##### Question asked:

Are you able to comment specifically on the history of dingo populations in the Grampians? I have been told there is no reliable record of their presence in the past, and would be interested in your understanding.

##### Response:

Limited research has been conducted on the life history and ecology of the Dingo in Victoria and the Australian Dingo Foundation is unaware of any documented evidence of an exact timeline of when Dingoes were completely extirpated from the Gariwerd region. The evidence of the presence of Dingoes in the region, prior to European occupation, lies with the spiritual significance, rock art (such as Bunjil's Shelter<sup>12</sup>, featuring two dingo 'helpers') and dreaming stories of the Dingo to the local Indigenous mobs as expressed within the 'Greater Gariwerd Draft Landscape Management Plan' as reported by the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation and Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

#### 5. Mrs McARTHUR - additional questions after the hearing

##### Question asked:

Given Parks Victoria's total failure to control deer, or indeed any other wild animal populations – across many Victorian parks – what makes you think Dingoes in the Grampians would be any different? Do you believe the State has the capacity and competence to manage the populations properly? If not, do you understand the concerns of sheep farmers in the area who are extremely nervous that they will end up paying the price?

##### Response:

*'To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering'* Aldo Leopold

*Resilience ... describes a suite of social or ecological system properties. Holling's original definition explains: 'resilience determines the persistence of relationships within a system and is a measure of the ability of these systems to absorb change of state variable, driving variables, and parameters, and still persist.'*<sup>13</sup>

Dingoes, as Australia's native apex land predators, are a keystone 'cog in the wheel' species that provide ecosystem resilience and stability and an overall net benefit to healthy ecosystem function. It is their removal from the landscape that has allowed for explosions in the numbers of

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/bunjils-shelter>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol17/iss4/art28/>



deer and other large herbivores as well as foxes and feral cats, negatively impacting on smaller mammals, birds and reptiles and accelerating species declines.

As top predators, through complex social and territorial behaviours, Dingoes regulate their own populations. Lethal control of Dingoes negatively impacts on this natural balance, breaking down social structures and territory boundaries, potentially causing unregulated breeding. Dingoes will not only regulate the numbers of 'pest' and prey species but also regulate their own populations.<sup>14</sup>

The Australian Dingo Foundation (ADF) have not been stakeholders in the 'Greater Gariweld Draft Landscape Management Plan' however we would anticipate that sheep farmers in the Gariweld region would be important stakeholders in the decision making process. The ADF would suggest that graziers' concerns could be appeased by redirecting (at least in part) current funding for toxins and other lethal control into compensating farmers for verified livestock losses as well investing in the use non-lethal livestock protection strategies, including the use of guardian animals, tracking collars for dingoes, exclusion fencing, fladry, solar powered, motion sensed deterrents and/or changes / improvements in livestock husbandry.

It is the view of the Australian Dingo Foundation, that with the recent approval to fence off the Wilson Promontory National Park<sup>15</sup>, this could provide an incredible opportunity for Victoria to lead the way in trialling a dingo rewilding project, without any potential adverse impacts on graziers.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1469-185X.2011.00203.x>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/projects/wilsons-prom-revitalisation>