

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the ***Inquiry into the loss of biodiversity and Ecosystem decline in Victoria***. I am a health professional and a professional dog trainer and as such am very concerned about the future of our planet for both human, and non-human, animals whom I regard as equally important. We are in the midst of the 6<sup>th</sup> mass extinction entirely driven by the behaviour of our own species.

I would like to discuss some of the major causes of biodiversity loss in relation to my own experience, hone in on one particular species which is dear to my heart, dingoes, and then offer some solutions.

***Terms of reference: Consider the decline of Victoria's ecosystems and measures to restore habitats and populations of threatened and endangered species***

Definition of Biodiversity: The variety of all living things; the different plants, animals and microorganisms, the genetic information they contain and the ecosystems they form.

Some of the major causes of biodiversity loss:

Habitat loss. We are destroying the biodiversity of our planet by habitat loss mainly by clearing land for housing and for agriculture. Humans have become the dominant species on the planet and are constantly encroaching on animal habitat without sharing the natural resources.

<https://soe.environment.gov.au/theme/overview/topic/land-use-change-and-habitat-fragmentation-and-degradation-threaten-ecosystems>

Introduced animals. Humans have introduced animals which are not suited to Australian soils such as cattle and sheep. We then kill native animals which are seen to be in competition with them such as kangaroos and dingoes, often in horrendous ways such as poisoning. Ruminant animals give off methane, a gas which is 28 times more potent than carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide, a molecule 265 times more potent than carbon dioxide, thus contributing to climate change.

Animal agriculture and climate change. Animal agriculture is a major driver of climate change and the leading cause of biodiversity loss largely due to land clearing and deforestation. Approximately 56% of Australian land is dedicated to animal agriculture.

Another major problem associated with animal agriculture is antibiotic resistance due to the fact that antibiotics are used as a growth promotant for animals and to prevent disease in overcrowded environments. Animal agriculture is responsible for about 80% of emerging diseases including Covid-19, SARS and MERS. The World Health Organisation state that antibiotic resistance is one of the biggest threats to global health, food security and development today.

The Department of Agriculture ignores these effects because exploiting these animals' results in economic growth and farmers are encouraged financially to breed even more of these introduced species.

Pollution. Most of Australia's energy needs relies on traditional sources; fossil fuels, although renewables are now contributing. Market forces estimates that tax-based fossil fuel subsidies cost over \$12 billion a year federally. Australia has an extremely bad reputation overseas as one of the world's biggest supporters of the fossil fuel industry.

<https://www.marketforces.org.au/campaigns/ffs/#:~:text=Market%20Forces%20estimates%20that%20tax,and%20use%20of%20fossil%20fuels.>

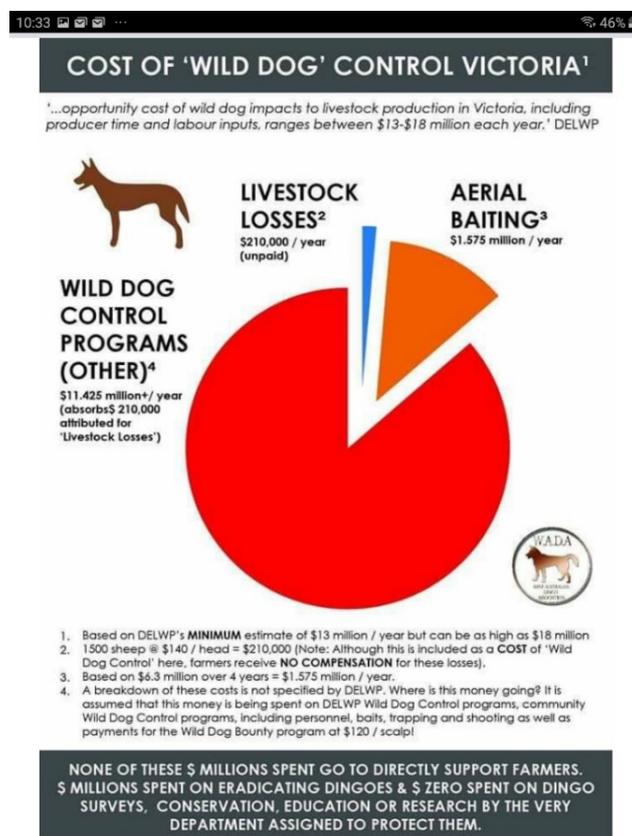
Australia has the highest per capita emissions in the OECD. In relation to this inquiry, fossil fuels are another major driver of climate change. As a result, nature is now out of balance leading to ecosystem decline. Plastic is another major pollutant and has a devastating effect on our oceans and wildlife.

Dingoes. I have been involved in dog training for almost 40 years and I must admit that one of my passions is all things canine. Dingoes (*Canis dingo*) are one of Australia's **native** species and are classified as endangered in Victoria. Since colonisation they have been relentlessly persecuted mostly in the name of protecting **introduced** species such as cattle and sheep. This puts Australia's unique biodiversity at risk by disrupting naturally functioning ecosystems.

The powerful "pest" control industry euphemistically calls dingoes "wild dogs" in order to justify killing them using inhumane and dangerous, schedule 7 poisons such as sodium monofluoroacetate (1080) and Para-aminopropiophenone (PAPP). Dingoes are known to suppress the hunting behaviours of feral cats and foxes and of course, they keep the rabbit population down. Given the opportunity, dingoes would keep introduced deer and brumby numbers under control at no cost! A Eureka award winning study at Evelyn Downs showed that allowing dingoes to survive actually caused less predation on farm animals. This is known as predator friendly farming. Where dingo populations are allowed to recover, invasive species decline considerably and native biodiversity increases.

[https://hsi.org.au/blog/australias-dingoes-vital-yet-villianised?utm\\_source=twitter.com&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=dingoes](https://hsi.org.au/blog/australias-dingoes-vital-yet-villianised?utm_source=twitter.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=dingoes)

Millions of dollars are spent each year on "wild dog" control for absolutely no benefit in the long term except to people employed in that industry as illustrated in the diagram below.



### Solutions to biodiversity loss:

1. Stop further land clearing for animal agriculture. Give farmers financial incentives to transition to plant-based agriculture and to grow trees on their properties. This would result in carbon capture, increase habitat for native species, use much less water and assist in improving animal welfare.
2. Return marginal land to native bush returning that ecosystem to a more natural state.
3. Cease logging native forest and require logging industries to plant suitable trees for harvesting. Disallow clear felling so that animals can easily move to a new habitat when adjacent trees are cut down.
4. Take advice from Aboriginal land managers about managing country and especially how to create slow burns which animals can escape and stop mega fires such as we saw in Victoria and elsewhere in 2019.
5. Stop killing our native apex predators, that is dingoes. Dingoes naturally keep meso predators such as foxes and cats under control. They also keep rabbit numbers down and control kangaroo numbers in a natural way taking the sick and weak. Killing apex predators causes a trophic cascade involving changes in predator and prey species which upsets the whole ecosystem. There are numerous humane alternatives and further research is needed into immunocontraception.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2018-07-07/culling-dingoes-changes-landscape/9938286>

6. Eliminate the use of dangerous poisons especially non target-specific poisons such as sodium monofluoroacetate (1080) which kills every animal which requires oxygen to breathe, including humans. The use of ground and aerial poisoning over huge swathes of land kills hundreds of non- target species including wildlife and working and pet dogs. The Australian Pesticide and Veterinary Medicine Authority admit that these products can take months to break down and also suggest they should not be used in urban areas, a directive which is not followed.

<https://www.al.org.au/1080/#:~:text=1080%20is%20a%20poison%20which,rabbits%2C%20pigs%20and%20other%20animals.>

A glance at the Facebook group, Australians against 1080 and PAPP poisons will verify how many non-target species are killed by these poisons with devastating effect.

1080 is commonly used to kill dingoes using the rationale that they are “wild dogs”. Peer reviewed studies by Kylie Cairns, a dingo geneticist says the term “wild dog” is misleading as canines in the wild are either pure dingo or have a high percentage of dingo DNA and actual wild dogs would not be capable of surviving for any length of time in the wild.

<https://www.kyliecairns.com/post/2019/10/10/renewal-of-aerial-baiting-exemption-in-victoria-for-wild-dog-control-using-1080>

