



From: POV eSubmission Form <ecosystems@parliament.vic.gov.au>
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Subject: New Submission to Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Categories: Submissions

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Mr Thomas McCutchan



SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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The decline of the Victorian ecosystem is absolutely in part due to the treatment of the Dingo. The Dingo is a naturalised native animal and Australia's apex predator.

The "wild dog" term and its consequences for public attitudes and awareness

In Australia, as well as internationally, the terms used to describe free-living animals and their management can have more cultural and emotive weight than their literal definitions, influencing stakeholder perceptions. For free-living horses, the term "feral horses" implies that horse management is an invasive species issue and thus removes legitimacy that might be afforded to the horses by terms like "wild horses", or even "brumbies" in Australia, which may give horses stronger cultural agency (Ballard 2005, Bhattacharyya et al. 2011). While "wild dog" has negative associations for the Australian public, "dingo" may have positive cultural associations because it portrays an image of an animal that may be considered iconic, and perhaps linked with the fact that it originated from an Aboriginal word (similar to "koala" or "kangaroo"). This accords with our findings that most respondents consider dingoes to be native (and therefore belong).

How wildlife and pest management issues are presented to the public shapes public understanding and support (Houston et al. 2010, Kidd et al. 2019), and a negative image has been constructed around the dingo since European colonisation in Australia (Parker 2007). This is important when considering that attitudes towards "wild dogs" were negative and significantly more so than attitudes towards dingoes, which were positive, yet only around one in five respondents was aware that "wild dog" management included dingoes. Further, respondents showed greater support for killing "wild dogs" than they did "dingoes" in response to attacks on livestock or predation on threatened species. These findings support our hypothesis that use of the term "wild dog" may obscure public awareness about dingo management.

We do not have data on how the terms "dingo" and "wild dog" are presented in mainstream media, but academic literature shows disparity in how different interest groups use these terms, with "wild dogs" typically used in publications about impacts on livestock and "dingoes" used in literature about conservation (Kreplins et al. 2018).

Community groups lobby their local media with “shocking images” (of attacked livestock) to promote “a highly charged atmosphere for wild dog management” (Howard et al. 2018: 249). Building on this framing by wild dog control advocates, negative attitudes towards “wild dogs” might be because the term “wild dogs” renders the dingo invisible and implies the focus is on invasive pest management (i.e., of feral dogs), according with public acceptance of management of introduced animals (Hytten 2009, Letnic et al. 2012). Indeed, government biosecurity staff have reported that they’ve been advised by their employer not to use “dingo” in communications specifically because using this term in relation to lethal control may elicit a negative response by the public (unpublished data in van Eeden 2015). Putting aside whether “wild dog” management describes control of dingoes or domestic dogs gone wild, this process of othering strips away agency from animals that might otherwise be viewed as cute, charismatic, and even personally familiar as pets, rendering their extermination acceptable (Hillier 2017).

Elsewhere in Australia, research is showing that dingo predation can benefit both native ecosystems and agriculture by keeping kangaroo populations low. Without predators, kangaroo numbers are booming in areas south of the Dog Fence, leading to widespread vegetation damage and habitat destruction. This negatively impacts both wildlife and livestock.

In these ecosystems without dingoes, small, vulnerable species are suffering from two fronts; higher predation from feral cat and foxes, and higher kangaroo numbers destroying the vegetation which native wildlife need to hide from feral predators.

At what point is the risk of dingo predation to wildlife and livestock outweighed by the benefits of cat and fox exclusion and overabundant kangaroo population reduction? Arid Recovery seeks to understand the balancing act of when and where dingoes are ultimately beneficial.

I would also recommend looking at the affect that the re-introduced world population have had in Yellowstone national park in the USA

The current management of dingoes in Victoria is an utter disgrace. It is based on misinformation and fear monger mongering from the livestock industry. The Dingo plays a vital role in the Australian ecosystem.

Happy to discuss this further and I would appreciate a response

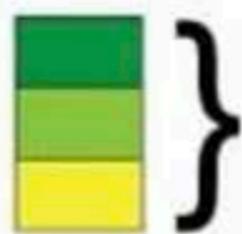
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File1: [5f4a2410406dd-2E0E3C08-0D8F-40B3-9E42-9AE1722CF085.png](#)

File2:

File3:

AUSTRALIA-WIDE DINGO ANCESTRY¹



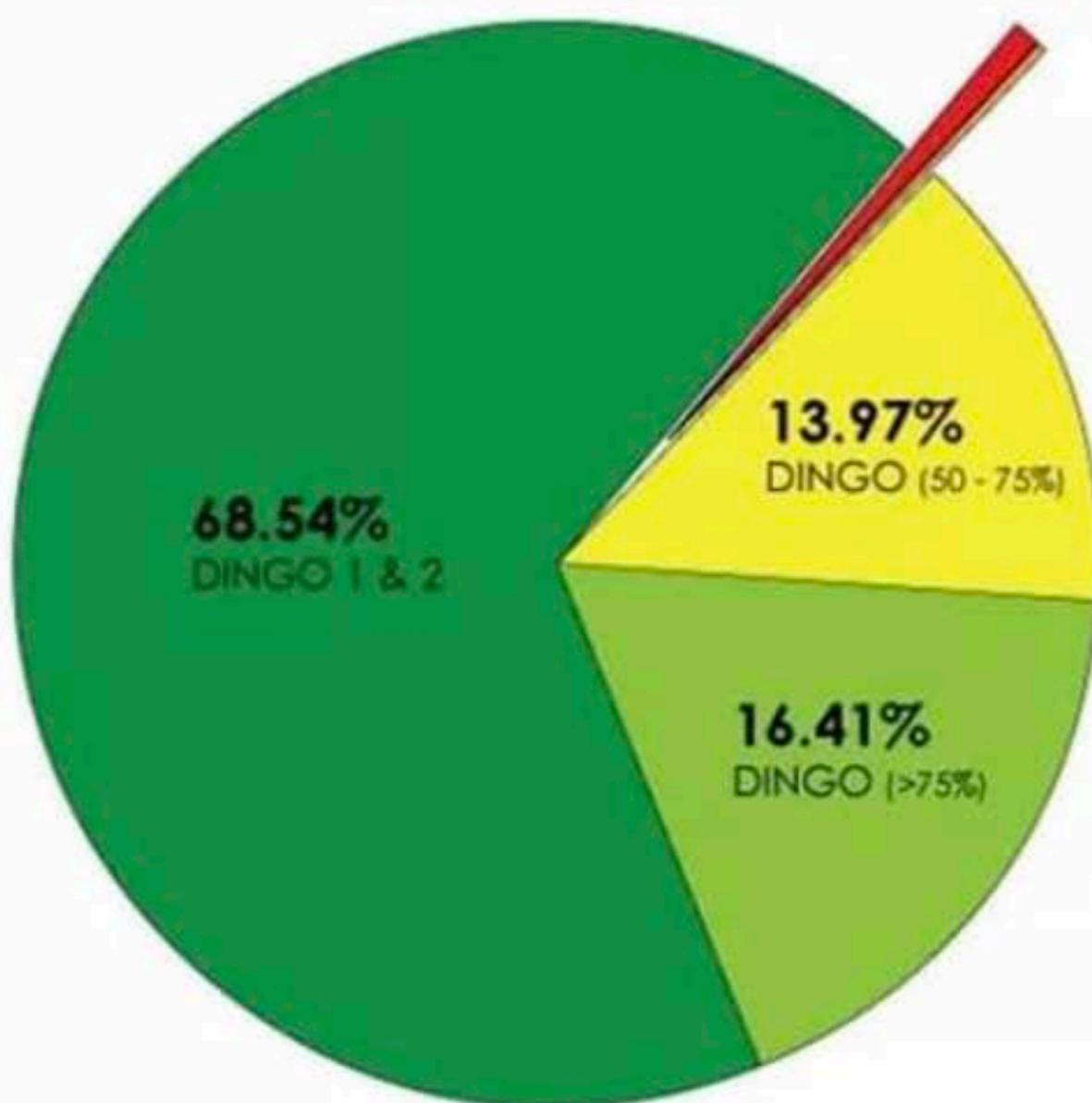
98.91% DINGO
(PURE DINGOES + >50%)



1.09% FERAL DOG
(DOG + <50% DINGO)

0.66%
FERAL DOG

0.43%
FERAL DOG
(<50% DINGO)



1. Raw data Stephens et al. (2015) plus Cairns et al. (2019) combined

Score	Description	No.	%
1	Dingo 1 & 2 (Dingo with no (or likely no) dog ancestry)	3033	68.54
2	Dingo with dog ancestry 1 (>75% dingo)	726	16.41
3	Dingo with dog ancestry 2 (50%-75% dingo)	618	13.97
4	Feral Dog with dingo ancestry (<50% dingo)	19	0.43
5	Feral Dog	29	0.66
		4425	