

The dingo dilemma: cull, contain or conserve - editors' prologue

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“The dingo dilemma: cull, contain or conserve” is the title we settled on when planning a repeat, after 20 years, of the 1999 Royal Zoological Society of NSW forum: “A symposium on the dingo.” The earlier title is neutral, whereas the 2019 forum carries the tensions and debates that had continued unresolved and vexatious over the intervening two decades. A flyer, advertising the day of the forum, captured the contemporary theme and the dilemmas of dingo management. We were aware that it was likely to be too stark for some scholars and practitioners in the field, but we were keen to push the debate forward. The flyer for the forum, set out below, captures our sense of where the primary dilemmas were located:

“In 1999, the Royal Zoological Society of NSW ran a symposium on the dingo. The papers from the day were published by the Society in 2001 as *A symposium on the dingo* (edited by Chris Dickman and Dan Lunney). All the papers from that symposium are freely available on the website of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW. Now, 20 years after the initial symposium, we are taking the opportunity to bring together much of the large body of research and ideas that have advanced our understanding of the dingo since 1999.”

The forum was held on 7 September 2019 in the Taronga Institute Lecture Theatre at Taronga Zoo, Mosman NSW.

The day was structured around a sequence of broad topics to both update key themes from the earlier forum and to introduce new ideas. The key themes included hybridisation, the ecological effects of the dingo, legislative issues, and dingo management and conservation. Given that there is a wide range of views on how to manage dingoes, and wild dogs, the day's program was arranged so that the papers reflected the divergent views on this controversial carnivore. Importantly, the day included cultural perspectives on the dingo, a view that had been previously overlooked in the debate about how to understand and manage the dingo.

The very term “dingo” is evocative. For some people, dingoes are to be admired, but for others, they are to be feared. This creates a dilemma as to how we, as a nation, should manage the dingo. The options include culling this carnivore, especially where it preys on stock, or containing dingoes with fences, or at the other end of the spectrum, conserving the dingo because of its role as an apex predator that has recognisable benefits for managing ecosystems, including suppressing the invasive alien carnivores – the cat and the fox. There is also the argument as to whether the dingo is a native species, and if yes, whether it qualifies for listing as threatened. Where

such tensions exist, there is a pressing need to review how and why we manage dingoes. This debate requires many voices, and in our opinion, the science of zoology has much to contribute. Hence this forum being a program of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW.

On the day of the forum, the spoken papers were presented, posters were displayed, and plenary debates held at four points in the day's program. This theme edition of *Australian Zoologist* publishes the forum and captures the diversity of ideas, science, and not unexpectedly, the emotions that run high on many of the issues. The aim of this prologue is to establish the context for the forum and give some background details.

Two years prior to the forum, at a dinner table at the International Mammalogical Congress in Perth, one of us, Thomas Newsome, argued the case for a re-run of the 1999 Royal Zoological Society of NSW symposium on the dingo. The case rested on the fact that so much had changed academically, new studies had been run and published, and that there were new insights from all the professional groups dealing with dingoes. Yet, many of the old concerns had remained, and new ones had arisen, as is evident as you read all the papers and follow the plenary debates in this theme edition. Mike Calver, former Royal Zoological Society of NSW councillor, and Perth academic, was sitting at the table and he thought that it was a great idea. The other two editors – Chris Dickman and Dan Lunney – were also sitting at the table and agreed to revisit the theme.

To our delight, and surprise, there was an immediate and enthusiastic response by the Royal Zoological Society of NSW council, and soon after when we invited speakers. We finished up with the longest list of speakers that we have ever put on stage in any previous forum, meaning that each spoken paper was shorter than in previous years, with the opportunity to expand on the points in the written work to follow. There were also more posters, and we thus had a strong forum, a wide range of viewpoints, and thus an opportunity to go some way to addressing the dilemma of how to see, manage and talk about dingoes, including the determined use in some circles of the term “wild dog”.

The day of the forum was arranged thematically, starting with an introduction to the many and varied themes that followed. At four times during the day the presentations were halted so that plenary sessions could be run. The objective was to hear other ideas, listen to other opinions, and address straightforward questions seeking clarifications of various points. Each plenary had the speakers from that

session sitting in a row at the front so that questions and answers could be easily managed. At each plenary session, some of the poster authors joined the row of presenters.

The facilitator of the day was Paul Willis, a master of asking a seemingly simple question, and pulling questions and answers from sometimes reluctant audience members and authors. Paul's trademark style calmed some frayed nerves, and provided an antidote to points that grate on others. Do read the plenary sessions, there are many new ideas and challenges to old ones. As part of capturing the day, photos were taken, and they are presented as part of this prologue and at the end of each plenary session.

The success of the day can be gauged by the reaction of Pat Hutchings, President of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW, who thought that the day was fascinating for its diversity and the strength of the individual papers. Pat was a member of the NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee that considered the listing of the dingo, so these arguments were not new. However, the real surprise here is that Pat is deeply committed to invertebrate life, and bristle worms in particular, so to revel in a day devoted just to one charismatic vertebrate is testimony indeed to the gripping sequence of ideas and scholarship that were on display. The large and diverse audience, the wide range of ages, including babies and retired scholars, all bear witness to the wide interest and grip that the dingo has on the public imagination, and the desire to know more.

As editors, we are indebted to many people. The first are the council members of the Royal Zoological

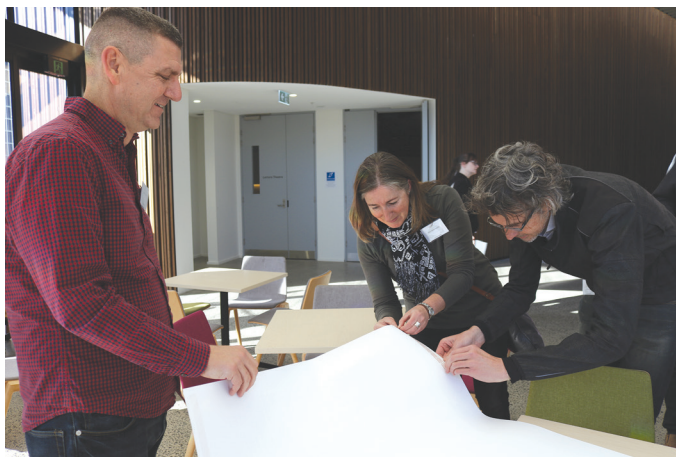
Society of NSW for their continued support up to and during the day, as well as for support in publishing the outcome of the forum. The next are the authors, both those who presented on the day, and those who are authors and co-authors here. These include all the poster presenters. We are indebted to the many referees. Reviewing is a silent task, anonymity is standard, but not compulsory, and many hours are devoted to reading and critically reviewing a submitted paper. The independent refereeing process is a critical component in making sure that the published papers are of the highest standard. The authors are thanked once again for revising their papers in the light of the comments received.

The day was recorded by Spark and Canon and the transcript served as an invaluable way to record plenary sessions, as well as supplying transcripts to authors to assist in preparing their paper as a written version. We also thank Ros Sherratt for her skills as a layout artist in making each paper, and the cover, visually attractive. Good writing and a good layout make a lot of difference. Judging from the sustained readership of the previous symposium, these papers will be downloaded and cited for decades.

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APPENDIX I



From left to right, Royal Zoological Society of NSW council members Martin Predavec, Adele Haythornthwaite and Peter Banks organising a poster to be stuck on the glass walls of the Taronga theatre. All the photos (except one in the final plenary session) were taken by Dan Lunney.

APPENDIX I



President of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW, Pat Hutchings, introducing the day, and then chairing the first session of presentations.



Chris Dickman holding up a copy of the publication arising from the Society's dingo symposium of 1999.

APPENDIX I



Morning tea time, courtyard to Taronga Theatre, from left: Peter Banks, Jenna Bytheway and Emma Spencer. Both Peter and Emma are standing near their posters.



Beginning of lunch time. Mike Fleming (left) in conversation with Stephen Jackson.



Alex Carthey, with baby Stella, standing next to her poster.

Paul Willis



Afternoon tea (from left): Chris Dickman, Nathan New with son Henry (note dingo on the baby pouch), and Lily van Eeden.



Chatting at the end of the day of the dingo forum. Seated, left foreground, Stephen Ambrose, timekeeper for the day.