

# A statement on the cultural importance of the dingo

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*Dingo is language down home in Warragul. He's in songline. Warragul songline. He's in there. It's the cultural connection that the dingo represents that we want to share here.*

The dingo is a native animal under the NSW *Biodiversity and Conservation Act 2016*, (previously under the NSW *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*) but it has not afforded any protection under either Act. Our cultural heritage also sits under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* and it is afforded protection, so we say the dingo is of cultural heritage value and feature of the environment and, therefore, it should be protected under these Acts. We've got dingo in artwork in rock shelters, in painting. We've got them buried with old people, but the living relationship, where we connect with the dingo, doesn't seem to be protected. Indeed, a dingo could visit a rock shelter. It could shit in a rock shelter, fossilise, become an object and, therefore, it's going to be protected under the National Parks and Wildlife Act, but our connection and songline or story is not getting represented or acknowledged in the same way.

There are many culturally significant species that are important culturally to us and others across the country. We feel like there's a real lack of understanding around the relevance of our cultural relationship to plants and animals, and a misunderstanding around how it works for us. Dingoes are threatened on our country. There's a lot of country that's dingo country where dingoes are at risk, and it's against our cultural law to harm or kill anything if it's not being used for a purpose like food or has broken the law. All plants and animals have those roles and responsibilities to each other. That's kinship and that's a big part of the story for us about understanding that there is a cultural landscape. There is a kinship process that's in place in the landscape and it's the sort of thing that we really value as traditional custodians, and there are many traditional custodians out there that want those values acknowledged too.

For the dingo, we've got songlines at home. We've got dingo places. If that place, where it's by law protected, is being impacted then that's a breach of our law and practice. There's all these plants and animals, all through these landscapes and in those places that are powerful for those animals. They're the increase sites. They're the places that our old people used to sing and dance and tell story. They create that songline, that kinship that connects us.

In our country, we have connections to plants and animals that run up and down the north and south coast and

along the ranges. They connect us all locally, but they also connect us across the regions. There is a lot of really important work that needs to be done to help build that recognition around the more appropriate ways of being able to understand our roles and relationships to country and understanding that they're different.

But you can't just talk to us about dingoes everywhere. You've got to talk to local custodians. You've got to understand that there's a whole heap of colonising factors that have disempowered our people, our connection to country and our ability to practise our culture. But there are many young people and old people out there that want to see their country healthy again and the only place, the only way to see country is to have our place back in that landscape understanding that kinship.

We know what it feels like to be a dingo. Dingoes are our brothers and sisters. We have that family, that connection to them. Therefore, if a dingo is being impacted negatively, well, that's a prosecution of our laws. That's the way that we want you to look at it. We want to work with land titles and stakeholders and, we want to manage dingo impacts, but always in a way that respects its cultural significance. To do this, it's so important that we come together and understand those roles and responsibilities that we have, that we have different values and we come from different places. That's why the old people developed the kinship that exists and that's how the land and the dingo gets looked after.

In our country specifically, the South Coast People have serious concerns regarding the aerial baiting of dingoes and its impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage values. The baiting programs are not developed in consultation with the Aboriginal community. It is primarily Aboriginal people who should determine the significance of Aboriginal cultural heritage values. Therefore, consultation with Aboriginal communities is fundamental to the effective management and protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Warrigal in local Dhurga language translates to wild dog, and he features prominently in our creation stories, and has great spiritual significance and is a part of who we are and represent. Warrigal plays a significant spiritual, totemic, cultural, dialect relationships in our culture. Hence, the dingo should be afforded the same protection under the National Parks and Wildlife Act, as we consider them a significant Aboriginal cultural feature of the landscape.

Aerial baiting has the potential to cause catastrophic impacts to native dingo populations and may potentially lead to localised extinction. This will impact on our Aboriginal cultural values. Dingoes maintain their ecological function in our country. They suppress the abundance or activity of other pest animals such as cats and foxes and may help protect smaller mammals. Baiting can also impact other native apex predators that eat the toxic baits, such as the spotted-tailed quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*). We fear that baiting will lead to severe impacts (e.g. localised extinction) of these species as well.

Our other concerns relate to the use of the term wild dog. The cultural definition of what is a dingo is based of physical attributes of the animal. Thus, what looks like a dingo is a dingo, and if it behaves like a dingo

it is a dingo. There is a growing trend and language acceptance that there are no dingoes, they are feral dogs. We view the dingo as being distinct to that of a feral dog, which is why we view the term wild dog as a misleading classification labelling both dingo and dog as one species.

We acknowledge the constant battle of the dingo with the agricultural industry. But if we are to properly acknowledge and respect the cultural importance of the dingo, we recommend a moratorium on dingo control until the impacts to cultural heritage values are adequately addressed, and people like ourselves are provided verifiable assurance that our cultural heritage is not negatively impacted. A formalised cultural consultation processes is what we would like to see in the future, so that we can work together to protect the cultural importance of the dingo.