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Why conserve the Australian dingo?

Dingoes are a native species

The dingo is a unique, ancient, and scientifically valuable member of the Canidae family. Dingoes have been in mainland Australia for at least 5,000 years. They have become naturalised; co-adapting with endemic animals and local environmental conditions. In evolutionary terms, the dingo is distinct, having been geographically isolated from other canids. Genetic mixing with domestic dogs is a recent phenomenon and does not void their value as native animals.

Dingoes are culturally significant

The dingo is culturally important to many First Nations Australians. Management of dingoes should not be undertaken without culturally appropriate consultation. Aesthetic and existence values of the dingo are important to many Australians, making it an iconic Australian animal deeply embedded in historic and modern Australian culture.

Dingoes provide a key ecological function

The extinction of a diverse suite of large carnivorous marsupials some thousands of years ago (and the more recent local and functional extinctions of quoll species across much of Australia) has changed the structure of Australian wildlife communities. Globally, declining predator populations tend to be associated with ecosystem instability and native species decline. As the largest mammalian predator in Australia, dingoes have an important ecological role. Their medium body size (average weight = 15.7 kg) and generalist diet means they strongly interact with other native species at all trophic levels, and these interactions can produce positive outcomes for other populations and species, ultimately benefiting ecosystems. Research to better understand positive, neutral and negative interactions between dingoes and other species (native and invasive) is ongoing. Preserving the dingoes' ecological role is a key part of maintaining the long-term health and biodiversity of local ecosystems.

Many people believe conservation of native fauna is a moral imperative

Australia has the worst mammal extinction rate in the world. Protecting our remaining fauna and flora is a high priority, and like other native animals, Australians expect that dingoes should be conserved. Positive attitudes towards dingoes and other predators are increasing and formal dingo conservation strategies are needed to address these changing perspectives. In some instances, conservation strategies may require some changes from traditional management approaches towards those that better recognise

the conservation value of dingoes. One way of achieving this may be through increased tolerance toward carnivores and their impacts and/or investment in non-lethal dingo management and livestock protection tools.



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Dingo conservation can enhance agricultural productivity

Dingoes prey on a wide variety of native and introduced species that cause negative impacts to crop and livestock producers. These, mostly herbivorous species compete with livestock and damage crops, and maintenance of dingoes in some agricultural areas can reduce damage from these other species. Management approaches that harness the ecosystem services of dingoes can improve agricultural productivity in many cases. Policy and management should focus not only on minimising the negative impacts of dingoes, but also on maximising their positive impact on agricultural production. With professional support, stakeholders should develop and implement strategic plans that identify the most appropriate management options for a given situation.

Summary

Dingoes are a native species with important ecological roles, and we seek to encourage an increase in the active protection of dingoes where required. Across Australia there are many dingo populations that have little to no modern dog ancestry, and management programs should continue to minimise the likelihood of future dingo x dog hybridisation. The presence of biogeographic variation in dingoes demonstrates value in wildlife managers and governments conserving locally adapted ecotypes. We urge a national recognition of dingo conservation values, and consistency in state and federal legislation regarding their status and management. Achieving this may require some changes from traditional management approaches towards those that better recognise the conservation value of dingoes to agriculture and society.