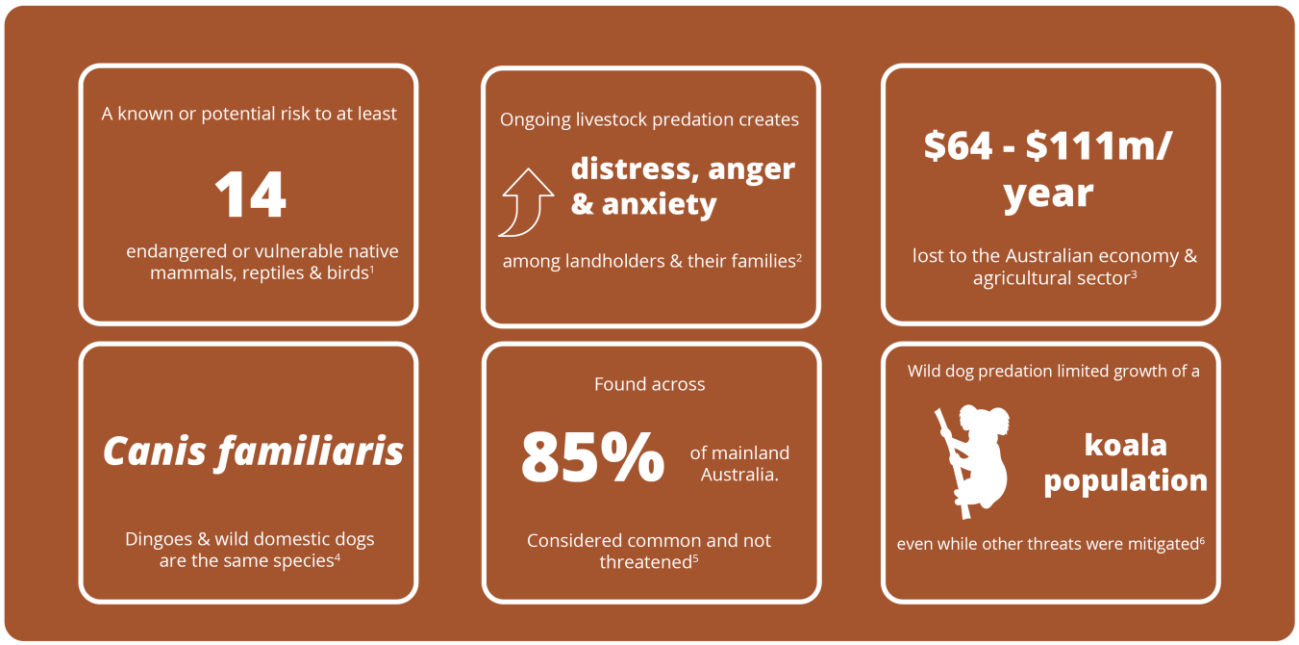
Managing wild dog populations

By Georgy Hadwen, HOPE researcher Qld (April 2024)

Wild dogs are an ill-defined group but according to a new study led by UNSW Sydney shows almost all wild canines in Australia are genetically more than half dingo, – suggesting that lethal measures to control 'wild dog' populations are primarily targeting dingoes

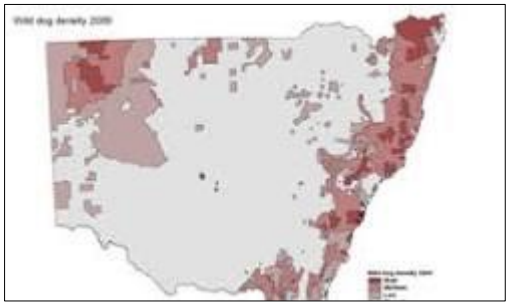
Notwithstanding: Managing wild dog populations in Australia presents several key challenges due to their impact on livestock, native wildlife, and ecosystems.

Dogs (not) gone wild: DNA tests show most 'wild dogs' in Australia are pure dingoes (unsw.edu.au)



https://pestsmart.org.au/toolkits/wild-dogs/

Wild dogs form substantial feral populations throughout Australia as illustrated in NSW.



https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity/vertebrate-pests/pest-animals-in-nsw/wild-dogs/wild-dog-biology

Some of the key issues include:

1. Predation on Livestock: Wild dogs pose a significant threat to livestock industries, resulting in economic losses for farmers and graziers.

2. Threat to Native Wildlife: Wild dogs can also prey on native wildlife, particularly small mammals and ground-nesting birds, leading to biodiversity loss and ecosystem imbalances.

3. Disease Transmission: Wild dogs can carry diseases such as hydatid disease, which can be transmitted to livestock and humans, posing public health risks.

4. Control Methods: Implementing effective control methods for wild dogs can be challenging due to their elusive nature and large, inaccessible habitats.

5. Social and Ethical Considerations: Some control methods, such as baiting and shooting, raise ethical concerns and may face opposition from the community.

To address these issues, policies for managing wild dog populations should focus on:

1. Research and Monitoring: Investing in research to better understand wild dog behaviour, population dynamics, and their ecological impact. Regular monitoring of populations and their interactions with livestock and wildlife is essential for informed management decisions.

2. Integrated Pest Management (IPM): Implementing a combination of control methods, such as trapping, baiting, shooting, and guardian animals (e.g., livestock guardian dogs), tailored to specific landscapes and situations.

3. Collaborative Approaches: Engaging with stakeholders, including landholders, Indigenous communities, government agencies, and conservation groups, to develop and implement coordinated management strategies.

4. Education and Awareness: Providing education and training programs for landholders on wild dog management techniques, biosecurity measures, and responsible pet ownership.

5. Regulation and Enforcement: Enforcing regulations related to the control of wild dogs, such as mandatory microchipping, registration, and containment requirements for domestic dogs to prevent them from becoming feral.

6. Research into alternative birth control methods: Supporting research into non-lethal and humane control methods, such as fertility control, genetic management, and development of novel repellents.

7. Biosecurity Measures: Implementing biosecurity measures on farms to reduce the risk of wild dog incursions, such as secure fencing, monitoring, and early detection systems.

Responsibilities placed on dog ownership should include:

1. Registration and Identification: Mandatory registration and microchipping of all domestic dogs to facilitate traceability and responsible ownership.

2. Containment: Ensuring domestic dogs are securely contained within properties or under effective control when off-leash to prevent them from roaming and potentially forming or contributing to wild dog populations.

3. Vaccination and Health Care: Regular vaccination, health checks, and parasite control for domestic dogs to minimize the risk of disease transmission to livestock and wildlife.

4. Training and Socialisation: Providing appropriate training and socialisation for domestic dogs to reduce the likelihood of aggressive behaviour towards livestock or wildlife.

5. Responsible Breeding Practices: Encouraging responsible breeding practices to prevent overpopulation and reduce the number of unwanted or abandoned dogs that may contribute to feral populations. Recent news coverage reported issues with abandoned pregnant dogs forcing charities

to accommodate and rehabilitate high numbers of dogs, many of whom are traumatised and unable to make that transition.

Globally the issue of wild dogs is not new: as indicated in the introduction Wild dogs had direct DNA links to Dingoes.

The population of dingoes in Australia is entirely due to imported animals by the first nation populations ensuring a breeding population that is now recognised as an Australian sub- genus - massively impacting on native marsupials.

Similarly, countries on low incomes have problematic wild dog populations including parts of India and sub-Saharan Africa as well as Eastern Bloc countries [sic] whose policy on dog ownership and fees created feral dog populations almost overnight and still exist into 2024.

Addressing these issues and implementing comprehensive policies and responsibilities, Australia must and can better manage wild dog populations while promoting responsible dog ownership and safeguarding agricultural productivity, biodiversity, and public health.

References

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