Submission No 515

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Mr Rob Costello
Mr David Donnelly
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Mr Jaime Robertson

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Opening Statement -

As graziers from the Northern Tablelands eastern fall, we welcome this opportunity to bring before the inquiry members matters of great importance to us.

Our group to address the inquiry is made up five landholders with properties adjacent to heavily timbered state forest and national parks estate lands.

We believe that the concerns we express will be very much parallel to the large number of affected landholders along the eastern fall of the Northern Tablelands from Tenterfield to Walcha and beyond.

Following discussions, we have lodged our individual submissions together with this jointly composed submission. Our uniform views:

- Our major issues with Crown Land are:
    - Wild dogs emanating from State Forest and National Parks onto farmlands
    - Fire control and prevention within and adjacent to Crown Lands (State forests, National parks)
    - Other Crown Land matters (TSRs etc)

Specific detail is set out below:

- **<u>Wild dogs emanating from State Forest and National Parks onto farmlands</u>**

    - Wild Dog numbers along the escarpment are significant and the problem is continuing to worsen

Data provided by New England Livestock Health and Pest Authority indicates:

2012 January to October	
Dogs sighted	581
Stock losses	1,073
Stock bitten	497
Dogs killed	183

It should be noted that the above figures are effectively understated due to the lack of reporting by many farmers.

- The question of “native status” of Wild Dogs applies to limited areas

From the feedback we have received the bulk of Wild Dogs DNA sampled show that they rarely represent anything near pure dingo status. If it is considered that there are areas of near pure dingo populations, then it is a matter for the government to keep them within these areas.

- Currently adjacent graziers are the wild dog buffer zone

By default, graziers within ten to twenty kilometres from the heavily forested state forest and national parks lands have become a buffer zone for wild dog control. These graziers must bear the heavy impacts of wild dogs together with a high annual resource cost to try to prevent the problem from getting totally out of control.

- Buffer zone should be within NPWS and SF lands with farmlands as supplementary buffer only

We believe that as the wild dog problem emanates from the Crown lands, that the buffer zone must be within the crown land. Dogs are in fact much easier to control within their home range than when they escape into semi open adjacent farmland. The eastern fall of the Northern Tablelands is a high rainfall productive zone and farmers should not have this additional burden placed on them.

- Buffer zones should include all state forest lands and NPWS controlled lands up to 10 km within these lands where feasible

To be effective a buffer zone within Crown land should be ten kilometres wide where practical. A ten kilometre distance is well within the capability for a wild dog to travel and thus the current perimeter wild dog baiting has minimal impact on the sustained Wild Dog incursions into farmland.

- Wild Dog control measures are considerably more effective within forested "Wild Dog Home Territory" than in adjacent farmland
- Ground baiting along fire trails within NPWS and state forest boundaries is a very effective strategy

As part of the overall Wild Dog control strategy, ground baiting adjacent to fire trails in the timbered Crown lands is a very important component to Wild Dog control measures due to the fact that Wild Dogs follow these trails. Additional fire trails within the national park estate therefore have an effective dual purpose.

- NPWS has limited resources to manage wild dogs effectively

It appears that extensions of the total national parks estate state wide are not always matched with new resources. Much of the more remote NPWS estate ends up left to "self managed" status as resources are constantly required to maintain the public areas. It is very often the case that these more remote areas adjoin farmland. It is simply not possible for the current NPWS resources to manage and control Wild Dogs and prevent the carnage and associated costs to adjoining landholders.

It is acknowledged that in quite a number of areas there is very good co-operation from NPWS pest animal control officers, however resources are limited given the very extensive NPWS to freehold land perimeter.

- NPWS wild dog control measures vary from district to district

Unfortunately, not all graziers report the same level of co-operation as the authors of this submission.

- Wild Dog eradication should involve should be strategic and involve:
  - Aerial baiting at 40 baits / km
  - Ground baiting
  - Trapping / shooting
  - Fencing (where appropriate). Clear boundaries relative to the height of the timber are necessary in order that boundaries can be maintained.
  - Constant monitoring for Wild Dog activity
- Wild Dog control should be nil tenure

This position has been endorses by the NSW Wild Dog Working Group and is a component within the State Wild Dog Management Strategy.

- Our experience shows that native wildlife (quolls, brush turkeys, possums) are more prolific in consistently Wild Dog baited areas.
- Wild Dogs have very significant negative impacts on landholders within the buffer zones (financial, stress, resources)

This position is borne out within the individual submissions.

- Wild dog impacts affect cattle producers as well as sheep producers

The individual submissions forwarded to the inquiry point out that cattle producers are seriously affected by the Wild Dog menace. Wherever there are breeding cattle adjacent to Wild Dog affected areas, there will be negative impacts.

- Wild Dogs and foxes carry harmful diseases affecting livestock (Neospora, Hydatids)

Group member, Rob Costello will elaborate further on these issues.

- Farmers often have a strategy to control foxes, cats and other feral animals.

The suggestion that there may be merit in the mesopredator theory must be addressed within the context of farmer controls of the other pest species. Any suggestion that the mesopredator theory should be the basis for allowing Wild Dogs to create havoc in farmlands is strongly rejected by the writers.

- New research should be supported and new techniques employed
- Wild Dog affected farmers have formed local and district Wild Dog Eradication Associations.

Sporting shooters can be to our advantage if some basic rules are followed:

- No shooting 4 weeks before and after baiting
- Contact with freehold neighbour to:
    - confirm direction of houses etc
    - When shooting will occur
    - Advise neighbour of any issues – eg fence breaks, Wild Dog tracks
    - Confirm that Wild Dog Trapper is not working in the area

In summary: We do have the prescription to the way forward, being the New South Wild Dog Strategy which needs to be fully supported by all government agencies.

- **Overall management of forested lands including fire management**

    - State Forests do not have the resources to manage the land they are responsible for, including:
        - Access trails / fire trails
        - Fire hazard reduction burns
        - Pest control
    - The NPWS estate is now so big and linked up that fire control is a major problem (eg recent Armidale fire)
    - There is an urgent need to put in place strategic fire control breaks through these vast areas.

- **Other Crown Land:**

    - TSRs should remain under Crown control
    - Where appropriate these lands should be leased to the adjoining landholder (who would be responsible for pest management)
    - Disused Railway line reserves should also be leased to adjoining landowners.
    - Legal fees for these arrangements should be reasonable.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the inquiry and we would be most pleased if our views can assist overcoming some of the difficulties landholders of this region endure.

Individuals –

Rob Costello

My name is Rob Costello. I am a 43 year old grazier who has been involved with my family's Angus cattle stud my entire life. Our Angus cattle stud, Nairn Park, celebrated its 50th year this year. I recently completed a Masters of Agriculture through UNE in which I undertook areas of study involving wild dog management and the disease risk related to wild dogs and other feral pests. I also studied units relating to sustainable land use, amongst others.

I am very passionate about educating youth in developing their skill set and knowledge of agriculture and NRM. I have been involved over the past 2 years with helping students at the New England Girls School (NEGS) in Armidale, to further their knowledge of cattle handling, judging and breeding. I have also tutored year 12 Agriculture students in the lead up to their HSC.

Potential threats to agriculture are a major concern to me and the wild dog issue is a serious threat to many livestock producers along the eastern escarpment at present. This threat is moving inland over a wider area each year affecting more and more producers.

From my knowledge gained from my lifetimes experience in Agriculture I believe that the wild dog problem facing producers in many regions like the New England region of NSW is one of the greatest threats to sustainable production faced by livestock producers of all classes of animals. There are at least six redundant woolsheds on neighbouring properties as livestock producers have been forced to switch enterprises. This has not reduced the wild dog activity in our area.

I have been the President of the Moona Winterbourne Wild Dog Control Association (WDCA) for the last 3 years. I have been involved with this group for the 10 years I have lived in the Walcha district. I have been actively involved with the research work on wild dogs conducted in our association's area by Dr Guy Ballard of the NSW DPI, with the help of NPWS. I have worked closely with rangers from the New England LHPA to plan and coordinate aerial baiting programs and other strategic wild dog control methods.

As the association President I am often faced with the emotional stress and anxiety that wild dog predation causes livestock producers in my association. Government estimates of the costs associated with wild dogs are grossly inadequate as it is difficult to quantify all the associated costs from an ecological, social and economic standpoint.

I grew up at Grafton on the NSW North Coast. My family purchased a property at Tenterfield called "Yoothamurra" in 1989 whilst I was at UNE studying economics and business studies. Yoothamurra is located 5km north of Tenterfield. We leased another Tenterfield property "Dingo Hill" in 1992 and purchased the adjoining property," Strathalpine" in 1993. These two properties are located on the Bruxner highway between 18km and 20km east of Tenterfield.

We held these properties until 2002 when they were sold to allow our move and expansion to Moona Plains Station, east of Walcha. The entire time I was at Tenterfield I sighted only 4 wild dogs, which were in a pack on Strathalpine. We never lost one head to wild dog predation in the time I was at Tenterfield. Recent years have seen numerous wild dog sightings and predation on all 3 Tenterfield properties we once held. The wild dog problem has developed at an alarming rate in the Tenterfield shire. I know this from conversations with the President of the Tenterfield combined Wild Dog Control Association (WDCA), Mr Allan Schroder.

This surge in wild dog activity is not isolated to the Tenterfield district. Similar stories are common throughout the New England and into parts of the North West. There are now documented reports of wild dog predation in areas such as Barraba, Warialda, Currabubula, Bendemeer and Woolbrook. It is clear that these dogs have originated from country to the east along the escarpment.

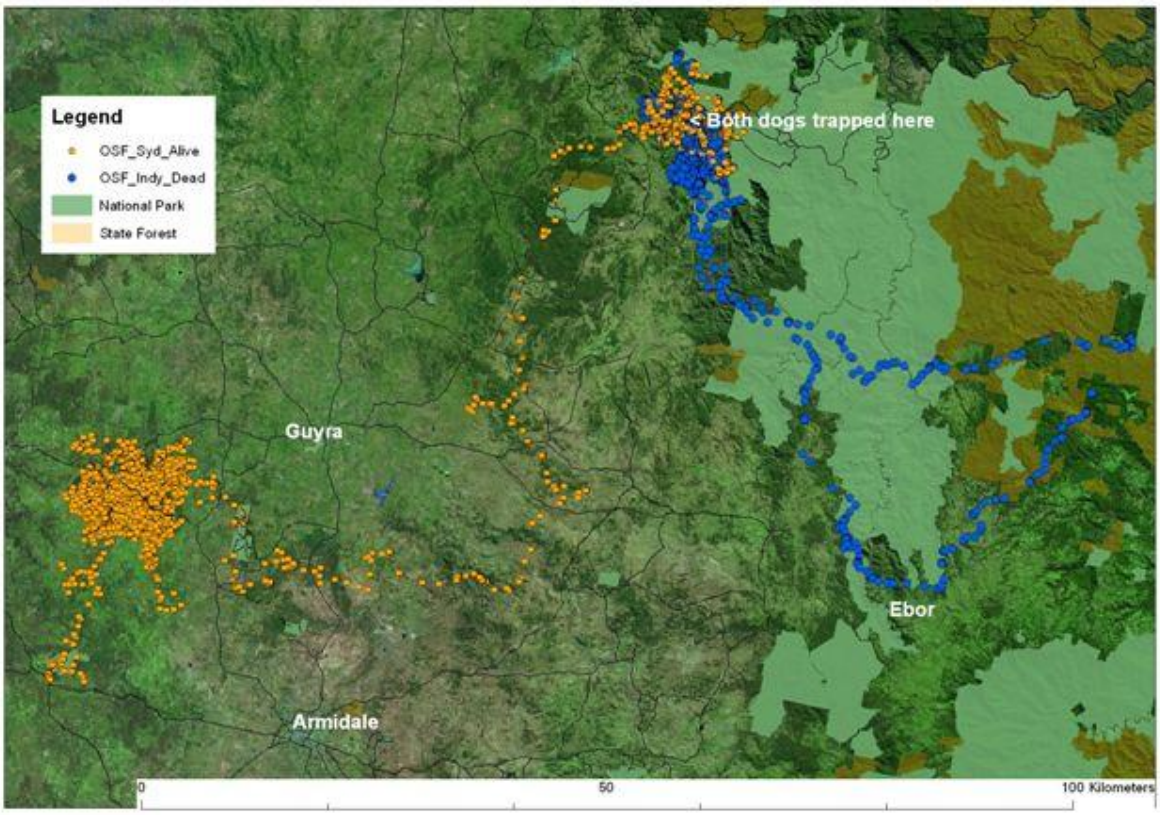
The fact that this is occurring suggests that current wild dog management has failed, on a regional level. I cannot speak for other regions of the state or country but I don't think our region is unique in

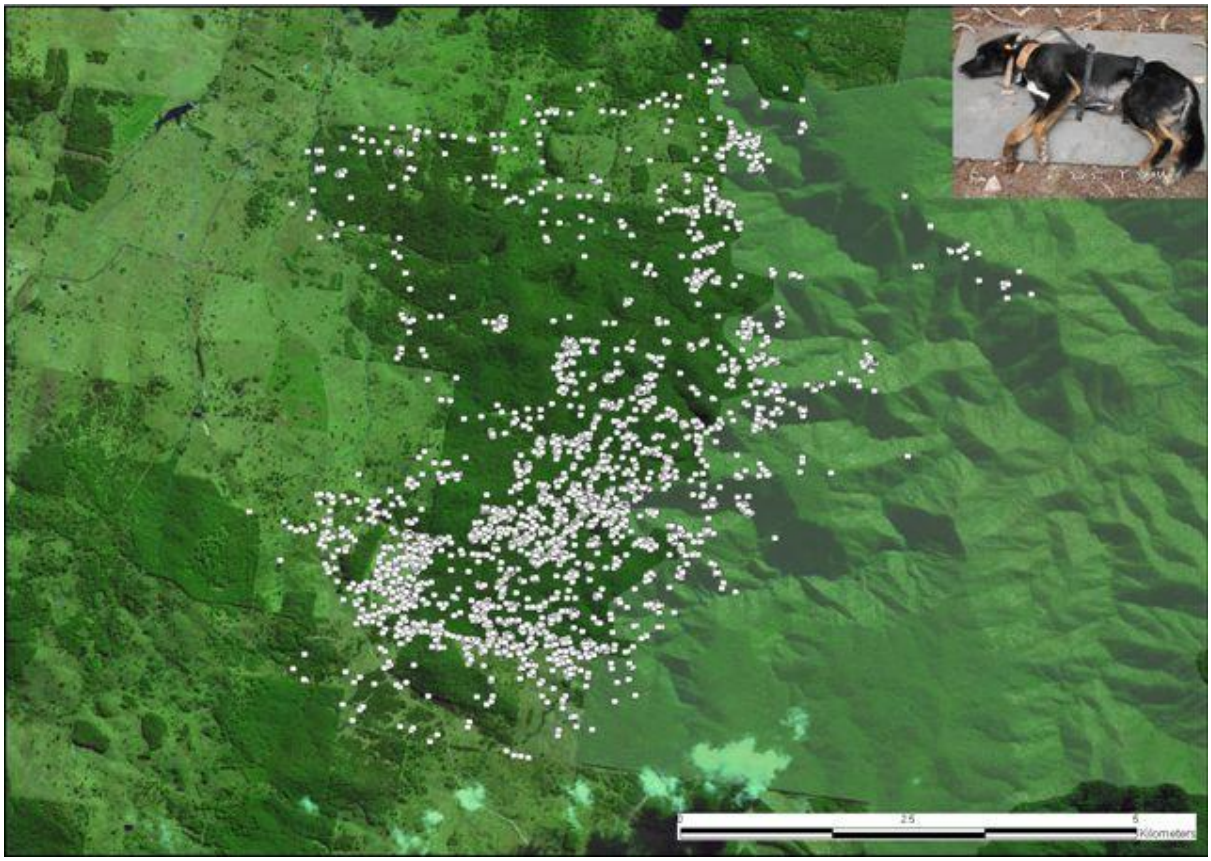
this problem. The Wee Jasper area of the state has documented problems that I have read as an example.

I have tried to obtain the cumulative figures for wild dog activity and stock losses in the New England for the last 5 years but discovered that no such records were collated until this year.

Wild dogs do not only impact on sheep producers. They have an impact on all livestock classes including cattle and goats. This is both directly through predation and indirectly through stock disturbance causing sub-optimal performance and diseases such as Neospora caninum and the zoonotic disease Hydatids. Wild dogs could also be involved in the spread of Theileria, which has little known about it. One known vector is the bush tick (*haemaphysalis longicornis*). If Rabies reaches Australia the potential spread through the feral animal population, including the wild dog population, would be concerning, to say the least. Little is known about what impact these diseases have on native fauna.

The following map highlights the movement of two wild dogs that were collared in the Wards Mistake area. Take note of the wild dog Syd (he is yellow) and the movement of that one wild dog. If this dog was carrying a disease like Neospora the area of spread would have been significant.





The above map shows a wild dog which was collared in the Walcha area. This shows then typical area or territory a wild dog covers.

An independent study undertaken in Qld for Agforce indicated that the total annual cost from wild dogs was greater than $67 million for the 2008/2009 year. Of this, Neospora accounted for $3.14 million and Hydatids was $2.06 million.

Wild dogs will never be controlled whilst the frontline remains in privately held grazing land where wild dog activity is often sporadic, making both strategic and reactive control measures difficult and less effective. Adding further problems to control methods are the ineffective laws that govern control of feral pests by private landowners. These leave the LHPA's as toothless tigers when it comes to enforcing the legislation.

The frontline needs to be centred further into National Parks where the dogs, core breeding areas are. The argument that this schedule 2 land is a core area for dingoes isn't supported by DNA testing that shows that most wild dogs are indeed hybrid animals and not purebred dingoes. Why should they be preserved if they aren't purebred?

The Crown land estates along the eastern escarpment are relatively linked up making an annual larger scale coordinated control and monitoring program a more feasible option if it is tied in with the current WDCA control programs. Bait rates at 40 baits/km produce a significantly higher success rate for eradicating wild dogs. NPWS currently baits at the lower rate of 10 baits/km.

The evidence shows that there needs to be a change in both attitudes and control measures in relation to wild dogs. They are a serious threat to some of the most productive grazing land in the

state along the high rainfall eastern fall of the New England. As wild dogs spread out across the landscape more and more livestock producers are going to face the financial and emotional burden that we producers along the eastern escarpment currently face. I wouldn't wish that burden on anyone I know.

David Donnelly

NSW WILD DOG WORKING GROUP - The Impact of Wild Dogs in Farmlands

This contribution attempts to portray the economic, social and aspects of environmental impacts of wild dogs in farming landscapes from the perspective of a farmer. Like so many farmers operating properties close to the eastern escarpment, I have had to include wild dog management as part of routine farm activities and similarly had to deal with the results of wild dog attacks on livestock.

Our eastern fall property: "Ferndale" was elaborately fenced some sixty years ago by a previous owner with a view to keeping the dogs out and running merino sheep. After about ten years of persistence and employing trappers and boundary riders he gave up. The trend to move out of sheep has continued westward to create a "non sheep" dog buffer of between five and ten kilometres wide. Whilst there are still some farms running sheep within this zone, the numbers are quite limited.

To remain viable, farmers over recent decades have had to adopt considerable savings and become more efficient. It is no longer an option to endure excessive losses of livestock caused by wild dog attacks, nor is it an option to pay staff to constantly check livestock. A loss of a couple of percent of calves to wild dogs can no longer be accepted as an overhead expense.

I predict that the impacts of wild dogs on a cattle operation will become more severe due to a number of factors, including:

- The move away from horned cattle to polled types. Polled cattle are less able to defend themselves and their calves.
- Lesser use of working dogs (as in our case) with the herd less accustomed to dogs.
- Larger herds for rotation purposes (as in our case) with more difficulties created during calving by wild dog disturbance.
- The hybridisation of various dog breeds causing differing stock attack modes.

Whilst sheep are much more vulnerable to wild dog attacks than cattle, there are common impacts of wild dogs on a farming business. The negative impacts are set out below:

Predation: This impact is often used as a gauge of wild dog activity. It is argued that it is completely unacceptable for wild dog activity to reach this point where productive livestock are maimed and slaughtered. In the case of a sheep farm the losses can be very high in a single night. In the case of a cattle operation young calves are killed and cows on the point of calving attacked and found drowned in dams where they have sought refuge.

Stock disturbance: Additional economic impacts include: stock being chased over fences with the subsequent repair costs, stock being difficult to handle, calves becoming motherless, wool being discounted. The practice of "yard weaning" of calves in the higher prevalence wild dog zones has a higher risk element due to the real potential of smothering of calves by wild dog menace.

Changed enterprise mix: When a farmer makes the decision to go out of sheep due to the burden of wild dogs there are impacts which may not be evident to far off administrators. These impacts include:

- Changed cash flow to farm enterprise
- Inability to capitalise on "opportunity store sheep purchases"
- Wasted infrastructure of significant value
- Construction costs of cattle infrastructure to replace sheep fences etc
- Loss of grazing benefits of dual stock operation (pasture utilisation, worm control etc)
- Impacts on local town service centre due to reduced activity
- In some instances, running cattle on land more suited to a sheep operation

Wild dog control measures: The very considerable costs of as many as four dog baitings per annum, checking traps and dog tracks are all essential measures for farmers operating within the wild dog activity zones.

Observed Environmental impacts: I spend a large part of my life in the bush and I have noticed a much greater abundance of native wildlife (eg bush turkeys, echidnas and quolls) since consistent regular wild dog baiting programs have been adopted. No doubt the baiting also reduces fox numbers.

Positive impacts of wild dogs in farmland areas: The suggestion of positive impacts of wild dogs cannot be considered in isolation to the real world where the farmer institutes measures to control other pests such as foxes, rabbits, pigs and cats. It is reasonable to say that most farmers will have in place measures involving professional and sporting shooters where these pests are targeted. Many farmers employ targeted pest animal controls including: rabbit ripping, weed control (blackberries), 1080 baiting and pig trapping. Research into mesopredator impacts of wild dogs without these farmer imposed controls leaves out a critical element.

Any argument suggesting that there may be positive impacts of wild dogs in farmland areas lacks the consideration of the overall perspective.

Economic costs: In my own case the average costs over a ten year period of wild dog management, predation and other stock disturbance would equate to around $10,000 per annum. I believe that there are many farmers where this cost would be much higher. We are fortunate to have a high level of farmer co-operation as well as excellent support from LHPA and National Parks. Without this support mechanism we would be placed in a much more difficult position.

The total costs of wild dog management on a regional basis are very considerable and therefore dictate a much more proactive approach involving all agencies including local government.

Social impacts:

There is a considerable social impact of the above wild dog activity as the farmer has to deal with what he may often consider as a personal failure to be there to prevent the slaughter of his stock. This impact which permeates through the whole farm family can be very difficult to deal with. A further social impact is brought about by scarce "free time" being taken up by wild dog monitoring.

Specific effects include:

- Stress on farm families following wild dog attacks on livestock
- Reduced free family time resulting from wild dog management
- Inability of farmer to contribute to volunteer community activities due to time taken dealing with wild dog management

The development of the New South Wales Wild Dog Strategy is the first step to providing the mechanism for a consistent, effective and co-operative framework to address this most important menace.

The Elks Family

My name is Gary Elks and with my family (wife and two children) we run a mixed grazing property "Hazelbrook" which is located 65 kilometres east of Guyra in the Wongwibinda district. This property has a boundary with the Guy Fawkes National Park. Unfortunately it is common to have wild dog predations on our sheep flock. This problem almost certainly, is thrust upon us by wild dogs and dingoes which encroach on our land from the large breeding ground and safe haven for the feral animals (wild dogs) known as the National Park.

Since 2000 on or directly adjacent to our property we have had 68 dogs trapped or shot and a further 23 sightings. These dogs were shot or trapped at considerable cost. Since 2005 we have had 109 sheep killed and 49 mauled of which all of these had to be destroyed effectively having 158 sheep deaths from wild dogs, which is a considerable direct economic loss to our enterprise.

It is not only the economic loss to myself and my family it is also the personal affects it has had. The stress has led to depression and anxiety. We should not have to fear that every day when setting foot on your property that there is a possibility that your animals and livelihood is under threat from encroaching predators from public land. The loss of social interaction, events, holidays and family time has been reduced as time is consumed addressing problems arising from wild dogs.

When attacks occur we find that the situation totally consumes us mentally and also physically. Following is what actually happened in January 2010.

On January 1st 2010, two wild dogs started attacking and killing a mob of wethers. Over the course of the month, the offending dogs killed 30 of these sheep, 28 outright and 2 others which had to be destroyed. The killing was constant throughout the month. With some background in trapping and hunting, my son and I took about trying to shoot or trap these dogs. My hours worked specifically on eradicating these particular dogs totalled 270 hours. In summary these dogs directly cost our family.

30 sheep value @ $100/head	$3,000
270hrs labour @ $25/head min	$6,750
	$9,750

This 270 hrs we spent chasing dogs is equivalent to six and a half weeks work for a 40 hour a week worker. This puts things into perspective for you as to the time we spend chasing dogs. The analysis above does not take into account fuel which will considerably increase our costs.

The economic affect does not stop there as remaining sheep become stressed, and heavily worm burdened which in turn causes a break in the wool staple and this severely devalues the income from remaining stock.

Also the reduced numbers of our flock due to predation makes it almost impossible to maintain flock numbers.

One other problem arising from wild dogs is the transfer of the disease neospora to cattle. Cattle can inadvertently pick up the disease from pasture where dogs have left faeces. This disease can cause abortions in cattle leading to large production losses. Also, hydatids in cattle and sheep cause economic losses as infected offal is disregarded with payment reductions.

These problem dogs certainly come from publicly managed land adjacent to us, which is the National Park. In my opinion there are three major actions that need to be taken by Public Land Management.

1. Dog Barrier fencing between public and private land. (This should be funded by public as the public wants to conserve flora and fauna). We have no problem with conservation though the public land managers and owners should be liable to stop problems encroaching onto private land.

2. Full time trappers around the boarder of public land thus creating a buffer zone.

3. Some perimeter baiting either hand or aerial.

Recently some money has been spent on some of these methods though public funding needs to increase significantly to lessen the burden on private land holding neighbours to public land.

The burden for private land holders adjoining public land is enormous from stock losses of sheep and cattle and it's about time that public land managers become accountable. As private landholders we should have the right to run sheep or cattle on our property without invasion of wild dogs from adjoining public land. This should be our basic right.

Jaime Robertson

I live at Fishington which is 50km east of Guyra on the edge of the Guy Fawkes River National Park. I am the 4th generation to live on Fishington and my kids will be the 5th.

The continuous preying of WILD DOGS on our livestock has become a massive problem. We spend approximately five hours per week on the maintenance of fences and flood gates, which involves the spraying of weeds and grass to keep the electric fence working. This is about 260 hours per year equal to about $15,000 per year.

When wild dogs breach our fences our work load can increase to 70 hours , keeping in mind that we still have to do stock work on top of this. The hours involved in control and the large loss of dead sheep and calves and bitten ones has a very large impact on our business making it significantly less viable.

We need to stop the increase in the wild dog population in the New England area and NSW. Wild dogs are killing in larger numbers and are a threat to not only livestock such as sheep, cattle and goats but also to our native animal population.

To do this more baits need to go to the edge and at least 15 kilometres into the National Parks and Forests and more baiting across private land and all tenures. More professional trappers need to be employed to slow the spread of the wild dog population. Wild dogs also spread disease that could pose a major threat to the cattle industry and therefore a threat to one of the Nations' biggest exporting business. Australia cannot afford to rely on mining exports only.

The Wild Dog Problem has to be taken seriously and addressed quickly and effectively.

Emma Turner

I work on the family farm ''River View" with my parents William and Andrea Turner, which is situated fifty kilometres on the eastern side of Guyra in the Wards Mistake area. My family has lived there for over 100 years and I am the fourth generation on the property. There are three enterprises operated on the property which are beef cattle, merino sheep and prime lambs. One of the main issues we have to contend with on our property is wild dogs. Currently our property is 'dog proof' for the whole boundary around the property and within the last five years internal dog proof fencing has also been completed. We do not share a direct boundary with a National Park; however, our closest public land is the Guy Fawkes National Park (GFNP), which is approximately three kilometres from our eastern boundary.

Currently, in our area the only form of proactive wild dog control that takes place in GFNP is the aerial baiting of 1080 once a year in April/May. The reactive forms of wild dog control that are completed by GFNP are to provide payment for a professional dog trapper/hunter to kill a dog but that is only on the provision that wild dog is killing livestock. Another form of reactive control is to provide fencing material.

I understand there is a need for GFNP to conserve the dingo within that area but that is not an excuse for the minimal level of wild dog control that takes place as there are local landholders that are suffering through the loss of income and assets as a direct result of attacks from wild dogs.

Wild dogs are incredibly detrimental to the productivity and profitability of agricultural landholders. Primarily the direct killing and maiming of livestock is the largest issue. Also, there are hidden production losses from livestock which are stressed through either disturbance or direct attacks on

those livestock. Other costs include fencing and the maintenance and repair of the wild dog protection fence.

Fencing is our main form of wild dog control that we use on our property. The maintenance of the dog fence is an extra cost associated with the protection of our livestock from wild dogs. The ten kilometres of dog fence on our property is checked and repaired on a weekly basis. An estimate of the cost of maintaining the dog fence is approximately $14,000 per year. Please note this figure does not take into account the cost of electricity in the operation of the electric fence. Unfortunately checking the fence every week does not necessarily guarantee that a wild dog will not manage to enter our property.

The Story of Lucky

Lucky is the name of a wild dog we had living and killing on our property between December 2008 and June 2009. The wild dog was nicknamed Lucky as he always seemed to have luck on his side During that seven months Lucky resided at “River View” he killed over 130 sheep and injured many more.

During that time another wild dog got into the property and together they wreaked havoc on our sheep. Another difficulty we encountered is the two wild dogs changed the time and paddocks they were killing. In the end they were killing sheep and having a feed fifty metres from my front door. The following picture is of the second dog which my father shot – you can see how close it was to my house.

Lucky's reign of terror finally ended on 26 June 2009. The relief for my family, me and the sheep was indescribable, and it was surreal to believe that after seven months of stress and anxiety, it was finally over.

An estimate of the cost of the wild dog Lucky has been completed and it includes the meat value of sheep killed, cost of professional dog hunter, our time and the cost of extra fencing which took place to reduce the area Lucky had access to. It also includes an estimate of the time taken in checking sheep and euthanizing any that were attacked and still alive. The total number of estimated hours for just my father and I was 1,180 hours. But remember we still had a property and business to run at the same time.

The cost of Lucky comes to a figure of **$125,000**.

This figure does not take into account fuel, the psychological and emotional cost to my family and the loss of genetic gain of the merino flock on our property. It also does not take into account the hidden production losses to our livestock through disturbance and stress, both to the sheep and the cattle. In regards to the reduction of genetic gain we have a self replacing merino breeding flock and last year we did not have enough breeding ewes coming into the system, due to the number of lambs Lucky killed, so we had to keep some of the better cast for age ewes back to breed merino lambs from. Also, this year we did not have enough ewes coming into the system, again, as we did not join as many ewes the year Lucky was here. So even though that dog has been dead for three years we are still experiencing a detrimental cost to our business as a direct result of the wild dog.

Due to the constant issues we have been having with wild dogs we have reluctantly made a decision to reduce our sheep flock numbers by 50% over the next twelve months. This has been a difficult decision for us to make but after having seven wild dogs on our property since April this year and my father, William having to deal with the fear of wild dog predation on his livestock for the last forty years we have had enough. I know my family will be very sad to see them go but the stress for both us and livestock is not worth it.

With the management of wild dogs in our area there is an ineffective management in the control of wild dogs this is because it is primarily reactive as opposed to being proactive. This I believe is a very ineffective control method as it has not inhibited the increase in numbers of the wild dog population. This has been evident in the number of areas where wild dogs are now being found. Once wild dogs have moved out of any Public Land and living on private land they are harder to capture/see and subsequently kill. The hybridisation of the wild dog with other domestic dog breeds has led to an increase in the average size of wild dogs in the last twenty years.

For a wild dog control program to be effective a number of different strategies need to be performed.

1. Baiting – this should occur in a buffer area on the edge of a national park ie 10km's in from the boundary. This would then limit the number of dogs that are in the process of the leaving the Park. Plus this also prevents private landholders being used as the 'buffer' area.
    a. Baiting should consist of both hand baiting and aerial; baiting at certain times of the year to coincide with times of increased dog activity eg mating season.
    b. Baiting rates within the buffer area should be used at the most effective rate ie 40 baits per kilometre.
    c. Baiting should also be co-ordinated with fox baiting programs as well, to increase the efficacy of all baiting programs.
    d. Also, within national parks access trails and fire control lines should be used and linked to the wild dog control or baiting program. They can also be used for trapping and monitoring wild dog activity through cameras.
2. Trapping – this should also be used within park boundaries to prevent those dogs that do not eat baits and be a further prevention method of wild dogs leaving the park. The timing of trapping should be planned around baiting times and times when wild dog activity is high.

3. Fencing – is another critical method of control but is only as effective providing the fencing is maintained. It should only be used as the final form of protection to livestock and peoples livelihoods.
4. Monitoring of wild dog activity through the use of cameras both within and the boundaries of public lands.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to address the inquiry in regards to the issue of wild dogs.

Regards,

Rob Costello, David Donnelly, Gary Elks, Jaime Robertson and Emma Turner