



Government
of South Australia

POLICY ON MANAGEMENT OF DINGO POPULATIONS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Adopted by the
Minister for Environment and Conservation
28 September 2005

Amended by the
Minister for Environment and Conservation
23 May 2011

1. POLICY OBJECTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The policy objective is to protect the livestock industry to the degree necessary to ensure its economic survival, while at the same time recognising that the continued survival of the dingo as a wildlife species is to be ensured.

The *Natural Resources Management Act 2004 (NRM Act)* has the broad objective of protecting agriculture, the environment and the public from the impact of pest animals and plants. Under the *NRM Act* dingoes (including dingo crosses) are declared pests south of the dingo (dog) fence (*Gazette* 30 June 2005, pages 2018-2060). It is an offence to move, keep, sell or release a dingo in this control area unless in possession of a permit. The issuance of permits is guided by this policy. All landholders south of the dog fence must destroy dingoes on their properties.

Additionally, under the *Dog Fence Act 1946*, landholders must take all reasonable steps to destroy all wild dogs (dingoes) in the vicinity of the dog fence.

2. IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of the policy objective is being achieved in the following ways:

2.1 Protection of the livestock industry (sheep and cattle)

2.1.1 The sheep industry is protected by:

1. maintaining the sheep zone free of dingoes;
2. the continuing, effective maintenance of a dog-proof fence around the edge of the sheep country;
3. the destruction of dingoes in the vicinity of the dog-proof fence, by the owners of the fence;
4. regular, government-organised baiting campaigns being carried out in a narrow buffer area immediately adjacent to the outside of the dog-proof fence; and
5. restricting the keeping of dingoes to specially authorised zoos and circuses.

(**Note:** Activities covered by 2 and 3 above are the responsibility of the South Australian Dog Fence Board)

2.1.2 The cattle industry is protected by:

1. Government-organised poisoning campaigns carried out in a limited area of the cattle zone (which lies outside the dog-proof fence) when dingo numbers are excessively high.

2.2 The survival of the dingo, essentially as a wildlife species, is ensured by:

1. restricting the organised baiting campaigns in the cattle country to limited areas and to times when dingoes are present only in excessively high numbers;
2. prohibiting the laying of baits from aircraft north of the dog fence;

3. seeking the consent of the Director of National Parks and Wildlife before laying baits from aircraft (south of the dog fence) in National Parks reserves; and
3. restricting the circumstances by which dingoes can be kept and thus limiting the opportunity to change the strain through domestic breeding.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In South Australia, the extent to which the emphasis is placed on livestock protection or continued survival of the dingo depends on whether the dingo occurs in the sheep zone or the cattle zone.
- 3.2 Within the sheep zone of the State, the pest status of the dingo has long been recognised. In an attempt to overcome its depredations, the early settlers found it essential to erect fences around individual properties and groups of properties and to eradicate the dingoes inside. Subsequently, the security of the sheep industry was assured within half the land area of the State, by the exclusion of dingoes from the area and by the erection of a continuous dog fence enclosing that area. The present dog fence, which extends for 2,225 kilometres from the Great Australian Bight to the New South Wales-South Australian border fence, has a current capital value of \$11.2 million. When erected, that fence represented only a small proportion of the total length and total cost of the numerous dingo netting fences which had been erected by the early settlers. In the opinion of the Minister for Environment and Conservation, the future of the wool industry in South Australia is dependent upon the area enclosed by the dog fence being maintained in a dingo-free condition and the fence being maintained to an adequate standard.
- 3.3 In contrast to the sheep zone, the pest status of the dingo is not so clearly defined within the cattle zone of the State which lies outside the dog fence. In good seasons, when stock are strong and alternative food is available to dingoes, the killing of calves is generally thought to be the exception rather than the rule, although it may be more common when dingoes group together. During periods of drought, the killing of calves by dingoes may be more common, but some landholders claim that, where calves are killed, weakened cows no longer need to produce milk and are better able to survive. Predation on rabbits and native plague rats by dingoes may benefit the cattle industry and confers a general conservation value by reducing the disastrous grazing effects of rabbits, in particular, on natural vegetation. This accounts for the fact that the dingo is not a declared species in this part of the State for the purposes of the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004*.
- 3.4 Consequently, the degree of control of dingoes varies between the sheep zone and the cattle zone. The sole, and compelling, reason for controlling dingoes is their inherent hunting ability and the adverse effect this has on the livestock industry. Sheep killing, which was very common during the early settlement of the sheep zone, is still a frequent occurrence whenever dingoes breach the dog fence.

- 3.5 Within the sheep zone, the policy objective of the Minister for Environment and Conservation is to maintain complete eradication of the dingo. This is a continuation of the long standing policy developed during the early settlement of the State, by individuals and organisations, and its attainment was only made feasible by eliminating dingoes in the sheep zone and by linking up existing individual fences to form a continuous protecting fence. The major responsibility for the maintenance of the dog fence lies with individual landholders whose properties adjoin the fence.

Their efforts, and costs, are supplemented by contributions totalling over \$300,000 annually, of which two-thirds is provided by the Government and one-third by a rate levied on properties which receive the protection of the fence. In recognition of the importance of the dog fence, in 1977 the Government provided an additional \$85,000 to shorten the western end of the fence to eliminate a section which was continually subject to severe damage. Because of the great damage which the dingo, even an individual dingo, can cause to sheep flocks, trapping, shooting and poisoning are used when dingoes penetrate past the fence into the sheep area.

- 3.6 Within a buffer area outside and immediately adjacent to the dog fence the policy aim is to reduce, by effective control, the number of dingoes present. The fence is frequently damaged by native animals, fires and floods, and the intention is to control the number of dingoes reaching it, so reducing the chance of dingoes penetrating the sheep area within. Such control is attempted by continual trapping and poisoning activities by individual landholders and by Government sponsored and organised poisoning programmes. Such programmes involve the use of 1080 meat baits laid from the ground. Earlier aerial baiting programmes involving up to 360,000 strychnine baits being broadcast annually over large tracts of watercourse country extending far from the fence are considered unnecessarily wide-ranging. The laying of baits from the air outside the dog fence is no longer permitted. Aerial baiting is permitted in that portion of the South Australian Arid Lands Natural Resources Management Board area lying inside (south of) the dog fence where the dingoes are a declared pest and must be destroyed by landholders. Aerial baiting is permitted only by operators accredited for such aerial operations.
- 3.7 In the cattle zone, because of the lesser hazard to livestock, the control of dingoes is much less concentrated and is restricted to sporadic and opportunistic shooting and occasional poisoning and trapping. On occasions, Government-supervised poisoning operations extend into a relatively small area of the cattle zone away from the dog fence, but only when field inspections support the claims of landholders that dingo numbers are excessively high. Such programmes only occur infrequently, about every third year or so (5,400 of the baits distributed in 1986 were used in these areas).
- 3.8 Under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972, the dingo is an unprotected species, Although this listing does not prevent dingo control (where undertaken in good faith for the purpose of destroying vermin) in that portion of the South Australian Arid Lands Natural Resource Management Board area lying inside the dog fence, it does mean that in certain circumstances, the Director of National Parks and Wildlife consent will be required - specifically in relation to dingo baiting activities in *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* reserves.
- 3.9 The Minister for Environment and Conservation is gravely concerned by the vulnerability of the sheep industry to any relaxation of the effort in maintaining the sheep zone free of dingoes and actively supports the resolution of the Standing Committee on Agriculture of 1975 that:

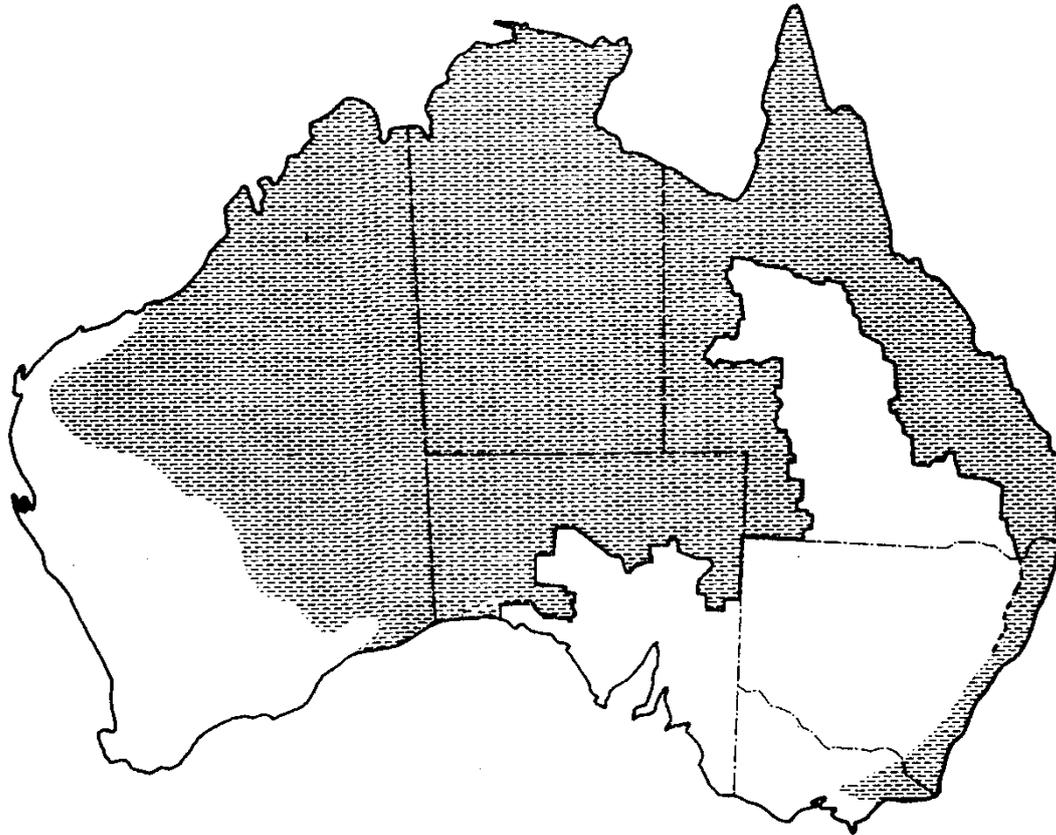
"State and Territory authorities concerned should take action to ensure that dingoes or their offspring, pure bred or otherwise, are not kept in other than specially authorised Zoological Gardens or Circuses."

In addition, in 2004 the Vertebrate Pests Committee and the Natural Resources Management Standing Committee published the national 'Guidelines for the Import, Movement and Keeping of Exotic Vertebrates in Australia'. The Minister for Environment and Conservation adopted these guidelines as a policy in 2005.

As a consequence, permits to keep a dingo are, in general, mainly granted to wildlife parks open to the public for educational purposes and with a high level of security. Further, the Minister considers that the general possession, attempted domestication, or commercial exploitation of dingoes is unacceptable because such practices are likely to lead to the re-introduction of dingoes into sheep areas from which they have been removed, thus jeopardising the sheep industry in Australia.

- 3.9 Similarly, the Minister believes that the domestication or commercial exploitation of dingoes by, for example, show breed societies, will undermine efforts to maintain the dingo essentially as a native wildlife species. Animal breeders are not able to breed for characteristics which maintain animals as a species in the wild – indeed the very nature of domestication means that wild characteristics will be actively selected against. Hence, domestication or commercialisation cannot be seen to be an acceptable alternative to maintaining the species in the wild.
- 3.10 Within South Australia dingoes are found throughout the arid part of the State outside the dog fence involving some 580,000 sq km and representing 60% of the State's total area. They also occur in a relatively small area of undeveloped country within the agricultural lands of the State adjacent to the Victorian border.
- 3.11 Dingo numbers have undoubtedly increased since the settlement of the State because of the provision of watering points and the introduction of rabbits and cattle. At any particular time their numbers reflect the fluctuating seasonal conditions which characterise the arid zone within which they live. The magnitude of such fluctuations can be gauged, to some extent, from the number of dingo scalps presented for payment - 19,000 in 1969/70, 600 in 1974/75, 3,000 in 1976/77 and 425 in 1986/87. (Bounties for dingo scalps were phased out in 1990 as they were not regarded as an efficient control strategy).
- 3.12 There is no evidence to suggest that numbers of dingoes are declining throughout their present range in South Australia and, as the accompanying map indicates, their range extends throughout some 60% of the Australian mainland.

AUSTRALIAN MAINLAND SHOWING SHEEP ZONES AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF DINGOES.



| | |
|--|---|
| Sheep Zones |  |
| Dingo Distribution. |  |
| Dog Proof Fences under control of State Authorities. |  |
| " " " maintained by individual Landholders. |  |

- Note :-**
1. Some individual properties, eg. in S.E. Western Australia, have Dog-netted Boundaries.
 2. Some dingoes exist within the sheep areas of Western Australia and Queensland. The former State has no continuous dog-fence around its sheep zone; the latter State's dog-fence was erected around some country which still contained dingoes.