

# NSW Invasive Species Management Review

By Julie Steepe

## Introduction

As a merino farmer for the last 10 years at Bulahdelah on the Mid North Coast of NSW I have suffered extensively from wild dog attacks on my sheep. These attacks are increasing to the point where the wild dogs are now attempting to attack me. The wild dogs are entering my property from neighbouring Council Land and MidCoast Council have refused, in writing, to control them. This is a clear breach of the *Biosecurity Act 2015* NSW (the Act). I have sought assistance from Local Land Services who are unable to force MidCoast Council to manage their wild dogs and Council are now refusing to take Local Land Services telephone calls. I have also sought the assistance of the NSW Police who, despite being the enforcement officers under the Act, refuse to prosecute MidCoast Council for their continued breaches of the Act.

## **To what extent are the NSW environment, industries and communities currently impacted by invasive species?**

I am currently sitting in the paddock typing this submission whilst watching my sheep as these wild dogs will attack at any time of the day or night. The last attack was Monday 16 October 2023 at 4pm DEST despite my Maremma being chained up with the sheep. The attack before that was 29 September 2023 at 7:10am when my dogs and I were with the sheep and the wild dogs attempted to attack me as well as the sheep. The time before that was on 23 September 2023 at 10am.

I am having to lock my sheep up when I am not with them. Obviously, this is having a massive impact on my time and finances. I am limited to the work that I can achieve whilst shepherding my sheep and I am forced to hand feed the sheep as they have such limited grazing time each day. This is unbelievably expensive.

My fellow farmers in the area are also suffering significantly from wild dog attacks, with one cattle farmer recently losing 5 calves in a week to wild dogs. Alpacas and horses are also being torn apart and killed as well as humans being attacked by wild dogs in the area. In 2020 five wild dogs were destroyed in a neighbouring area because they were known for attacking humans. And yet National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) have a current study being undertaken allowing the breeding of wild dogs on their land, overtly breaching the Act.

**To what extent do you think existing programs in NSW are effectively managing invasive species?**

We have the National Wild Dog Plan and the Local Lands Services community baiting programs as existing programs in our area. Despite MidCoast Council and NPWS being self-appointed key stakeholders in these programs they undertake bare minimum controls, with a couple of baits put out on their vast areas of land. Of course, the wild dogs are generally bait shy, so a baiting programme is not usually an effective standalone control method. I believe the total involvement from NPWS is putting out a handful of baits in 6,000 hectares, despite being fully aware of vast numbers of wild dogs on their property. And knowing these wild dogs are attacking people.

I believe MidCoast Council did zero wild dog control in 2022 and have only undertaken minimum wild dog control this year and only due to my constant pressure. MidCoast Council are now refusing to do anything further, despite knowing my animals are being ripped apart on a regular basis by wild dogs being harboured on their land.

I think the existing programs are not effective nor adhered to by the key Stakeholders ie government agencies and if there is participation from the key stakeholders in our area then it is nothing more than a token gesture.

**What, if any, are the key barriers to effective management of invasive species?**

The biggest barrier to effective management of wild dogs is government agencies. They disregard the Act, believing they are above the law. Any farmer living near a National Park will tell you that they don't have a wild dog problem, they have a NPWS problem.

The employees of NPWS near me believe the wild dogs are dingoes and they are protecting them. This is despite humans being attacked as these wild dogs in my area have lost all fear of people. I believe that MidCoast Council may now share the same beliefs as NPWS and are now protecting the wild dogs on their property which is completely contrary to their legal duties.

MidCoast Council are claiming lack of funds as a defence against complying with the *Biosecurity Act 2015* NSW which states:

Any person who deals with biosecurity matter or a carrier and who knows, or ought reasonably to know, the biosecurity risk posed or likely to be posed by the biosecurity matter, carrier or dealing has a biosecurity duty to ensure that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the biosecurity risk is prevented, eliminated or minimised.

MidCoast Council are stating, in writing, that they are shielded from the Act due to the clause "so far as is reasonably practicable", citing a lack of finances which makes it 'unreasonable' for them to carry out wild dog control.

Government agencies refusing to comply with their statutory requirements is the number one barrier for effective wild dog management. Given these government agencies are self-assessed key stakeholders in wild dog control, their refusal to comply with the Act makes their actions, or inactions, even more abhorrent.

**How has invasive species management changed since the introduction of the NSW Biosecurity Act 2015 legislation and associated programs and plans?**

I was a merino farmer before the introduction of the Act and I have seen no significant changes in wild dog management in our area since the introduction of the Act. There have been more meetings and more documents but no effective prevention, elimination or minimisation of wild dogs in my area. In fact, I would say that the wild dogs are significantly increasing in number with very little fear of humans. This is a tragedy waiting to happen in such a largely populated area.

The key stakeholders give lip service to their responsibilities but nothing of consequence is done. We have some of the most exceptionally talented wild dog trappers and shooters, yet they are not able to access the wild dogs as they are being harboured on government land. The private landowners have very limited opportunities to despatch the wild dogs as they spend very little time on private property, however the wild dogs do such massive amounts of damage in that short time when they do enter private land.

**What are the future risks posed by invasive species to the NSW environment, industries and communities?**

The number one risk posed by wild dogs is someone will be killed, probably a child. And it will be completely preventable. The second risk is that farmers will cease raising animals in our area. This will have a devastating flow on affect. That will reduce the amount of food available to our community. It will reduce the number of jobs available in our community. It will reduce the cash flow of our community and therefore our communities will become a shell of its current self or die.

**What opportunities do you see to improve the outcomes of invasive species management in the future?**

I see a very easy way to improve the wild dog management in NSW and that is to get NPWS and Councils to abide by the Act without the ability to use loopholes such as “so far as is reasonably practicable”. If NPWS and Council undertook effective wild dog management practices then we wouldn’t have a wild dog problem here in NSW.

Another opportunity would be to introduce a wild dog bounty. Queensland have a wild dog bounty as do Victoria and those programs are very successful. Wild dog eradication is very time consuming and expensive. If a bounty of \$100 a head was introduced in NSW I can guarantee that the numbers of wild dog culls would dramatically increase and make it easier and cheaper for farmers to get assistance in culling dogs.

**Summary**

The wild dog problem is getting worse, not better. It is imperative for farmers and the community that we get these wild dogs under control. Wild dog management would be greatly enhanced if the government agencies were forced to abide by the law and prevent, eliminate or minimise wild dogs on their land, regardless of their personal beliefs and wild dog management would also be greatly assisted by a government funded bounty.

#60

**COMPLETE**

**Collector:** Web Link 1 (Web Link)  
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Page 1

**Q1**

First name

Julie

**Q2**

Last name

Steepe

**Q3**

Respondent skipped this question

Organisation name (if relevant)

**Q4**

Email address

[REDACTED]

**Q5**

Phone number

[REDACTED]

**Q6**

Yes

Can we contact you about your submission (if required)?

**Q7**

I am a private land manager/owner

What best describes you?

**Q8**

**Hunter**

Which of the following regions best describes your location/area of interest?

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**Q9**

**I agree to have my submission published with my name or company/organisation**

The Commission publishes submissions on its website for transparency. If you do not want your personal details or responses published, please tell us below.

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Page 2

**Q10**

To what extent are the NSW environment, industries and communities currently impacted by invasive species?

Wild dogs are a massive problem in my community and the problem is increasing.

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**Q11**

To what extent do you think existing programs in NSW are effectively managing invasive species?

Very ineffective

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**Q12**

What, if any, are the key barriers to effective management of invasive species?

Government agencies are the key barriers to effective management of invasive species.

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**Q13**

How has invasive species management changed since the introduction of the NSW Biosecurity Act 2015 legislation and associated programs and plans?

Nothing has changed and my local government is refusing (in writing) to abide by the Biosecurity Act 2015 NSW.

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**Q14**

What are the future risks posed by invasive species to the NSW environment, industries and communities?

Humans are already being attacked by the wild dogs in my community and National Parks have embarked on a breeding program with these wild dogs!

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**Q15**

What opportunities do you see to improve the outcomes of invasive species management in the future?

The removal of wild dogs from my community will enable better farming opportunities, increase profits in the community and people will feel a lot safer.

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**Q16**

Any other comments?

National Parks and Councils need to abide by the Biosecurity Act and prevent, eliminate or reduce the wild dogs in my community.

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