



Hon Vicky Darling MP

Member for Sandgate

Ref: CTS 18944/11



**Queensland
Government**

Minister for Environment

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to your letters of 27 October and 16 November 2011 enclosing a copy of Petition No. 1798-11, 1715-11 and 1809-11 lodged in the Queensland Legislative Assembly.

The Petitions draw to the attention of the House that the Fraser Island dingo is recognised as possibly the purest strain of dingo on the eastern Australian coast and perhaps Australia-wide, but is currently on the verge of extinction due to loss of habitat and continued culling.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House cease all experimentation on the Fraser Island dingoes including, culling, trapping, collaring, hazing and ear-tagging. Undertake an independent scientific peer review of the current management strategy and establish an Advisory Committee to oversee the humane and ethical treatment of the dingoes. Undertake a scientific population study of wildlife on the Island. Ensure that rangers responsible for dingo management are suitably qualified biologists with a knowledge and understanding of dingo behaviour. Establish an Interpretive Centre to educate and inform visitors regarding the natural attractions of Fraser Island and correct behaviour when encountering a dingo. Establish a Care Centre for sick or injured animals and ensure a continued independent monitoring of all management plans implemented.

Fraser Island is managed under legislation including the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. The key principle for management of national parks is contained in section 17 of the Act which states "A national park is to be managed to provide, to the greatest possible extent, for the permanent preservation of the area's natural condition and the protection of the area's cultural resources and values". The dingo is classed as native wildlife under this legislation and hence is protected on the national park estate.

Following the tragic death of a young boy attacked by dingoes on Fraser Island in April 2001, the Queensland Government released a strategy for the management of dingoes on the Island. Core objectives of the Fraser Island Dingo Management Strategy (FIDMS) (updated 2006) include:

- conserving a sustainable wild dingo population on the Island;
- reducing the risk posed to humans by dingoes on Fraser Island to an acceptable level (low); and
- to provide visitors with an opportunity to view dingoes in an environment as near as possible to their natural state.

Level 13
400 George Street Brisbane Qld 4000
GPO Box 2454 Brisbane
Queensland 4001 Australia
Telephone +61 7 3239 0844
Facsimile +61 7 3227 6309
Email environment@ministerial.qld.gov.au
Website www.derm.qld.gov.au

The FIDMS has been reviewed once (2006) and independently audited twice (2003 and 2009). The audits were conducted by Dr Laurie Corbett, who is a world-renowned expert on dingoes. Dr Corbett confirmed in 2003 that dingoes were prevalent and widely distributed across Fraser Island and not in danger of imminent extinction. His 2009 audit concluded that the FIDMS was still working well to achieve the twin goals of protecting public safety and conserving a sustainable population of wild dingoes.

In 2009 the Queensland Government announced additional research into dingo numbers, and more importantly the capacity of the dingo population to self regulate according to natural prey abundance. A dingo working group was established, incorporating internal and external experts, to inform the appropriate and ethical development of the research.

The resulting Fraser Island Dingo Population Study is a multi staged research project. Analysis by Griffith University of Stage 1 – a capture, mark, recapture study – supports the estimate of a dingo population on Fraser Island of between 100 and 200 animals, depending on the seasons and breeding cycle. This is consistent with the original estimate made by Dr Corbett and scientifically refutes the claims that the dingo population is 'on the verge of extinction'.

Further research underway is examining the various aspects of not just the dingo population, but also dingo movements and their interaction with people on the Island. It will provide a clearer picture of the behaviour of these unique animals, to assist in their long-term conservation and to ensure that the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service's (QPWS) approach to dingo management remains adaptive and informed by independent scientific analysis. The results from this important research will assist and inform an independent review of the FIDMS which is due to commence in 2012.

QPWS takes visitor education very seriously and the education component of the FIDMS has been independently recognised as world best practice. QPWS continues to review its' communications strategies used to educate visitors and the broader public about appropriate behaviour when on Fraser Island to ensure the approach remains contemporary and best practice.

QPWS has a visitor information centre at Eurong on Fraser Island, with other centres in close proximity including Rainbow Beach and Maryborough. These centres provide information on dingo behaviour and visitor safety guidelines. There are similar dingo behaviour and visitor safety guidelines at key visitor sites across the Island. The Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) has produced a comprehensive web page dedicated to dingo management on the Fraser Island web pages at www.derm.qld.gov.au/fraser. A copy of the latest dingo brochure can be downloaded from this site.

In accordance with the FIDMS some camping areas, townships and resorts on Fraser Island have been fenced. The total area excluded stands at just 0.2 per cent on the total 165,000 hectare landmass. The other 99.8 per cent of Fraser Island is available for wildlife including dingoes to roam freely.

The humane destruction of select individual dingoes in accordance with the FIDMS should not be confused with culling. QPWS is not culling dingoes. QPWS decisions to humanely destroy dangerous dingoes are taken very carefully and strictly in accordance with established procedures spelt out in the FIDMS. An objective and incident-based assessment is made of each aggressive or dangerous interaction and authorisation to carry out a humane destruction is taken collaboratively among several senior QPWS officers.

The ear tagging of individual dingoes has occurred since 2002 with well over 300 animals being tagged over this period. QPWS trapping and tagging procedures have been successfully used for many years and have been developed with the welfare of the dingoes as a priority. The traps that we use have been specifically designed to minimise harm to animals and incorporate a spring mechanism which provides some give once an animal has been caught.

Tagging is an essential management tool for identification purposes and is a well established wildlife management practice. Tags not only identify a particular dingo in the event of an incident but also contribute to much needed population data. There is no evidence to suggest that tagging has any detrimental effect on the animal. It can be noted from the ear tag register that from 2002–2011 an average of 33 animals per year, predominately juvenile and sub-adult animals, were tagged showing good recruitment in the population as a whole.

Hazing is a non-lethal aversive technique practiced at times by conservation agencies on Fraser Island and elsewhere in the world. It can help to discourage potentially dangerous animals from soliciting food from humans and becoming habituated in this type of behaviour. The success of alternative engineering and education solutions on Fraser Island has reduced the need for hazing to be used as a management practice. Currently, rangers on Fraser Island do not haze dingoes unless they have management permission.

QPWS employs dingo management Rangers to attend to dingo issues on Fraser Island. These rangers also perform additional duties other than dingo management—including fire management, visitor education, compliance duties and weed and feral animal control. QPWS dingo management Rangers are well educated and trained to perform in their duties and have access to assistance from various experts such as veterinarians, ecologists and animal behaviourists when required.

Regarding the petition's request to see a wildlife care centre established on Fraser Island, a key principle of the FIDMS is that dingoes are wild native animals that should be interfered with as little as possible. QPWS dingo management Rangers are dedicated to monitoring and providing assistance when required to injured animals. Considering the limited number of severe injury instances to dingoes the establishment a wildlife hospital on Fraser Island is not warranted.

Should you have any further enquiries, please contact Mr Ross Belcher, Regional Manager of the Department of Environment and Resource Management on telephone 4121 1800.

Yours sincerely



Vicky Darling MP
Minister for Environment