



Victorian Pest Management

A Framework for Action

Wild Dog Management Strategy



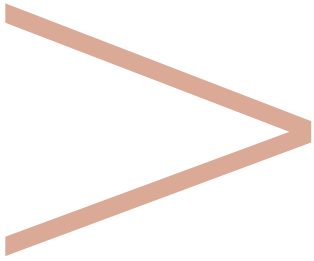
Department of
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Wild Dog Management Strategy

Reasons for Government investment in wild dog management

In Victoria, wild dogs occur on public land in the alpine areas of Gippsland and the North East and have recently been reported in the western Mallee. While wild dogs are not recognised as a threat to native fauna in most circumstances, they can affect agricultural enterprises. The majority of the damage is caused by wild dogs moving from public land onto adjoining private land to attack livestock, particularly sheep. Wild dogs have both an economic and social impact on the communities where they are present.

Scope of the wild dog management strategy

The approaches described in this Strategy are consistent with the aims and outcomes of Victorian Pest Management – A Framework for Action (VPMF) and deal with wild dog management in Victoria. Wild dog management is principally the responsibility of each land manager. The Government's role in wild dog management includes the provision of an appropriate legislative and policy framework. The Government will primarily contribute to wild dog management in situations where that action results in public benefit, and will provide funding in accordance with the agreed shared investment guidelines.

Goal

Minimise the impact of wild dogs on economic and community values through the implementation of a community supported strategic approach to wild dog management that contributes to the protection of livestock and meeting the social outcomes of regional and statewide strategies.

Aim

To limit the damage caused by wild dogs to livestock enterprises through coordinating strategic and sustained management.

Implementation of the Strategy will effectively coordinate strategic and sustained wild dog management statewide across all land tenures in a way that:

- Creates effective long-term partnerships with the community so that wild dog management priorities are clear and reflected in Regional Wild Dog Action Plans;
- Is based on recognised best practice wild dog management and focuses principally on the protection of livestock rather than destruction of wild dogs;
- Recognises that the implementation of best practice wild dog management must be managed effectively and accepted within the community;
- Ensures a coordinated and cooperative management approach between public and private land managers in Victoria and with interstate authorities where appropriate;
- Provides targeted support to private land managers that reflects their commitment to wild dog management and the priorities of Regional Wild Dog Action Plans;
- Improves community knowledge and understanding of the wild dog problem and ensures skilled and effective community participation in management activities;
- Monitors project effectiveness;
- Improves current mechanisms for the recording and monitoring of wild dog impacts and issues, eg. mapping electric fencing status, stock losses and attack sites; and
- Ensures all land managers are aware of their duty of care to land and water resources.

Stakeholders in managing wild dogs

Government and community stakeholders in wild dog management include:

- State Government: The Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE), Parks Victoria;
- Victorian Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) and the Victorian Catchment Management Council (VCMC);
- Federal Government; Environment Australia and Bureau of Resource Science, (Natural Heritage Trust, and National Feral Animal Control Program);
- Alpine Park Liaison Committee;
- Vertebrate Pest Committee (the lead committee providing technical and policy advice on matters related to the prevention, management and control of vertebrate pests to Governments throughout Australia and New Zealand);
- Key industry groups such as the Victorian Farmers Federation, animal welfare groups and conservation groups;
- Private landholders (including companies, corporations and Landcare groups)
- Local government; and
- Interstate vertebrate pest management authorities/government institutes.

The roles of the key agencies that are involved in wild dog management are set as follows.

Department of Natural Resources and Environment

NRE is the main State Government department responsible for the administration and management of Victoria's resources and public land and waters. NRE has policy interpretation and legislative responsibility for wild dog management. NRE is also responsible for delivering cost-effective advisory, educational and regulatory services in sustainable land and water management and agricultural industry development.

Public land managers – Forests Division, Parks Flora and Fauna Division, through Parks Victoria, and Land Victoria - are the NRE Divisions responsible for the management of most public land in Victoria. The management of public land by Parks Flora and Fauna Division is directed through Parks Victoria. Public land management is carried out in accordance with the Victorian Biodiversity Strategy, which is a whole-of-government document for the Victorian community with NRE being the lead agency for its implementation.

Victorian Catchment Management Council

The VCMC was established under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*. Its role is to advise the Minister for Environment and Conservation on natural resource management issues and report on the quality of land and water resources.

Catchment Management Authorities

The major role of Victoria's CMAs is to ensure the sustainable development of natural resource-based industries; the maintenance, and where possible, improvement of land and water resources; and the conservation of natural and cultural heritage.

Local government

Local government has an important role to play in natural resource management. In relation to wild dog management, local government is responsible under the *Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animal Act 1994* for providing a scheme for controlling domestic dogs. Escaped domestic dogs are considered to have added significantly to the wild dog population.

Public land management

Forest Management Plans and Park Management Plans are the principal strategic documents for management of forest land and land managed by Parks Victoria, and incorporate pest management as a component.

In Victoria wild dogs are not recognised as a threat to native fauna in most circumstances, however they can affect adjoining agricultural enterprises. Where wild dog management on public land also benefits adjoining private land, this management will be the responsibility of the relevant public land manager and met through the Good Neighbour Program (GNP). The GNP is managed by NRE to address damage caused to the community by pests originating on adjoining public land.

Victorian Legislation

The principal legislation relating to the management of wild dogs in Victoria is the *Catchment and Land Protection Act*, which is administered by NRE. Wild dogs under this legislation are defined as feral dogs, dogs-run-wild, and dingoes and their hybrids (except for recognised canine breeds such as the Australian Cattle Dog [Queensland Heeler] and the Australian Kelpie), and are declared an Established Pest Animal. All land managers are responsible to prevent the spread of, and as far as possible eradicate, them from their land. In addition, the *Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animal Act 1994* places responsibility on dog owners to control them at all times.

The *Wildlife Act 1995* and the *National Parks Act 1975* are also relevant in wild dog management.

Strategic approach to wild dog management in Victoria

Wild dog management will aim to optimise return on investment while achieving minimal damage to agriculture. It will follow shared investment principles detailed in the VPMF, reflecting the responsibilities of, and the benefits to, respective stakeholders and be based on best management practices.

Best practice wild dog management is based on findings of the Victorian Wild Dog Program Review carried out by the Australian Agribusiness Group in 2000, and from interstate studies. These findings indicate that the focus of best practice must be primarily to prevent attacks on livestock by wild dogs, rather than concentrating on the numbers of wild dogs killed. No single technique will achieve this aim. These studies recommend that attacks are best minimised by using buffer zones on the boundaries of public and private land to prevent wild dogs from

moving onto grazing lands, in conjunction with follow-up management to control high impact wild dog incursions on agricultural lands. They indicate that little benefit is expected from the management of wild dogs beyond the buffer zones.

Effective wild dog management in Victoria will involve close integration of policy, research, on-ground management and monitoring if it is to achieve the goals of the Strategy.

Strategy 1 Effective coordination of the wild dog program

It is essential that the community has input into the management as well as the ownership of the wild dog program. A new approach is required to ensure that this occurs. As a result, regionally based and community formed Wild Dog Management Groups (WDMGs) will be established and based in the North East and Gippsland regions respectively. While line management of staff delivering the program will be retained by NRE, these Management Groups will be required to set the strategic and funding directions for the operation of the wild dog program in their region, taking into account best practice wild dog management practices. A key component of the strategic direction setting will be the development of Wild Dog Action Plans.

It is also important that a formal mechanism exists for collaboration between key individuals and groups responsible for wild dog management in Victoria, and those from interstate agencies whose activities are relevant to this state. To achieve this, an annual wild dog program workshop will be instituted at which planning, reporting and information exchange will be carried out.

In addition, the Victorian Government will take the lead in developing stronger links between Federal Government agencies, and those from other states where wild dog programs relevant to Victoria are implemented.

Objective 1 – Improve the coordination of the wild dog program

Strategic Action	Key Responsibility	Partners	Timeframes
1. Establish Wild Dog Management Groups in the North East and Gippsland regions respectively.	NRE	CMAs, Parks Victoria, Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) landowners, industry and community groups	July 2002
2. Develop and implement Wild Dog Action Plans	WDMGs	NRE, Parks Victoria	June 2003
3. Conduct an annual wild dog program workshop to ensure co-ordination between WDMGs, information flow regarding research results and needs, and maintenance of collaboration with relevant information and personnel from interstate.	NRE	WDMGs, Parks Victoria	June 2003 and ongoing
4. Develop effective inter-Government collaboration with Federal and State agencies involved in wild dog management relevant to Victoria	NRE	WDMGs, Federal/interstate agencies	June 2003 and ongoing

Strategy 2 Best practice wild dog management

Wild dog management techniques will be effective, safe, humane and appropriate to limiting the damage caused by wild dogs to livestock. Existing research indicates that, undisturbed, most wild dogs do not move far from home territories in bushland, therefore management effort is most beneficially targeted on the boundaries between public and private land. The strategic aim is to create a buffer zone adjacent to stocked areas, and to remove wild dogs from this area using a mix of best practice management techniques. This reduces the risk of wild dogs moving from public to private land.

With the focus on best practice wild dog management, it is recognised that to be effective, techniques such as trapping, baiting and electric fencing must be carried out at a high level of efficiency and closely integrated with each other. Programs must be well planned and based on a clear strategic view of what is to be done and how effectiveness is to be measured.

Management strategies, their relative emphasis and the means by which they are to be implemented in a region, will need to be developed by each Wild Dog Management Group, and form part of their respective Wild Dog Action Plans.

Case Study: Use of an integrated approach at Mansfield

The property is located near Mansfield in the Goulburn Broken CMA and is 333ha. Wild dogs had been a limiting factor on sheep profitability in the past however, with the erection of several electrified boundary fence sections between 1993 and 1998 the impact was reduced to the point where there were no losses in 1999.

The length of the boundary fence adjoining uncleared public land on the property is 16km, with 1.2km of electric fence erected in 1993, followed by 1.6km in 1994 and 1.5km in 1998. All electric fencing is maintained in good working order. The electric fencing incentive funding was provided by the Government to encourage the adoption of innovative management techniques.

Tender wool, reduced lambing percentages, mismothering, loss of condition, crow predation, injury related flystrike and poor weight gain factors affecting flock performance as a result of wild dog attacks are no longer problems. The success of the electric fencing strategy adopted on this property can be directly attributed to the care and maintenance that is taken to ensure that the working condition of the fence is such that wild dogs are excluded from the property.

The electric fence is, however, only part of an integrated approach to wild dog management. Poisoning on-farm and in adjoining public lands, coupled with the proactive and reactive trapping and snaring activities of the dogger remain vitally important management activities.

Objective 2 – Ensure best practice wild dog management

Strategic Action	Key Responsibility	Partners	Timeframes
5. Focus wild dog management activities on recognised best practice.	WDMGs	NRE, Parks Victoria	Ongoing
6. Carry out an audit of traps currently being used for wild dog management.	NRE	WDMGs	June 2003
7. Develop a policy on the use of padded-jawed traps or laminated steel-jawed traps consistent with the intention to phase out all toothed steel-jawed traps used for wild dog management over a two-year period.	NRE	WDMGs	June 2003
8. Develop electric fencing, poisoning and trapping strategies as part of the Regional Wild Dog Action Plan.	WDMGs	NRE, Parks Victoria	June 2003
9. Provide the community with information regarding the accepted industry minimum standards for electric fencing.	NRE	WDMGs	June 2003

Strategy 3 Targeted research for best practice wild dog management

Research into best practices for wild dog management will be targeted to enhancing the strategic approach outlined in this strategy, be readily applied in the field and made available to the community. A priority will be for research activities that support the effective implementation of this strategy and assist resource decisions in the development and implementation of Wild Dog Action Plans.

Objective 3 – Ensure effective research provides for best practice wild dog management.

Strategic Action	Key Responsibility	Partners	Timeframes
10. Align priorities for research to addressing knowledge gaps identified in key documents, including Regional Action Plans and targeted at long-term solutions through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i assessment of existing techniques for best practice wild dog management; ii development of safe, effective and humane management techniques; and iii making research summaries available to the community. 	NRE	WDMGs, Parks Victoria, industry groups and organisations, including animal welfare, VFF, landowners, Landcare, and community groups	June 2003 and ongoing

Strategy 4 Effectively manage community response to changes to the wild dog program

NRE recognises that any change of focus in the wild dog program will need to be managed effectively and accepted within the community. It will also need to be achieved progressively over a period of time. The process for change will be aided through the development of extension programs, clear communication processes and training activities that recognise that change is often difficult and requires support.

Objective 4 – Effectively manage change

Strategic Action	Key Responsibility	Partners	Timeframes
11. Communication			
i Establish communication links with all stakeholders through a topical periodical newsletter.	NRE	WDMGs, Parks Victoria	June 2002
ii Community communication channels will be identified and used to distribute information relating the wild dog program.	WDMGs	NRE	June 2003
iii Consult with the community as part of the Wild Dog Action Plan development process.	WDMGs	NRE, Parks Victoria, Industry groups and organisations, land owners and community groups	June 2003
12. Extension			
i Produce an Electric Fencing Handbook and make it available to the community detailing electric fencing standards, erection methods and on-going maintenance.	NRE	WDMGs	June 2003
ii Produce new or update Landcare Notes and/or Fact Sheets on key aspects of the program and make widely available, including on NRE's website and on request through the NRE Customer Service Centre.	NRE	WDMGs	June 2002 and ongoing
13. Training			
Identify training needs of NRE staff involved in wild dog management and implement an appropriate program to ensure a high level of relevant skills are available to the wild dog program	NRE	WDMGs	2003 and ongoing

Strategy 5 Encourage participation of local government

Local government is responsible under the *Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animal Act 1994* for controlling domestic dogs. This is particularly important in some areas, as the population of wild dogs in the highlands of eastern Australia contains dingoes, feral dogs and hybrids of the two. Local government will be encouraged to ensure domestic dogs do not compound regional wild dog problems through:

- Enforcement of registration regulations; and
- Coordinating activity with NRE as part of a regional approach to wild dog management.

Objective 5 – Encourage greater local government involvement in wild dog management.

Strategic Action	Key Responsibility	Partners	Timeframes
14. Encourage local government in enhancing domestic dog management where this potentially impacts on wild dog problems in that area.	NRE	WDMGs, Municipalities	Ongoing

Strategy 6 Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

Reporting by private land managers on issues relating to wild dog damage to livestock is a critical component of this strategy. In the past this has been fragmented and in some instances poorly understood and carried out. Prompt reporting of stock losses is essential for coordinated and effective management to be carried out and for resourcing decisions to be made by Government or WDMGs. This reporting will form part of a community based monitoring program of the damage caused by wild dogs to livestock. Information from this program will assist the WDMG in determining resource allocation. The reporting of attacks and wild dog activity and requests to NRE for assistance in wild dog management will be coordinated through a clearly defined process, with a designated NRE Officer as the first point of contact for landholders.

The Pest Animal Information System (PAIS) has been developed and is used by the North East, Gippsland and North West Regions to record wild dog program activities, eg trapping and poisoning details and results, such as baits taken and dogs caught. While this is currently a 'stand-alone' system, it will be integrated into NRE's Integrated Pest Management System (IPMS). Quarterly reports will be used to determine the ongoing effectiveness of the program, using predetermined measures that reflect the shift away from dogs killed to livestock protected.

Objective 6 – Ensure effective monitoring, evaluation and reporting

Strategic Action	Key Responsibility	Partners	Timeframes
15. Revise the reporting requirements for private land managers to ensure the most effective data collection on stock losses and attack sites	NRE	WDMGs	June 2003
16. Coordinate the requests for NRE assistance through the process detailed in Appendix 1.	NRE	WDMGs	Ongoing
17. Implement the PAIS/IPMS for recording wild dog program activity and develop a community-based monitoring program that feeds into this System.	WDMGs, NRE	Community	Ongoing

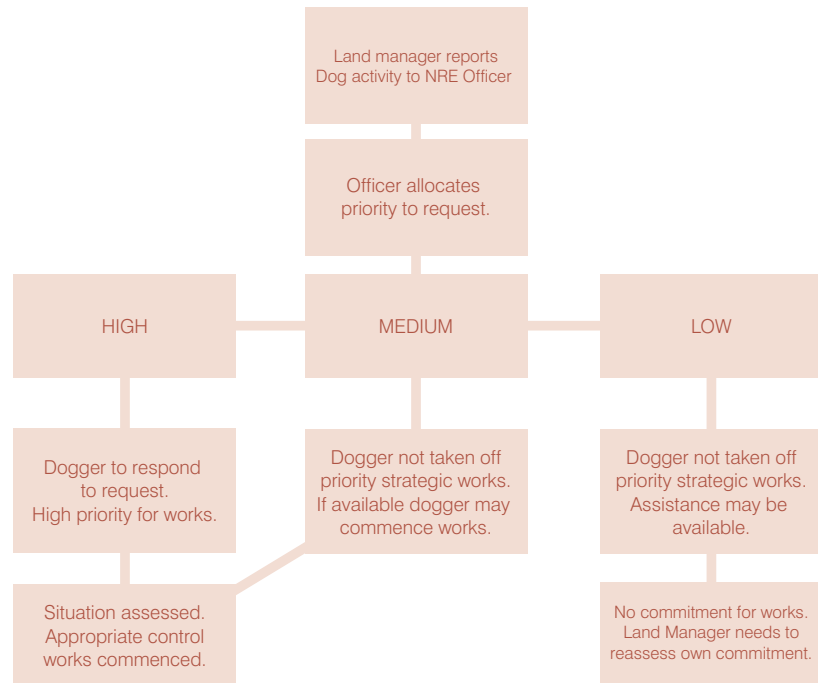
Performance indicators

1. Increased community support and ownership of wild dog management programs through:
 - The adoption of best practice management techniques and group coordination programs;
 - The successful implementation of Regional Wild Dog Action Plans;
 - An increase in the area of private land protected against wild dogs by implementation of best practice wild dog management techniques;
 - All new electric fencing complying with accepted industry minimum standards and existing fences upgraded to this standard; and
 - Formal process in place to ensure cooperation between private and public land managers and interstate authorities.
2. Quantifiable increase in priority recording through the implementation of the PAIS / IPMS system including the mapping of all priority areas, electric fencing, trap lines and bait stations.
3. The development and implementation of indicators for monitoring the wild dog management program's activities and effectiveness. This may include a trend of increasing 'dog attack free' days (a measure of the number of days no attacks are recorded for a defined area) and reductions in the number of stock lost as a direct result of wild dog attacks per year.

Appendix 1

Procedure for allocating priority of response to requests for assistance from land managers in managing wild dogs

Request for Assistance Flow Chart



Suggested Criteria for allocating priority.

Priority	Criteria
HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incurred stock losses that are of sufficient size and frequency to justify management. • Commitment to wild dog management (eg contributes to other wild dog management activities). • Has wild dog electric fencing erected to NRE standard that separates wild dogs from stock across the property. • Electric fencing is well maintained.
MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incurred stock losses that are of sufficient size and frequency to justify management. • Commitment to wild dog management (eg contributes to other wild dog management activities). • Has little fencing erected but this is well maintained. • Has an agreed proposal with NRE for the ongoing planned erection of electric fencing.
LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incurred stock losses that are of sufficient size and frequency to justify management. • No commitment to wild dog management (eg does not contribute to other wild dog management activities). • It is practical to erect electric fencing, however this has not occurred and/or there are no proposals for their establishment.

