Dingoes, Western Science, Traditional Knowledge And the K'gari (Fraser Island) Controversy

Dr Ted Christie[1]***, 03 February 2026***

Disclosure Statement

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The decision of the Queensland's Government's *Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation* to euthanise dingoes on Queensland's K'gari island, following the death of a Canadian tourist, has created controversy.

K'gari is home to an estimated 200 dingoes. The Dingoes are considered sacred to the Traditional owners.

Concerns of the Traditional owners of K'gari reflect their claims that no one from Government had reached out to call, inform or consult them about the plan to cull the pack of dingoes.

However little consideration has been given in the public debate about one source of the existing controversy and the decision-making process by Government:

A collision between Western science and Traditional knowledge.

> ***Finding solutions for environmental conflicts on Indigenous lands should not be seen as the exclusive domain of Western science - or the sole province of Traditional knowledge.***
> ***Decision-making should recognize that Western science and Traditional knowledge are complementary.***

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[1] Dr Ted Christie's book ***Finding Solutions for Environmental Conflicts: Power and Negotiation*** provides an innovative, **cross-disciplinary approach** that integrates **law, science, and alternative dispute resolution (ADR)** to resolve complex environmental disputes...

A significant aspect of the book is its promotion of incorporating Indigenous Traditional knowledge into the conflict resolution process, particularly for issues concerning sustainability, biodiversity, and environmental impact assessments (EIA).

- *Western science focuses on experimental validation and measurable data;*
- *Traditional knowledge is based on knowledge, innovations, and practices developed from centuries of lived experience, that is passed on to succeeding generations.*

A good example of ***integrating Western Science and Traditional knowledge*** - for potential application in Australia - is the ***US Environmental Protection Agency's*** ("***EPA***") legislative framework for environmental assessment.

The EPA promotes participation of Federally recognized Indian Tribes as a "*Cooperating Agency*" when a project's impacts may affect Indian country and other Tribal areas.

The benefits Indigenous involvement may bring as a "*Cooperating Agency"* include: -

- Identifying potential negative impacts to Tribes that "*Lead Agencies*" [Government] may not identify;
- Contributing input on reasonable alternatives for the proposed action; and
- Providing essential knowledge about cultural or sacred sites.

Given the history of K'gari and dingoes, perhaps now is the time for a due diligence approach based on a ***Western science/Traditional knowledge linkage*** to develop a Risk Assessment and Management Plan to prevent history repeating.

> ***Moving to a National scale, on how best to evaluate and counter-balance Traditional knowledge and Western science to resolve cultural heritage/development conflicts, remains a crucial challenge that must be effectively addressed in Australia.***

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