Question on Notice
No. 1714
Asked on Wednesday, 12 November 2008

QUESTION:

MR LEE asked the Minister for Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation (Mr McNamara) –

Will he confirm local reports that there are no more than 30 dingoes left on Fraser Island and if the local reports are not accurate, how many dingoes does the government estimate are now living on the island?

ANSWER:

It is difficult to gain an exact figure on the number of dingoes in the Fraser Island population at any one time.

Dr Laurie Corbett, who is the author of "The Management of Dingoes on Fraser Island" (1998), estimated that the Island's dingo population of 25 to 30 packs peaks at approximately 200 animals during whelping in June–July and declines during the next 10 months to about 100 animals when breeding recommences with territory and pack sizes showing little variation.

Dr Corbett stated that "although a number of dingoes have been humanely destroyed since 2001, the dingoes remain prevalent and widely distributed across the island" in his 2003 Audit of Fraser Island Dingoes conducted as part of the Fraser Island Dingo Management Strategy.

Regular monitoring and tagging by Rangers confirms his original population estimates as reasonably accurate. Rangers have tagged at least 100 individuals since 2006 with many individuals remaining untagged.

The EPA is currently awaiting the final report of a University of Queensland PhD project that was commissioned as part of the Fraser Island Dingo Management Strategy and jointly funded by the EPA. This research project is investigating dingo population dynamics on the Island and will provide more definite estimates of the population. This information will be made available to the Fraser Island Scientific Advisory Committee.

Preliminary DNA research results from this project support the above population estimates. By comparing the origin of alleles in sampled dingoes taken on the Island the researchers can estimate population numbers. An allele is one member of a pair, or series, of different forms of a gene. Of animals assessed between 2002 and 2004, 64 individual animals had a 3 in 1 billion probability of having the same genetic material. Many of the samples differed by only one or two alleles as would be expected in an Island population. This allows researchers to estimate that the number of individuals on the Island is approximately 200.

Further to this, Dr Corbett is scheduled to be on Fraser Island in December 2008 to conduct a second audit of the population as part of the dingo management strategy.