

2013 Eureka Prize for Environmental Research

The National Dingo Preservation and Recovery Program and the Victorian Dingo CARE Network jointly congratulated the winners of the prestigious 2013 Eureka Prize for Environmental Research, from the Australian Museum.

Ms Jennifer Parkhurst of the NDPRP and Dr Ernest Healy of the DCN extended their appreciation and congratulations to those included in the winning research team:

Professor Chris Johnson - University of Tasmania, Dr Michael Letnic - University of New South Wales, Dr Euan Ritchie - Deakin University, Dr Arian Wallach - James Cook University, and Mr Adam O'Neill, Evelyn Downs Station in South Australia.

The team of researchers has conducted an impressive body of ground-breaking research into the positive ecological role of the dingo in Australia, and has made a major contribution to winding back the entrenched prejudice against the dingo that has been used to justify dingo persecution and mismanagement since the colonial era.

Arian Wallach, team member, said:

'Dingoes are currently persecuted across Australia, mostly with the use of 1080 poison, with catastrophic consequences for biodiversity and for the dingoes themselves. The selection of our team's work on the crucial ecological role of dingoes is hugely uplifting, and indicates a beginning of a shift in our relationship with big predators and wild nature.'

As stated by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, which sponsored the prize, the research has shown that, *'Far from being vermin, Australia's dingoes sustain biodiversity and can help land managers control invasive species'. The Office further highlighted the research findings in stating, 'ecosystems with dingoes have better vegetation condition and more diverse and abundant populations of small native animals'.*

The NDPRP and the DCN also congratulated the Australian Museum and the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage for standing their ground in making this very deserving award. They did so in the face of attempts to undermine their decision by at least one department of primary industries, where entrenched anti-dingo prejudice, and resistance to scientific evidence, still prevails.

This award is a vindication of the very high standard of the body of research conducted by the winning researchers over a long period. The NDPRP and the DCN believe it is unfortunate that recent efforts to discredit the winning research have been made by a small number of researchers associated with the pastoral industry, whose independence is questionable. The Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre (IACRC), in particular, an organisation which includes powerful pastoral industry stakeholders, attracts particular scrutiny in this regard.

Ms Parkhurst and Dr Healy stated:

'The NDPRP and the DCN believe that The IA CRC should not be engaged in research into the ecological role of the dingo, as the conflict of interest it faces is too great and its independence too open to question. Certainly, no public money should be given over to the IACRC for dingo-related research. Standards of public accountability should require that public money be awarded to researchers who are, and are seen to be, genuinely independent.'

The high-calibre, independent research conducted by the Eureka award winners foreshadows new ways forward in reconciling conservation and pastoral industry interests. This potential should not be undermined by misguided attempts to breathe new life into historically outdated anti-dingo prejudice.

Jennifer Parkhurst –NDPRP
Ernest Healy –DCN

Dingo Profile - Ben Allen

