

Dilemmas of transgression: Ethical responses in a more-than-human world

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| Abstract: | <p>To transgress is "to do something that is not allowed"; in a human-constructed world, animals, especially those seen as 'incompanionate', are often deemed to be doing something not allowed. We explore the ethical dilemmas of 'transgression' in the context of critical reflection on an instructive example of dingo-human relations on Fraser Island, Australia, which has incited ongoing debate from diverse publics about the killing of 'problem' dingoes. We outline the historical and ethical complexity of such relations, and suggest that human-nonhuman encounters, direct or indirect, have the potential to produce new, less anthropocentric topologies in which transgression is reconstructed and humans and animals can share space more equitably. The kind of knowledge and ethical re-positioning beginning to emerge in dingo-human relations, suggests transgression itself as a metaphor for its further re-imagining: a disruption of spatial, emotional and ethical boundaries to shape more responsive, respectful and less anthropocentric topologies.</p> |
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Dilemmas of transgression: Ethical responses in a more-than-human world

For Peer Review

Original article

Introduction: Transgression and more-than-human geographies

'Transgression' is a morally loaded term; synonyms include 'breach', 'crime', 'lawbreaking', 'malefaction', 'misdeed', 'sin', 'offense', 'trespass', 'violation', 'wrongdoing'. To transgress is, at its simplest, is "to do something that is not allowed"¹. In a human-constructed world, animals are often deemed to be doing something that is not allowed, even where it is an activity essential for survival, such as foraging for food, excreting waste, seeking a mate, constructing a home and raising young. The story of bats in suburban Australia is one example of an animal whose daily life constitutes a set of activities deemed unacceptable because of their smell, noise and potential risk of disease to humans; hence, many argue that bats should not be permitted within spaces of human habitation².

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9 In this paper we explore the ethical dilemmas of 'transgression' in the context of
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11 'incompanionate' animals. Based on research, anecdotal evidence and newspaper
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13 reports, we reflect on dingoes in the World Heritage-listed Fraser Island, off the coast
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15 of Queensland, Australia, as an instructive example of an animal whose hybrid nature,
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17 and hence 'transgressive' behaviour, fluctuates with space and time. Dingoes inhabit
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19 wilderness, urban and rural space, each with different discourses around the dingo's
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21 protected status as wildlife, its pest status as destroyer of other animals, its iconism as
22
23 a keystone predator representing increasingly distanced nature, or as domesticated
24
25 pet (Archer-Lean et al, 2015). The dingo also has a contested history in Australia as a
26
27 'native dog', arriving some 5,000 years prior to European colonisation, further
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29 problematizing its status as wild or introduced species. Each space-time context has
30
31 different rules for what constitutes transgression. On Fraser Island, the actions of the
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33 Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (the state body that manages the area) incite
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35 ongoing debate from diverse publics about their treatment of 'problem' or
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37 'transgressing' dingoes, treatment that at times has included dingo culling and
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39 targeted killing.
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47 Transgression is therefore a useful concept with which to explore the spatial and
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49 material impacts of human rule-making about nonhumans. The boundaries that
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51 construct transgression may be physical, cultural or regulatory, but they are human-
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9 defined and transgression is generally seen as one-way – animal transgression into
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11 human territory - with often severe consequences for the individual animal or its
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13 species. Wildlife conservation parks ostensibly reverse this definition to protect
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15 animals from human transgression, but as we shall see in the example of the Fraser
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17 Island dingo, even this protection extends only so far before the wildlife becomes the
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19 transgressor.
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23 The consequence of transgression by dingoes on Fraser Island can be death, most
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25 often of the dingoes, and occasionally of humans. Nonetheless the history of dingo-
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27 human interactions also presents a valuable example of a growing human knowledge
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29 of ‘dingo worlds’ and dingoes’ diverse relations with humans as a ‘trickster’, a sheep-
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31 killer”, a ‘real special thing’, or a domestic pet³. We argue that encounters with
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33 dingoes, either directly, or indirectly through sharing knowledge, can form the basis of
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35 an ethics that resituates the dingo outside the transgression discourse, requires a
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37 greater openness to understanding the dingoes’ ‘standpoint’, and guides humans
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39 towards a less punitive and more informed way of living alongside the dingo.
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Transgression as an ethically and politically asymmetric relation

... what is being advocated ... is an interspecies contact or symbiogenesis based upon a more convivial, less fixedly human and more risky approach to boundaries⁴.

The question of how humans can live more compassionately alongside animals, or at least with reduced levels of harm to animals, has been addressed extensively within geography⁵ and in other disciplines such as anthropology⁶, sociology⁷ and within environmental histories and philosophy⁸. Responses to such a question are often grounded in ethics, including animal rights advocacy⁹, and canvas not only the sharing of space by humans and their 'companion species', but also with those that are 'incompanionate'¹⁰ – "forms of life with which interspecies relating may not be so obvious or comfortable"¹¹, such as rats and viruses.

Human constructed restrictions or barriers to animal movement, both produce and enforce classification of different animals as pets, pest or vermin¹². Even animal protection and anti-cruelty legislation privileges human needs, convenience and comfort over those of animals, differentiating between a dog as a 'pet', a certified 'working dog' or a 'stray'¹³, and the ethico-legal treatment of animals varies greatly between companion animals and 'consumption' animals¹⁴.

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9 Animal transgressions across human-defined boundaries that injure or kill humans can
10 become public, media-worthy events constructed as tragedy or nuisance, generating a
11 command and control response from authorities. While these responses are not
12 explicitly described as 'setting an example' to other animals, they are a response to the
13 need to be 'seen to be doing something', as the following newspaper article suggests:
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20 Bat culling to be allowed under new Queensland permits (from the Courier Mail
21 newspaper 2012¹⁵)
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25 Bats are in the sights of the new [Queensland] State Government, with growers
26 to be allowed kill permits to stop flying foxes repeatedly decimating their crops...
27
28 ...Leading the call for a "serious culling program" is federal Member for Kennedy,
29
30 Bob Katter, who claims talk is being dominated by a "clear-cut value system that
31
32 puts the lives of bats higher than the lives of human beings".
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37 The animal movements and occupation of space that qualify as transgressions change
38 over time, as can be seen in the emergence of the nineteenth century "sanitary city"
39 described by Atkins, where particular animal species were first classified as vermin¹⁶. In
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41 the non-urban settings of outback Australia:
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46 [c]amels are now referred to as "humped pests," "a plague," "real danger" ... and
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48 "menacing" ... These accusations lie in stark contrast to the praise laid upon
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9 those dromedaries who assisted colonists in the exploration and establishment
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11 of modern Australia ...¹⁷.

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13 Similarly, the cane toad in Australia has been transformed from the sugarcane farmer's
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15 weapon against cane beetle to the ultimate transgressor of 'wild' spaces, ugly, toxic
16
17 and destructive¹⁸. These shifting boundaries and classifications reveal animal
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19 transgression as a marker of an anthropocentrically constructed landscape that
20
21 changes according to the shifting needs and desires of humans.
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25 In this paper, we take up a point emphasised recently by Hodgetts and Lorimer¹⁹, that
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27 animal geographies are multiple, with different topologies that are not necessarily
28
29 commensurate with those of humans. Topologies here is used in Shields'²⁰ sense to
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31 mean conceptualizations of space in terms of significant connections and relationships
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33 within the space, foregrounding some and backgrounding others, rather than
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35 'geometries' that focus on distances and shapes. For any space, there are likely to be
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37 "multiple, conflicting spatialisations that intersect, usually remaining separate but at
38
39 certain times and places breaking in on each other"²¹. Finding ways to understand
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41 how topologies differ between species, for example through ethology, "helps
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43 acknowledge intersections, absences, incommensurabilities and discordances within
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45 and between the multiple ways and forms of being in the world"²². In the examples
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9 offered in this paper, transgression is a point at which human and animal topologies
10 collide.

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12 To discuss transgression is to discuss the boundaries and borders that make
13 transgression possible. These borders, suggests Castree, may most obviously be those
14 political borders defined by national governments, but more broadly are those
15 “conceptual cuts” that separate ‘inside’ from ‘outside’ or ‘out of place’. They occur in
16 any arena where “dividing lines are drawn and come to have material efficacy.”²³

17
18 In this paper, we are concerned with borders in a more-than-human world, and in
19 particular with re-examining the idea of animal transgression across human-defined
20 boundaries. We argue that human construction and enforcement of such boundaries
21 reflect an asymmetry of power founded on the principle of human exceptionalism –
22 the presumption of an “unbridgeable hiatus” between humans and nonhumans²⁴. This
23 conceit, “keeps us searching in vain for what barricades us from, rather than bonds us
24 to, our co-habitants on earth”²⁵. One of the ways in which this search for separation
25 takes form is in the construction of human space and boundaries that exclude animals
26 and their activities. The threat imposed by animal transgression across these
27 boundaries is thus a threat to a topology that reflects and represents the distinction
28 between human and nonhuman and the privileging of the human.
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9 Transgression by animals is therefore part of a topology – an ethical landscape²⁶ – that
10 foregrounds, through material and/or regulatory boundaries, places of value to
11 humans, and backgrounds (by ignoring or excluding) the value and use of these places
12 for nonhumans. Boundaries, transgressions and responses to transgression form “a
13 terrain of ethical events which is as variable as the terrain of the earth itself”²⁷ that
14 varies across farms, laboratories, wilderness and domestic settings, and across
15 complex cultural conceptions of when, why and which animals are ‘in place’ or ‘out of
16 place’²⁸.

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28 The material effect of human topologies is that many animal spaces are largely
29 produced and shaped by legislation²⁹, especially those in which humans and animals
30 live in close proximity (such as cities), or come into periodic proximity, such as the
31 wildlife tourism site discussed later in this paper. Nevertheless, as Whatmore has
32 noted and as can be seen in our critical reflection on dingoes of Fraser Island, even
33 where wild animals are caught up in human life, they frequently exert agency that
34 subverts human topologies to their own, for example by offering humans a somewhat
35 different and more disconcerting ‘first-hand’ wildlife experience than the one they had
36 in mind³⁰; in the city, such animal agency is evident in the way that ‘subaltern’ animals
37 (rats, pigeons and cockroaches) subvert or modify human design and efforts to exclude
38 or exterminate them³¹.

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9 The principles of human exceptionalism and its associated ethical discourses underlie
10 the recent history of dingo-human relations on Fraser Island in Queensland, Australia.
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12 The construction of an 'ethical landscape' can be seen in practices that include
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14 restrictions on dingo movements from protected national park areas to tourist
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16 campsites (through fences or deterrents), and the removal or killing of animals who
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18 transgress physical, legal or moral boundaries. However such practices, and the
19
20 assumptions that underlie them, have begun to change on Fraser Island in part
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22 because of human-dingo encounters that stand outside the transgression discourse.
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24 From such encounters it is possible to imagine a different way for humans and dingoes
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26 to share space "without interfering with each other"³².
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32 33 **A short history of dingoes on Fraser Island**

34 35 36 *The dingo 'problem' on Fraser Island: the transgression discourse*

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38 People who visit Fraser Island for the first time often struggle to find the words
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40 to describe the beauty of this magical island. But also animal life, especially the
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42 230 species of birds, Australia's purest dingo and many other species contribute
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44 to the unique island environment³³.
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48 Fraser Island, located near Australia's eastern coast in the State of Queensland (see
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50 Map below), is the world's largest sand island, over 120 kilometres long, and since
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9 1922, designated a World Heritage area because of its 'natural values'. The Island is a
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11 well-known tourist destination, with an emphasis on the Island's wildlife which
12
13 includes Australia's 'purest' strain of dingo (*Canis lupus dingo*). During peak tourism
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15 season, the restricted residential areas on the island adjacent to the Great Sandy
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17 National Park are heavily populated by humans.

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25 The dingo arrived in Australia some 5,000 years ago, via south-east Asia, and in most
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27 parts of Australia bred with the domestic dog following European colonisation. While
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29 some Aboriginal traditional landowners and contemporary residents have, over time,
30
31 semi-domesticated the Fraser Island dingo, it is still thought to be the 'purest' strain of
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33 dingo in Australia. A discussion between one of the authors and an Aboriginal
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35 traditional landowner of Fraser Island, living at nearby Hervey Bay, revealed the long-
36
37 standing history of human-dog-dingo relationships on the island: "We used to take our
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39 domestic dogs on the island. Then Parks and Wildlife came along and they stopped all
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41 that from going on. They put all their restrictions on there – what you can and what
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43 you can't do, but before that you could sort of just about do what you want"³⁴. This
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45 history complicates debates around the dingo's 'wildlife' status, which is marketed to
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9 tourists who seek their photographs of a top-order predator. The Fraser Island dingo-
10 human locale therefore provides an instructive case in which to explore transgression.
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12 In 2001, two dingoes killed a child on Fraser Island, Australia, which led to an
13
14 immediate culling of 31 dingoes by government authorities in charge of the national
15
16 park. Culling of the dingoes occurred alongside an outpouring of outrage from animal
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18 welfare and environmental groups as well as many individuals³⁵. It also stirred
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20 questions about whether urban-based Australians and wild animals can successfully
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22 share the same space:
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27 The child's name was Clinton Gage and his death broke his family's heart, sold
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29 newspapers around the world and challenged and reproached Australians for
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31 their failure yet again to interpret the dingo and its wilderness environment
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33 through an informed and responsible discourse³⁶.
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37 The 2001 Fraser Island Dingo Management Plan distinguishes between 'wild' and
38
39 'habituated' dingoes, and the Environmental Protection Agency of Queensland has
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41 claimed that because of prolonged contact with humans, some dingoes had "changed
42
43 their natural habits, losing their fear and wariness [of humans]"³⁷.
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46 The conceptual boundaries between 'natural' and habituated behaviour, however,
47
48 become blurred when humans are involved in reinforcing 'wild' behaviours³⁸.
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50 Strategies directed at reinstating dingoes' 'natural' fear of humans and de-habituating
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9 them to humans, include barrier fencing to spatially segregate humans and dingoes,
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11 discouraging human-initiated contact with, or proximity to, dingoes, and 'hazing' –
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13 spraying animals with pellets or other irritants (a practice which has since been
14
15 discontinued)³⁹. The most recent version of the Fraser Island Dingo Management
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17 Strategy (FIDMS)⁴⁰ continues an interventionist approach, for example, trapping and
18
19 ear-tagging to identify 'habituated' dingoes.
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23 Nevertheless, humans are now being called upon to modify their behaviour and
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25 become 'dingo safe'. According to a review commissioned by the Environment
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27 Protection Authority of Queensland, soon after the introduction of a public education
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29 and awareness raising program in 1998, 'dingo-related' incidents dramatically
30
31 declined. However reported incidents rose again after 2001⁴¹ and the graph below
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33 from a later review up to 2012 shows that between the years 2002 and 2012 around
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35 70 dingoes were killed under the FIDMS.
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42 <FIGURE 2 HERE>
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46 The reporting of another Fraser Island dingo attack in 2011 reflects a continued
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48 management approach of killing 'problem dingoes' while shifting some responsibility
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50 to humans:
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9 Dingoes destroyed after Fraser attack (from the Sydney Morning Herald
10 *newspaper, 2011*⁴²)

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13 Two dingoes that attacked a toddler on Fraser Island yesterday have been
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15 captured and destroyed, the Department of Environment and Resource
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17 Management has confirmed.

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20 [Terry Harper, general manager of the Department of Environment and Resource
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22 Management] advised all visitors to the island to be "dingo smart":

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25 "Our ambition is to keep dingoes wild on Fraser Island which is a wild place," he
26
27 said. "One of the implications of that is that people need to take personal
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29 responsibility for going to wild places and on Fraser Island that includes being
30
31 'dingo smart'".

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34 Being 'dingo-smart' however has a history that began long before the Department's
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36 education and awareness campaign.

37 38 39 *Dingo-human relations over time*

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42 Across Australia, Aboriginal elders have recalled raising dingoes as pets to protect
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44 children from other dingoes, and early miners and timber-getters also recount positive
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46 stories of befriending dingoes⁴³. For many Aboriginal people the dingo is part of the
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48 Dreaming, "fitted into the wider kinship structure" and buried with ceremony⁴⁴. The
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50 wild side of the dingo has also been acknowledged, and its capacity to behave as a
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9 'trickster' "moving freely between the worlds of gods and humans and playing tricks
10 on both"⁴⁵. In Australia more widely, the dingo has been seen as a "vicious sheep-
11 killer", endangered wildlife or a domestic pet⁴⁶. In discussion with one of the authors,
12 an Aboriginal landowner urged all people, tourists and residents to treat the dingo as
13 "an apex predator, like lions or wolves"⁴⁷.
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18 However these diverse representations of the dingo – spiritual lawman and law-
19 breaker, human pet and human predator – have historically been absent in tourists'
20 interactions with the Fraser Island dingo. Parker argues that tourism operators "[lure]
21 parents and children to the island with a flawed and impossible discourse—the
22 children's dingo"⁴⁸. She suggests that the presence of families with children in areas
23 such as campgrounds where dingoes live reflects the alienation of many Australians
24 from their natural environment, where "they no longer seem able to recognize the
25 dangers of wildness"⁴⁹. It is more than alienation however: in their offerings of food to
26 dingoes and their assumption that dingoes could be tamed into behaving like domestic
27 dogs, tourists on Fraser Island have, argues Parker, effectively transgressed the dingo's
28 territory by stealth and attempted to colonise it, "bearing unsuitable gifts and
29 demanding something in return"⁵⁰.
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49 Meanwhile, Fraser Island residents, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who currently live
50 in close proximity to dingoes know not to feed them⁵¹, and there is a growing
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9 awareness by non-Indigenous scholars and conservationists of the need to *re-present*
10 the dingo in a more complex form than simply as 'wildlife' or 'marauder', in order to
11 understand and live alongside it:
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15 ... if it is finally accepted that ... dingoes naturally have a complex repertoire of
16 behaviours that include symbiotic and predatory associations with humans, then
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18 it can be assigned its place on the landscape as a dangerous animal and
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20 conserved as such animals are everywhere, with its separation from people given
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22 due weight⁵².
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28 *Transformative encounters: human mourning and dingo standpoints*
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30 After the culling of 31 dingoes on Fraser Island in 2001, there is evidence of a concern
31 that dingoes were "dying because of human mistakes"⁵³. The reactions to the culling of
32 the dingoes recorded in a survey by Burns et al⁵⁴ included grief and shock: feeling
33 afraid *for* the dingoes⁵⁵, and sadness at the killing of a "real special thing"⁵⁶. Others
34 saw it immediately as a justice issue, noting that dingoes had been fed by humans and
35 calling for fairness for the dingoes⁵⁷, or described the culling as a tragedy and an
36 incident that was no fault of the dingo⁵⁸. Other responses were more political and
37 directed anger at government and wildlife management, suggesting that the
38 government had simply wanted to be seen to be doing something⁵⁹ or that it was
39 people rather than wildlife who needed managing⁶⁰.
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9 These responses point to an identification with the dingoes' 'point of view' or, in
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11 Wolch's⁶¹ terms the 'dingo standpoint'. They suggest that more is at stake than the
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13 survival of a tourist attraction, or even an ecosystem. The compromise approach taken
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15 to dingo management since 1998, where the education of humans has been added to
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17 other strategies such as animal tagging and the killing of 'problem' dingoes, responds
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19 to a history of dingo-human encounters that reaches beyond the attack incidents
20
21 described in the media reports and beyond expert explanations for dingo behaviour
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23 and advocates' arguments for dingo rights. In their grief and anger, the survey
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25 respondents expressed a connection with dingoes that might begin to inform a
26
27 different kind of ethics in dingo-human relations.
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32 33 *The ethical terrain in dingo-human relations*

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35 The killing of dingoes on Fraser Island has been underpinned by definitions of 'natural'
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37 dingo behaviours as acceptable when they remain 'in place' (behind boundary fences),
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39 and the behaviour of problem – transgressing – dingoes as 'unnatural'. These
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41 definitions in turn enable the human act of killing to be ethically justified in that it
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43 becomes not simply the killing of animals who transgress 'human' space and threaten
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45 humans, but the *mercy* killing ('euthanasing'⁶²) of 'unnatural' animals who can no
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47 longer represent the 'pure', natural dingo and have lost their dingo way.
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9 Such justification becomes a way to resolve the tension between meeting objectives of
10 human wellbeing (in this case through the preservation of boundaries) and those of
11 animal protection⁶³. It reverses the conservation principle where boundaries are
12 constructed to provide 'reserves' for wildlife that protect them from humans⁶⁴. It is
13 only the transgression by the dingo of human-ordered space that is invoked by policy
14 makers and park managers under such justification.
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18 Arguments for killing dingoes also rely on a different conservation principle that
19 values, and hence ethically privileges, the preservation of a species rather than
20 individual animals or populations: the maintenance of a 'generative' heterogeneity in
21 ecosystems and landscapes, rather than specific existing differences between "species,
22 genes, habitats"⁶⁵. Thus the suffering of individual dingoes becomes subsumed in the
23 debate about the dingo as a 'type' of nonhuman, as a 'pure representative' of the
24 species, or as an essential component of the ecosystem; producing and reproducing an
25 ethics of space in which nonhumans may be rendered invisible. The Australian Dingo
26 Conservation Association couches its aims in terms of protecting and conserving "the
27 Australian Dingo" rather than individual dingoes⁶⁶; elsewhere, the deaths of individual
28 wolves have been made ethically invisible in the same way⁶⁷.

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31 In suggesting that strategies to make dingoes fear humans need to be accompanied by
32 a strategy to make people fear dingoes, Burns et al call for greater recognition of the
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9 fact that “human–Dingo interactions involve two parties”⁶⁸. Each encounter, close or
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11 distant, good or bad, deadly or friendly, between dingoes and humans is a place-based
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13 encounter between individuals, each with a ‘face’. On Fraser Island it was those
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15 encounters that generated mourning, anger and fear for the dingoes after the incident
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17 in 2001. Instone suggests that this is part of a bigger conceptual shift: that each
18
19 respectful encounter in which the ‘trickiness’ of dingoes is accepted and negotiated
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21 “refocuses attention on the transformative power of the encounter between humans
22
23 and non-humans in the making of Australian nature”⁶⁹.
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27 Even encounters that are less direct can produce a transformation in human-animal
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29 relations. The resort guest quoted above⁷⁰ who regrets the loss of “a real special
30
31 thing”, may indeed be referring to ‘the dingo’ as a type or as a species, and may not
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33 have had an encounter with the elusive dingo; the statement is nonetheless an
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35 expression of sadness that responds to the killing of 31 individual dingoes. Other
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37 comments from residents and tourism employees also refer to a generic ‘dingo’ – who
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39 is fed by humans, whose future is feared for, who needs to be managed less than
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41 humans do – but they too are expressing grief and outrage at the deaths of individual
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43 dingoes. Later in this paper we return to the ethical distinction between concern for a
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45 collective and concern for individual animals.
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9 The slow co-evolution of a different kind of relationship between humans and dingoes
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11 is reflected partly in the concern that authorities have to demonstrate that there is a
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13 declining number of dingoes being killed (even when, as indicated in the Figure 2
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15 above, the evidence for a consistent decline is not strong⁷¹). However it is also
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17 reflected more positively in the attempts that have been made to achieve an
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19 understanding of dingo worlds, of the way 'transgressions' are constructed by humans
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21 and the possibility that transgressions might occur in both directions. Developing a
22
23 more equitable human topology for Fraser Island will, as Parker notes, take time, and
24
25 meanwhile the 'dingo-proof' fence continues to provide a physical boundary between
26
27 tourists and dingoes⁷².

32 33 **Developing ethical topologies: staying in the open and paying attention**

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35 Shifting towards a less anthropocentric sharing of space by humans and animals is
36
37 therefore not merely a matter of knowing more about animals – “producing better and
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39 better or more accurate representations, as if we can take preexisting identities and
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41 bring them into the conversation”; it is, as Hinchliffe et al have noted, rather about
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43 changing our engagements with animals⁷³. Dingoes and humans living well together on
44
45 Fraser Island, and in all of the spaces they inhabit, will emerge from new
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47 understandings of dingo worlds and dingo standpoints that resituate the dingo outside
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9 the transgression discourse – and hence inspire new and ethically different practices
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11 by tourist, conservationist or resident.

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14 *Encounters: where human and dingo topologies intersect*

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16 Histories of human-nonhuman relations acknowledge a more symmetrical co-
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18 *constitution* of space by humans and nonhumans⁷⁴. In a study of tourists whale-
19
20 watching and swimming with dolphins, Cloke and Perkins⁷⁵ note the contribution of
21
22 the animals themselves, through both carefully staged and unanticipated actions, to
23
24 “the changing nature of places and ... the performances which help to define those
25
26 places”⁷⁶. We need to consider, argues Clark, “not only how nonhumans make worlds
27
28 *of their own*, but how they provide worlds *for others*”⁷⁷, including humans. Human-
29
30 dolphin interactions allow familiarity with the animals to grow through sharing of
31
32 spaces⁷⁸. Through co-constituting spaces in ways that enhance humans’ enjoyment,
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34 animals perform the opposite of transgression; rather than *breaching* a human-defined
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36 space, they help to define it.
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42 Considering animals as co-constituents of space has ethical and practical possibilities
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44 beyond the wild encounter, for example, for shared urban topologies that include
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46 conceptions of ‘the zoöpolis’⁷⁹, and the ‘living city’⁸⁰, where sites of significant
47
48 interaction include parks, abandoned land, public infrastructure spaces, and
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50 waterways that cut across the established spatial divisions “between civic and wild,
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9 town and country, human and nonhuman"⁸¹. Instone and Mee have described the 'dog
10 park' of Australian cities as a still "uneasy settlement" between humans and dogs but
11 nevertheless one where "shared knowledges and practices can be developed and
12 performed"⁸².

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18 Encounters with animals can give us time to see the animal's 'face'⁸³, and the
19 possibility of an engagement based on empathy and an understanding of 'animal'
20 standpoints'⁸⁴. Haraway has argued that humans need to have a certain *regard*⁸⁵ for an
21 animal in order to give it a face; Parker notes in her discussion on dingoes that this
22 regard is reciprocal:
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30 Many writers have commented on the moment when an animal returns their
31 gaze...

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34 The dingo, pushing her paws through the sand to locate the trap, wants to live...

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37 Without the barrier of a denigrating discourse, it would be hard to look a trapped
38 dingo in the eye⁸⁶.

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41 Such encounters with animals appear to induce an empathy or awareness that
42 translates into a 'care ethic'⁸⁷, an awareness that Segerdahl likens to "a moral wound
43 [that] had been opened that ought never to heal. We have become vulnerable to what
44 I, at this moment, want to call, the other animals"⁸⁸. For Karlsson, encounter is "the
45 basic, moral event", where asymmetries of power imply "an increased responsibility
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9 on account of the more powerful part”⁸⁹. Lynn⁹⁰ argues that beyond encounters with
10 particular animals, there is also moral value derived from a capacity to empathize with
11 both individual and collective wellbeing of animals, including “wild or distant
12 animals”⁹¹. Smith⁹² notes that the empathy induced by watching the clubbing to death
13 of one seal may extend our ethical consideration to “include thousands of similarly
14 situated seals or members of other quite different species and/or even permeate our
15 felt understandings of the ecology of the entire planet”⁹³.
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24 Both transgression and transformative encounters occur at the intersection of
25 disparate topologies, one nonhuman, the other human; the latter kind of encounter
26 has been elaborated in various ways that all include ideas of openness, attentiveness
27 and empathy that transcend cultural and ethico-legal boundaries and the notion of
28 transgression by the nonhuman.
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40 *Paying attention and staying in the open*

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42 Our thinking on intersecting topologies can be extended to enrol diverse spatial
43 contexts. In Wolch’s zoöpolis⁹⁴, humans would stop distancing themselves from
44 animal worlds and become more closely acquainted with animal lives and their
45 connections with each other and their environments. Wolch describes such a process
46 as a form of ‘re-enchantment’⁹⁵. Van Dooren and Rose⁹⁶ convey some of this re-
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9 enchantment with animal worlds in their work on the narratives through which flying
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11 foxes are connected to place:

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13 Given the flying foxes' intense determination to return to or remain in camps
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15 where they have mated and given birth, the experience of those who return to
16
17 find that the home camp has been rendered uninhabitable or even razed must
18
19 be stressful and demoralizing in the extreme. ... [F]lying foxes inhabit not just
20
21 trees but worlds of meaning...⁹⁷

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25 To be re-encharmed by the other, and recognize its expressiveness, involves paying
26
27 attention to other lives and worlds, using for example some of the methods of tracing
28
29 nonhuman topologies described by Hodgetts and Lorimer⁹⁸. It includes too the kind of
30
31 attention paid in Whatmore's stories of 'becoming elephant',⁹⁹ and in Darwin's study
32
33 of earthworms¹⁰⁰. It is "getting 'dirty and knowledgeable' in order to know and talk
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35 about animals responsibly"¹⁰¹.

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39 This kind of unequal relation [between human and animal] cannot be made good
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41 through codification, nor abolished by means of radical political theory/action
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43 (such as that of animal rights). Instrumental relations call for something more
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45 nebulous, but perhaps also more authentic: an alternative form of life, namely,
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47 the willingness and ability to 'stay in the open'.
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9 To stay in the open is to give up some certainty¹⁰², to constantly question our own
10 assumptions and attitudes about animals, and to pay attention to the experience of
11 animals¹⁰³. In doing so, transgression might disappear and be replaced with an
12 informed acceptance that dingoes do what dingoes do, that all animals do what
13 animals do. It enables humans to learn more about animal topologies, and
14 acknowledge how these might differ, vastly or incommensurably, from human-
15 constructed worlds. Haraway for example asks laboratory practitioners to question
16 themselves about how laboratory practices could be “less deadly, less painful, and
17 freer”¹⁰⁴.

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30 The move away from a worldview based on human exceptionalism is a form of ‘giving
31 up’ not only conventional modes of inquiry, but the self: “to cast oneself ... with some
32 ways of life and not others”¹⁰⁵. In their study of water voles, Hinchliffe et al¹⁰⁶ found
33 that paying attention to detail produces another world, one that is understood with
34 more than simply the senses:
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41 In practice, the pictures and written texts are woven together with the traces,
42 tracks, and mammals to form a complex of writings. Our eyes (and to a lesser
43 extent our noses) were being trained to recognise distinctions that were
44 formerly invisible to us. The pictures, field signs, and conversations were
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9 changing the way we sensed and, as we will see later, the way water voles made
10 sense¹⁰⁷.

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13 The authors note that they were learning “to be affected” and that the idea of
14 faithfully representing the water voles was being replaced with a form of “creative
15 address” to them¹⁰⁸: “allowing others, of all shapes and sizes, to make a difference to
16 the process of knowing”¹⁰⁹.

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23 What is needed, suggests Lorimer, is “a humble willingness to put one’s knowledge at
24 risk in the process of learning to be affected by the phenomena under
25 investigation”¹¹⁰. Paying attention is also a form of Karlsson’s¹¹¹ ‘attentive-love’: more
26 basic than sympathy because it arises directly from the perception of particular
27 animals’ potential for pain or suffering¹¹². Clark eloquently describes an alternative
28 ethical future to the present asymmetry between human and animal: the “profound
29 non-symmetry” of empathy and compassion:
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39 No less than the unbalancing of our relationship with nature, the offer of help –
40 without expectation of return or recompense – to those who have been laid low
41 by the ordinary chaos of terrestrial existence also upsets the assumption of co-
42 constitutive relations – and draws us deeper into the issue of how to live as best
43 we can in an inherently precarious physical reality¹¹³.
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9 Empathy and compassion lead to other ways of being with (or not being with)
10 nonhumans; making room¹¹⁴, being alongside¹¹⁵, practicing conviviality¹¹⁶ and other
11 forms of entanglement with nonhumans require a different lens from that of
12 transgression – a different topology - for seeing the world. After empathy, the practice
13 of an ethics that accommodates alternative topologies would require changes to the
14 design and regulation of space in myriad ways – “not only animal regulation and
15 control practices, but landscaping, development rates and design, roadway and
16 transportation decisions, use of energy, industrial toxics, and bioengineering”¹¹⁷. Some
17 such encounters, those that involve more than simply ‘being alongside’, might involve
18 Taylor and Carter’s ‘etiquette’ for multispecies interactions, an etiquette that provides
19 a framework for engagement based upon attentiveness and acceptance:
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34 ... etiquette involves reciprocity of seeing, touching, and speaking with the other,
35 a bodily invitation to interact by welcoming gesture, following the rules of
36 courtesy and trust, allowing the space to respond (or not) as a journey in
37 discovery of the other¹¹⁸.
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44 Forms of writing are still being developed to convey the kind of knowledge that
45 emerges from encounter and the “slowed-down attentiveness” that is different from
46 the researcher’s usual observation and categorization¹¹⁹ or the dominant definitions
47 and responses typical of a discourse of transgression. An example of such experimental
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9 writing is Pär Segerdahl's edited book on animal studies, where "animals made us
10 undisciplined in our discipline"¹²⁰. Here the scholarly chapters are interleaved with
11 short narratives:
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15 These short pieces often describe an experience, or a notion, or a thought that
16 secretly drives our work but cannot be digested completely in scholarly form.
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19 These interludes *reveal animal studies to transgress not only disciplinary borders,*
20 *but also borders between the academic and the personal*¹²¹.
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24 This suggests that in order to situate encounters with nonhumans outside a discourse
25 of transgression - to shape a new topology that takes account of the nonhuman
26 'standpoint' - humans will need to push beyond existing ethical and scholarly
27 boundaries.
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30 31 32 33 34 35 **Conclusion**

36
37 The localised histories of dingo-human encounter, and the individual responses to
38 dingo deaths on Fraser Island, profoundly influence the ways in which humans choose
39 to interact with the dingo. This paper is part of a wider and continuing project by many
40 to write about such encounters, to inform new ethical topologies that can
41 acknowledge multiplicity, and guide future interactions with animals more generously.
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43 For policy-makers and park managers on Fraser Island, this would mean continued
44 pressure to reduce the number of dingoes killed, and to make a greater investment in
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9 educating and supervising visitors to the Island. For visitors, it might mean exposure to
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11 more information about dingoes through encounters that occur either under
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13 supervision or from a distance, and a deeper understanding of the dingo's world and
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15 the dingo 'standpoint'. These more distant and cautious interactions may nonetheless
16
17 produce the kind of empathy for dingoes as a collective that Lynn and Smith¹²²
18
19 describe, and an informed willingness to live 'alongside'¹²³ rather than 'convivially' in
20
21 the sharing of space.
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25 The kind of knowledge and ethical re-positioning gained through encounter with the
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27 animal other, both felt and written at least in part outside traditional scholarly
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29 conventions, suggests transgression itself as a metaphor for its further re-imagining: a
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31 willingness by humans to disrupt spatial and cultural boundaries and the boundaries
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33 between thinking and feeling, in order to shape more responsive, respectful and less
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35 anthropocentric topologies.
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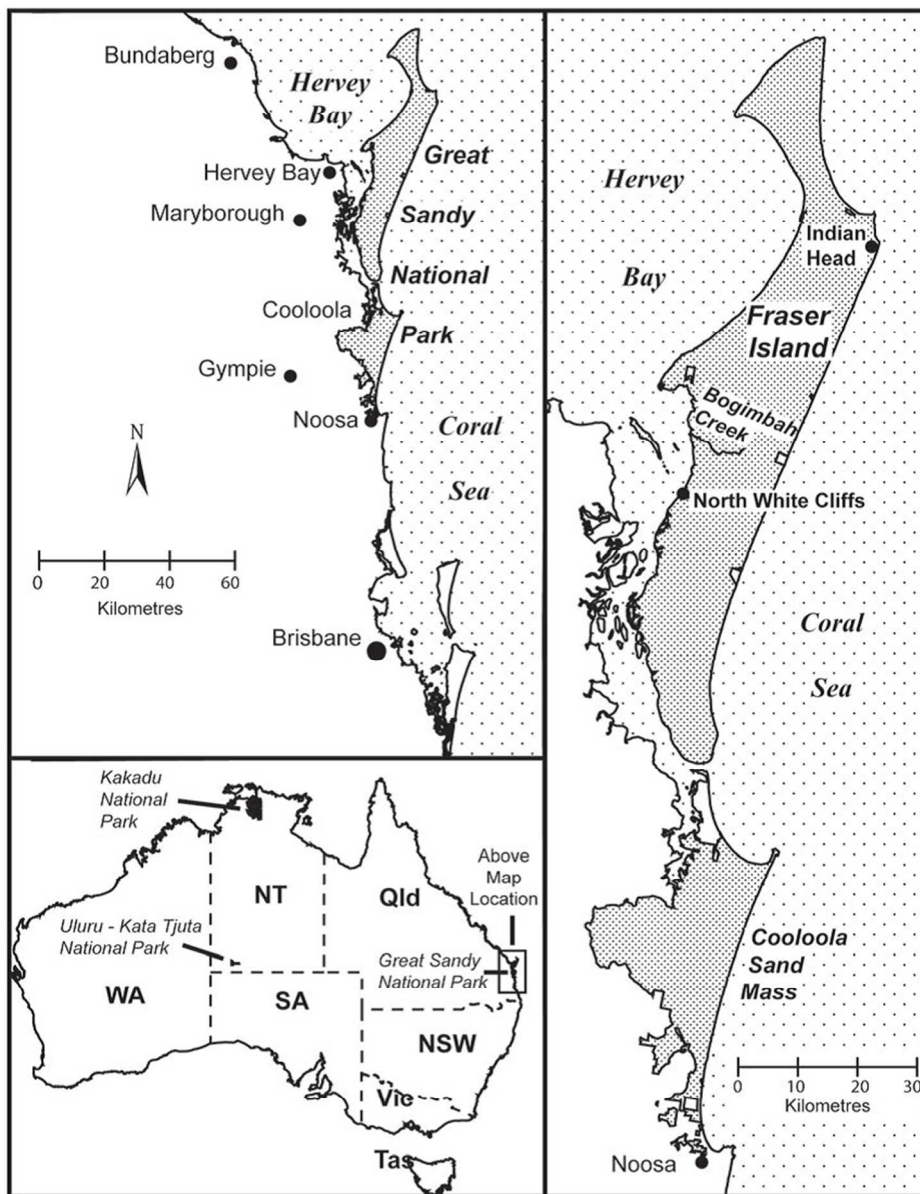
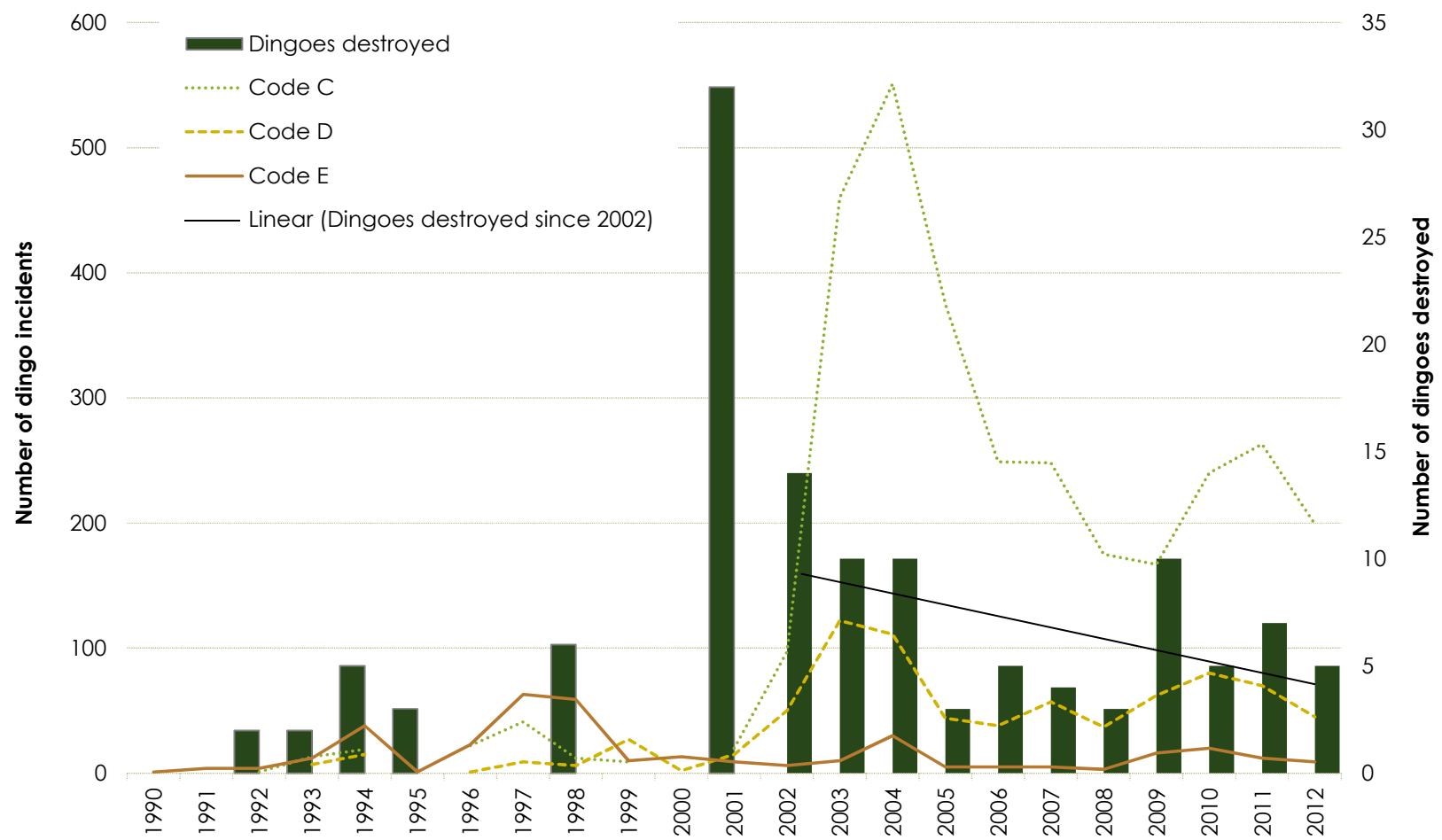


Figure 1: Map of Fraser Island from J. Carter, 'Displacing Indigenous cultural landscapes: The naturalistic gaze at Fraser Island World Heritage Area', *Geographical Research*, 48(4), 2010, pp. 398-410, p.402

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