

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

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Abstract:	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.

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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"<sup>1</sup>. 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 habitation<sup>2</sup>.

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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  
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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  
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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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22  
23 The consequence of transgression by dingoes on Fraser Island can be death, most  
24  
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 pet<sup>3</sup>. We argue that encounters with  
32  
33 dingoes, either directly, or indirectly through sharing knowledge, can form the basis of  
34  
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 boundaries<sup>4</sup>.

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 geography<sup>5</sup> and in other disciplines such as anthropology<sup>6</sup>, sociology<sup>7</sup> and within environmental histories and philosophy<sup>8</sup>. Responses to such a question are often grounded in ethics, including animal rights advocacy<sup>9</sup>, and canvas not only the sharing of space by humans and their 'companion species', but also with those that are 'incompanionate'<sup>10</sup> – "forms of life with which interspecies relating may not be so obvious or comfortable"<sup>11</sup>, 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 vermin<sup>12</sup>. 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'<sup>13</sup>, and the ethico-legal treatment of animals varies greatly between companion animals and 'consumption' animals<sup>14</sup>.

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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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15 Bat culling to be allowed under new Queensland permits (from the Courier Mail  
16 newspaper 2012<sup>15</sup>)  
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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 ...Leading the call for a "serious culling program" is federal Member for Kennedy,  
28 Bob Katter, who claims talk is being dominated by a "clear-cut value system that  
29 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 vermin<sup>16</sup>. In  
40 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  
47 "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 ...<sup>17</sup>.

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13 Similarly, the cane toad in Australia has been transformed from the sugarcane farmer's  
14  
15 weapon against cane beetle to the ultimate transgressor of 'wild' spaces, ugly, toxic  
16  
17 and destructive<sup>18</sup>. These shifting boundaries and classifications reveal animal  
18  
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 Lorimer<sup>19</sup>, that  
26  
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'<sup>20</sup> sense to  
30  
31 mean conceptualizations of space in terms of significant connections and relationships  
32  
33 within the space, foregrounding some and backgrounding others, rather than  
34  
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"<sup>21</sup>. Finding ways to understand  
40  
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"<sup>22</sup>. 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.”<sup>23</sup>

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 nonhumans<sup>24</sup>. This  
23 conceit, “keeps us searching in vain for what barricades us from, rather than bonds us  
24 to, our co-habitants on earth”<sup>25</sup>. 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 landscape<sup>26</sup> – 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”<sup>27</sup> 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’<sup>28</sup>.

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28 The material effect of human topologies is that many animal spaces are largely  
29 produced and shaped by legislation<sup>29</sup>, 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 mind<sup>30</sup>; 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 them<sup>31</sup>.

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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  
13  
14 restrictions on dingo movements from protected national park areas to tourist  
15  
16 campsites (through fences or deterrents), and the removal or killing of animals who  
17  
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  
21  
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  
25  
26 to share space "without interfering with each other"<sup>32</sup>.  
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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  
39  
40 to describe the beauty of this magical island. But also animal life, especially the  
41  
42 230 species of birds, Australia's purest dingo and many other species contribute  
43  
44 to the unique island environment<sup>33</sup>.  
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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  
14  
15 season, the restricted residential areas on the island adjacent to the Great Sandy  
16  
17 National Park are heavily populated by humans.

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20 <FIGURE 1 HERE>  
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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  
28  
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  
32  
33 dingo in Australia. A discussion between one of the authors and an Aboriginal  
34  
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  
38  
39 domestic dogs on the island. Then Parks and Wildlife came along and they stopped all  
40  
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"<sup>34</sup>. 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-  
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11 human locale therefore provides an instructive case in which to explore transgression.  
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13 In 2001, two dingoes killed a child on Fraser Island, Australia, which led to an  
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15 immediate culling of 31 dingoes by government authorities in charge of the national  
16  
17 park. Culling of the dingoes occurred alongside an outpouring of outrage from animal  
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19 welfare and environmental groups as well as many individuals<sup>35</sup>. It also stirred  
20  
21 questions about whether urban-based Australians and wild animals can successfully  
22  
23 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  
30  
31 their failure yet again to interpret the dingo and its wilderness environment  
32  
33 through an informed and responsible discourse<sup>36</sup>.  
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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  
40  
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]"<sup>37</sup>.  
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47 The conceptual boundaries between 'natural' and habituated behaviour, however,  
48  
49 become blurred when humans are involved in reinforcing 'wild' behaviours<sup>38</sup>.  
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51 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' –  
12  
13 spraying animals with pellets or other irritants (a practice which has since been  
14  
15 discontinued)<sup>39</sup>. The most recent version of the Fraser Island Dingo Management  
16  
17 Strategy (FIDMS)<sup>40</sup> continues an interventionist approach, for example, trapping and  
18  
19 ear-tagging to identify 'habituated' dingoes.  
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22  
23 Nevertheless, humans are now being called upon to modify their behaviour and  
24  
25 become 'dingo safe'. According to a review commissioned by the Environment  
26  
27 Protection Authority of Queensland, soon after the introduction of a public education  
28  
29 and awareness raising program in 1998, 'dingo-related' incidents dramatically  
30  
31 declined. However reported incidents rose again after 2001<sup>41</sup> 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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47 The reporting of another Fraser Island dingo attack in 2011 reflects a continued  
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49 management approach of killing 'problem dingoes' while shifting some responsibility  
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51 to humans:  
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9 Dingoes destroyed after Fraser attack (from the Sydney Morning Herald  
10 *newspaper, 2011*<sup>42</sup>)

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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  
21  
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  
28  
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  
35  
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  
45  
46 stories of befriending dingoes<sup>43</sup>. 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 ceremony<sup>44</sup>. 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"<sup>45</sup>. In Australia more widely, the dingo has been seen as a "vicious sheep-  
11 killer", endangered wildlife or a domestic pet<sup>46</sup>. 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"<sup>47</sup>.  
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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"<sup>48</sup>. 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"<sup>49</sup>. 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"<sup>50</sup>.  
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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 them<sup>51</sup>, 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  
17 it can be assigned its place on the landscape as a dangerous animal and  
18 conserved as such animals are everywhere, with its separation from people given  
19 due weight<sup>52</sup>.  
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#### 27 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"<sup>53</sup>. The reactions to the culling of  
32 the dingoes recorded in a survey by Burns et al<sup>54</sup> included grief and shock: feeling  
33 afraid *for* the dingoes<sup>55</sup>, and sadness at the killing of a "real special thing"<sup>56</sup>. Others  
34 saw it immediately as a justice issue, noting that dingoes had been fed by humans and  
35 calling for fairness for the dingoes<sup>57</sup>, or described the culling as a tragedy and an  
36 incident that was no fault of the dingo<sup>58</sup>. 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 something<sup>59</sup> or that it was  
39 people rather than wildlife who needed managing<sup>60</sup>.  
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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's<sup>61</sup> 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  
16  
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  
22  
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'<sup>62</sup>) 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 protection<sup>63</sup>. It reverses the conservation principle where boundaries are  
12 constructed to provide 'reserves' for wildlife that protect them from humans<sup>64</sup>. 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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22 Arguments for killing dingoes also rely on a different conservation principle that  
23 values, and hence ethically privileges, the preservation of a species rather than  
24 individual animals or populations: the maintenance of a 'generative' heterogeneity in  
25 ecosystems and landscapes, rather than specific existing differences between "species,  
26 genes, habitats"<sup>65</sup>. Thus the suffering of individual dingoes becomes subsumed in the  
27 debate about the dingo as a 'type' of nonhuman, as a 'pure representative' of the  
28 species, or as an essential component of the ecosystem; producing and reproducing an  
29 ethics of space in which nonhumans may be rendered invisible. The Australian Dingo  
30 Conservation Association couches its aims in terms of protecting and conserving "the  
31 Australian Dingo" rather than individual dingoes<sup>66</sup>; elsewhere, the deaths of individual  
32 wolves have been made ethically invisible in the same way<sup>67</sup>.  
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48 In suggesting that strategies to make dingoes fear humans need to be accompanied by  
49 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”<sup>68</sup>. Each encounter, close or  
10 distant, good or bad, deadly or friendly, between dingoes and humans is a place-based  
11 encounter between individuals, each with a ‘face’. On Fraser Island it was those  
12 encounters that generated mourning, anger and fear for the dingoes after the incident  
13 in 2001. Instone suggests that this is part of a bigger conceptual shift: that each  
14 respectful encounter in which the ‘trickiness’ of dingoes is accepted and negotiated  
15 “refocuses attention on the transformative power of the encounter between humans  
16 and non-humans in the making of Australian nature”<sup>69</sup>.

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28 Even encounters that are less direct can produce a transformation in human-animal  
29 relations. The resort guest quoted above<sup>70</sup> who regrets the loss of “a real special  
30 thing”, may indeed be referring to ‘the dingo’ as a type or as a species, and may not  
31 have had an encounter with the elusive dingo; the statement is nonetheless an  
32 expression of sadness that responds to the killing of 31 individual dingoes. Other  
33 comments from residents and tourism employees also refer to a generic ‘dingo’ – who  
34 is fed by humans, whose future is feared for, who needs to be managed less than  
35 humans do – but they too are expressing grief and outrage at the deaths of individual  
36 dingoes. Later in this paper we return to the ethical distinction between concern for a  
37 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 strong<sup>71</sup>). 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  
20  
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 dingoes<sup>72</sup>.

### 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  
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37 therefore not merely a matter of knowing more about animals – “producing better and  
38  
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 animals<sup>73</sup>. 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 nonhumans<sup>74</sup>. In a study of tourists whale-  
19  
20 watching and swimming with dolphins, Cloke and Perkins<sup>75</sup> 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”<sup>76</sup>. We need to consider, argues Clark, “not only how nonhumans make worlds  
27  
28 *of their own*, but how they provide worlds *for others*”<sup>77</sup>, including humans. Human-  
29  
30 dolphin interactions allow familiarity with the animals to grow through sharing of  
31  
32 spaces<sup>78</sup>. Through co-constituting spaces in ways that enhance humans’ enjoyment,  
33  
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’<sup>79</sup>, and the ‘living city’<sup>80</sup>, 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"<sup>81</sup>. 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"<sup>82</sup>.

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18 Encounters with animals can give us time to see the animal's 'face'<sup>83</sup>, and the  
19 possibility of an engagement based on empathy and an understanding of 'animal'  
20 standpoints'<sup>84</sup>. Haraway has argued that humans need to have a certain *regard*<sup>85</sup> 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 eye<sup>86</sup>.

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41 Such encounters with animals appear to induce an empathy or awareness that  
42 translates into a 'care ethic'<sup>87</sup>, 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"<sup>88</sup>. 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”<sup>89</sup>. Lynn<sup>90</sup> argues that beyond encounters with  
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11 particular animals, there is also moral value derived from a capacity to empathize with  
12  
13 both individual and collective wellbeing of animals, including “wild or distant  
14  
15 animals”<sup>91</sup>. Smith<sup>92</sup> notes that the empathy induced by watching the clubbing to death  
16  
17 of one seal may extend our ethical consideration to “include thousands of similarly  
18  
19 situated seals or members of other quite different species and/or even permeate our  
20  
21 felt understandings of the ecology of the entire planet”<sup>93</sup>.  
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25 Both transgression and transformative encounters occur at the intersection of  
26  
27 disparate topologies, one nonhuman, the other human; the latter kind of encounter  
28  
29 has been elaborated in various ways that all include ideas of openness, attentiveness  
30  
31 and empathy that transcend cultural and ethico-legal boundaries and the notion of  
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33 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  
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44 contexts. In Wolch’s zoöpolis<sup>94</sup>, humans would stop distancing themselves from  
45  
46 animal worlds and become more closely acquainted with animal lives and their  
47  
48 connections with each other and their environments. Wolch describes such a process  
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50 as a form of ‘re-enchantment’<sup>95</sup>. Van Dooren and Rose<sup>96</sup> 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  
14  
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...<sup>97</sup>

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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 Lorimer<sup>98</sup>. It includes too the kind of  
30  
31 attention paid in Whatmore's stories of 'becoming elephant',<sup>99</sup> and in Darwin's study  
32  
33 of earthworms<sup>100</sup>. It is "getting 'dirty and knowledgeable' in order to know and talk  
34  
35 about animals responsibly"<sup>101</sup>.

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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  
42  
43 (such as that of animal rights). Instrumental relations call for something more  
44  
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 certainty<sup>102</sup>, to constantly question our own  
10 assumptions and attitudes about animals, and to pay attention to the experience of  
11 animals<sup>103</sup>. 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”<sup>104</sup>.

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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”<sup>105</sup>. In their study of water voles, Hinchliffe et al<sup>106</sup> 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 sense<sup>107</sup>.

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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 them<sup>108</sup>: “allowing others, of all shapes and sizes, to make a difference to  
16 the process of knowing”<sup>109</sup>.

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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”<sup>110</sup>. Paying attention is also a form of Karlsson’s<sup>111</sup> ‘attentive-love’: more  
26 basic than sympathy because it arises directly from the perception of particular  
27 animals’ potential for pain or suffering<sup>112</sup>. 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 reality<sup>113</sup>.

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9 Empathy and compassion lead to other ways of being with (or not being with)  
10 nonhumans; making room<sup>114</sup>, being alongside<sup>115</sup>, practicing conviviality<sup>116</sup> 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”<sup>117</sup>. 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 other<sup>118</sup>.  
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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 categorization<sup>119</sup> 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"<sup>120</sup>. 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*<sup>121</sup>.  
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23  
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  
14  
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 Smith<sup>122</sup>  
18  
19 describe, and an informed willingness to live 'alongside'<sup>123</sup> 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  
26  
27 animal other, both felt and written at least in part outside traditional scholarly  
28  
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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51 <sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster, *Online Dictionary* (Merriam-Webster, Inc, 2015).  
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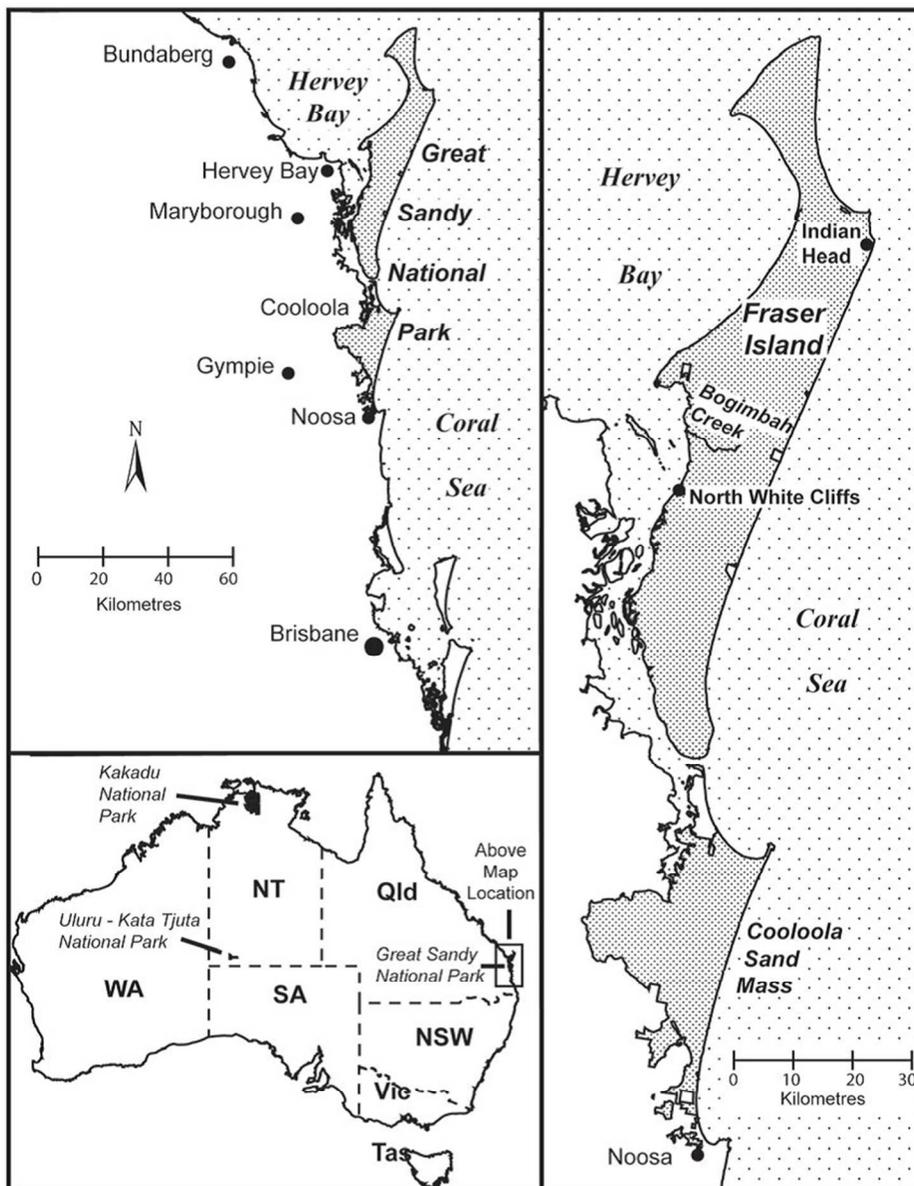
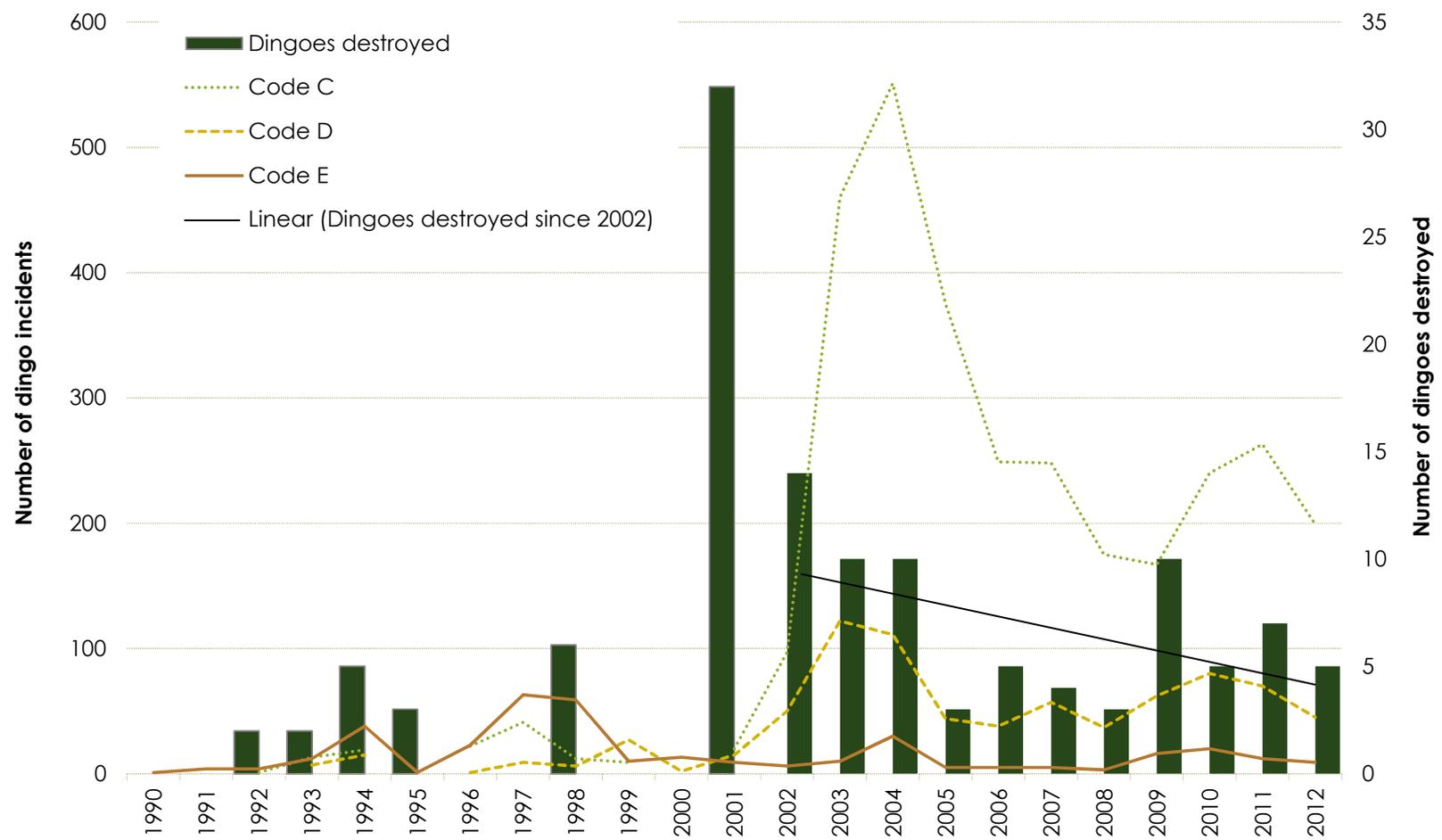


Figure 1: Map of Fraser Island from J. Carter, 'Displacing Indigenous cultural landscapes: The naturalistic gaze at Fraser Island World Heritage Area', *Geographical Research*, 48(4), 2010, pp. 398-410, p.402

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Wed 13/07/2016 8:52 AM

Jess Bracks <jbracks@ecosure.com.au>

Re: Request for permission to reprint a Figure from Ecosure report

To Jane Palmer

Happy for you to use it thanks Jane :)

I'm in Tamworth for work today so will have limited availability, would still love to chat out of interest though so will try you tomorrow.

Cheers  
Jess

Jess Bracks  
Ecosure - Principal Wildlife Biologist

On 12 Jul 2016, at 2:26 PM, Jane Palmer <[Jane.Palmer@usq.edu.au](mailto:Jane.Palmer@usq.edu.au)> wrote:

Brilliant Jess – thanks!  
-Would be great to chat just to confirm that you're happy for us to use the diagram – will try to call you tomorrow  
Very best wishes  
Jane

Dr Jane Palmer  
Vice-Chancellor's Research Fellow (Community Futures)  
Institute for Resilient Regions  
University of Southern Queensland  
<http://staffsearch.usq.edu.au/profile/Jane-Palmer>  
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Tel: +61 7 4631 2152  
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**From:** Jess Bracks [<mailto:jbracks@ecosure.com.au>]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 12 July 2016 2:07 PM