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MEDIA RELEASE

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New study reveals conservation concerns for the K'gari (Fraser Island) dingo population.

The K'gari dingo population has been under constant pressure since the island was World Heritage listed in 1992. As unrestricted visitation continues to increase each year the threat to the long term sustainability of the population also increases.

Tourism is important to the Island's economy but it is also recognised as a major factor in dingo mortality, 'habituated' dingoes euthanized, vehicle strikes and loss of habitat being just some factors contributing to dingo deaths. Another critical conservation concern is genetic health. This is particularly relevant on K'gari where the population is small and isolated from the mainland, and in light of the recent fires that raged across the Island destroying both habitat and wildlife.

A scientific report published in May this year revealed that there is strong evidence the K'gari dingo population is suffering from the loss of genetic diversity and low effective population size. (*Conservation concerns associated with low genetic diversity for K'gari–Fraser Island dingoes*,) Conroy, Lamont, Bridges, Stephens, Wardell-Johnson, Ogbourne. (2021.)

A species' ability to maintain genetic diversity is crucial in ensuring its long-term survival. It is possible the lack of genetic diversity in the K'gari population could heighten the risk of extinction. This is a major conservation concern.

Conservation genetics is a key component of the Fraser Island Strategic Research Program (2014) the aim to establish a baseline understanding of the levels and trends in genetic diversity, this paper is the first study to incorporate a large sample of K'gari dingoes which could provide the baseline data required. Knowledge of the population's genetic status is essential in developing ongoing management strategies.

Therefore further research must be undertaken and an ongoing genetic monitoring program established. This must be considered a priority if we are to ensure the long term conservation of a self-sustaining and viable dingo population on K'gari.

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