

# OPINION

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## EDITORIAL

# Blocking of fox documents raises questions



**F**OXES have long been a contentious issue in Tasmania and the past year has certainly raised further questions about their presence in the state.

The police have committed to an inquiry into allegations of fraud linked to fox eradication initiatives, five scats long believed to have come from foxes were found to belong to other animals, and foam rubber was found in two other scats, indicating the foxes had been held in captivity.

Fairfax Tasmania can now reveal that a state department blocked the release of progress reports from the now-dissolved Fox Eradication Program on the grounds it could hurt Tasmania's relationship with the Commonwealth.

An unnamed applicant requested the program's Stage 2 Annual Report, Stage 3 Mid-Year Progress Report and Stage 4

Annual Progress report in May.

Letters leaked to Fairfax Tasmania reveal the state's Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment Department intervened before the documents could be released under Freedom of Information laws.

"The subject of foxes and the eradication program is a highly sensitive matter within the state," the letter stated.

"The information was provided to the (federal Environment) Department (by the state) on the understanding that it was communicated in confidence.

"Its release could cause damage to the relationship between the Commonwealth and Tasmania."

The Fox Eradication Program is highly sensitive because of the secrecy surrounding it. The lack of information has long caused confusion and angst as to why millions of

dollars has been spent on hunting an animal whose physical presence has not been noted since 2011.

Of course we cannot afford to risk allowing an invasive and dangerous species into our sensitive state and it would be irresponsible to do anything but take the threat of foxes seriously.

But DPIWE's argument that the documents would create confusion or misinformation without background or context does not stack up.

Taxpayers' money is taxpayers' business. These documents should be released immediately or the public should receive an explanation as to why we cannot view them. Anything else is unacceptable.