

Information watchdog probing fox files

THE nation's information watchdog is investigating further a federal government department's decision not to publicly release secret Fox Eradication Program (FEP) files.

The Environment Department withheld three FEP documents earlier this month - the program's Stage

2 Annual Progress Report, Stage 3 Mid-Year Progress Report, and Stage 4 Annual Progress Report.

The documents were withheld at the request of Tasmania's Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, which claimed their release could damage the state's relationship with

the commonwealth.

The files were requested under Freedom of Information laws in May by an unnamed applicant.

A leaked letter shows the Office of Australia's Information Commissioner (OALC) advocated for the release of the information, but was overruled by the Environ-

ment Department, which concluded the publication of the files was not the public interest.

OALC would not comment on the matter, but suggested the Environment Department's decision would be contested further.

"The OALC doesn't generally comment on matters

that are ongoing," a OALC spokeswoman said.

The applicant of the information argued in July that

publication of the files would promote "effective oversight of public expenditure and transparency in funding acquittals and reporting would mitigate concerns of maladministration and/or fraud in

the use of public monies."

Police are considering an investigation into allegations of fraud in the FEP.

Windermere Independent MLC Ivan Dean plans to address the matter in Parliament on Wednesday.

He has called for transparency on the matter.

- CHRIS CLARKE