

over hoax claims

# Expert probes foxes in state

PATRICK BILLINGS

THE co-author of a scientific paper that claimed foxes were widespread in Tasmania is doing new research in the area.

Stephen Sarre yesterday declined to comment on calls for his 2012 "Foxes are now widespread in Tasmania" paper to be reassessed by the scientific journal it was published in.

Denison MP Andrew Wilkie has written to the *Journal Of Applied Ecology* asking it to consider whether recent allegations of hoax fox evidence in Tasmania "have any bearing upon the merit of the conclusion reached" by the peer-reviewed paper.

It follows reports on ABC TV's 7.30 that zoologist Simon Fearn raised doubts about the evidence used by the state's Fox Eradication Program to claim the existence of the pest in Tasmania.

"Sufficient evidence exists to suspect that some hoaxing has occurred via mainland fox scats being placed in the landscape," Mr Fearn wrote in his 2011 report for the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment.

Mr Fearn's unreleased report claimed 26 of the 97 fox scats were possible hoaxes and another 11 were most likely from other animals.

The allegations do not relate to Professor Sarre but it was these fox scats that he and

the co-authors, including DPI/PWE, relied on to conclude the pest was widespread in Tasmania.

DPI/PWE is reviewing allegations made by MLC Ivan Dean, a long-time fox sceptic, of fox evidence tampering.

Prof Sarre, of the University of Canberra, said he had not seen Mr Fearn's report.

"I have not seen the 'leaked internal report' and as this is a Tasmanian Government issue, I will not be making any comments on it or any other related matter," he said.

"I am currently involved in a research project aimed at an analysis of fox-positive scats and will report on that when it is appropriate to do so."

Mr Wilkie said the journal was considering his request.

He said he had long-held concerns about the Fox Eradication Program, which cost taxpayers tens of millions of dollars from 2001 to 2014.

No live fox was ever caught or captured on film.

Tasmania Police recently found Mr Dean's allegations of fox evidence tampering did not point to criminal wrongdoing.

It referred the matter to DPI/PWE to investigate any breaches of the State Service Act.

Last week a man was charged with bringing a fox carcass into the state after it was found on a highway in the North in October.