

NEWS

Secret fox files revealed

BY CHRIS CLARKE

THREE Fox Eradication

Program documents – kept secret until this week – have given insight into the former government body's practices during its final stages.

The progress reports, obtained by Fairfax Tasmania, show the program was struggling to gain public support, despite millions of federal

government dollars being pumped into its continuation.

The three reports were sent to the federal Environment Department by the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE) in 2014 and 2015.

The FEP was abolished in 2014, after eight years of operation – and 13 years after

rumours of a deliberate fox incursion first emerged.

The program was originally intended to run until 2017.

Despite poor attendance to the FEP's public meetings and a lack of evidence of the species' existence, the documents show program staff continued to encourage the expenditure of government money.

All three reports listed the

media and the public as a hindrance to the program.

"The project has benefited from a decline in public media attention as the unproductive work and stress generated by this previously had adverse impacts on staff," the 2015 Stage 4 Mid-Year Progress Report reads.

"Unfortunately individuals still feel the need to make hoax reports of fox discover-

ies."

The Stage 4 Mid-Year Progress Report reveals 27 fox sightings were followed up between December 2014 and June 2015 – six of which were deemed to require further attention.

None produced evidence of foxes.

One scat, one animal print, one animal kill and one animal importation

were all reported to the program between February and June 2014, but none were fox.

The reports were original withheld from the public under Freedom of Information laws, after DPIPWE claimed the release would hurt Tasmania's relationship with the Commonwealth.

The files were released after Fairfax Tasmania revealed the controversy.