

OUR VIEW

editorial

Are foxes the new Tas Tiger?

IT WAS a famous line, from an iconic popular television series – Seinfeld.

“Jerry, just remember. It’s not a lie ... if you believe it.”

Wise advice to Jerry Seinfeld – and perhaps a lesson to be heeded, when it comes to seeking the elusive Tasmanian fox.

While it might sound funny, it is sage advice which should be applied to any decision, by any government, which seeks to control any invasive pest or animal.

It doesn’t matter whether it is goats, donkeys, camels, wild dogs, foxes or other vertebrate species; eminent environmental scientists have argued it must be based on facts, not emotion.

One thing is certain – when it comes to Tasmanian foxes, there is no middle ground.

You are either in the camp which says there were, and are, foxes, or you believe they have never been on the island State and are not there now.

The protagonists claim to have produced evidence that foxes had been found in Tasmania.

The evidence was crying out for extreme vigilance and fully justified the amount of money spent, in the past 13 years.

On the other hand, eminent environmental scientists said that evidence lacked quality, was based on nonsense logic and is of unproven Tasmanian provenance.

Those who argue for a fox control and monitoring program, say the risk is too great to ignore. There is no doubt the introduction of the fox to Tasmania would have a devastating effect on stock, particularly sheep numbers, and wildlife.

However, any major expenditure of public money must be based on rigorous justification, data and explanations.

In the mean time, attention now needs to turn to the control of feral cats.

Too little attention and time have been spent in controlling this pest species.

As eminent vertebrate specialist Dr Clive Marks said, you don’t control cats just by funding the idea of doing so.

Techniques to monitor the threat, strategies to control the animals and policies to make it happen are now urgently needed.

Whatever the belief about the existence of foxes in Tasmania, lessons can be learnt and should now be applied to extensive feral cat control.

– ANDREW MILLER