

# Tasmanian fox report has no merit, claim duo

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**NOT CONVINCED:** Denison independent MHR Andrew Wilkie has questioned a government report that claims foxes are widespread in Tasmania, weeks after the state's fox evidence was called into question.

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Denison Independent MHR Andrew Wilkie and a scientist have written to an esteemed ecology journal asking it to consider discrediting a Tasmanian government report that claims foxes are widespread in the state.

The pair wrote separate letters to the United Kingdom's Journal of Applied Ecology earlier this month.

The journal prints bi-monthly and promotes original papers that apply ecological concepts, theories, models and methods.

It is highly regarded internationally by the science fraternity.

The pair asked the journal to review the 2013 report – which was co-authored by Tasmania’s Primary Industries, Parks, Water and the Environment Department – after it was revealed late last month that almost half of the state’s fox scat collection was deemed suspicious by an internal expert in 2011.

In his letter – penned last week to the journal’s managing editor Dr Erika Newton – Mr Wilkie said he was deeply concerned about the legitimacy of the evidence.

“(The departmental reports made public last month) seem to have cast significant doubt upon the authenticity of the scat-DNA data as early as 2009,” Mr Wilkie wrote.

“The purpose of me writing to you is to ensure that you are aware of these reports. I would encourage you to assess whether they may have any bearing upon the merit of the conclusions reached by the 2013 paper that your journal peer-reviewed.

“As I understand it, the scat-DNA data was critical in this regard and was assumed to establish beyond doubt that an extant fox population existed in Tasmania.”

Mr Wilkie said he was “compelled” to ensure claims against the FEP were “investigated appropriately”.

The claims were assessed by Tasmania Police earlier this year and no criminal offences were identified.

The allegations are now subject to an Integrity Commission investigation and a departmental inquiry.

Scientist Dr Clive Marks – a long-time skeptic of the fox program – also wrote to the journal.

He said there was little concrete evidence to support the government report’s assertions and he suggested a complaint should be lodged with the UK Research Integrity Office.

A DPIPWE spokesman said police had seen the report in question and found no wrongdoing.

The spokesman said the department was also reviewing the material.

“If the department finds information that requires action on any of the evidence previously provided as part of the eradication program it will act on that including informing the Journal of Applied Ecology of the outcomes,” he said.

Between 2001 and 2014, the Tasmanian government spent more than \$40 million on fox eradication.