

# The great fox fable

By ANDREW MILLER

**T**HE call has been made for a full police investigation into Tasmania's Fox Eradication Program (FEP) after Tasmanian Agriculture Minister Jeremy Rockliff confirmed the program had been wound up, after nearly 13 years.

"There is no evidence that foxes have been detected since July 2011; however, it is important we remain vigilant," Mr Rockliff told an estimates committee hearing recently.

However, Tasmanian Member for Windemere Ivan Dean said it was now time for a police investigation into the activities of the Fox-Free Task Force and the program, which is estimated to have cost between \$30 million and \$50m.

"The Minister has virtually disbanded the program and amalgamated it into the Invasive Species Unit," he said.

But Mr Dean said it raised important questions as to whether or not there had ever been foxes living in Tasmania.

He told State Parliament the entire taskforce and fox eradication program was based on false

## EXPOSE

information, "on evidence that is clearly questionable, and wrong in many instances."

"You could almost refer to it as 'noble cause corruption' – it is where evidence is manipulated or improved, or encouraged or fabricated to prove an event, or to prove a crime."

Outside Parliament Mr Dean repeated calls for a police inquiry, to find out what happened.

"It could be a parliamentary inquiry, but the police are probably in the best position to carry it out."

Mr Dean said it would not have to be a long inquiry, "they could determine an outcome very quickly".

Only two living foxes had been discovered during the entire 13 years of the program, he said, although other sources said more than 1500 sightings had been recorded in Tasmania up until 2009.

Attorney General Dr Vanessa Goodwin told the Tasmanian Parliament recently the Federal Government was still paying for the FEP.

Last financial year, the government committed nearly \$2m over four years to "develop and maintain surveillance and incursion response capability for foxes".

This was on top of nearly \$1m committed by the previous State Labor Government.

Dr Goodwin said the money would now be spent on developing monitoring capacity for a broad range of plants and animals, not just foxes.

At its height, the program was attracting \$5.5m a year in a mix of Federal and State funding and employing 47 staff.

Ben Lomond gamekeeper and sporting shooter Ian Rist said claims the animals were in Tasmania were "a crock of fox scat".

"Here we are suddenly seeing parallels with the thylacine story," Mr Rist said.

"Suddenly everybody started seeing foxes – there were foxes everywhere, getting run over on the side of the road.

"But just because you find a fox on the side of the road doesn't mean it is a Tasmanian fox."

■ Continued p6

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