

**THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
COMMITTEE MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART
ON MONDAY, 25 MAY 2009.**

Dr DAVID OBENDORF WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION
AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Wilkinson) - David, thank you for your submission and for your interest.

Dr OBENDORF - Thank you. The documentation I provided is reasonably comprehensive and there are really four facets to it. By way of introduction, I am a veterinarian registered in Tasmania since 1980. I worked within the Department of Agriculture, which later became the Department of Primary Industry and Water for 17 years and resigned in 1997. From 1995 to 2005 I was the only Australasian representative on the Scientific Advisory Committee for the World Organisation for Animal Health in Paris. In that time I had responsibility for examining the impacts of wildlife and wildlife diseases on the profitability of trade and the viability of the infrastructures of veterinary services across the world. We submitted papers on that to the OIE scientific journal.

In 2002, after the outbreaks of foot and mouth disease and mad cow disease in Europe, the State Government, under Minister Llewellyn, commissioned me to write a comprehensive report on Tasmania's preparedness for and response to outbreaks of significant animal diseases. That document has been presented to the Government and all 33 recommendations have been supported and accepted by the Government. It is a comprehensive document looking at the incursion risks of various diseases that come in with animals. It offers a risk assessment profile and that is the approach I have taken to this fox inquiry as well, looking at a macro-organism rather than a micro-organism like a virus or a bacterium.

In 2005 I presented evidence, both written and oral, to the fox inquiry undertaken by the Invasive Animals CRC in conjunction with DPIWE. That substantive evidence relating to the significant incursion risks and also the evidences based on the hotspots provided by the Government up to 2005 is available in the text. It is on that basis that I present my submission. I have provided a copy for the members giving everybody background on the number of years that this has been running.

As you all know, Burnie was the location of the first confirmed case of a fox incursion in 1998 as a result of a fox escaping from a container boat transferring freight between the port of Melbourne and Tasmania. This fox brazenly escaped from the containment yard at the Brambles depot and was seen trotting off along the Burnie beach. Over the next couple of weeks the fox was seen in the vicinity of Burnie but attempts to catch it were unsuccessful. At the time the Director of Parks and Wildlife Service, Max Kitchell, said that this significant wake-up call for Tasmania, an of a single fox coming in as a result of freight transit, would never happen again. He said, 'We commit ourselves to ensure that this will never happen again'. He put this on the public record.

On that basis, in 1998 we had the evidence that, on a risk-assessment basis, Tasmania was open to foxes and we knew that the likelihood of incursion was quite high. The

consequences based on all the biological information we have is that the impact to the biodiversity and to farming interests is quite high, so you would have to say that this ranks as an important risk to deal with, as you would with foot and mouth disease, equine influenza, rabies or anything else. The issue then comes down to looking at the criteria under which you conduct what we call, an import risk assessment. That is the scientific criteria which try to evaluate both the likelihood of entry, establishment and spread of an organism, whatever that organism might be. So you are dealing with a macro-organism, like a bumblebee or a fox or a micro-organism like swine flue, or HIV or whatever it might be. You look at the risk and then you say, if on all the criteria you have a porous border, if barrier quarantine is not adequate and you can put in measures to improve it, then you should do so. Then you have to look at how you validate the risk management and how you determine whether the risk management is consistent with the capacity to mitigate the threat. Most of my documentation is based on looking at that.

The most important document, I feel, is that pertaining to the assumptions in relation to foxes in Tasmania, which I trust you have all been able to see, in which I have tried to highlight that, in this case you are dealing with a set of criteria which need to be fulfilled in order to get somewhere. I was very grateful to the Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr Rod Andrewartha, who gave me the inspiration to use this as a template to looking at whether something is predicated upon reality or whether it is based on rhetoric and whether you are basing assumptions on best fit, valid assumptions, whether they are known facts or whether they are invalid assumptions based on a range of flaky or variable inputs.

The document stands alone. I have tried to look at the questions that were required to be answered and those questions were, 'Are there free-ranging foxes currently in Tasmania, yes or no? How long have foxes been living in Tasmania - before 1970, since at least the 1970s and after 2000-01 when the incursion was thought to have occurred? What are the likely routes of entry of live foxes into Tasmania? What are the basic requirements for foxes to successfully establish in Tasmania?' So it is one thing for something to come in as a biological organism and if it has to reproduce through a relationship with another gender, it requires those two genders to be present. So the entry of one organism does not immediately assume that you will have establishment, so that was a very critical piece. The concept is, first of all, to know that the threat of entry is present, but the second thing is to say, what are the basic biological and natural requirements for that organism to reproduce itself and spread.

I looked at the environmental factors that foxes living in Tasmania prior to 2000 would have been exposed to. So it is looking at the variables that exist in the environment that might militate against foxes establishing here, such as natural predation, use of poisons, maybe climatology that might not favour, or lack of food or whatever it might be. Is this a valid reason for why the foxes are or are not establishing here? I went on the say, 'Currently, what is the relative risk of the different routes of entry of foxes into Tasmania?' That was a risk categorisation, when you look at where you look at the threat risk and what is most likely to be the scenario where foxes do manage to gain access. It was looking at barrier quarantine, effectiveness of pre-embarkation inspections and what is happening at the border in terms of border inspection, post-border quarantine measures and then looking at the covert, malicious level and intentions to bring in foxes for the purposes of something that has been considered to be the basis of Tasmania's present fox population.

Finally, I said, 'If foxes are present and widely distributed in Tasmania, can the use of 1080 meat baits eradicate them? The word 'eradicate' is important because it is one thing to have foot and mouth disease in Tasmania, but another thing to have the effective tool to control the spread and eradicate and contain that infection to the stage where it is snuffed out. If you cannot do that you are effectively saying you need an exit strategy, a mitigation control option. That may be vaccination in the case of foot and mouth disease or it may be a range of other factors that need to be put in place. To me they were the critical questions that needed to be answered.

I think the conclusions are critical, on pages 11, 12 and 13. I concluded that there is no problem with considering Tasmania as an open vessel for the incursion risk of foxes and it has been so for a long period of time. On the basis of the likelihood of entry and the consequence, there is no doubt that the precautionary principle would have to be applied and that proper due process would have to consider this and other organisms, but this one is highly likely to be a high risk organism for biodiversity and potentially for agricultural interests.

I would like to read from my conclusions:

'On the basis of the risk assessment matrix it would determine that there is a high to very high justification for preventing the entry, establishment and spread of foxes in Tasmania. That said, the assessment takes into consideration efforts to prevent the entry threat through biosecurity measures in the form of port quarantine measures, inspections of transport, freight and passenger vehicles arriving from fox endemic locations - from Victoria for example - or through public awareness activities.

As this assumption review highlights the eradication of foxes that are believed to exist in Tasmania relies on

- (1) accurate and verifiable bio-intelligence confirming the presence of foxes at a given site; and
- (2) the use of effective tools for their detection and eradication or elimination.

The State Government's fox eradication program has consistently referred to the presence of foxes and not the establishment of foxes.'

It is one thing to say I am present in this room but I am not going to reproduce in this room. I do not have that capacity unless another person will copulate with me. In other words it is a situation of the presence being one thing and establishment or reproduction is another.

'Implicit in the Government's policy is the assumption that if foxes have been continuously present in various locations across Tasmania for at least seven years they must have reproduced, establishing themselves within the landscape and spread to other areas. As discussed in this paper, the occurrence of single foxes does not constitute a breeding population of

foxes and greater emphasis has been directed into firstly, confirming that foxes are breeding in Tasmania and secondly, if they are reproducing in Tasmania, what has kept the population at such cryptic levels for so long.'

That is critical. We have to understand why they could be at low levels but still present and why they are leaving signs but they are not obvious in terms of other methodologies that are being applied to detect them.

'If foxes have not reproduced in Tasmania then the only alternative explanation for their continued presence and their ongoing sightings would be the continual introduction of additional foxes. This would suggest that the State's biosecurity measures for foxes are still insufficient to prevent new incursions of foxes.'

There are only two alternatives as I see it. Either they are cryptic, here at low levels and have reproduced and it is a question of finding the most effective measure for removing them, or there is constantly a reintroduction of other animals into the population.

'The only explanation for the continued presence of foxes that are not reproducing would be that foxes have remained isolated as single animals or are sterile or all of one gender.'

The most recent information from Alan's task force in collaboration with the Invasive Animals CRC suggests that we have both gender male and gender female foxes a within biogeographical area that would suggest that they should be able to find each other.

'The recent information suggests that fox scats of both sexes have been recovered from sites in Tasmania suggesting that breeding potential exists. After seven years of a government program the presence of their excreta and the lack of factual foxes is, however, hard to comprehend.'

That is the basis of what I am finding is the conundrum for the scientist; trying to validate what bits of information to put together to form a robust, credible argument that can be embraced by the whole of community.

'Currently the program is not able to prove that foxes have reproduced at any hot spot although it is assumed. Currently the State Government's only fox eradication tool, as I understand it, is the deployment of buried 1080 meat baits. The use of this tool assumes that foxes present in a given hot spot would discover one of these baits, eat it and then die. There is no recorded evidence, as I have found, that the use of 1080 meat bait has eradicated foxes once they have established breeding populations in new territories with ample food resources which is the situation in Tasmania.'

CHAIR - David, are you saying 1080 is not enough to eradicate them?

Dr OBENDORF - I believe so.

CHAIR - You need stronger -

Dr OBENDORF - You need to have other measures to annex to that on the basis that you know that there are definitely foxes in that environment, not just from their scats but you know that there is a presence of foxes in those areas.

CHAIR - One argument is that if the scats are there, obviously it is the foxes that leave the scats. What is your answer to that?

Dr OBENDORF - I can leave a fingerprint or my DNA here, saying I have been in this location and you know that I have been in this location. If you did not know I had been in this location and found my fingerprint here, you would have grounds to believe that I had been in this location. To use a crude analogy, if someone had been able to get some part of my anatomy and place it in this room to set me up, my biological fingerprint would be here although I had not been here. With forensic validation you are looking for a time-space continuum, something that occurs in a location during a short period of time where you have two bits of corroborative evidence to support the validation of presence.

If I had a photograph or a footprint of a fox and a very reliable, authenticated report from some member of the public of a fox sighting and other information, it would build confidence in the reliability of that knowledge.

CHAIR - How long does it take a fox community in normal circumstances to increase to the extent that people would see them from time to time?

Dr OBENDORF - I do not want to go into the minutiae of the biology of foxes. I am sure others could explain the biology of the fox more clearly than I can. The fox is a seasonal breeder producing one set of cubs a year and there is an attrition rate for those cubs depending on predation and other factors. Their ability to establish a population is determined by the risk factors they are likely to face. If there are adverse factors in that environment directly affecting the survival of cubs to adulthood, that reduces their capacity to establish quickly. The capacity for a cryptic, low-grade population of foxes is plausible but I find people reporting fox sightings anonymously in Tasmania most unusual. They say they don't want to face ridicule and retribution, but this tends to change people's perception of what is real and what is not real. That's why I thought this, to me, was a clarifying document to say that in the face of all this the current program faces some manifold problems. Knowing as fact that foxes have successfully entered Tasmania and perhaps have done so on numerous occasions for many decades, yet having no clear evidence of establishment of local reproducing fox populations is not an issue: why is that? Secondly, the assumption that there are several foxes present in several hot-spot sites based on incidents and evidence, and applying a control measure on an ad hoc arbitrary basis, a tool for which there is no evidence that it can successfully eradicate the target species: why is that? What I am recommending as priorities for useful action are developing a suite of diagnostic and forensic measures or methods to confirm the presence of foxes at identifiable hot spots, of which they believe there are a number. Further, collection of the bio-intelligence on the establishment of mixed gender foxes at identified fox hot spots; in other words, where breeding is occurring.

Effectiveness of the current control eradication strategies deployed in Tasmania gets down to whether 1080 is going to be the bees knees to do the job, and that gets down to resourcing and funding and so on. Finally, absolutely necessary is enacting special legislation to support the eradication of foxes across all of Tasmanian land tenures. If

this was a major animal health disease - a list A disease - there would be statute that said, irrespective of land tenure, we have the capacity to come in, inspect, monitor, set up exclusion control areas, define a measure of control, impound animals, slaughter animals, vaccinate animals or whatever. With foxes it is arbitrary at the present moment.

Mr KONS - Is it a myth that there are still foxes down at Webb Dock and all those places or is it a fact?

Dr OBENDORF - The work that was being done at Webb Dock is that they are undergoing control there and they have done so. It has been reasonably effective because you have a high-density fox population there. They are reasonably amenable to attractants and taking baits. It is one of the highest density fox populations in the world. It has been recognised as that and they still could well be there. I do not know whether they now represent the same risks that they did in the late 1990s.

Mr KONS - What is Tasmanian Government's involvement on those docks, if any?

Dr OBENDORF - You would be more aware of that than I would. It would be a situation where I think those matters have been increased. The relationship with Victoria pre-embarkation would be greater than it was in the 1990s. It is a bit like catch-up. We were concerned that somebody in the stevedoring community might do something stupid with empty containers that are coming back to be filled up when they are being loaded because these foxes all around Webb Dock are so amenable to taking scraps and waste from stevedores that it would be relatively easy to get one of these animals into a crate, close it off and within 12 to 18 hours it is at Burnie.

Ms FORREST - Surely, you can hear them howling. They make a very distinctive noise.

Dr OBENDORF - Not if you are in a busy shipping environment and it is in an enclosed container. This is the situation of Dr Clive Marks' work at Webb Dock which sort of demonstrated the high density of foxes in that area.

CHAIR - How do they get there? It seems such a strange place for them to have a high-density population.

Dr OBENDORF - There is so much availability of good food and refuge there for them to live. It is fox heaven in all criteria. There are rodents, rabbits, a lot of garbage waste. There are all sorts of interstices around that area. Rock walls create really good dry den sites for them. They are really opportunistic. That is why they are such a good invasive species.

CHAIR - You do not see many of them over there, do you? People would say they are not at Webb Dock. I have never seen them out Port Melbourne way. I have been down there on numerous occasions. I used to knock about down there a lot - never seen them. They are saying the same here. We know they are at Webb Dock, it is fox heaven as you say, so somebody could say if they are at Webb Dock they could well be in Tasmania but they could be just as elusive.

Dr OBENDORF - There is a whole concept of cryptobiology, when you are looking for something and do not know whether it does or does not exist. Tasmania is a classic for

that with the thylacine. Somebody can create a lot of local urgency and extra reporting as a result of saying, 'I definitely saw a Thylacine and this is a picture of something that I saw'. You know from looking at the psychology of people that over the next few weeks or months, depending on how well that is reported and how much credibility is given by other people who come into the fray, that you will get an increase in reportages based upon that. Not that this is identical with that but you have to differentiate the hysteria from reality. I have tried to say, as a conservative person, that the likelihood of consequences is high but you have to base your resource application - the money that you give to a program - on what is going to be effective at eradicating these animals. It is one thing to find their scats - and as a pathologist I tend to review all the cases in terms of plausibility and reliability of the scientific evidence from the major incidents. To me the one at Glen Esk Road was a clear case of a flagrant fabrication. I presented a comprehensive report to the Government on that and it should have been realised that this case, as it was being reported, was not a bona fide incident of a fox killed on a road.

A DPIW general manager at the time put out a press release two days after the fox incident saying that a person had come forward and asked that his confidentiality be maintained. The release said he was driving east on Glen Esk Road when a fox emerged from the left-hand side of the road, ran across the path of the vehicle and was struck by a tyre. The report fixes the time of the incident very close to 9.30 on the morning of 1 August 2006. As a forensic pathologist I assessed all of the aspects of that incident looking at the pathology and the slides. My conclusion was that this was a decomposed fox. It had been dead for a lot longer than the period of time that had been considered. It was complete fabrication.

Mr HIDDING - Right. You clearly make a number of quite grave allegations, as you have now, throughout your documentation. I thank you for your brevity and the way that you put it. In law enforcement and justice matters, any assessment of whether a certain mischief has taken place requires looking at the question of motivation. For instance, why would person X have wanted to kill person Y? Was it a crime of passion? Was there a large inheritance at stake? Motive is a major issue. Excuse me for paraphrasing your material, but you seem to be saying that a person or persons are trying to build a story, a false reality to a degree. What are some possible motives for this ongoing story-building that you and a few others appear to be thinking is taking place? Could it be like a firebug? We do not really know what goes on in their head but they enjoy watching a fire burn? Is it about careers or jobs? What possible motivation could there be for Tasmanians to be participating in the building of a story about foxes in this State?

Dr OBENDORF - That is a very hoary-headed monster because it asks, what is Tasmania, and what is the relationship between authority - people like Kim Evans and John Whittington - and ordinary citizens? How do they relate to seeing their particular patch and defining how they work within their landscape? In a sense a group of individuals might decide to do something malicious, malevolent, unilateral and independent and thereby circumvent what normal people would consider to be a good thing for the outcome of the common good. Equally, as has happened in many jurisdictions, bureaucracies can take advantage of a circumstance that fulfils a particular need not because they invented a story-line, they just take the story-line to another level. I am not saying that this story-line is necessarily incorrect. It is just that if you put all your emphasis onto the belief, as David Llewellyn did, that we had a malicious, malevolent, intentional introduction of a number of foxes, brought in here as cubs, reared

in secret and released in four different locations for the purposes of hunting, that needs to be supported by rigorous evidence.

Mr HIDDING - With the greatest respect, that has not stopped you from making a series of allegations and questioning of people's -

Dr OBENDORF - Could you give me an example?

Mr HIDDING - I hesitate to do so because there are probably some areas where I would want to ask those individuals some questions based on what you -

Dr OBENDORF - We don't name individuals. I am more interested in what you think I am alleging.

Mr HIDDING - Okay. I guess I will play the card. You say in your material about the fox that was found on the Glen Esk Road that the on-site arrival of Fox Free Task Force officers - and there are two names there, Nick Mooney and Mark McKay - 'within an hour or so of the report to the department was somewhat serendipitous'.

Dr OBENDORF - Yes.

Mr HIDDING - 'And the subsequent media involvement in this incident was, I believe, stage-managed.'

Dr OBENDORF - Yes. Clearly stage-managed, I believe so.

Mr HIDDING - Yes, but what about the serendipitous arrival?

Dr OBENDORF - That's a coincidence. To me it was a very unusual coincidence that two individuals would be passing at that time and receive the call from the Fox Hotline, the 1800 FOX OUT number, to come to that particular location to undertake the beginning of the investigation. The sensationalism was really predicated around the subsequent media reports about a still-warm fox that was floppy and had all the indications that it had been killed within the last several hours. From a pathologist's point of view, knowing the physiology of how animals change after death, this animal had not been killed a few hours previously. What I read out was the press release put out by a member of parliament claiming that he had a witness statement that the animal was alive, had run across the road and had been killed at that time, 9.30 in the morning.

Mr HIDDING - My final question, is there any possibility that you could be building your own story in the same way as you are accusing others, in other words, using facts and language to build your own story?

Dr OBENDORF - That is a good point of view, and I guess it is for other people to criticise my story. In the due process of doing this assessment, I requested this information through the processes of the department to analyse this material. I presented the information to the department without going public or making any comments about it, and giving them the opportunity to review that information. Their revision, although not as extreme as mine in terms of how long that animal has been dead, was able to corroborate the basis of what I had said, that this animal had not been killed that

morning. This affected the credibility of the story-line. The story had gone out on local radio that a chap alleged to be Basil Brush had been speaking to Roisin McCann and gave an in-depth interview about what had happened. As it turned out this individual was subsequently interviewed with his full name given on ABC news the following night. In just this one story-line, which you get involved in, the complexities and the bigger picture is lost. The bigger picture is that \$5.5 million in resources has been allocated to this thing. One of my slides, which you have not seen today, was to demonstrate that the Auditor-General has just done a report suggesting that 76 per cent of the revenue stream that is required for the Resource Management and Conservation branch of DPIW is derived from two particular areas. One is, the Fox Task Force and the other is for devil facial tumour disease. So a substantial driving of the budget allocation for one area of resource management and biodiversity conservation comes out of two projects.

So, to me, qui bono - who benefits? The beneficiaries are the people who are in charge of doing the work. They must be shown to be doing the work to a standard that will be consistent with what the community expectations are. This is a risk, but how do you prove that you are doing it in an effective way?

Mr DEAN - The position in relation to the Glen Esk fox and your assertion that it had been killed a much longer period prior to the time it was identified, was also confirmed by other veterinarians?

Dr OBENDORF - I believe so. Yes, that was a subsequent report. Kim Evans and the others might like to speak to that. I tried to discuss this with the other veterinarian because I believe he was not privy to all the information that I was privy to, which made his findings somewhat limited. If he had the scope of knowledge that I had, which was evidentiary knowledge, he may have concluded even more strongly in favour of saying that this animal could well have been maintained in a cool environment because this animal was not going into rigor mortis. It was floppy; it was going out of rigor mortis. It was decomposing. There were bacteria all through its tissues and the tissues were breaking down. In all the years that I have conducted veterinary pathology, you certainly know what is decomposed and what is not. The stage-managing was the thing that did get to me. They were suggesting this animal had been run down and yet the injuries were not consistent with a vehicle trauma, in my opinion as a veterinarian.

Mr HIDDING - It was a fox, though?

Dr OBENDORF - It was a fox.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for that, David.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.

Mr KIM EVANS, Dr JOHN WHITTINGTON, Mr NICK MOONEY AND Mr ALAN JOHNSTON, DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND WATER, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

Mr EVANS - Dr John Whittington is a deputy secretary in the department and is the former chair of the Fox Eradication Program Management Committee. Alan Johnston is the manager of the Fox Eradication Program in the department. Alan has a very long history in the department and has held a range of roles, including being responsible for setting up the early Tasmania shops. He was manager of the Regional Business Development branch in the agency but most notably was the manager of our Animal Health branch for a number of years. Nick Mooney is known to most Tasmanians in terms of his expertise in wildlife and wildlife management. Nick is the section head for Wildlife Monitoring and Management within our agency, a technical adviser to the Fox Eradication Program, and has been closely involved in the Fox Eradication Program since it commenced.

We have already provided a comprehensive submission covering each of the terms of reference. Minister Llewellyn has also provided you with specific information in regard to other questions put to him. I have also forwarded to you recently some further information to update our original submission, which was a summary of our program up until March of this year. Work continues on the fox eradication efforts, and there is some further information that I will ask Alan to present since we completed our submission.

Our agency, I think it is fair to say, would consider that it doesn't have all the answers, all the expertise or all the resources when it comes to ensuring that Tasmania is free of the impacts of foxes. Over the years we have worked closely with a range of stakeholders, external reviewers and other institutions, in terms of their advice, input and cooperation. Along the way, we have obviously had a good degree of constructive criticism, and that has really helped us to refine and enhance our efforts and increase our chance of success.

Today we welcome the opportunity to present the work, for various concerns and criticisms to be raised, and to objectively evaluate and continue to seek methods for enhancing our fox eradication efforts. In that respect I do agree with the previous speaker, Dr Obendorf. We are responsible for this program and this sort of process is a good way to ensure that we are held accountable for the moneys that we are spending and the responsibilities that we have been given to ensure that we are fox-free. Before I do open it up for questions, I wanted to ask Alan Johnston to just give you a brief update on the activities of the program since we have provided our submission and also to extend an invitation to committee members to visit the office of the fox eradication program as well as staff undertaking their operation of work in the field, because I think it would really be useful to you to get a hands-on feel for what is actually happening on the ground.

Mr DEAN - We tried to do that, didn't we? We were sort of put off.

Ms FORREST - We are still working on it, aren't we?

Mr EVANS - I do not know. I think a really important part of this exercise is to just see what actually does happen and talk to the relevant staff and look at the work that they are

doing. Can I ask Alan now to just give a brief update on the work that has happened since March?

Mr JOHNSTON - Can I just say in answer to that little exchange there that we certainly did not put any barrier in the way of your coming.

Mr DEAN - No, no-one is suggesting that.

Mr HIDDING - So you understand what we are talking about: I understood that it was conveyed to us that there was nothing for us see at Mt Pleasant - just offices with no-one in them.

Mr JOHNSTON - Certainly not by us. A date was set and I got a phone call back to say that the date had been cancelled.

Mr HIDDING - We were going to talk to you about what is the best way to go and experience it.

Mr EVANS - We have made the offer. You have obviously made the request and we should try to ensure that we can meet your expectations. We would actually appreciate the opportunity to show you what we do.

Mr JOHNSTON The general day-to-day activities continue beyond the time frame from when we put the submission in. I did not intend to go through the detail about how much baiting we have done or any of those types of things but perhaps just pick up on a few of the more specific issues that have come up which perhaps are relevant to this discussion. We gave you an update of some more information that we have received in relation to this genotyping of foxes now. The summary of that now is that 36 of our fox-positive scats have now been analysed by Dr Oliver Berry of the University of Western Australia. Out of those 36 he has been able to identify eight individual foxes of which there are five males, two females and one that he was not actually able to determine the gender of. The scats for those foxes were actually collected between February and December 2008.

Perhaps just to help you with understanding it - there are a few things here which I will talk about as we go through - on the front page is the complete list of the fox-positive scats that we have collected since 2005 which you did have in the submission. The additional information that is included there is in the column on the right-hand side where we have identified the one that we now have information for in terms of gender - so the males and the females and the unknown - and where those scats were located, and the date of collection. Then on the next page, just to give you a bit of an idea in a broad sense of where those animals were, that map identifies where the scats that were eventually determined to be from males and females were collected. As you are probably aware, the University of Canberra does the analysis of the scats initially to determine whether they are fox or not and then those that are fox-positive go to the University of Western Australia for this additional work.

Mr KONS - Just on the front page, Alan, where it has the collecting method - investigation and dogs - is that dogs killing, or sniffer dogs?

Mr JOHNSTON - No, no. There is a range of different ways by which we actually get the scat, I guess. One of those is that we now have three scat-detector dogs. The ones identified as 'dog' have actually been identified by our scat-detector dogs. Those called 'investigational' were as the result of something like a really good sighting report where our staff have done some work in the area and picked up some scats and those are the ones that have come back positive.

There is one there collected by a member of the public and then the other grouping there is just identified as 'strategic'. You are probably aware that we have this major scat collection survey, which eventually will go statewide. The ones there that are identified as 'strategic' have come out of that process. So scats are coming to us from a range of different mechanisms. All the fox-positive scats are now going to Dr Berry in Western Australia in an effort to undertake that genotyping work.

The other information we have had since the submission is on the next page before you and that is dietary analysis. We have results back for 34 of those fox-positive scats which have been examined by a person named Barbara Triggs who is a renowned expert in the field and has identified through her dietary analysis all the animals and so on that you can see listed there.

For each of the scats we have the date when they were collected, their location, what results have come out of it, et cetera. Just in terms of summary, the native wildlife that is there includes the brush-tailed possum, the ringtail possum, the Bennett's Wallaby, the eastern grey kangaroo, the eastern barred bandicoot and quolls. There is also a number of other species - sheep, rabbits, mice, cattle, and then there is a whole range of other things - reptiles' scales, insect materials, feathers, human hair, which was quite an interesting one, rubber, plastic and paper.

That pretty much confirms what we would have expected, that the foxes have a very wide range of things that they consume, which presumably comes from scavenging - things like rubber bands and plastic through to the native wildlife. One that is particularly interesting out of that is the eastern barred bandicoot. There are very, very small numbers of eastern barred bandicoot in Victoria -

Mr MOONEY - Almost none in the wild.

Mr JOHNSTON - whereas within Tasmania, of course, we have lots. It is not confirmation that the dietary analysis is telling us therefore that it clearly came from a Tasmanian source but I guess it is a bit of an indicator. So it is interesting information and we will continue to get that sort of work done on a regular basis as we can.

In terms of actual additional evidence by way of either scats, carcasses or whatever, we have had no additional evidence confirmed since the submission came in so that list you have on the front page there plus the older stuff - the carcasses, footprints, the blood sample and an older carcass going back to 2002 is the sum total of the evidence in recent times.

When we set up this part of the program two years ago we identified that we would need to review our work, quite appropriately, and determined two years ago that the time frame for doing that would be as we get up towards the end of this financial year. We are

currently in the midst of an external review using people from an organisation called Land Care Research New Zealand who are considered world leaders in this type of work. Two of their people spent a week in Tasmania about two or three weeks ago and they are engaging with a range of other people. On the last page of the handout I gave you are the actual terms of reference of that review.

To pick up on what Kim said, we acknowledge that we do not have all the answers to this and there are things we need to be looking at improving in the way we go about our business into the future, so hopefully coming out of that review with the expertise that is going into it we will get some really good recommendations of things that we could be doing better into the future.

Mr KONS - When do you expect the response?

Mr JOHNSTON - About the end of June they are hoping to give us a report back.

CHAIR - This is the New Zealand one.

Mr JOHNSTON - Yes.

CHAIR - They have just done an extremely good job on stoats, which were a real menace on the south island of New Zealand. I understand they have virtually eradicated those from the area around Christchurch. I have just been there.

Mr JOHNSON - They have a lot of history and expertise in this type of work.

The other thing to bring to your attention in relation to funding is that we have put in an application for funding under the Australian Government Caring for our Country program. As you know we are partly State and partly Federal Government-funded. We are seeking funding for an additional four years, the time frame of that program and at this stage we are still waiting for feedback from the Commonwealth minister on what their future funding for the program will be.

CHAIR - I have been told that Webb Dock is fox heaven. I have never seen a fox there and neither have a number of people who live in the area. It would seem from anecdotal evidence that there are numerous foxes there. It is a large community. Do you know of any sightings of foxes around Port Melbourne and Webb Dock?

Mr MOONEY - There are quite common sightings, almost like possums here. In the last few years there have been intermittent efforts to reduce them. From their end they do not want them there for all sorts of reasons including getting embarrassed about anything that turns up here. They are not nearly as common as they were, according to the people who study foxes around Melbourne. That population is continuous pretty well through Melbourne and holds a density of about 15 per square kilometre right through Melbourne. Some of the highest densities are near those ports. People used to see lots of foxes when they had a hamburger van at the port and once they got rid of that they have dropped off a bit. People were feeding them around the port. Melbourne cemeteries have very high densities, because there are plenty of denning sites, mice and bugs and things but that is not uncommon to big cities. London has a similar situation. For many years there were a pair breeding under the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

Mr JOHNSTON - We are in regular contact with the Port of Melbourne and do quite a lot of work trying to make the workers on the docks much more aware of the fox population and the fox issue for Tasmania. To support what Nick is saying, the feedback we get from the Port of Melbourne people is that the population has declined enormously, primarily because so much of the area now has been developed. There is much less natural fox habitat so they find much less evidence of the presence of foxes now.

Mr HIDDING - I should place on the record a statement of potential conflict of views. In 1957, a young Dutch family arrived in Melbourne, built a house in Station Road, Nunawading, and put 12 chooks in a chook pen. A four-year-old boy whose bedroom was closest to the chook pen -

Ms FORREST - Named Rene.

Mr HIDDING - heard at 5 a.m. a most unholy row and we all went out. There were 12 dead chooks and a red fox escaping over the hill, so I have hated the rotten suckers ever since.

Laughter.

Ms FORREST - Obviously he has been traumatised for life since then.

Mrs BUTLER - How big is their territory?

Mr MOONEY - It depends on the quality of the habitat. The territory being a defended part of the home range is often quite small, but the home range can be anything from two square kilometres to 10, or even larger in semi-arid areas where there is not much happening. It is highly variable and different for males and females, adults and youngsters. Let's say a breeding vixen, which needs the most resources, might range more widely but then she is hooking in to her mate for help as well. A working figure is up to seven square kilometres being normal for foxes. Where foxes do not have neighbours, such as we are suggesting here, who knows. No-one has ever studied them in that situation. That is one of our major problems. Just because they behave in a fashion in normal densities, we do not know what happens here.

Mrs BUTLER - That figure of 294, is that the number of sightings in an area?

Mr JOHNSTON - That is reported sightings for the year. In 2008, the total reported sightings in Tasmania was 294.

Mr MOONEY - Just for that year and we call them sighting reports because they are just reports of sightings.

Ms FORREST - What is the gestation period for a fox?

Mr MOONEY - It is about the same as a dog, I think, six months.

PUBLIC INTERJECTION - No, it's 63 days.

Mr MOONEY - Is it? 63 days.

Ms FORREST - Do they only have one litter a year?

Mr MOONEY - Yes, unlike a rabbit, a fox increases its numbers by increasing the survivability of its young. They usually have three or four young, most of which survive in a good year. Oddly enough the rabbit situation is pretty well adapted to cope with foxes because that is the natural order of things.

Ms FORREST - We have heard that there have been foxes in Tasmania and most of them have been dead, except the one in Burnie caught on video. There appears to be a lack of evidence of breeding or establishment. How does the department address that? A fox on its own will harm the environment and the other wildlife, but it won't create an establishment issue.

Mr MOONEY - Quite so. You can only establish that genetically if you have reference DNA from the parents. You cannot just do it on speculation as you must work back from the parents, so it is hard to do genetically unless you are lucky enough to have parental DNA and then identify an offspring or a sibling. It is a bit difficult with foxes because Australia's 30 or 40 million foxes came from six or seven animals, so they are all related. This complicates things. There is no proof of establishment and the only adjunct evidence of establishment is the juvenile fox retrieved from the side of the road at Lilloco in 2005. That was a young fox, so unless it had arrived shortly before it is hard to avoid thinking that it was a result of breeding.

Ms FORREST - How young was that fox?

Mr MOONEY - It was 10 weeks old, not at the age it would be dispersing. It should have been with mum or somewhere near.

We have no evidence of establishment. In fact you might argue the opposite. The female fox found dead on the roadside in 2003 at Burnie was in perfect condition, prime breeding age and she had ovulated but not mated, meaning you had a very lonely fox, so to speak. That happens in nature, but is very rare. She should have had young or been pregnant at that stage, so this tells you the most obvious answer to that -

Ms FORREST - How did you tell she had ovulated previously, or was ovulating then?

Mr MOONEY - From the scars on the ovaries. That would suggest a fox wandering around without finding a mate, an antisocial fox. The only evidence we get of whether there has been breeding is from rare opportunities like that.

Ms FORREST - Could you tell if she had had cubs?

Mr MOONEY - No, she hadn't.

Ms FORREST - Had she ovulated more than once.

Mr MOONEY - Yes.

Ms FORREST - Does that beg the question of how long she had been here and whether she had been on her own before she died? I live in Burnie, and there were claims that she had probably been killed on the mainland and brought over, as opposed to being killed on the road. If she had come from Webb Dock on a boat -

Mr MOONEY - She should have been pregnant.

Ms FORREST - Yes. Or at least have had evidence of having cubs.

Mr MOONEY - Yes. They have a very tight breeding season, so she should have been pregnant. We had from the Lillico fox on the one hand a suggestion of breeding, but on the other a suggestion that we had had a very lonely fox at Burnie a few years before.

I watch these genotypes with trepidation, because it is possible that we will get lucky, or unlucky depending on your point of view, and get that evidence eventually or someone will find a den. There have been reports of dens but fox dens are very similar to devil dens - a massive den that smells a bit. Unless you really know your stuff, you will not know the difference. They den in very similar places - under old buildings, in caves, wombat holes, nothing that would surprise you.

Ms FORREST - My staff member is from England. She lived in rural UK for many years and very well knows the sound of foxes and also the fact that if a fox is around, a dog will go and roll itself in the fox and will come back stinking as well. She said to me that she finds it hard to believe that if they are really here that someone would not hear them. She does say that maybe there are not enough of them in the right places. There are a lot of places you can hide in Tasmania and not be close to people to be heard. That is one sceptical view, that they have a very distinctive calling sound.

Mr MOONEY - *Heartbeat*, that old English rural drama, was classic for playing a fox in the background, so people are familiar with that call. That is a call they use for territorial and mate solicitation. It is always prominent at high densities. Where you have lots of foxes there is lots happening in all sorts of ways, including calls. We have had a whole lot of people reporting fox calls and some of them are visiting tourists from England and elsewhere. Sometimes it comes months after the fact because they did not know there were not supposed to be foxes here. So they took no notice until they were chatting away to someone and found out.

In fact way back in 2001, the very first reaction that started this whole thing was two English naturalists camped at Longford and they reported two foxes calling to each other along the water. That is when we first started taking notice of what was happening up that way.

Ms FORREST - Seeing a fox is one thing but scats are evidence of a fox being in that particular location, but would recording of the sound be another form of evidence?

Mr MOONEY - I suppose so but people would suggest that the recording was brought from elsewhere. You can wait an awful long time for a sound and miss it, of course. There is some fantastic new technology now, and I am a bit of a luddite so I am suspicious of new technology, but this seems really good. It is very sophisticated sound-recognition gear. So you can pre-program this machinery, a laptop computer essentially, with hundreds of

different calls and that machine will monitor, record and analyse the call and it can send you a text message that it has recorded a number -

Ms FORREST - Is the Fox Task Force looking at using those things?

Mr MOONEY - Yes. It is being tested on some other things at the moment just to see if it is as good as it seems, that would give you the ability to record something and hear about it in real time.

Ms FORREST - So if you received a text message saying that there are fox sounds in Burnie, you could get your people there?

Mr MOONEY - One of the problems is that there are a lot of Tasmanians really are not familiar with the range of sounds that our wildlife makes. There are really only one or two fox calls, out of lots of calls they make, that are unique. I have had a lot to do with foxes on the mainland now, whether I like it or not, and a lot of the calls I have heard you would not pick out as outstanding here if you really know the range of calls that crakes and some of these little swamp birds make that have an unbelievable range of sounds. So just because someone says they heard what they think is a fox call, that does not mean it was.

Ms FORREST - What is the cost of it and is that going to fit within the current budget?

Mr MOONEY - It is a few thousand dollars for the thing and the people who are making it up are using it. As you can imagine, every endangered species program in the world would want to have these things for recording frogs or birds or anything. It will end up in an esky with a little microphone attached and is quite practical. When technology like that turns up it is worth our while dropping something off to try to pick them up. We were recording orange-bellied parrots and that is where I became aware of the technology; someone else was using it. They have used it across the Northern Territory, trying to track the march of cane toads. It is in the interests of thousands of people to get this right. We don't have the expertise to develop things like that but we can certainly use it.

CHAIR - Devil if you do, devil if you don't; that is the difficulty, isn't it?

Mr MOONEY - Yes.

CHAIR - You are saying there is ample evidence of foxes in Tasmania?

Mr MOONEY - Yes. I would summarise it by saying I have become a greater fan of risk assessment for anything. It is a good way to clearly and rationally think. The risks of getting this wrong, by saying there probably aren't so let's just take a punt on it, are permanent and spectacular.

CHAIR - Can you expand on that?

Mr MOONEY - We have gone through this time and time again. We tried to get help from the university - but they were too busy - for estimating the costs. We think it would cost at least \$10 million, probably more like \$20 million, year in, year out probably forever if

you took those values seriously that you are trying to protect. You can talk about agricultural loss in lambs, poultry or whatever but that is often exaggerated. It can be as bad as, say, 30 per cent of lambs but often it is often only 5 per cent because the farmers are aggressively poisoning year in and year out. There is a list of species that are survivors in Tasmania because we don't have foxes. Most of that group are extinct on the mainland because they have foxes. Forgive the crude pun, but it is not rocket science to work out what is going to go very quickly. It is those species that like the same sorts of places as foxes. There are also species that breed very conservatively, such as bettongs, so they cannot compensate for extra predation. They are not adapted to cope with foxes and they have a very conservative, slow system. If you put in something new that eats a lot of them, they cannot cope and become extinct very quickly. Also, species that the fox would predate on and compete with, such as the quolls, would become extinct very quickly. That is a hard-hitting list.

What we would be obliged to do, and it scares the pants off me, is contemplate what we're trying to do with Tasmanian devils for a whole list of species. Trying to hold onto the orange-bellied parrot has cost the Australian community millions of dollars. If things went badly, we could suddenly be faced with more of those problems, not just devils and parrots. It can be three, then four, then five, then six, to a point where you are overwhelmed and you can't cope resource-wise with protecting these animals. One of the projects we have had going is identifying the key parts of some of these species that are so obviously at risk if foxes get going. Someone not very kindly called it 'doomsday planning', but that's what it is. If things go really badly and we have to give up on eradication and move to controlling the impacts of foxes then we target that population. We know where our stock is but we often do not know where our key wildlife assets are.

You can list those and put some costs next to them. Wildlife tourism takes a dent because we lose that and lose our special image as a place without things such as foxes. To me personally it would be extremely distressing to live in a place like Victoria, which is essentially what Tasmania would become from a wildlife point of view in many decades. It just doesn't happen overnight or in five years. If we are trying to contain the situation, such as we are, that slows down all of these changes. Foxes are remarkable animals. Once they get a foothold they will beat you, so a decision had to be made very early on. Do we wait and see what happens? By the time everyone is happy about the evidence you may as well go home. As you said, you're damned if you do and damned if you don't. I wouldn't want to be sitting in my rocking chair watching foxes scamper around my backyard and thinking, 'I wish we'd had a bit more of a go'.

Mr JOHNSTON - I did make mention in the submission that we mentioned there, too, the University of Tasmania's economics faculty is still doing some work for us trying to put a dollar figure to the impact of an established fox population in Tasmania. I had hoped we'd have that report from them by now, but it shouldn't be too far away. Certainly when that comes we'll make a copy available.

Mr MOONEY - It essentially replaces some problems we've had. Most people here would be aware years ago we had lots and lots of devils, and at times they were a problem for farmers but they are essentially much easier to control than a fox. There wouldn't be a devil in the world that could get on this table. They can't jump, whereas a fox is athletic and can bound over anything. So it's not just substituting one for another, it is the degree

of difficulty plus all the other impacts. I think it would make Tasmania a different place, and that is something that is hard to put a price on.

A little bit has been made of the risks of hydatids recurring; that is a low risk but it is there. Quite a few foxes on the mainland carry hydatids, but it's slightly different than the horror-story dog hydatids we are familiar with. There are some small risks like that, but to me they are not the major issue.

CHAIR - If foxes take a large foothold in Tasmania, as we say is the case already, can you put a figure on the loss of endangered species, and the Auditor-General has just spoken out about that.

Mr MOONEY - I would say there is absolutely nothing to compare with a fox. This sounds like a very radical statement, but I have talked it out with a few people, and foxes would probably be the biggest impact on our wildlife since the last ice age. This is if they got to full numbers, and Tasmania has the potential to hold over 200 000, that's for sure. You just apply what you know from Victoria.

Mr HIDDING - I think we should give you the opportunity to comment on some elements of the questions I asked the person who was in the chair previous to you, seeing you are here - and I deliberately ask that question while you are here. Perhaps you could give us your view of the Glen Esk fox finding, and I will ask some questions if there are any in my mind afterwards.

Mr MOONEY - Certainly. On 1 August 2006 I was going to one of the never-ending - excuse me - bloody meetings in Launceston. At that stage I was going up and down like a yoyo literally several times a week to meetings in Launceston, and we've got staff in Hobart and Launceston, so one of the Hobart staff members and I were delivering a vehicle for release in Launceston, stripped down so it didn't have its first aid kit, and all these bits and pieces in it.

We were just getting into the town boundary at Launceston when we got a call that someone reckoned they'd picked up a dead fox at Glen Esk, so we did a U-turn and went back.

Mr HIDDING - That got your attention.

Mr MOONEY - Yes, but you never know. We've had people from Canberra claiming they'd picked up foxes, and they'd been possums, and that sort of thing.

Mr HIDDING - Well, that's Canberra.

Mr MOONEY - It's interesting when you actually analyse it. Someone sees something on the road at night and pull up past it, so they go around the back of the car and pick it up and put it near a fence post, or something, where you can find it. They never actually have a good look for it.

So we went there and there were a couple of fellows and a flat tray ute on the side of the road there, and yes, there was a dead fox in the back of the ute. I started chatting to the guys and we drifted apart and my colleague started chatting to another one just trying to

see if there was any tomfoolery going on, as does happen in Tasmania. It all seemed genuine and they seemed very straight-faced about it. The fellow showed me some blood on the road where he said they'd picked the fox up. The reception for phones was pretty ordinary there at the time. They were farm contractors, with big fertiliser trucks with great big heavy wheels. They'd been going off to work in convoy up Glen Esk Road. The fellow in front had just seen something on the road before he ran over it. He had a look and said, 'What was that I ran over?' The fellow behind him came along and said it was a fox. He put it on his tool box and they went up the road further. People just don't seem to be able to leave things alone, but that is what people are like. By that time the foreman had turned up so the animal went into the back of his ute and they drove around for five or 10 minutes to find telephone reception and phoned it in. Meanwhile they had all sort of scratched their heads and had a look at it and taken a photo on their mobile phone - that was the one that turned up -

Mr HIDDING - Can I just clear something up? Did you believe that the driver believed that he had run over an already-dead fox?

Mr MOONEY - He never said that. The report that went in the newspaper, that it had come out from the left and been run over, was a report by a very new manager who was not a fox program manager and he had never talked to a witness. It was just a wrong report. The fellow never said he saw it alive. He said he just could not be sure. This fox was there; it had a big belly flap ripped off it which was not bleeding, which suggests to me that the fox may have been dead from that injury. But there was very fresh blood, the eyes were full, bright and clear. When you touch them they are like your own eyes - very clear. Blood was still oozing out of the mouth. I sniffed it all over, much to the amusement of the farm workers, and I could not smell any hint of putrefaction, rotting or anything like that. In fact it actually did not smell very strongly. This marking you mentioned earlier - a strong smell of foxes - is a territorial sign. So not all foxes do it all the time. If they are being territorial they do it.

Mr HIDDING - Like a tomcat?

Mr MOONEY - Yes, if they do not want to draw attention to themselves - like a vixen would not - they do not do it. They can actually leave a scent on their feet so they do not need to do it to leave a message.

We did not have a camera or anything because we were just going to another of these damn meetings. I cut a little hole in its rib cage and stuck my finger in just to see if it was warm. I did in fact stick my finger up its bum to see if it was warm - which is another standard procedure - and the farmer standing there said, 'What are you doing that for? I have a thermometer'

Laughter.

Mr MOONEY - He pulled out his soil-testing thermometer that they use for planting potatoes, so we could have done all that again with a bit more dignity.

Ms FORREST - For whom? You or the fox?

Laughter.

Mr WILKINSON - And a bit more reliability as to the actual temperature too, I would imagine.

Mr MOONEY - Indeed. So I got chest, rectal and ambient temperatures. It was about 12.4 C for the chest, and the ambient temperature was 7.9 C, and I got my colleague to witness the temperatures. I later tested the thermometer against mercury thermometers and other ones and those little cheap ones are surprisingly accurate.

CHAIR - If I can, what does the temperature mean that you have just described?

Mr MOONEY - It means the fox was warmer than the air - 4 degrees warmer. I was there for half an hour before we realised one of the guys had a thermometer, so the day had warmed up considerably.

Mr HIDDING - But if a possum had lain on the road for two days it still would be warmer than the air, would it not?

Mr MOONEY - No, no. It would have cooled down and follow the ambient temperature or a little bit behind. I got the weather recordings from as near as I could from there and it was about 2 C that night. So that fox, if it had been there a long time or dead in the area a long time, should have been very cold.

Ms FORREST - So even in the heat of a potentially warm bitumen road? I do not know if it is bitumen or not out there.

Mr MOONEY - No, it was on a wooden tray of a truck. The core will not warm up. It takes a long time for an animal's core to cool down. It also takes a long time to warm up. A few hours before the site would have been 3 degrees Celsius and that would have been much the same so it would have been quite a bit warmer. When the guys picked it up they said it was warm and floppy. Certainly an hour before it would have felt warm.

Mr HIDDING - If I rang my mate, Horatio, from CSI in Miami, what would he tell me about a human body, for instance, that had expired two days earlier?

Mr MOONEY - The same sorts of things. It would depend very much on the ambience. If you put someone in a freezer - not that I would put somebody in a freezer - they still take a long time to cool down. It is not used as the be-all and end-all of establishing time of death because it does not cool in a flat curve but in steps and some very odd things happen. That happens after certain period as chemical change starts happening in a body. It is an indication.

We bagged that animal and took it off to the lab. The next night we shot a big cat and a couple of hares and took some cooling curves from them. Since then we have shot a lot of foxes on the mainland and taken cooling curves from them. We put them in standard temperatures, let them cool and took their measurements every half hour. As it turned out on the web site there was plenty of data on cooling for deer for policing reasons in America but nothing on foxes.

Mr HIDDING - What was your finding?

Mr MOONEY - From where it started to peter off, we believe it died somewhere between 14 and 17 hours before we measured it at 9.30 a.m. That was from the cooling curves. The final report on the post mortem from Tony Ross, after all the haggling as your previous witness said, suggested that it had died on the evening of the night before. He suggested the time of death was something like 5 p.m. the night before.

Mr HIDDING - Would blood still coming from the muzzle have coagulated by then, after 14 hours?

Mr MOONEY - I am not saying that it had not coagulated but it was still very fluid and sticky. You can think that but all you can do is observe. It was interesting because by about three hours later the eyes had started to shrink and wrinkle. As the day warmed up and the time went on there were very distinct changes in that body. The eyes started to shrink and shrivel and all the rest of it. They were very clear and very bright when I saw it. We have been trying to make sense of that because we have looked at dead foxes subsequently and tried to mimic the injuries, we look at iris dilation and things like that, plus do the post mortem. We look for rigor mortis onset and that is highly variable, particularly in relation to what the animal was doing before it died. If it was sauntering along and just suddenly died, rigor mortis can take a long time to set in. If it was under stress before it died, had an adrenaline rush, rigor mortis can cut in fairly soon. The onset of rigor mortis is a guide but not a lot more. There are large margins for error. We vacuumed the fur looking for pollen or something that may be unique to anywhere, looked at the gravel, all that sort of stuff and then the post mortem was done.

I think a night later we received an anonymous call from a fellow saying he lived at Campbell Town and did not know what all the fuss was about that fox. It was run over near Epping and moved because the guy did not want you clowns crawling all over his property. If that was the case it would indeed explain what I would agree are two sets of injuries; one killing the animal which included a broken pelvis, the fox being ground flat and a bit of skin torn off with very ragged edges perhaps from the big tyre of a truck running over it. They have big angle tread so it would just grind and mash something. That explains the somewhat mashed state of the corner of the animal. If you look at the estimated times of death as being the evening before, that to me is a link, as well as the phone call from someone who claims to live at Campbell Town and knows what happened.

Unfortunately, one of the problems with public vilification of this program is that it makes witnesses want to be anonymous. They commonly say they do not want to be part of that. We seem to be stuck in a catch-22 position with a lot of our witnesses; even if they give us their name they want to remain anonymous.

Mr HIDDING - I asked the previous witness his view of people building stories. You have made a statement now on oath that there is often tomfoolery at these situations so -

Mr MOONEY - We have had stuffed foxes put on the side of the road et cetera. I remember an incident at Oatlands when a stuffed fox was stuck in the grass on the side of the road and it was obviously a set-up so I asked the local policeman to go and get it because people were not going to muck him about. Someone went sheepishly to the police station

a few days later and asked for their fox back. Most of that stuff is pretty obviously tomfoolery and the people cannot help it.

Mr HIDDING - Clearly you were suspicious about certain aspects of the Glen Esk thing because you had gone to all the trouble to shoot animals and do temperature tests.

Mr MOONEY - Absolutely.

Mr HIDDING - Clearly you are sensitive about the possibility of a criticism about these things.

Mr EVANS - That goes to the collection of all evidence. We are very sceptical and suspicious about evidence until we verify it.

Mr MOONEY - It is a big call to say a fox was likely run over in Tasmania. I have lived that issue for many decades, fearful about foxes arriving, so it is a big call to make because it is almost changing history in Tasmania.

Mr HIDDING - You have a heightened degree of lack of confidence in your fellow man. You called it tomfoolery. It is pretty serious stuff.

Mr MOONEY - It is.

Mr HIDDING - Following all the signs and all the things you have done, what do you genuinely believe to be the situation with the Glen Esk fox incident?

Mr MOONEY - I think it was run over near Epping, as the person suggested and moved. Wherever that happened it would have been seen before that time in the morning. People commute with their kids, it is a common funnel to farms in the back. I cannot believe that fox would have been there for much longer than just before we turned up. It is impossible. The eyes were full and all of that. Ravens sometimes pick eyes, they sometimes don't. I have done a lot of work with roadkills, far too much probably, and those things are not all givens. I think it was there for a short time before these people found it. I think they genuinely found it.

Mr HIDDING - You do?

Mr MOONEY - Yes, I think so. I am not a friend of theirs, I cannot speak for them or vouch for them.

Mr HIDDING - Is there any scope, in terms of public policy, for new legislation, to deal with the tomfoolery that you firmly believe takes place with these things? In other words, if it is just tomfoolery - that is, citizens being silly - clearly they are playing with Tasmania's future.

Mr MOONEY - Indeed.

Mr HIDDING - Should there be laws? In your professional capacity, do you believe that laws would stop people from mucking about with this, that if they see a fox they must not touch it?

Mr EVANS - It is not fair to ask Nick to answer a question about whether the Government should or should not create laws.

Mr MOONEY - I would like to defer to Mr Dean. The police must have to deal with the equivalent of this all the time. From memory a false report to police, giving a statutory declaration is a serious thing but that is not dealing with the tomfoolery. We have lots of statutory declarations about lots of things. That has its own discipline, but I really do not know. The tomfoolery is more akin to vandalism really. A better example would be the fox that was held up in the front of the newspaper for a photo in 2001. That would seem to be a much more rounded version of tomfoolery, if you like.

Mr EVANS - Coming to your point, yes it wastes a lot of our time. It affects the credibility of the program and the way the public deals with it. Unfortunately it also impacts directly on all of the staff involved in this program - staff who work extraordinarily hard and are extremely dedicated to this cause. This is against a background where you get a lot of ridicule from the public at times and that is largely caused by the fact that some people treat it as a joke and get involved in these acts of tomfoolery, as Nick has indicated. So from that perspective, yes, it needs to be dealt with. Whether or not you need legislation to do that, whether there is adequate existing legislation, I would prefer to leave it.

Mr HIDDING - Why do you prefer that? You are the head of the agency. We are a body looking at the effectiveness of this fox task force. At the end of the day we will write a report that will make some recommendations, I would have thought.

Mr EVANS - I thought I had made it clear that we would regard that as totally inappropriate, and it does affect the way the program operates. If we had other instruments to assist us in that respect, over and above what already exists, then we would welcome those.

Ms FORREST - In your view, can you achieve that without legislative reform?

Mr EVANS - We believe we can. We put an enormous amount of effort into education, public awareness, working with landowners and so on to ensure that the community and particularly the stakeholders, landowners and the like, take the program seriously. You can approach it in a range of different ways. I do think that the public sentiment, particularly amongst the rural landowners and stakeholders, has moved since the early days when they were very sceptical, so I think we are making some good ground in terms of education and awareness and changing people's attitudes. But the reality is we still get occasions when people play games, and obviously it is the butt of a lot of jokes and that needs to be tackled on a range of different fronts.

Mr DEAN - I have a number of questions and I could go probably for two hours. In relation to the Glen Esk fox there was evidence where it happened, it ran out alive, ran across the road. There was evidence first of all that it was fairly recently killed and it was not until veterinarians became involved that the story started to change and other evidence started to come out. Wouldn't you think it reasonable in all of the circumstances that, where that happens, there should be a full investigation? Don't you think that would have been helpful? The Fox Eradication Branch had placed a lot of emphasis on that fox and that

find to show that there are foxes in this State. Wouldn't you want to know the full circumstances regarding it with an investigation?

Mr MOONEY - A more rounded, fuller investigation would be good.

Mr DEAN - Why wasn't it done?

Mr EVANS - Can I maybe defer to Alan with this question as to management?

Mr DEAN - I don't care who answers it.

Mr JOHNSTON - I would like to say two things. There was an extraordinary amount of investigation of the carcass and the circumstances, working out time of death and all those types of things. I will start by saying I wasn't working with the program at that time, so I was not involved at that point. There was a lot of work done in the immediate area trying to ascertain what had happened, and Nick talked about vacuuming the hair, looking at the gravel and a whole lot of things like that. I am not quite sure where you are leading, but in terms of interrogating witnesses we do not have the power to interrogate witnesses. We spoke to them and we got what we could from them but we do not have power to interrogate them.

Mr DEAN - But surely you would have the ability, wouldn't you, to call in the police if you wished to? You could use other resources, couldn't you, that would be available to you, I would have thought?

Mr JOHNSTON - Yes. I am not quite sure on what grounds you would do that. These people have found a dead animal, a bit of road kill, on the side of the road.

Mr DEAN - A short time later there was a lot of evidence to suggest that it wasn't there, it was elsewhere, or it wasn't killed when they believed it was first killed, it wasn't as recent, and all of those things.

Mr HIDDING - What law would be broken, though?

Mr DEAN - False reporting, setting it up. Whether a law is broken or not does not matter. It is trying to, I guess, authenticate the find, isn't it? That is what it comes down to.

Mr MOONEY - We have other means. We searched that area and found six fox scats. They were old, DNA degraded and we could not match them to that fox. That is a way we have been doing this.

There is a problem here too, Mr Dean, in that things have evolved. We first started this whole process many years ago, collecting information, as you would as a scientist or a biologist, and now that information has to be used for far higher purposes and, as you suggest, it was not collected by a forensics team, so to speak, in the first place. Regarding a more rounded investigation of that incident, key incidents like that are useful and it often depends on who we have had on staff, whether they have had any training or not. At that time, we did not have anyone highly trained, let us put it, on staff like that, and we cannot close roads and do all those things. We do not have any

authority whatsoever. We cannot stop anyone going anywhere. A more rounded investigation would be useful. I am trying to think of a better word than 'rounded'.

Mr JOHNSTON - I guess I would also say that in the totality of our evidence, it is one small piece now. We do not hang our hat for this program on the existence of that fox at Glen Esk. We have, since that time, moved forward with an extensive list of evidence that put forward to you before.

Mr DEAN - You are running out time. I would like to go into that a lot more too because there are a lot of other instances. If we are serious about this whole thing, why have not approaches been made to give the Fox Eradication Branch the right to enter any property where it is believed foxes could be living or could be seen? Why haven't we moved in that direction? It seems to me that this is serious matter. Why should a farmer in this State have the right to stop you coming onto his or her property if there are foxes on it?

Mr JOHNSTON - I think that is a very valid point. I guess our response at this stage would be that the cooperation from landowners has been excellent. The issue of us not being able to get onto land to do the things we want to do has not, probably up to this point at least, been a significant issue. I think we are, though, reaching a point where we believe that some of these things need to be explored more. There are probably two reasons for that. One is that one of the problems we are going to confront is that while we have tremendous landowner support, we need that landowner support to continue on into the future and that will probably get harder and harder to do. So it may well be that over time the landowner support might wane a little bit, which will then become a real issue in restricting our ability to do what we want to do. We, at the moment, would say that 90 to 95 per cent of landowners who we approach give us access to their land.

The other thing that is relevant to this is that in recent times, of course, some of that evidence you have there in front of you is telling us that we potentially have an issue in more urban areas. That creates a different set of circumstances in terms of dealing with landowners and so forth. So we would, I guess, agree with your point that we are needing, around now, to start thinking more seriously about how we do confront that but it has not been a particular impediment up to recent times.

CHAIR - We do not want to get too far out of time. I would think we will ask that you come back at some later stage. We would love to take up your invitation, thanks, to have a look at what you are doing in the field.

Mr JOHNSTON - There is just one other thing. There was a fair bit of discussion earlier about import issues. We have had an import risk analysis done and I can leave you with a copy of that document, if you like, which looked at all the different pathways into the State.

Mr EVANS - Can I take the opportunity to say that I hope we can organise a field trip - we should be able to do that - and we are more than happy to come back at any point.

CHAIR - Thanks very much. Thanks for your time.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.

Mr IAN RIST WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

Mr RIST - Thank you very much for having me here today. I have been interested in this fox thing for quite a few years. When I was running Mountain Creek Hunting and Fishing Lodge back from about 1996 onwards I first became alarmed when I heard that a fox had jumped off the boat at Burnie on 31 May 1998. I am quite aware there were witnesses and that it actually did happen. I heard little rumblings for some time afterwards about certain things to do with the escape. Of course then it all started in 2000-01. That is where I would really like to start. As committee members are aware, a fox exited from a container at Agfest in May 2001. We are aware of that. I believe that that was the same fox that was seen on Illawarra road just a few days later - 15 May - by Chris Spencer - a very notable wildlife authority who is very good at identifying wildlife. There is no doubt at all that what he saw was what he saw.

Mr DEAN - Are you a professional shooter as well?

Mr RIST - I am a former professional shooter, a professional hunting guide and a former professional gamekeeper.

Mr DEAN - You do a lot of spotlighting and so forth?

Mr RIST - Not so much now but I did. When I was running Mountain Creek Hunting Lodge we had a terrible problem. We had thousands and thousands of game birds out - that is pheasant, partridge et cetera. If I get to the heart of this it was to do with what I felt was the expenditure imbalance between what was being spent on foxes in the early days as compared with what was not being spent on feral cats. I had many meetings down here with Bryan Green. Bryan even came to my property. We had long discussions about the topic. That is what started all of this. I took particular interest in it in about the middle of 2000 and even 2001. I know a detective-inspector who was charged with leading the investigation into the alleged import of up to 19 foxes. There were rumours spread around. There was a police and ministerial briefing on 20 June 2001 and I think it all went from there. Certainly there were a lot of accusations made. The people named are in my submission: Messrs Bryant, Rigby and one other chappie. The police went through this. I have copies of the police letters here - Mr Dean signed one of them back in those days. Basically nothing came through those allegations. The police basically said those rumours were based on gossip. Nothing came of it but it certainly stirred up a few politicians.

Back in 2001 at the height of what I call 'fox-fever' it was pretty well put out there that we had a small window of opportunity - Nick Mooney's own words. Nick said, 'If we can get through one breeding season with no cubs born it means we have won'. We then had a mysterious photo appear. Police signed off on this in mid-July 2001. I only have copies of letters from Mr Dean to Deputy Commissioner Johnston, but I believe it would have gone through the chain to McCreadie and through to Minister Llewellyn himself.

This is where it all gets quite amazing for me. Within a week or 10 days a photo appeared of two men holding up a dead fox under the Longford sign. I know the people involved and it has come to me. I wish to give that evidence in camera. I wish to name names in camera if that is acceptable to you, Chair.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr RIST - I will come back to that in a little while. There is a little bit more I need to cover.

This photo appeared and there is quite a story behind it. It was admitted to me later in an Internet forum and in the newspaper by Nick Mooney that, yes, indeed, it was a hoax, and it certainly was a hoax. But that photo, I feel, was testing the waters. There was a \$5 000 reward out of that, not a government reward, which was posted in all hunting magazines at the time - *Outdoors* and *Sporting Shooter* and that sort of thing. That the same ad was pasted in Melbourne gun shop windows. Why? Why would you be offering a reward for a Tasmanian fox and posting rewards in Melbourne gun shop windows? I will let your imagination run.

Where this gets murky is that just a month or so after a chap by the name of Eric Jeffery Bosworth and his accomplice, or his shooting mate, Scottie Geeves, were supposed to have been spotlighting down at John Youl's place on 10 September. They saw an animal in the spotlight. Young Scottie claims he held the spotlight while Mr Bosworth fired a shot. They did not go up and check the animal. I just find this absolutely amazing. From my professional shooting background, I know that this animal was illuminated by a 100-watt spotlight. Mr Bosworth was viewing the animal through a four-power telescopic sight. The distance measured off when Chris Emms and a couple of others went there was just 60 metres. With a four-power scope at 60 metres you would be able to count the whiskers on the fox's face, and I am not joking. He could not have mistaken it. His story was that he mistook what it was.

Some 11 or 12 days later Mr Bosworth was in there again and he supposedly looking for wood this time. They drove up to the gate and they spotted a carcass lying near the gate, which they collected. Mr Bosworth then rang the *Examiner* and a couple of other people and National Parks. They all descended on Mr Bosworth's house at 88 Main Street, Perth, to quote Mr Bosworth, 'like a swarm of bees'.

That got so much media it was amazing, and the media are responsible for a lot of the hype that has gone on. That fox was supposed to have been shot on John Youl's property at Symmons Plains. I gave a statement to Tasmania Police some time ago that we were in the company of some people at Northern Midlands Gun Club. I have named them in the statement and Mr Bosworth claims that, no, he did not shoot that fox there, he shot it at Geelong in Victoria, brought it over here under the seat of the vehicle and was after the \$5 000 reward. That was never paid.

I have newspaper articles here where Mr Bosworth claimed that he also knew where there was a vixen and cubs, but unless the Government paid his \$5 000 reward he certainly was not going to play ball.

CHAIR - Are we talking here about in-camera evidence?

Mr RIST - It is common knowledge that Bosworth was involved in the Symmons Plains fox. The mystery is with the two people that we just saw up there a while ago. But I am going to sit down and prove to you people that they are both linked. Even our good people within the department -

Mr HIDDING - Mr Rist, you were saying that later you want to go into camera and name people. It would appear as though you are naming and accusing. Do you understand we are in open committee right now?

Mr RIST - Yes, I certainly am.

Mr HIDDING - You have privilege -

Mr RIST - I have no problem with what I have said to date. To name the people in that photograph, I do have a problem with that in open committee. I would like to come back to that.

CHAIR - I am just reminding you. If any of us, me included, hears anything which we believe might be a problem too, we will pull you up, if that is the case.

Mr RIST - Please do.

Mr HIDDING - Did you just say that Mr Bosworth admitted to you or has admittedly publicly that he brought the fox from Victoria?

Mr RIST - Yes, he admitted to it publicly. I named the people who were there when the conversation took place. I gave a statement to Tasmania Police back in 2003 to that effect. I gave it to Sergeant Mikulski and the person with him was Glenn Atkinson from National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Mr HIDDING - You heard this first-hand, you heard Mr Bosworth say that?

Mr RIST - I did not hear it directly from Mr Bosworth, Mr Hidding, no.

Mr HIDDING - So that is hearsay.

Mr RIST - I am afraid it was hearsay amongst a group of people there at Northern Midlands Gun Club. That is what I put in the police statement. I do not say this lightly; Bosworth did gloat about the fact that he was going to be the recipient of a \$5 000 reward.

Mr HIDDING - Mr Chairman, we are hearing here evidence about hearsay that makes quite substantial charges and something that could be a very serious matter about a citizen and we are not in camera. What has been said has been said. So that Mr Rist does not feel constrained - and he does not appear to feel constrained at this point, but so that he does not feel further constrained - I wonder whether, we should go into camera so that he can speak freely.

Mr RIST - I certainly would feel more comfortable.

CHAIR - If you would feel more comfortable - it is getting to a stage where I do not know what else is going to be said but that is the difficulty with it, I suppose. So, I think we will deliberate privately first. That would be the best.

Short suspension.

CHAIR - With these committees, because this is privileged information, comments can be made which people might think are unfair - and sometimes they are unfair when other people do not have the ability to answer them. That is why we hear some evidence in camera. If it is at any stage necessary, we can go back in camera. But we will now go back to open evidence. Are you happy with that?

Mr RIST - Yes, certainly. I am a pretty straight shooter. I shoot from the shoulder, I do not usually hold back on things.

I have had great difficulty after analysing some of Mr David Llewellyn's input into all this since day one. Mr Llewellyn, who was the Police minister at the time in 2001 and also the DPIWE minister, would have known the results of those police investigations. So at that stage, when the ministerial briefing was held on 20 June and the police formed this task force, the Government acted appropriately. Mr Llewellyn, as minister, acted appropriately. I would not have given him any other choice but to do what he did and proceed with this thorough police investigation. But it came up with nothing. Then, for months and even years afterwards these cub allegations, these cub import allegations were used as rock solid evidence. That obviously was wrong.

I have got a letter here that somehow slipped through the net. I can put the police letters up from Otley to Dean, Dean to Johnson up there and you can read them. Some of them have passages blacked out. I think the one that really needs to be looked at is the letter that slipped through the net in 2003 when the Acting Police Commissioner, Lupo Prins, was asked a couple of direct questions and Mr Prins came back with this answer. I am sure I have it with me. The question was asked of the Police Commissioner at the time by Senator Shayne Murphy - although I got this letter from Tasmania Police file disclosure, FOI. The question asked were these - as you can read now. Tell me if I am going too fast.

Mr KONS - I cannot see it too well from here.

Ms FORREST - Give us the general overview of the letter.

Mr RIST - This letter was sent to the Commissioner of Police. The Acting Police Commissioner, Lupo Prins, replied. He said:

'Dear Shayne, Thank you for your letter dated 13 June in relation to fox investigation and related matters. Dealing with the specific questions that you have posed I can advise as follows:

Tasmania Police has not conducted any investigations or received any further information concerning the introduction of foxes into this State since 2002. As you are aware, there has been a special fox taskforce established within the National Parks and Wildlife department. Any information received by Tasmania Police, either through Crimestoppers or elsewhere, is passed on to the fox taskforce. Tasmania Police members are available to and do assist the taskforce as and when required.

There have been no further conclusions reached since the original reports. No persons have been confirmed as introducing foxes into the State. Tasmania Police have received information that a number of persons have been responsible for the introduction of foxes into the State, however investigations to date have failed to provide any evidence to prove with this.

There is no evidence currently in possession of Tasmania Police to prove any particular person has introduced foxes into the State. At this stage Tasmania Police have insufficient evidence to prosecute any person with the import of foxes into this State, regardless of the statute of limitations.'

Quite a few people use the statute of limitations - and I am talking about ministers - to say that we could not prosecute anyone because the matter had gone beyond the statute of limitations.

CHAIR - The statute of limitations varies depending upon what matter it is. In relation to this it would seem like a magistrate's matter. That being the case, you would be looking at 12 months.

Mr RIST - It was originally. It has gone out to six years now, so I believe.

CHAIR - That is settled. You are looking at three to six years' settlement. One year in relation to the Magistrate's Court.

Mr RIST - I can sit here all day and point the finger at who said what. But for quite a while after, Minister Llewellyn did use that and used it in the Parliament. I have transcripts of the *Hansard* there. He said that it seemed as if some irresponsible Tasmanians had brought in fox cubs, reared them up and released them. I certainly do not want to make any enemies here today, especially up that end of the table. I am quoting what actually happened. It is there on the *Hansard* if anyone wants to read it.

Mr HIDDING - What would be wrong with me as an enemy? That is discriminatory!

Mr RIST - I am not being discriminatory. I am talking about the current Government and I am talking about a minister in the Government.

CHAIR - The big question is this: sometimes people could argue that you are damned if you do and damned if you don't. In other words, one could argue that if the department put their hands in the air and raised the white flag and said they had not actually seen a fox for however long, so they are not doing anything, the foxes could take hold and there would be huge problems as a result of that. Therefore are you saying, one, you do not know whether there are foxes here; two, you accept that something has got to be done; and three, you are saying that what is being done is too much when you look at the amount of finances put through the department at present? Is that correct?

Mr RIST - Yes. Well, I mean, we are talking about \$5.5 million a year at the moment, aren't we? And that is to go on for the next 10 years. If we are still talking about eradicating foxes in eight, nine or 10 years' time, forget it. It is all over. They are established, they are here. I mean it is all over red rover.

While I am on that point too - DPIW at the moment is claiming that they are recovering scats across the length and the breadth of this State. I just find that absolutely amazing. If that is the case, it is all over red rover; the foxes are established. We can talk about this scat testing for days and days. I guess Mr Obendorf would have covered the scat testing this morning? He did?

Mr DEAN - He did not have time to cover it properly, no.

Mr RIST - Okay. Well we have had 38 scats supposedly recovered from Tasmania at the moment. Eight of them have been identified genotype and they have been identified as coming from male or female foxes. Those eight scats, along with a lot of other carnivore scats that were recovered in this scat program, were sent to this hair expert, this Barbara Triggs who has all this mammal hair expertise. Barbara is a very efficient and well-known person in that field.

What I find amazing is that all the carnivore scats that they tested - cat, quoll, devil, supposedly fox - except the eight fox scats revealed the hair of our most common little wallaby here in Tasmania, the little red Rufus wallaby. I find it absolutely amazing that it was in the carnivore scats recovered in Tasmania but there was not a trace of this Rufus wallaby here in any of the fox scats, supposedly recovered in Tasmania.

Call it hypothetical, call it what you like but, as a bush person, I just can't accept it. I am sorry, I can't. Either the foxes do not like Rufus wallabies and everyone-else does or there is something very funny going on here. I sound very sceptical, don't I? Well would someone please explain? Why would you find all the hair of the Rufus wallaby in all the other carnivore scats that were collected in Tasmania - that is quoll, devil, cat - but not in those of a well-known scavenger? Foxes are certainly quite capable of killing Rufus wallabies. But none of the red fox scats have any sign of the Rufus wallaby.

Mr HIDDING - Why wouldn't you?

Mr RIST - You want me to answer that?

Mr HIDDING - Yes.

Mr RIST - I believe that the scats may not have been collected in Tasmania. There you are, I have said it. Now if someone wants to take me to court and sue me, let them. I have no problem with it. My conscience is clear.

Mr HIDDING - They will not be doing that based on what you say here.

Mr RIST - Thank you. It is just impossible -

Mr HIDDING - What motive would anyone have? That is a question I asked earlier.

Mr RIST - Yes.

Mr HIDDING - With any mischief that people undertake one of the first questions where you can generally ask yourself is what possible motive could somebody have keeping up this elaborate story?

Mr RIST - I believe that - and have believed for a long time - that money is the main motivator here. There are jobs at stake - there are 60-odd jobs at stake - and there is a huge amount of money at stake in Canberra. I do not know whether you people are aware or not but the CRC Invasive Animals in Canberra has little commercial offshoots. One is the Institute of Applied Ecology at the Canberra University that does all the DNA testing.

In fact in the last couple of years it has recovered half a million dollars from Tasmania for DNA testing of scats et cetera. The other offshoot company is Pestat which supplies all the pheromones, the bait attractants, the additives and the other commercial offshoot is Animal Control Technologies. That supplies all the baits - millions of dollars worth. That is a pretty good motivation for me, Rene.

Mr HIDDING - I do not get it, though. There is no one single person who has taken 10 per cent of all the salaries. There are many individual people on salaries and, on the face of it, they would be able to get work somewhere else - they are scientists. The proposition that you and others are posing that there has an elaborate case built. I am not such a sceptic but I am cynical enough to believe that that is actually possible. However, my commonsense asks me to look for substantial motive to one or two people who might be driving this agenda for some major gain. All I am seeing is mid-range salaries ongoing. I am sure whether that is enough.

Mr RIST - I will put it to you very directly: with the scats that have been recovered, I do not believe they were fox scats recovered in Tasmania. That leaves two conclusions. Either they are being inserted this end or they are being inserted the other end. They can be the only two conclusions. I do not believe -

Mr HIDDING - Or the science is not good enough.

Mr RIST - I would think the science is plenty good enough - it is very good.

Mr HIDDING - So, you believe that an acceptable majority of the fox scats that have been tested as containing fox DNA would be fox scats?

Mr RIST - I have no doubt they are fox scats, I just have a doubt where they were recovered. My bush sense and everything about it tells me, if we have foxes across the length and breadth of Tasmania, why aren't they being shot? At the moment, we have in excess of 10 000 crop control permits - that is, spotlight rifle permits - in the possession of farmers, forestry people and a whole heap of others. That is a small army. Some of these people, especially professional forestry shooters, are out six and seven nights a week, from dark until daylight, and you mean to tell me that we are recovering scats all across the island and none of these professional shooters are seeing foxes, let alone shooting one - and I can assure you that they are all aware of the rewards that are out there.

CHAIR - Thirty-nine scats was the evidence that we have received and they range from places such as Burnie, Boat Harbour, Wynyard, Barrington, Tunbridge, Old Beach,

Oatlands, Campbell Town, Conara, Seymour, various locations in the Midlands, Longford, Gladstone, Derby, Hawley Beach, Spreyton and Lillico Beach.

Mr RIST - I go back to my previous words. If those scats were defecated here in Tasmania by foxes in those broad-scale areas, it is all over red rover, foxes are here and established. I then say to you, why aren't the professional hunters and the task force shooting them? The task force has more gear than the Argentine Army - seriously.

CHAIR - What do you do then?

Mr KONS - They do not have a ship.

Laughter.

CHAIR - It would seem to me that what you are saying is, 'Look DPIW, this is ridiculous. I believe that all this is a conspiracy.' Therefore you do not do anything or do you do something? In the end that is the question, isn't it?

Mr RIST - That brings me back to -

CHAIR - But is that the question, in the end?

Mr RIST - Yes, that is the question.

Ms FORREST - What is the cost of ongoing vigilance?

Mr RIST - Okay, we are taking the precautionary principle. You say that is acceptable, we take the precautionary principle, just in case.

CHAIR - It seems that it is acceptable and it seems that the commonsense approach should take place. Do you agree with that?

Mr RIST - I did in the beginning. When I had all this money tied up in this game farm, may I assure you that I was the last person in Tasmania who would want to see foxes become established. I was having enough problems with feral cats eating pheasants at \$50 a hit each per night, partridges at \$20 each per night. Foxes were the last thing I wanted to see and that is why I took a great interest in it. But the more I looked at it, the more I felt that it just did not stack up.

The evidence that we are supposed to have is the Bosworth fox - and we have gone into that thoroughly. We have the fox down on the side of the road at Burnie in October 2003. This fox, in my opinion and through DPIW's own forensic tests, had not eaten for a week. That suggests to me it was contained. The pathology reports I saw through my good friend Mr Obendorf, showed that it was killed by what he believes, as a qualified pathologist, several sharp blows to the head. That fox was found on the side of the road by a cyclist, a Burnie footballer. Are you aware of who it was? It was Brad Davis. He reported it to the police and the police came in, scooped it up, took it away and then the circus started - the photos in the paper, the famous fox in the box that was.

CHAIR - What about the fox that was seen getting off the boat in Burnie?

Mr RIST - May 1998? Agree 100 per cent, Mr Wilkinson, that did happen. I have spoken to witnesses who actually saw it. It did happen.

Mr DEAN - To be fair to you, you are not saying that there are no foxes in Tasmania?

Mr RIST - I am not here to debate whether there are or whether there aren't. What I am here to debate and discuss is the evidence that has been put up so far. I am not arguing. I do not know whether there are foxes or not. I would be a magician if I did. I have difficulty with the evidence. With the one on the side of the road at Burnie, to me all the indicators are that it came off the boat, it was thrown out soon after outside the port gates. I have my suspicions, but I do not intend to discuss them here today. I have my suspicions, but I am not sure enough to actually put them into practice. I do know for a fact that there were DPIW personnel going backwards and forwards doing risk assessments at that time on the Toll and Bramble ships.

So I have my suspicions but that got the whole thing going again. You will remember that the taskforce was going to be wound down and stopped. Then the whole circus got going again. That was October 2003. We did not have any evidence at all till Christmas Day 2005. A lady cyclist was supposed to be riding her bike by the Lillico penguin rookery and she happened to look down and noticed a dead fox cub right on the crown of the road. She did not think any more about - or so she says. When she got back to Canberra, two months later on 23 February 2006, she suddenly remembered that she saw this cub. She was cycling round Tasmania; she claimed she did not realise foxes did not inhabit Tasmania. Well we have wasted a lot of money on all those big fox-free signs, haven't we? They are everywhere. All along the highway and yet this lady obviously did not see any of them. The DPIW descend on this, they scrape the remains of this so-called cub out of the bitumen and I thought well, okay, here is another one. We have got cubs here. That means they are breeding. This is the statement that was made: we have fox cubs and they are breeding.

I have had some revised information from Mr Mooney, the gentleman that was sitting here earlier, directly in an Internet forum that, no, that is not actually what happened. That cub was put there by a rabbit shooter - a person who wants to remain anonymous. We have a letter from him, but he wants to remain anonymous. That cub was put there so it would be noticed. I mean, it is illogical to me. Why? If I found a fox cub or shot a fox cub I would be ringing the two television stations and saying look here what I have got. This is what has troubled me too - all these anonymous witnesses that we seem to have all the way down the track. It is an anonymous letter or it is a person who wants to remain anonymous - it just goes on and on.

Okay, we will skip off that one and we will go onto the Old Beach episode. We have a suspicious chook kill at Old Beach, down on Phil Riley's property, 96 Kathleen Drive.

CHAIR - This is the last comment, if that is okay because of this other meeting we have.

Mr RIST - I am happy to come back. Please, I would love to come back.

CHAIR - The committee will discuss that.

Mr RIST - I will be very quick. The dead chooks are left in situ for five days. There is no other evidence from sand pads until five days later they find a spot of blood which is sent off to the Institute of Applied Ecology in Canberra and is tested. There were five beautiful stories done in *The Mercury*. I have them here and I will present them when I come again. It grew from a suspicious chook kill at Old Beach to a full-fledged fox attack in five separate stories. I think Rohan Wade actually wrote the stories.

Mr HIDDING - Whose fault was that, that it was overblown? Was that *The Mercury's* fault, do you think?

Mr RIST - Alarmist journalism. I will say this here: Rohan and I corresponded in the earlier days. There was no greater sceptic than Rohan in the early days. He wrote a lot of stories that were anti the fox task force. I do not know at what stage he turned the corner.

Mr HIDDING - Around about when he got employed, I think.

Mr KONS - Yes, when he started working for us.

Laughter.

Mr RIST - Okay. You said it, Mr Kons, I didn't.

Mr HIDDING - Mr Kons was joking - as was I.

Mr RIST - I had a severe altercation with Rohan one day on the phone after he had written the final story. He just about came through the phone to me. I suggested something about what Mr Hidding said - brown envelopes or something - and Rohan just about came through the phone to me. Anyway, what he did not tell me was that the following Friday night he had handed his notice in at *The Mercury* and was starting work with Mr Green and Mr Kons, I believe. Was he not? Was he not your media adviser?

Mr HIDDING - Outrageous.

Laughter.

Mr RIST - I think he was.

CHAIR - Probably not a bad spot to end it. We have to stop. We have this other meeting that we have to attend to. Thank you very much for coming along and speaking to your submission. The committee will discuss if it is necessary for you to come back and then get in touch with you to let you know when that will be.

Mr RIST - May I assure you, Mr Chair, that it gets better. It certainly does.

Laughter.

CHAIR - Thank you.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.