



# PESTS MART

## Fox Bounties

Bounty systems offer financial incentives to hunt and destroy pest animals.

Bounty systems offer what appears to be a simple solution to pest animal problems by providing financial rewards to reduce pest numbers. However, reviews of past bounty schemes from Australia and around the world show that they are an ineffective form of pest animal control and do not deliver long-term solutions to a widespread pest animal problem.

### Problems with fox bounty systems

**Bounties do not guarantee a significant reduction in fox damage.** The aim of a bounty is to reduce fox population numbers, but this does not necessarily reduce the damage caused by these pests.

**The need for evidence to pay a bounty limits the type of control techniques used.** To collect a bounty, hunters need to present a nominated body part (such as a scalp, paw or tail), which limits the control methods to those that allow recovery of the body. This may mean that potentially more efficient, cost-effective or humane control tools are not used.

“ To improve the success of a fox control program, those that suffer the fox damage and will benefit from control should have ownership and be directly involved in the fox management ”

**Bounties need considerable supervision, and are subject to fraudulent practices.** Evidence from past bounty schemes has revealed a range of deceptive and fraudulent behaviours. Fox body parts are often collected from areas

other than the targeted control zone, or outside the specified time frame and stored for later presentation. There have also been reports of thefts from collection

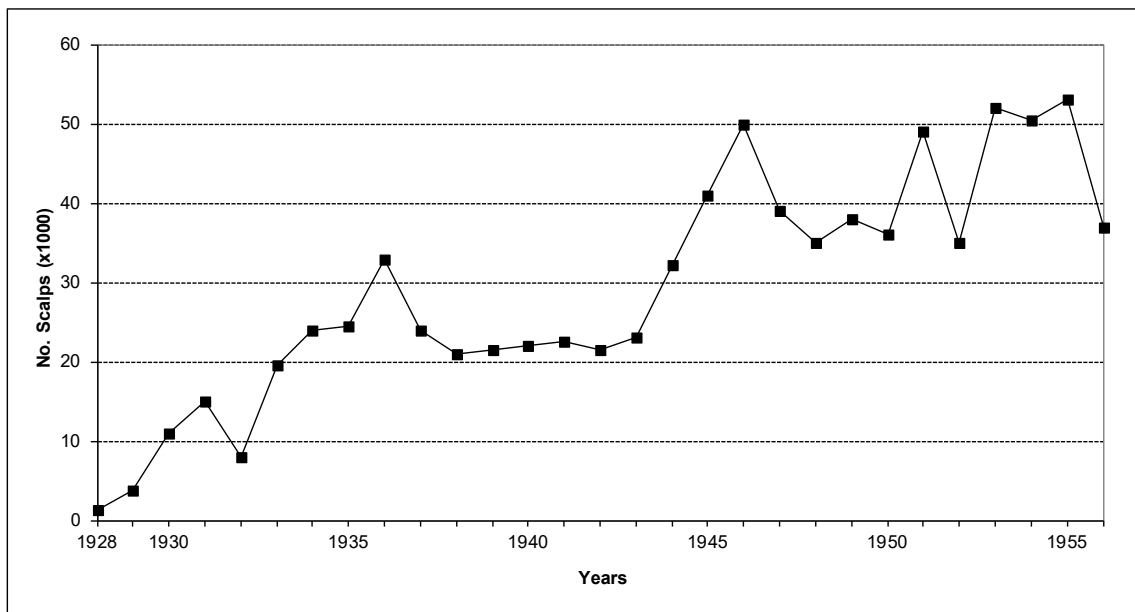


*Foxes with their tail skins removed. Taken in NSW during the 2002-03 Victorian bounty scheme.  
Image: Kerry Wratten & Gordan Murray, NSW DPI.*

depots or other hunters.

**Bounty hunters usually have no interest in reducing fox damage; their aim is to make money with the least amount of effort.** Bounty hunters usually concentrate their effort in areas where they can most easily collect foxes. But this is not necessarily where foxes are causing significant damage.

**Bounty payments create a source of income that does not guarantee an increase in control effort or encourage long-term control of the fox population.** The payment of bounties is considered as an ongoing source of income rather than an incentive to put more effort into control. Bounty hunters have been shown to be selective in the individuals they take – harvesting the younger, more naive animals that are often the doomed surplus from each reproductive year anyway. Similarly, they generally do not hunt beyond a certain amount of time, so the older, more difficult-to-shoot foxes are often left behind, ensuring a future breeding stock.



*Fox scalps collected for bounty scheme in WA 1928-1956. The upward trend in numbers demonstrates that bounties are not an effective method of long-term fox control (data from Tomlinson 1957).*

### **Bounties are often introduced for the wrong reasons.**

Bounties are often put in place as a quick fix, ‘seen to be doing something’ response to political pressure, instead of properly assessing alternative solutions and cost benefits.

### **When can bounty systems be successful?**

There may be some situations where a bounty scheme has potential. There are examples from around the world where bounties have been used to successfully eradicate small, isolated populations of pest animals that are established in a relatively small area. Conditions of these bounties are usually set to limit the number of participants and the duration and areas of operation. Bounty payments are limited to the control of individual animals.

As an example, a bounty was used as part of a strategic campaign to eradicate the coypu (an aquatic rodent) in

“ Foxes are too numerous and widespread in Australia for a bounty payment to have any impact on their population numbers.”

eastern England. The bounty payments offered financial incentives during the final stages of the campaign, to keep trappers motivated to catch the last difficult individuals and to finish the campaign on time.

### **Alternatives to fox bounties**

Bounties have been shown to be an ineffective use of Government funds. The resources of pest control authorities could be better invested in:

- development and implementation of regional and community fox management plans
- extension of information on best-practice techniques and strategies for pest animal management
- enabling group collaboration and landscape-wide control (See PestSmart Case Study link below)
- research and development of more effective tools for fox management.

### **Further reading**

- <http://www.pestsmart.org.au/pestsmart/foxes/>
- Hassall and Associates (1998). [Economic Evaluation of the Role of Bounties in Vertebrate Pest Management](#). Report prepared for the Bureau of Resource Sciences, Canberra.
- PestSmart Case Study: Coordinated Group Fox Programs. [pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/FoxCS\\_Coord.pdf](http://www.pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/FoxCS_Coord.pdf)
- Saunders G and Braysher M (2005). AWMS Position Statement on Bounties. <http://www.pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/AWMSBounties.pdf>
- Saunders G and McLeod L (2007). [Improving Fox Management Strategies in Australia](#). Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, Australia.
- Tomlinson AR (1957). Bonuses for Vermin Control. Vermin Control Conference, Perth, March 1957:15a-15g.
- Victorian Institute of Animal Science Vertebrate Pest Research Department (2003). [Evaluation of the 2002/2003 Victorian Fox Bounty Trial](#). VIASVPRD, Victoria.
- Wilson B (2007). [Use of Bounties For Pest Animal Management](#). Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, Queensland.