

# Service budget 'out of control'

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A WALLPAPER "expert" was paid \$1500 to advise the National Parks and Wildlife Service on the renovation of an old post office.

More than \$9000 was paid to vegetation experts to analyse the eating habits of the yellow-footed rock wallaby.

And six different consultants received a total of more than \$18,000 to report on the sonar calls made by fruit bats.

National Parks and Wildlife documents obtained by *The Daily Telegraph* show that more than \$600,000 was spent in just 12 months on a raft of obscure heritage and environmental projects.

The State Government yesterday defended the expenditure, saying the amount spent on consultants was lower than when the Coalition was in power.

But National Party Leader George Souris said the nature of the projects being funded showed the Government had "lost control" over the allocation of funds.

Mr Souris pointed to the payment of \$1500 to a wallpaper expert to ad-

vise on the renovation of a post office in the historic Blue Mountains township of Hartley.

"It shouldn't have been that hard or that expensive," Mr Souris said. "All you have to do is ring a supplier and order the right kind of heritage wallpaper."

Mr Souris said many of the other consultancies could have been carried out by salaried staff within the department.

Other projects included:

- Assessment of green and golden bell frog habitats at Culburra (\$901);
- Fruit bat call recordings and analysis (more than \$16,000);
- Tracking and monitoring of bristlebirds (\$3085);
- Vegetation analysis in the habitat of the yellow-footed rock wallaby (more than \$9000);
- Assessment of a proposed car park on the red-crowned toadlet in East Ryde (\$100).

A spokeswoman for Environment Minister Bob Debus said the Opposition had misrepresented the expenditure.

The Government had adhered to strict guidelines on the use of consultants, she said.