

Media Release

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No Concerns for Poultry Industry from Influenza Find

Poultry Industry Association Executive Director Michael Brooks says the industry and consumers have nothing to worry about from the detection of a low grade strain of avian influenza in wild birds.

Mr Brooks said the find proved the effectiveness of MAF's Biosecurity New Zealand programme in monitoring bird populations for possible infections.

"We've always known there were some low pathogenic avian influenza strains (LPAI) in wild bird flocks and for the past two or three years monitoring and testing has been enhanced so you would expect to find evidence of the virus," said Mr Brooks. "But it is High Pathogenic Avian influenza (HPAI) – which is a severe disease, that spreads quickly causing sudden deaths in birds in very large numbers - that is the concern for our industry and raised human concerns a couple of years ago.

"New Zealand remains free of the HPAI strains but Biosecurity New Zealand recognises the low-grade, potential threat posed by migrating and resident wild bird populations and that's why they monitor and test these flocks.

"The fact is that wild bird testing has been carried out since 1975 and several different low grade strains have been detected in some birds over that period. They are no threat to the wild bird populations and certainly of little or no threat to poultry farmers or consumers. That is again the case with this latest find.

"I'm sure that given the enhanced testing and monitoring we will continue to identify these viruses in wild birds. It's reassuring for poultry farmers and consumers to know that these programmes are effective and will give us early warning in the unlikely event that an HPAI infection does reach New Zealand."

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