

Issue 5, 4 November 2024

The Poultry Industry Association of New Zealand (PIANZ) and the Egg Producers Federation (EPF) have joined with the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) to provide farmers with regular updates about our preparations for high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI).

HPAI study tour findings industry online webinar

In late September, PIANZ and EPF hosted a webinar for members to hear about the key findings from the UK and Australia study tours on HPAI. Dr Mary van Andel, Dr Maryna Sokolova and Dr Chris Kebbell from MPI shared these findings, which are informing MPI's readiness and response preparations.

EPF Chair John McKay, who attended the UK study tour, highlighted the crucial role of the One Health partnership in New Zealand. He said a collaborative approach between all parties will achieve consistency of action and deliver results, as demonstrated in the UK.

"Their strong relationships between government, regulator and Industry resulted in a good understanding of what to do, when and why for best results. Communication was key."

John McKay also stressed the importance of early communication with the public to prevent misinformation and conspiracy theories from derailing the facts of an outbreak and its response.

"Having one source of truth for information, rather than multiple, was necessary when building trust between the public, media, government, and industry."

Michael Brooks, EPF and PIANZ Executive Director facilitated the webinar and said the critical outtake from the study tours to the UK and Australia was: “You can only control what you can control.” He said the priority for industry now is to work with farmers to use the best available resources to develop strong biosecurity, tailored operational plans, and staff education.

“These are critical tools to help minimise the impact of an outbreak. We cannot stop wild birds with HPAI potentially arriving in New Zealand, but we can and must work hard to prevent them from infecting our birds.”

Dr Mary van Andel said investing in preparedness now is key. “That means having crisis management and business continuity plans in place at industry and farm level, and having strong and aligned relationships between the regulator, industry bodies and farmers.”

“But strong on-farm biosecurity is the single most significant activity in decreasing the risk of infection at the farm level.”

Detailed minutes and the video of the webinar are available on the EPF and PIANZ member websites — www.eggfarmers.org.nz and www.pianz.org.nz.

MPI operational readiness planning update

The Government has confirmed the high-level One Health approach to HPAI H5N1, led by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), Department of Conservation (DOC), Ministry of Health (MOH), and Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora, in partnership with industry.

The New Zealand One Health approach to HPAI H5N1 aims to:

- reduce the impact on native species
- reduce the impact on the commercial poultry sector
- maintain supply of poultry meat and eggs to the domestic market and maintain access to overseas markets where possible
- protect human health.

The Government has confirmed its support for an early incursion response led by MPI and a quick transition to industry management should HPAI H5N1 become

established in our wild bird population, meaning it won't be able to be eradicated and will be an ongoing risk of doing business.

MPI is undertaking a range of activities to prepare for responding to HPAI, working with industry and other One Health partners.

National Readiness and Response Guideline for HPAI

In late September, MPI and poultry sector representatives held a workshop to discuss the management of the broader risks that HPAI presents to the poultry industry before and when an outbreak occurs. The conversation included consideration of the draft National Readiness and Response Guideline for High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI), which is intended to provide further clarity about how MPI and industry prepare for and are likely to respond to an outbreak of HPAI in New Zealand. The workshop focused on detailed planning for the depopulation of poultry at a range of commercial facilities and included a discussion on how the industry is preparing for HPAI, gaps in preparedness and where support from MPI is likely to be needed. MPI and industry will hold workshops to further our readiness planning.

Updating industry members

Following the webinar in late September, MPI staff attended industry events last month to discuss HPAI H5N1 and the work required to prepare for its arrival in New Zealand.

Dr Chris Kebbell, Manager of Operational Readiness, attended the WPSA New Zealand Poultry Science Industry Conference in Tauranga and the 2024 Egg Producers Federation Conference in Christchurch. His presentation described how H5N1 could arrive in New Zealand, the potential impact on the commercial poultry industry and MPI's likely approach to an incursion.

He emphasised the pivotal role of the industry in responding to HPAI and the ongoing management of the disease if it becomes established in our wild bird population. Improving on-farm biosecurity is the first line of defence and a core component of business continuity planning to mitigate the impact of HPAI's arrival and maintain supply.

Other key points from Chris's presentation included:

- Overseas experience indicates the New Zealand commercial poultry industry is at risk from the arrival of H5N1 with significant impacts – including high mortality and loss of production.
- If HPAI arrives in New Zealand, MPI will activate an initial response and establish an incident management team to coordinate early response activities nationally and regionally.
- MPI's approach to this disease response may differ from what farmers expect. If the disease becomes established here, industry and individual farmers must adapt to living with an ongoing risk of HPAI.
- Free-range and non-housed birds are at increased risk. Lessons from overseas show the importance of farmers being proactive about on-farm biosecurity planning and action and preparedness at the farm level – including business continuity plans and plans for returning to business after an incursion.
- H5N1 will spread in wild bird movements, so the best option for mitigating the risk of HPAI infecting a commercial flock and managing the disease is through education: knowing about the disease and what to expect and strengthening on-farm biosecurity controls and preparedness.
- Movement controls may be imposed on infected properties using powers under the Biosecurity Act 1993.

Encouraging greater biosecurity among backyard poultry and other bird owners

A campaign launching later this month aims to educate non-commercial bird owners about HPAI and encourage them to be ready in case it arrives in New Zealand.

The campaign will encourage people who own backyard or domestic poultry, pet birds and other birds to follow the biosecurity steps on the MPI website to protect their birds. The aim is to make sure bird owners are aware of HPAI, how it spreads and how to protect their birds now, ahead of a possible outbreak.

Template biosecurity plans for egg farmers

MPI and EPF will be working together to revise and update the “Procedures for Animal Welfare and Biosecurity” resource for farmers to use as a template to develop their farm biosecurity plans.

Once finalised, the resource will be shared with farmers to use for their own farms, with support from industry. MPI will continue to support industry's efforts leading national, sector and farmer level readiness. In the meantime, EPF members can still sign up for the free biosecurity audit carried out by QCONZ.

At the recent EPF Conference, Andrew Lamond of Lamond Poultry talked about his own experience of getting a welfare audit. He viewed the audit as a valuable way for poultry producers to test their current systems and readiness for HPAI, boosting confidence in their own biosecurity.

Resources

Information and advice on HPAI – MPI

www.mpi.govt.nz/HPAI

Poster and factsheet

Signs of HPAI – A3 poster – MPI

Factsheet for commercial poultry operators – MPI

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Prepared by:
Ministry for Primary Industries
Poultry Industry Association of New Zealand
Egg Producers Federation
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