

Issue 4, 5 September 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).

“Investing in biosecurity measures and preparedness now will pay dividends” – update on recent trips to the UK and Australia

The recent trip to the United Kingdom (UK) was an important part of the ongoing progress on strong working relationships between MPI and Industry. The delegation included representatives from PIANZ and EPF who joined specialists from MPI to meet with farmers, growers and technical experts over an intensive five-day schedule.

The positive outcomes of the trip were many. EPF and PIANZ report both industries will benefit from the discussions with their UK counterparts, and the officials at the UK’s Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

Egg Producers Federation Chair, John McKay, was part of the delegation and said the trip “exceeded everyone’s expectations”.

“At a high level, we learned that a lot of our planning and thinking is on the right track. What we saw in the UK gave us further clarity on depopulation, disposal and decontamination practices. We look forward to sharing our learnings with farmers and growers across egg and poultry industries in a report to be circulated. We will be running a joint webinar with MPI and Industry representatives for interested parties later in September.”

PIANZ Chair, Egbert Segers, said the feedback he received from the delegation was that time spent with senior members of the Defra team was invaluable to the poultry and egg representatives, and that each person they met with was very generous with their information and knowledge.

“The key outtake overall was that investing in our biosecurity measures and preparedness now will pay dividends in our ability to withstand and respond to an HPAI incursion later.”

The delegation heard from UK farmers that taking on-farm biosecurity seriously and implementing key measures can significantly reduce the risk of HPAI spreading from wild birds to commercial facilities.

The UK egg and poultry experts said that at a minimum, New Zealand farmers need to do the following to reduce risk:

- ensure anything going into sheds is protected from wild bird contamination
- protect each shed individually
- prevent water getting into sheds (potentially contaminated water from outside can bring avian influenza inside)
- ensure staff are well-trained on the correct biosecurity requirements.

The delegation noted that while the impact of HPAI H5N1 on the UK poultry and egg industries was substantial; but by having strong farm level biosecurity and business continuity plans in place, the duration can be relatively short-lived.

For the general public, the priority message is that HPAI H5N1 is not a food safety issue. UK sales data of egg and poultry product purchases showed there was no drop in consumption due to consistent, early communication from trusted authorities. Industry and MPI are working together to ensure this is a clear message to New Zealand consumers to support business continuity at home.

Just prior to the UK trip a smaller delegation from MPI, EPF and PIANZ went to Australia to assess how it was responding to their HPAI H7 and H9 strains.

To reiterate, the strains affecting Australia are not HPAI H5N1 which is adapted from and carried by wild birds. Australia’s H7 and H9 strains mutated from a low pathogen avian influenza so the planning and management of the Australian response differed in parts, from the UK.

The delegation focused their time in Ballarat in Victoria, where the Australian Emergency Response Headquarters is based.

Along with the focus on biosecurity for both poultry and egg industries, Australia was also consistent with the UK when it came to public messaging on food safety of egg and poultry products, and the health and safety measures required to protect their staff across all farms.

Industry webinar

PIANZ, EPF and MPI will host a webinar for farmers and growers at 3.15pm on Tuesday 24 September on the key learnings from the two study trips. An invitation with more details will be sent soon.

MPI readiness operational planning update

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

Strategic and tactical plans

Last week, industry chairs and Executive Director Michael Brooks met with MPI Director-General Ray Smith for their monthly meeting. Work is underway to develop two key documents to consult with industry on during September.

‘A Strategic Guide for National Biosecurity Operations for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza’ will provide a high-level description of how a MPI response will likely run when HPAI is first identified in New Zealand

‘A 3D Plus Tactical Guide’ will include more detailed operational level guidance on the 3Ds - Depopulation, Disposal and Disinfection to guide the MPI response and to support development of industry readiness plans. It will include decision support flow/decision charts, calculators, standards and operational specifications, and a database of resources to support operations in the field.

MPI wants to test and further develop the working drafts of these documents with industry this month. In addition, a joint workshop is being planned to agree priorities, roles and responsibilities and next steps to support ongoing industry and MPI readiness work streams.

Inter-agency tabletop exercise

Late last month MPI hosted an inter-agency tabletop exercise with staff from the Department of Conservation, Ministry of Health, Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora, Auckland Council, Northland Regional Council and Waikato Regional Council.

The exercise aimed to:

- increase awareness of what an MPI-led HPAI response will look like
- ensure a common understanding across each agency of the different agency plans
- define the roles and responsibilities of each agency involved
- identify gaps and additional players needing to be involved.

It included multiple scenarios, starting with the discovery of several wild dead birds on privately owned land that tests later confirm died of HPAI, through to detection at a nearby free-range poultry farm, and increasing reports of dead wild birds.

Feedback from the participating agencies was very positive. Learnings will be used to inform planning and there will be further exercises, including with industry, in the future.

Resources

Biosecurity New Zealand's information and advice on HPAI

www.mpi.govt.nz/HPAI

Poster: signs of avian influenza in poultry

Signs of HPAI – A3 poster – MPI

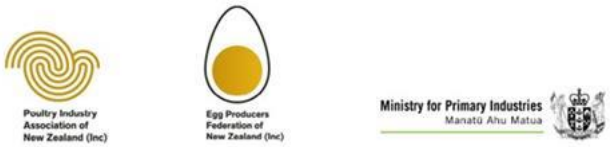
Bird flu – GOV.UK

www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu

HPAI outbreak updates – Australian Government

www.outbreak.gov.au/current-outbreaks/avian-influenza

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