PIANZ Industry Member Q&A:

1. **What is this type of avian influenza?**
   There are two types of avian influenza: low pathogenic (LPAI), less contagious and deadly in poultry, and high pathogenic (HPAI), which has much higher mortality rates among poultry.

   LPAI viruses are present in many waterfowl in New Zealand. When those birds come in contact with poultry, they can mutate to HPAI. Until now, there have not been any confirmed cases of HPAI in New Zealand.

   Biosecurity New Zealand (BNZ) tests have confirmed that layer hens in one shed on the Hillgrove farm in North Otago tested positive for an HPAI, with the subtype H7N6. While it is NOT the highly contagious H5N1 type circulating among wildlife worldwide or the two strains affecting Australian poultry farms, it is being taken very seriously.

2. **How did the farmer realise there was an issue?**
   The farm first noticed health issues with laying hens in one shed and notified their vet. MPI was then informed of sick and dying hens on November 29th. Samples were sent to MPI's laboratory for testing and confirming the H7N66 avian influenza subtype. This is not the H5N1 type, which has caused concerns around the rest of the world. Confirmation that this was a high pathogenic strain was reached last night. The farm has strong biosecurity standards and locked the shed down while the testing was completed.

3. **How many farms are affected?**
   Only one farm has tested positive for a high pathogenic avian influenza.
   This is the Hillgrove farm in North Otago. It is currently locked down with movement restrictions and increased biosecurity measures.

4. **How has this happened?**
   MPI suspects this is a 'spillover event' when layer hens who forage outside the sheds are exposed to the virus from wild waterfowl. While it may be an LPAI in the waterfowl, it can mutate into an HPAI once contracted by a chicken. The farm has excellent biosecurity, but events outside the shed are more challenging to protect free-range hens from.

5. **Was it expected?**
   It was not unexpected. New Zealand has not had a case of HPAI until now, mainly due to our geographical isolation, which cannot indefinitely protect us from the strains that have affected other countries.

6. **How can you be sure it's not the H5N1 strain?**
   The samples have tested positive for H7N6 avian influenza—not the H5 type circulating among wildlife around the world, which has caused concern. This strain is also different from the high pathogenicity strain in Australia earlier this year. At this

stage, it is like New Zealand's low pathogenicity strains, which is why MPI suspects it was transmitted from local waterfowl before mutating to a high pathogenic strain.

7. **Have birds died?**
   A number have died naturally from the HPAI itself, and the balance will be depopulated in accordance with the protocols required to manage this type of outbreak. These layers were in the last week of their laying cycle, so we're due for depopulation shortly prior to this incursion.

8. **What risk does this pose for neighbouring farms?**
   Biosecurity controls restrict movements on and off the affected farm. We are collaborating closely with the farmer, who has taken appropriate steps to ensure the chickens are locked down. We have placed strict controls to restrict the movement of birds, poultry products, feed, and equipment. The farm is about ten kilometres away from the nearest chicken farm.

9. **What should egg and poultry farmers do to ensure they're best prepared and protected?**
   Industry has been working with MPI, the Government, and the One Health partners to implement rigorous on-farm biosecurity measures and standards. New Zealand now has the potential to protect individual farms from infection and limit the wider impact of HPAI once detected.

   What Members need to do:

- Check for any signs of avian influenza – excessive diarrhoea, runny nose, decreased activity, quiet sheds, appetite, reduced egg laying, swollen comb, or wattle. The most obvious sign is sudden death.
- If any of these symptoms appear, call your local vet immediately.
- If more than one appears, or mass death occurs (more than three birds at once), notify the **Exotic Pest and Disease Hotline at 0800 80 99 66** and follow instructions.
- It would be helpful to have your Agribase number and, if possible, your GPS number for accessible locations.
- Strong biosecurity is **critical.** The affected farm has among the highest levels of biosecurity in NZ, yet the birds still contracted avian influenza. Follow Biosecurity New Zealand's biosecurity guidelines to reduce the risk of pests and diseases on your farm or lifestyle block. www.biosecurity.govt.nz/ biosecurity-on-your-farm-or-lifestyle-block
- It is important to note there are no food safety concerns with HPAI. People who thoroughly cook their eggs and poultry products are not at risk of infection. If you hear of misinformation concerning food safety, please correct the source.
- MPI has information and advice on our website here:
- HPAI or high pathogenicity avian influenza | NZ Government (mpi.govt.nz):
- Commercial poultry
- Food safety and human health

10. **Will this result in an egg shortage?**
    No.

11. **Should the public be worried that any eggs from that farm may be contaminated before the virus is detected?**
    No. This is not a food safety issue. Avian influenza viruses are sensitive to heat treatment, so well-cooked eggs and poultry products are safe to consume.

    New Zealand has benefitted from the knowledge shared by many other countries worldwide that have experienced waves of HPAI in recent years. There is no evidence in any of these countries that people can be infected by eating well-cooked eggs or poultry products (including chicken, duck, and turkey).

    Thorough cooking means heating food to an internal temperature of:

- 75°C for at least 30 seconds, or
- 70°C for 3 minutes, or
- 65°C for 15 minutes
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12. **How do we keep up to date with developments?**

    The Ministers of Biosecurity and Trade and MPI will give daily updates as the situation develops.

    MPI and Biosecurity New Zealand are leading the response, so the latest updated information will be available on a dedicated HPAI webpage from the MPI website.

    The poultry and egg industry websites will also carry updated information; however, MPI is at the frontline of communicating developments.

    PLEASE NOTE: Due to the expected interest in this topic, Industry members may be contacted by the media for 'background information', 'off the record' chats, or to 'verify something' they may want to corroborate.

    There is only one spokesperson on this issue at the moment, MPI.
    Any media inquiry, no matter how casual, must be referred to industry Executive Director Michael Brooks, who will then speak to MPI for the official response. Misinformation can spread very easily and quickly become 'fact'. MPI is in the driver's seat and working closely with us, so they will be in the best position to respond to any media inquiries.