

Issue 7, 13 March 2025

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).

H7N6 Otago response update

MPI, Mainland Poultry and industry continue to work closely together to manage the response to HPAI H7N6 at a commercial free-range egg farm in Otago.

Cleaning and disinfection (C&D) at Hillgrove Farm have progressed since our last update. Each of the four layer sheds and three rearing sheds must be partly disassembled, cleaned, disinfected, then fumigated, with verification by MPI staff between each step. Once this process is complete for each shed, the sheds need to be reassembled.

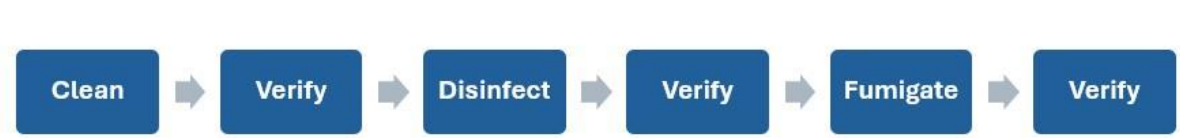
Treatment of outside areas has been challenging, particularly the areas of rock garden outside each shed the hens cross over to make their way to and from the ranges. The rocks can't be fully treated in situ, so have to be relocated and treated then buried at a quarry on the farm. The rock gardens will be replaced with new rocks from an external supplier.

The decontamination process at Hillgrove Farm takes a risk-based approach to ensure there is a low to negligible risk of any H7N6 HPAI virus persisting in the environment to reinfect hens on repopulation. Areas that can't be cleaned and disinfected (like the free-range areas) have treatments applied (eg mowing of grass and liming) as well as a fallow period to minimise the risk of live virus survival on the ranges.

Ancillary buildings and any equipment on the farm that may be contaminated also need to be cleaned and disinfected, although not all equipment can be decontaminated and returned to site – for example, manure belts in each of the sheds had to be cut out and replaced.

C&D of all sheds is likely to be completed by the end of March. A stand down period of 28 days must be completed before repopulation.

The approach taken to C&D and lessons learned will be pulled together for sharing in a webinar for members, with industry and MPI, to aid in readiness planning. This will include information of chemicals used, specifications and process. Details on this webinar will be released shortly.



Trade update

MPI continues to engage with relevant trading partners to provide updates on stamping out H7N6 and discuss ways to reopen trade. While there are common elements across markets, solutions are agreed with each country. MPI continues to make positive progress in resuming safe trade. Most recently, we have reopened access for trade in day-old chicks and hatching eggs with Malaysia worth around NZ$25 million.

A technical working group has been set up between industry and MPI to:

- assist with work to quantify the costs and benefits of pursuing World Organisation of Animal Health (WOAH) freedom status
- provide input into surveillance design as appropriate
- provide information on impacts of the change in WOAH freedom status, including on how this influences data used to support return to trade, markets and product mix.

Membership of the working group includes representatives from PIANZ, EPF (including the genetics sector) and petfood exporters. MPI is represented by Chief Veterinary Officer Dr Mary van Andel, as well as staff from MPI's bilateral trade and relations, animal exports, surveillance, response and operational readiness teams.

H7N6 epidemiological report

MPI has published a detailed epidemiological report on the H7N6 response. The report describes the outbreak and the response, including clinical disease seen in hens at Hillgrove, factors that limited the spread to a single property, the likely origin of the virus, and the surveillance and laboratory testing that was undertaken. You can read the report here:

www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/67965-H7N6-response-epidemiology-report

Australasian Veterinary Poultry Association Conference

Kerry Mulqueen (Senior Technical Adviser, PIANZ), Judith Mair (Mainland Poultry) and MPI Operational Readiness Manager Dr Chris Kebbell attended the Australasian Veterinary Poultry Association Conference in Wagga Wagga, Australia last month.

Along with international speakers, conference delegates also heard from Australian Government and industry representatives on the status of HPAI in various states, including the latest outbreak in Victoria and the response.

Speakers from the Australian broiler and egg industries also shared how they have been building industry capacity to respond to disease incursions. Mary Wu from the Chicken Meat Federation also spoke about work industry is doing around the use of liquid Nitrogen whole house gassing as an

alternative to carbon dioxide. While it is yet to be trialled or approved with poultry in Australia, it seemed to be a straightforward system with some shed sealing and simple delivery.

Australia Eggs presented and discussed the biosecurity-related material they have developed on their member website for farmers. In New Zealand, EPF has just completed the development of similar documentation for farmers.

Speaker Professor David Swayne from the United States (US), talked about the current outbreak in North America, control methods and lessons learned. Prof Swayne noted the success of the partnership approach in the US's response. He also said that while the primary introduction of disease into an area was through wild birds, in many cases disease was brought in by equipment and people – meaning there had been a breakdown in biosecurity.

While in Australia, Dr Chris Kebbell also met with counterparts in Canberra at the Department for Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) to share ongoing readiness activities for H5N1and to strengthen opportunities for collaboration.

New biosecurity resources for egg farmers

We learned from the visit to the United Kingdom last year exactly how important strong biosecurity is as a defence against H5N1.

EPF has worked with MPI to develop three key resources that egg farmers can use to improve their biosecurity, supported by MPI's On Farm Support team. These have been circulated to members and are available on the EPF members section of the website under the 'Biosecurity' tab.

MPI's On Farm Support team is available free of charge to help farmers tailor the biosecurity plan template to meet their own farm's requirements. To access this support, email onfarmsupport@mpi.govt.nz with your farm's location and details. Put Poultry Biosecurity Review in the subject line.

HPAI detections overseas

A new science report has confirmed that H5N1 has spread to the **Indian Ocean sub-Antarctic** archipelagos of Crozet and Kerguelen. In October 2024, the virus was detected in dead southern elephant seals, king penguins, gentoo penguins, brown skuas and kelp gulls.

The report's writers conclude that there have been independent introductions of the virus to Crozet and Kerguelen from the distant South Georgia Islands in the Southern Atlantic, and not from the more nearby coasts of South Africa. In light of this new report, MPI is considering how this new information might affect its assessment of the likelihood of HPAI H5N1 arriving in New Zealand, currently assessed as low.

You can read the report here: Mass mortality events in the sub-Antarctic Indian Ocean caused by long-distance circumpolar spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b

In the **United Kingdom**, controls have been extended in response to outbreaks of H5N1. The current risk of poultry exposure to HPAI H5 in Great Britain (England, Wales, Scotland) is assessed as:

- high (event occurs very often) (with high uncertainty) where there is suboptimal or poor biosecurity
- medium (event occurs regularly) (with high uncertainty) where good biosecurity is consistently applied at all times.

An Avian Influenza Prevention Zone is in force across Great Britain, requiring bird owners to follow strict biosecurity and hygiene rules, including:

- keep ducks and geese separate from other birds
- prevent contact with wild birds and rodents
- clean housing, equipment, vehicles and footwear
- keep records of bird movements, deaths and eggs.

There are additional rules if you keep more than 500 birds. Some areas have housing measures requiring all bird owners to keep their birds inside. H5N1 has also been detected in Northern Ireland, where a Temporary Control Zone has been established around a commercial poultry premises in County Tyrone.

www.gov.uk/government/news/bird-flu-avian-influenza-latest-situation-in-england#latest-situation

In the **United States** (US), H5N1 has been detected in poultry and wild birds in all 50 states. Outbreaks of H5N1 in dairy cattle have been detected in 17 states. There have been a number of human cases in the US, associated with known H5N1 outbreaks in poultry and dairy cattle. It appears that, in at least some of the cases reported recently in the US, inadequate personal protective equipment (PPE) played a role in the spread to humans.

These outbreaks during the northern hemisphere winter is only to be expected in a seasonal disease that is spread by migrating wildlife.

www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary

In **Australia**, Agriculture Victoria has confirmed that the **H7N8** strain has now been detected at four poultry properties in Victoria. All four properties are in close proximity. Control orders have been in place since the first detection of H7 on 8 February, restricting the movement of poultry, poultry products, equipment and vehicles on or off properties in designated zones around the infected properties to prevent disease spread.

This is a new outbreak and not related to the 2024 outbreaks in Victoria, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, which were successfully eradicated.

A restricted area with a radius of about 5 km is in place around the infected properties. This is part of a larger control area. People within the control or restricted areas cannot move birds (including game birds), products (including eggs and manure) or equipment into, out of, or within the area without permit. A housing requirement is in place for properties with 50 or more birds in the restricted area. To reduce the risk of further disease spread, birds on these properties must be kept in cages or sheds to avoid contact with other birds.

https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/animal-diseases/poultry-diseases/avian-influenza-bird-flu

Cabinet documents published

As we reported in the November newsletter, the Government formally confirmed the high-level One Health approach to H5N1. The approach aims to reduce the impact of H5N1 on native species and the commercial poultry sector, maintain supply of poultry meat and eggs to the domestic market and maintain access to overseas markets where possible, and protect human health.

The Cabinet paper and supporting documentation have been published on MPI's website:

www.mpi.govt.nz/about-mpi/official-information-act-oia-releases/mpi-and-corporate-official-information-act-releases/cabinet-papers-and-related-documents/

You can find them either by using the filter at the top of the page (search on HPAI) or scrolling down the page and looking for 'One Health Response Approach to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza – Cabinet paper'.

Resources

Information and advice on HPAI – MPI

www.mpi.govt.nz/HPAI

'Bird flu, be ready' information for backyard and pet bird owners – MPI

www.mpi.govt.nz/bird-flu

Biosecurity resources for EPF members – login to the members area and click on the Biosecurity tab

https://eggfarmers.org.nz

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