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Committee

By email -
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Dear Finlay,

I am writing to further update you on the ongoing avian influenza cases we are seeing in the UK. An outbreak of highly pathogenic influenza (HPAI) H5Nx (the N-type has not yet been confirmed) was confirmed by the Chief Veterinary Officer for Scotland on 18 March 2022 and involved a captive swan at the Hessilhead Animal Rescue Centre, Beith, North Ayrshire.

As a result, the Scottish Government activated its contingency plans to control and eradicate the disease. A veterinary investigation was carried out to establish the source and the potential spread of the disease. All of the birds on the premises have been humanely euthanised and the owner of the premises is receiving support and guidance from Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) officials.

A risk assessment has been carried out by EPIC and officials consider that the conclusions of the risk assessment indicate there is too much uncertainty about the biosecurity risk this premises poses to local establishments to apply a derogation in this case. As a result, Scottish Ministers have implemented a 3 km Protection Zone (PZ) and a 10 km Surveillance Zone (SZ) in accordance with the Avian Influenza and Influenza of Avian Origin in Mammals (Scotland) Order 2006. This Declaration took effect on 18 March 2022 at 19:30.

This was the eighth outbreak of HPAI H5 in Scotland within the 2021/2022 outbreak season. The previous premises were: near Arbroath, Angus; two cases near Gretna, Dumfriesshire; near Annan, Dumfriesshire; near Moffat, Dumfriesshire; near Inverurie, Aberdeenshire; and near Collieston, Aberdeenshire. However, a ninth Scottish infected premises (IP) was also confirmed by CVO Scotland on 19 March 2022: a commercial poultry premises near Strichen in Aberdeenshire.

Since 27 October 2021, there have been 106 confirmed IPs within the UK: nine in Scotland, five in Wales, six in Northern Ireland and 86 in England. There have also been over 808 wild bird findings of HPAI H5N1, with over 225 of these in Scotland.

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As you know, in light of the high number of recent findings of avian influenza in wild birds, a risk assessment was carried out to assess the risk of poultry and captive bird exposure to HPAI H5 across Great Britain. The risk of incursion of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5 infection in wild birds remains at VERY HIGH (event occurs almost certainly). The risk of poultry and captive bird exposure to HPAI H5 across Great Britain remains at HIGH (with low uncertainty) where biosecurity is sub-optimal, and MEDIUM (with low uncertainty) where stringent biosecurity measures are applied.

In response to the initial outbreaks of HPAI H5N1, the Chief Veterinary Officers from Scotland, England and Wales declared an [Avian Influenza Prevention Zone](#) (AIPZ) across the whole of Great Britain on 03 November 2021, to mitigate the risk of the disease spreading amongst poultry and captive birds. These measures were enhanced on 29 November to include the requirement for all bird keepers to house their birds and continue to follow strict biosecurity measures in order to limit the spread of and eradicate the disease.

The risk to the general public's health from avian influenza is very low. However, the risk to people with intensive exposure to infected birds is considered to be low. Food Standards Scotland advises that avian influenzas pose a very low food safety risk for consumers, and it does not affect the consumption of poultry products, including eggs.

Any suspicion of a notifiable disease, such as avian influenza, should be reported immediately to the [local APHA field office](#) (email: APHA.Scotland@apha.gov.uk).

However, if a single dead wild waterfowl (swans, geese or ducks), a single dead bird of prey, or five or more dead wild birds of any other species (including gulls) are found at the same place at the same time, they should be reported to Defra's GB telephone helpline: 03459 33 55 77. It is advisable that these birds are not touched.

You will also want to know that in Great Britain, anyone that keeps poultry or captive birds is legally required to register their birds on the GB Poultry Register if they keep more than 50 birds. Keepers with less than 50 birds are strongly encouraged to register. It is also a legal requirement to notify APHA of any significant changes in the average number of birds kept. Further information can be found www.gov.scot/avianinfluenza.

Needless to say, should you have any questions, my officials will be able to answer these. In the first instance, you should contact Sheila Voas, Chief Veterinary Officer Scotland.

Yours sincerely,



MAIRI GOUGEON