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Finlay Carson  
Convenor  
Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment  
Committee

By email -  
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11 March 2022

Dear Finlay,

I am writing to update you on the unfortunate ongoing avian influenza cases we are seeing in the UK. This morning, Chief Veterinary Officer for Scotland confirmed one new case of highly pathogenic influenza (HPAI) H5N1 in a small backyard flock of 10 chickens and three ducks near Collieston, Aberdeenshire.

As a result, the Scottish Government has activated its contingency plans to control and eradicate the disease. A veterinary investigation will be carried out to establish the source and the potential spread of the disease. In addition, a 3 km Protection Zone and 10 km Surveillance Zone have been declared around relevant infected premises (IP). Within the zones, a range of different controls are in place, which include restrictions on the movement of poultry, carcasses, eggs, used poultry litter and manure.

A number of birds on the premises had already succumbed to disease and the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) is humanely euthanasing the remaining birds for disease control and animal welfare purposes. The owners of the premises are receiving support and guidance from APHA officials.

This is the seventh outbreak of HPAI H5N1 in Scotland within the 2021/2022 outbreak season.

Since 27 October 2021, there have been 101 confirmed infected premises (IPs) within the UK: seven in Scotland, five in Wales, six in Northern Ireland and 83 in England. There have also been over 785 wild bird findings of HPAI H5N1, with over 204 of these in Scotland.

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 has been increased from HIGH (occurs often) to VERY HIGH (event occurs almost certainly). The risk of poultry and captive bird exposure to HPAI H5 across Great

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Britain has been increased from MEDIUM (with medium uncertainty) to HIGH (with low uncertainty) where biosecurity is sub-optimal, and has increased from LOW (with medium uncertainty) to MEDIUM (with low uncertainty) where stringent biosecurity measures are applied.

Since 29 November, following advice from the Scottish and other UK CVOs, Scottish Ministers agreed to strengthen the biosecurity requirements of the Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ), to require housing of all poultry and captive birds, which means that will be a legal requirement for all bird keepers in that area to keep their birds indoors and to follow strict biosecurity measures in order to limit the spread of and eradicate the disease.

We are mindful that housing birds for long periods of time can have impacts on their welfare and the early introduction of housing measures may also mean that they remain in place beyond 16 weeks, which will mean free range egg producers will not be able to market their eggs as free range.

With the UK no longer free from avian influenza under the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) rules, we have lost of OIE disease freedom for avian influenza and there are some restrictions on exports of affected commodities to third countries. Trade in poultry and poultry related products with third countries that do not require whole UK avian influenza country freedom may continue on the basis of the conditions included in the export health certificates, unless otherwise notified by the importing country.

The Scottish Government continue to work with its operational partners in Scotland and across the rest of the UK to keep poultry and other captive bird owners informed about the measures they can take. Messages are regularly issued to poultry keepers by text message as well as through social media.

Due to the threat of avian influenza from wild birds, it is possible there will be more cases found in poultry in Scotland, despite the introduction of the mandatory biosecurity measures in the AIPZ.

I appreciate that such news will continue to disappointing all members of the Committee, as it is to me. It does appear as though H5N1 is becoming part of the annual cycle for poultry and other captive bird owners and hopefully in response to that, they will maintain increased biosecurity at all times throughout the year.

I am sure you will appreciate that any suspicion of a notifiable disease, such as avian influenza, should be reported immediately to the local Animal and Plant Health Agency office in Perth on 03000 600 704.

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

Yours sincerely,



**MAIRI GOUGEON**

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