

H5N1 Avian Influenza (H5 Bird Flu)

Councillor Briefing— ORC Role and Response



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H5N1 Avian Influenza

Now confirmed in New Zealand — Otago remains in Phase 1 Preparedness

- **What it is:** A viral disease-causing severe illness and high mortality in birds, occasionally affecting mammals. The strain of current global concern is H5N1.
- **Who is taking the lead:** MPI is the lead agency and sets the framework for the response.
- **Current Status:** New Zealand has **2** confirmed detections. No mass mortality events, and **no cases** in poultry. Otago has had no confirmed detections to date.
- **Human health risk:** Transmission from animals to humans is rare and has generally involved close contact with infected animals without PPE. No evidence suggests human to human spread.
- **Vaccination:** An outbreak could significantly raise extinction risk for native birds. DOC has begun vaccinating five native species in response.

H5N1 Avian Influenza

National Update

- MPI is briefing council Chief Executives directly on the national response — Otago's session is scheduled for **20 August 2026**
- Iwi engagement is being coordinated nationally (MPI, DOC) alongside ORC's regional mana whenua engagement, to avoid duplication or mixed messaging to rūnaka
- MPI's national Waste Disposal team is reaching out to regional councils this week with responses to disposal-related questions raised nationally

Australia Update

- H5N1 continues to spread among wild seabirds across five Australian states
- Last week, saw the first confirmed mass mortality event — greater crested terns near Cape Jaffa, South Australia
- No detections to date in Australian poultry, livestock, or other mammals
- **Relevance for Otago:** reinforces that wild bird spread and mass mortality events remain a live and evolving risk, not just a New Zealand-specific concern



[Learn More About Bird Flu- LINK](#)

Roles at a Glance

Organisation	Role	Responsibility
MPI	National Lead	National response lead — sets surveillance and technical guidelines. <i>Does not run local on-the-ground response.</i>
DOC	Conservation Lead	Leads the field response on public conservation land — native species and marine mammal expertise.
Health New Zealand	Human Health Lead	Manages human health risk and safety protocols for frontline staff.
Regional Councils	Regional Coordinator	Coordinates the Otago region — information flow, preparedness and consistent messaging. <i>Not the operational responder.</i>
District and City Councils (TLAs)	Local Land Managers	Leads on-the-ground preparedness on council-owned land and assets.
Private Landowners	Private Landowners	Responsible for carcass disposal on their own land, per MPI guidelines.

Phases of Preparedness and Response

1

Preparedness – Current Stage

Pre-arrival in region

- **Focus:** Planning, training and ensuring people, systems and resources are ready to respond.
- **ORC Role:**
 - Lead regional coordination and planning at an operational level
 - Maintain preparedness plan, contacts and site register
 - Coordinate PPE, signage and training
 - Support TLA readiness and response planning at an operational level
 - Lead regional communications and awareness (Otago lens to national comms)

Phases of Preparedness and Response

2

Initial Response

Detection in Region

- **Trigger:** H5N1 detected in the Otago region.
- **Focus:** Rapid response, public safety, reporting and managing affected sites.
- **ORC Role:**
 - Regional response coordination and information sharing at operational level
 - Coordinate communications across Otago
 - Manage incidents on ORC land and coastal areas
 - Pollution response to assess environmental risks
 - Monitor environmental impacts and support TLA

Phases of Preparedness and Response

3

Long Term Management

Once Endemic

- **Trigger:** H5N1 bird flu becomes established in New Zealand.
- **Focus:** Ongoing monitoring, risk management and adapting long-term operations.
- **ORC Role:**
 - Continue regional coordination and communications
 - Monitor environmental impacts and emerging risks
 - Support councils and landowners with risk management
 - Review lessons learned and update plans
 - Integrate H5N1 bird flu management into BAU operations

Otago Specific

- **Taonga species & biodiversity:** Otago is home to nationally and culturally significant native bird populations that could be impacted by H5N1.
- **ORC Responsibility:** For the land they own and staff regularly working in wetlands, waterways and coastal environments where sick or dead birds are most likely to be detected.
- **Phase 1 Preparedness:** Otago remains in the preparedness phase, with no confirmed H5N1 detections in Otago. Early awareness and readiness are critical.
- **Early reporting matters:** Prompt reporting of sick or dead birds enables rapid assessment and response by MPI, DOC and partner agencies

Otago Operational Preparedness to Date

- **Regional Coordination:** Established the Otago H5N1 Coordination Group (OHCG), bringing together staff from Otago's five TLAs, DOC, Fish & Game, Mana Whenua, MPI On Farm Support, Health NZ and LINZ to coordinate regional preparedness at an operational level.
- **Preparedness Planning:** Developed the Otago H5N1 Preparedness Plan and identified high-risk sites across the region in partnership with TLAs and key stakeholders.
- **Roles & Responsibilities:** Defined agency roles and responsibilities to support a coordinated and effective response.
- **Operational Guidance:** Developed operational guidance for reporting sick or dead birds and managing response activities safely.
- **PPE:** Procured and distributed an initial PPE stock to ORC and TLAs, with training for high-risk responders being planned.

Otago Operational Preparedness to Date

- **Signage:** Procured H5N1 signage through Te Uru Kahika, distributed to TLAs, and ready for deployment if cases are confirmed in Otago.
- **Mana Whenua & Cultural Engagement:** Working with rūnaka to address impacts on taonga species, mahika kai, and disposal protocols, ensuring preparedness reflects cultural values and tikanga.
- **Communications:** Developed a coordinated regional communications approach aligned with MPI messaging, ensuring Otago speaks with one voice if H5N1 is detected.
- **Disposal:** Working with TLAs to develop disposal procedures for bird carcasses and contaminated materials (e.g. PPE and biohazard waste), including landfill and deep burial options.
- **ORC Property:** Identified high-risk locations on ORC-managed land, including flood schemes, and developing response protocols for the safe management and removal of affected birds if required.

Poultry Sector Engagement

MPI Role -

Lead agency for poultry biosecurity. Working directly with farmers on preparedness and response through the PIANZ and On Farm Support.

ORC Role -

Regional Coordination, working to connect councils, agencies, and stakeholders to ensure information is shared, preparedness activities are coordinated, and support is available

What we have done so far:

- Connected with On Farm Support reps and PIANZ; included reps in regional coordination meetings
- Collated a list of poultry farmers in Otago and made contact to introduce ORC and reconfirm roles/responsibilities and offer support
- Connected farmers with consents team for any related enquiries
- Engaged with PIANZ/Egg Producers Federation on their regional roadshow planning

Next steps?

- Egg Producers Federation regional roadshow event penciled in for **Wednesday 19 August** (Dunedin or Oamaru, venue TBC) — ORC invited to participate alongside MPI.

What to Look For

Signs that are worth a second look

- 1) **Dead or visibly sick birds:** Especially where several birds are found together, or over a short period, in the same area.
- 2) **Unusual behaviour:** Lethargy, loss of coordination, tremors or seizures, or birds unable to fly or stand normally.
- 3) **Any species can be affected:** Wild waterfowl and seabirds are most commonly affected. H5 bird flu mainly affects birds, not usually mammals or people.
- 4) **Clusters matter most:** A single dead bird on its own is far less concerning than a cluster — but it's still worth noting and reporting.

What To Do

1

Don't touch or collect the bird: Handling increases risk to you and doesn't change the outcome for the bird.

2

Note the details: Location (GPS if possible), date/time, species if known, and roughly how many birds are affected.

3

Report it: Call the MPI exotic species hotline on 0800 80 99 66, and the biosecurity team know so ORC has visibility.

Response Steps



1. Call/report received

- Record as many details as possible, e.g. location, no. of birds, contact info for person reporting, etc.



2. Alert MPI and the regional network

- Call MPI 0800 80 99 66
- Confirm ownership of the affected site
- Refer to regional network contact list



3. Assess site risk and identify response actions

- Check & update site register based on current available information for site
- Coordinate with relevant parties



4. Implement response actions

- Undertake required site management and public communication
- Keep relevant parties up to date
- Needs to be supported by detailed response planning



5. Document actions taken

- Capture actual response actions in 'Record of response actions' tab of site register
- Allows review of response to inform long-term management



Key Public Messages

- Otago Regional Council is preparing for possible H5 bird flu impacts on land we manage
- MPI is the lead agency for all national advice. ORC will provide local updates on land that we manage.
- If you see 3 or more sick/dead birds in one place, do not touch & report it to MPI
- Parks and public spaces will remain open unless signs or updates say otherwise

Key Public Messages

- If bird flu is detected in Otago, ORC and TLAs may implement public communications and access restrictions to protect people and wildlife.
- Wash your hands and footwear after visiting H5N1 bird flu-affected areas.
- Risk to people is low. Avoid contact with sick or dead birds and follow local signage or instructions.
- ORC is supporting tikanga with mana whenua where bird deaths affect taonga species or culturally significant places.

The main public message for Otago is simple -

Stay away from sick or dead birds, keep children and pets away, and report three or more sick or dead birds in one place to MPI on 0800 80 99 66.

**DON'T LET
BIRD FLU
TAKE FLIGHT**

**BIRD
FLU**
BE READY

GOVT.NZ

FIND OUT MORE

Key Contacts

Remember

No confirmed detections in Otago yet:
stay alert, not alarmed — and don't
hesitate to reach out with any questions

- **ORC Biosecurity:** Robert Win & Sinéad Keogh — first point of contact for anything H5N1 bird flu-related in Otago.
- **MPI Exotic Pest Hotline: 0800 80 99 66 — report any sick or dead wild birds here.**
- **DOC:** for wildlife on public conservation land.
- **Health NZ:** if you or a colleague has had direct contact with a sick or dead bird and have health concerns.
- **Further guidance:** [MPI: Bird flu landing page](#) / [DOC: Avian influenza and wildlife health](#) / [Health New Zealand: Highly pathogenic avian influenza](#)

Updates to Councillors

- **Monthly updates on the response will be provided by email**
 - If something changes, then an interim update will be provided
- **Online sessions will like this one, be held as needed to provide updates**
- **Portfolio Leads for the Environmental Delivery Group will be kept up to date**
 - Will provide guidance on opportunities for Councillors to support the response and co-ordination

Questions?