



H5N1 Avian Influenza Plan

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PURPOSE

To provide a consistent, safe, and effective process for the education & awareness, reporting, collection, handling, transport and disposal of wild bird carcasses during suspected or confirmed H5N1 Avian Influenza (bird flu) incidents in accordance with Queensland Government directives.

SCOPE

This plan outlines Mornington Shire Council's response to suspected or confirmed cases of H5N1 avian influenza within the Mornington Shire Council local government area.

Council managed land includes public open spaces, parks, sporting fields, and other public areas under Council's care within the township. Council may also respond to reports of deceased wild birds on residential properties and, where requested by the Wellesley Islands Rangers, on native title lands, including beaches, waterways, and bushland areas.

This plan applies where H5N1 avian influenza has been assessed by the relevant government authorities as posing a low risk to public health. Should the public health risk level be elevated, additional legislative, operational, and biosecurity requirements may apply and must be implemented in accordance with Queensland Government directives and advice.

This plan will be reviewed and amended as necessary to ensure it remains consistent with current legislation, government guidance, and operational requirements.

COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES

Council must:

- Comply with all relevant environmental, biosecurity and workplace health and safety legislation.
- Follow directions issued by relevant government agencies regarding HPAI response activities.
- Respond to reports of dead or dying wild birds on Council managed land.
- Treat all suspect bird or marine mammal carcasses as potentially infectious
- Report mortality events to the relevant authorities.
- Implement biosecurity and workplace health and safety controls for staff and contractors involved in response activities.
- Manage carcasses in a manner that minimises public health, biosecurity and environmental risks.
- Ensure carcass disposal methods are consistent with the assessed public health risk level.
- Maintain records of site assessments, collection, and disposal activities where required.
- Report any potential exposure incidents in accordance with Council's incident reporting procedures.
- Provide public information and manage community enquiries regarding deceased wild animals.

BACKGROUND

What is H5N1 Avian Influenza?

Avian influenza (bird flu) is a viral disease that primarily affects birds, although it can also infect other animals and, in rare cases, humans. There are many strains of avian influenza, which are broadly classified into two categories: low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) and high pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). These classifications are based on how the disease spreads within domestic poultry, particularly chickens, and do not reflect the ease with which the virus spreads among wildlife or humans.

The virus referred to in this plan is known by several names, including bird flu, avian influenza, high pathogenic avian influenza, H5 bird flu, and H5N1. For the purposes of this plan, the term H5N1 avian influenza (HPAI H5N1) is used to describe the specific strain of concern.

In June 2026, H5N1 was detected in two migratory seabirds on the south coast of Western Australia. This marked the first detection in Australia of the H5N1 strain that has been circulating globally.

Internationally, this strain has caused significant mortality in poultry, wild birds and a range of mammal species, particularly marine mammals and animals that prey on or scavenge infected birds.

H5 bird flu spreads between animals via droppings and respiratory secretions of birds, and contaminated environments, equipment, eggs, feed, footwear and clothing. Bird flu can persist in the environment for extended periods under favourable environmental conditions.

Leading Government Agencies

National coordination is being led by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF).

The Queensland Government is closely monitoring the situation and has measures in place to respond quickly if H5 bird flu is detected in Queensland.

Biosecurity Queensland is communicating with industry, veterinarians, wildlife carers and local communities with a focus on enhanced surveillance and public awareness.

At the time of preparing this plan, the Queensland Government's H5 bird flu preparedness arrangements have been activated.

Signs to look out for

Bird flu symptoms usually appear 1 to 10 days after exposure to the virus. The illness can range from mild to severe disease depending on the virus strain.

Signs of infection in birds include:

- sudden death
- lack of coordination, tremors, swimming in circles
- twisted necks or other abnormal posture
- inability to stand or fly
- diarrhoea
- difficulty breathing, coughing or sneezing
- swelling of the head, neck and eyes
- cloudiness or change in colour of eyes.

Infected marine mammals may show a wide range of signs, including:

- lack of coordination and tremors
- seizures
- difficulty breathing
- nasal discharge
- drooling
- death, including the potential for mass mortality events.

Symptoms in domestic pets may include:

- Lethargy
- Loss of appetite
- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Nasal discharge
- Difficulty breathing
- Wobbliness or loss of coordination
- Seizures (in severe cases)

Some people may have no symptoms, while others may get flu-like symptoms such as:

- fever or chills
- conjunctivitis (red and sore eyes)
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or blocked nose, or sneezing
- headache
- muscle aches
- tiredness or weakness
- diarrhoea, nausea, or vomiting.

Prevention

You can help reduce the risk of avian influenza (bird flu) to yourself, your family, and your pets by following these simple precautions:

- Avoid contact with sick or dead birds, as well as bird droppings, feathers, eggs, body fluids, and areas where birds congregate.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after handling animals, eggs, or raw poultry products.
- Keep pets away from wildlife by preventing cats from roaming and keeping dogs on a lead in areas where wildlife is present.
- Clean and disinfect footwear, clothing, equipment, and vehicles after visiting natural environments to help prevent the spread of disease.

For Bird and Poultry Owners

People who own, care for, or work with birds and poultry should adopt good biosecurity practices, including:

- Preventing wild birds from accessing poultry enclosures, feed, and water sources.
- Regularly cleaning and maintaining pens, aviaries, feeders, water containers, and equipment.
- Washing hands thoroughly before and after handling birds.
- Closely monitoring birds for signs of illness, unusual behaviour, or sudden deaths and reporting any concerns to the relevant authorities.

Treatment

At present, there are no treatment options available for wildlife infected with H5N1 avian influenza. In cases where animals are severely affected and animal welfare is compromised, humane euthanasia may be considered where appropriate and feasible.

Domestic animals exhibiting signs consistent with avian influenza may be eligible for veterinary assessment and supportive treatment. Suspected cases should be reported to a veterinarian as soon as possible for advice and management.

Human infection with H5N1 is rare; however, anyone who develops influenza-like symptoms following contact with infected birds, other animals, or contaminated environments should seek medical advice promptly.

When handling animals, including wildlife, standard infection prevention and control measures should always be followed, regardless of the perceived level of risk. Appropriate personal protective equipment, good hand hygiene, and safe handling practices are essential to minimise the risk of disease transmission.

Vaccination

People who work with birds or have regular close contact with poultry are encouraged to discuss seasonal influenza vaccination with their healthcare provider.

RISKS OF H5N1 ON MORNINGTON ISLAND

The introduction of H5N1 avian influenza to Mornington Island presents primarily a biosecurity and environmental risk, with the potential to significantly impact native wildlife populations and local ecosystems.

There may also be economic impacts associated with reduced availability of poultry products, including eggs and chicken meat, should disease control measures affect production and supply chains.

Residents who keep backyard or pet chickens should implement appropriate biosecurity measures to protect their birds and promptly report any signs of illness or unusual deaths to the relevant authorities.

Although domestic dogs and cats can become infected with H5N1, such cases are uncommon. Dogs are considered to be at very low risk, and there is currently no evidence from overseas outbreaks that dogs play a significant role in transmitting the virus to people or other animals.

From a public health perspective, H5N1 is considered a low risk to the general community. Human infection is rare but can occur following close contact with infected birds, other infected animals, contaminated environments, or contaminated materials.

People at higher risk of exposure to avian influenza include those who have direct contact with infected animals or their bodily secretions. Within Mornington Shire Council, this will be:

- rangers
- veterinarians and vet nurses
- animal control and environmental health officers
- people who hunt, handle, or process wild birds or other animals.

People who may be more likely to develop severe illness if infected include:

- those with weakened immune systems
- pregnant or postpartum women (up to 6 weeks after birth)
- babies and children under 5
- older people
- people who smoke
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Mornington Shire Council may face unique challenges associated with H5N1, particularly where disease impacts traditional hunting practices, culturally significant species, and land management activities.

The Wellesley Island Rangers play an important role in monitoring migratory bird nesting sites and are well positioned to identify unusual bird mortality events or changes in native and migratory bird populations that may indicate the presence of avian influenza.

ADVICE TO THE PUBLIC

Public messaging regarding H5N1 avian influenza is coordinated nationally to ensure consistent and accurate information is provided across all jurisdictions. Members of the public are advised to:

AVOID contact with sick or dead wild birds or wildlife and their environment. Do not touch or collect sick or dead wild birds or wildlife.

RECORD what you see. If safe, record information on the number of dead birds/animals, species, location, date and time.

REPORT sick or dead wild birds to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888 (24/7).

Given the unique circumstances of Mornington Island, community members are encouraged to report sick, injured, or deceased wildlife to the Wellesley Island Rangers or Mornington Shire Council Environmental Health Officers. These local officers play an important role in monitoring wildlife and public health, and can assist with reporting and coordinating appropriate responses to suspected cases of avian influenza and other wildlife diseases.

A range of government-produced resources are available to support community education, preparedness, and response efforts related to H5N1 avian influenza and may be distributed as required. These resources include fact sheets, biosecurity guidance, public health information, reporting procedures, and educational materials for animal owners, wildlife carers, industry stakeholders, and the broader community. These resources can be found here: [Resources for bird flu - DAFF](#)

Recommended resources to distribute through Mornington Shire Council channels are:

Keep watch for bird flu poster: [Avian Flu Poster](#)

Bird flu awareness – Keep watch for bird flu video:

<https://publish.viostream.com/player/download/dicbhzw6f11e8>

What you need to know about H5 avian influenza (bird flu) – Pet birds and chickens poster: [h5-bird-flu_pet-birds-chickens_poster-january-2025.pdf](#)

For the most up to date information regarding H5N1 avian influenza, can be found on the DAFF website:

[Bird flu \(Avian influenza\) - DAFF](#)

Management of wildlife suspected or confirmed to have H5 bird flu

Wild animals infected with H5N1 avian influenza are unlikely to survive. In the event of an outbreak, response activities may include enhanced surveillance, increased biosecurity measures, disease monitoring, and the management of wild bird carcasses by relevant state government agencies.

The Wellesley Islands Rangers maintain regular communication with Biosecurity Queensland and may assist with the surveillance, sampling, and testing of wild animals for H5N1 avian influenza.

Disposal methods

Leave in-situ

Allowing carcasses to remain and decompose naturally may be the preferred option in remote or isolated locations where there is limited public access and minimal risk of disease transmission.

Council may consider placing barricades and signage around the area to minimise disturbance.

This option reduces:

- The risk of cross-contamination during handling;
- The potential movement of pathogens to new locations; and
- The operational burden associated with collection and transport.

However, in-situ disposal may not be appropriate where:

- The site is regularly accessed by the public;
- The site is near residential areas;
- There is an identified public health or environmental risk.

On-site disposal

Where carcasses remain on the property where the mortality event occurred, they are not considered waste under waste legislation.

Where practical and environmentally suitable, Council may undertake disposal on-site or at a nearby property under Council ownership or management that is suitable for disposal activities.

Disposal methods should be consistent with the principles outlined in the AUSVETPLAN Operational Manual – Disposal.

Where deep burial is undertaken, the following requirements apply:

- Be outside drinking water catchments.
- Not intersect groundwater.
- Be at least 100 metres from watercourses.
- Burial depth must be sufficient to prevent disturbance or prevent access by scavenging animals.
- Minimise odour impacts.
- Be located in low permeability soils where possible. Where soils are permeable, a clay liner or other low-permeability material should be considered.

Transporting carcasses, temporary storage, and landfill disposal

Transporting carcasses

Where HPAI is assessed by Queensland authorities as presenting a low public health risk, wild bird carcasses are not considered regulated clinical waste and do not require transport by a licensed clinical waste transporter.

Where carcasses are removed from the site:

- Double bag carcasses or transport them in sealed leak-proof containers.
- Prevent leakage, contamination, public exposure, and odour release.
- Cover loads where decomposition has resulted in offensive odours

If HPAI is declared a high public health risk, transport must comply with regulated waste requirements unless otherwise directed by the Queensland Government.

Temporary storage

Where carcasses are temporarily held before disposal, they must be stored within secure containers that:

- Prevent leakage and odour.
- Exclude scavenging animals.
- Restrict public access.
- Minimise disease transmission risks

Landfill disposal

Where HPAI is assessed as a low public health risk:

- Carcasses may be accepted as general waste at a landfill licensed to receive general waste.
- Carcasses should be disposed of promptly to minimise odour and environmental risks.

Where practical, treatment methods such as composting or pasteurisation may be used prior to disposal.

Where treatment is not practical:

- Dispose of carcasses in a lined landfill cell; or
- Undertake approved deep burial.

Where lined landfill disposal is unavailable, deep burial may be considered subject to:

- Protection of groundwater;
- Separation from watercourses;
- Use of low-permeability soils or liners;

- Prompt covering of carcasses; and
- Controls to prevent access by scavengers and minimise odour.

Disinfecting and disposing of contaminated materials

Any reusable equipment used to collect or transport a bird carcass must be cleaned with detergent and water immediately following use, then disinfected. Cleaning should be undertaken in a manner that minimises the creation of sprays, splashes or aerosols.

Personal protective equipment should only be removed after contaminated equipment has been cleaned or appropriately contained for cleaning.

Any contaminated disposable materials should be disinfected and disposed of as general waste or otherwise managed in accordance with the most current government requirements. Where disinfection cannot be undertaken, materials must be sealed in impermeable containers or double-bagged prior to disposal.

A bleach solution containing approximately 3% sodium hypochlorite is considered effective for disinfection against HPAI.

Council officers transporting contaminated materials to a waste facility should advise the facility operator of the nature of the material being disposed.

High public health risk declaration

If HPAI is declared as a high public health risk:

- Wild bird carcasses must be managed as clinical or regulated waste.
- Council must update this plan and relevant procedures to ensure collection, transport and disposal must comply with Queensland Government requirements.
- Disposal must occur at a facility licensed to receive and manage the relevant waste stream.

Emergency Disposal Arrangements

Council acknowledges that large scale wild bird mortality events may occur in remote or isolated locations where strict compliance with clinical waste management requirements may not be practical due to the volume of carcasses, operational constraints or limited access to licensed facilities.

In such circumstances DETSI may issue an Emergency Direction under the Environmental Protection Act 1994.

Where an Emergency Direction is issued, Council must comply with all conditions specified in the direction, which may include the collection, transport and disposal of wild bird carcasses at a designated landfill or other approved disposal facility. Council officers must ensure all disposal activities are conducted in accordance with the conditions of the Emergency Direction and any accompanying biosecurity, environmental and public health requirements.

Scenarios

Sick or dead wildlife found on native title lands

Suspected cases of avian influenza in wildlife should be reported to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline and the Wellesley Islands Rangers. On native title lands, including beaches and waterways, Rangers can assess potential risks to public health, cultural values, and the environment, and determine whether carcass removal is necessary where leaving animals in situ is not appropriate.

Where a mass mortality event occurs and in-situ decomposition is deemed inappropriate, the Rangers may request Council assistance. Council will then undertake a site assessment and work collaboratively with the Rangers to implement an appropriate disposal method.

Small number of carcasses reported in the township

Where members of the public report a small number of deceased wild birds on residential properties or in public spaces, the preferred response, unless otherwise directed by relevant state authorities, is to leave the carcasses in situ to decompose naturally. Where this is not practicable or appropriate, carcasses may be disposed of as domestic waste, unless alternative management or disposal requirements have been specified by state authorities.

In these circumstances, the bird carcass and any contaminated materials used during collection (such as disposable gloves, paper towel or similar materials) should be carefully placed into a sealed heavy-duty plastic bag and disposed of through the household general waste collection service.

When handling a carcass, direct contact should be avoided. Gloves, a shovel, towel, heavy-duty rubbish bag, or another suitable barrier should be used to minimise exposure.

Any equipment that becomes contaminated should be cleaned with detergent and water in a manner that avoids creating splashes or aerosols. Personal protective equipment (PPE) should be removed carefully after cleaning is completed.

For small numbers of deceased wild birds on residential properties:

- a. The Emergency Animal Disease Hotline may provide advice regarding the management and disposal of affected animals.
- b. Place the animal in a sealed plastic bag using gloves or a suitable barrier (e.g. shovel).
- c. Place the sealed bag into household general waste.
- d. Clean and disinfect any equipment used.
- e. Wash hands thoroughly after handling.

Mass mortality events within the township

While large-scale bird mortality events are considered unlikely within the township, preparedness remains important. The most likely scenario is a mortality event occurring on the town sports oval, due to its proximity to the foreshore and the presence of bird species that commonly congregate in the area, including seabirds, shorebirds, and ducks.

Council Environmental Health Officers will lead the response to such incidents by undertaking a site assessment to evaluate public health and safety risks. Council will then work closely with the Wellesley Islands Rangers to coordinate and implement an appropriate response. The preferred response, where safe and appropriate, is to leave animals in situ to minimise disturbance and reduce the risk of disease

spread. Local authorities will assess any risks to public health, community safety, cultural values, and the environment before determining whether carcass removal is required.

Where removal is necessary, council may coordinate an appropriate response such as disposing of carcasses on-site, or collect and transport carcasses to an approved disposal facility.

The preferred option should consider:

- Public access to the area.
- Environmental impacts.
- Biosecurity risks.
- Operational practicality.
- Workplace health and safety

Mornington Shire Council does not have poultry facilities within the local government area; therefore, proximity to poultry operations is not a consideration when assessing disposal options.

Waste levy exemptions

Where HPAI is detected in Queensland, the Chief Executive Officer of DETSI may declare bird carcasses and directly associated contaminated materials exempt from the Queensland waste levy.

Council will need to segregate carcasses and associated materials from other waste streams, and ensure disposal activities comply with the conditions of the exemption in order to be eligible.

Waste mixed with general municipal waste will not be eligible for any levy exemption that may be granted.

Records

Council must maintain records of:

- Site assessments
- Significant mortality events.
- Notifications to government agencies.
- Disposal locations and methods.
- Any directions received from Biosecurity Queensland or other authorities.

References

- Biosecurity Act 2014 (Qld)
- Environmental Protection Act 1994 (Qld)
- Environmental Protection Regulation 2019 (Qld)
- Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011 (Qld)
- AUSVETPLAN Operational Manual – Disposal
- Queensland Government HPAI Guidance Materials
 - Bird flu advice for local government
 - Guideline - carcass disposal for birds suspected or known to have H5N1 high pathogenicity avian influenza
 - Risk assessment for wildlife carcasses infected with high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI)
- Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Qld)
- Council Waste Management and Workplace Health and Safety Plans and Procedures