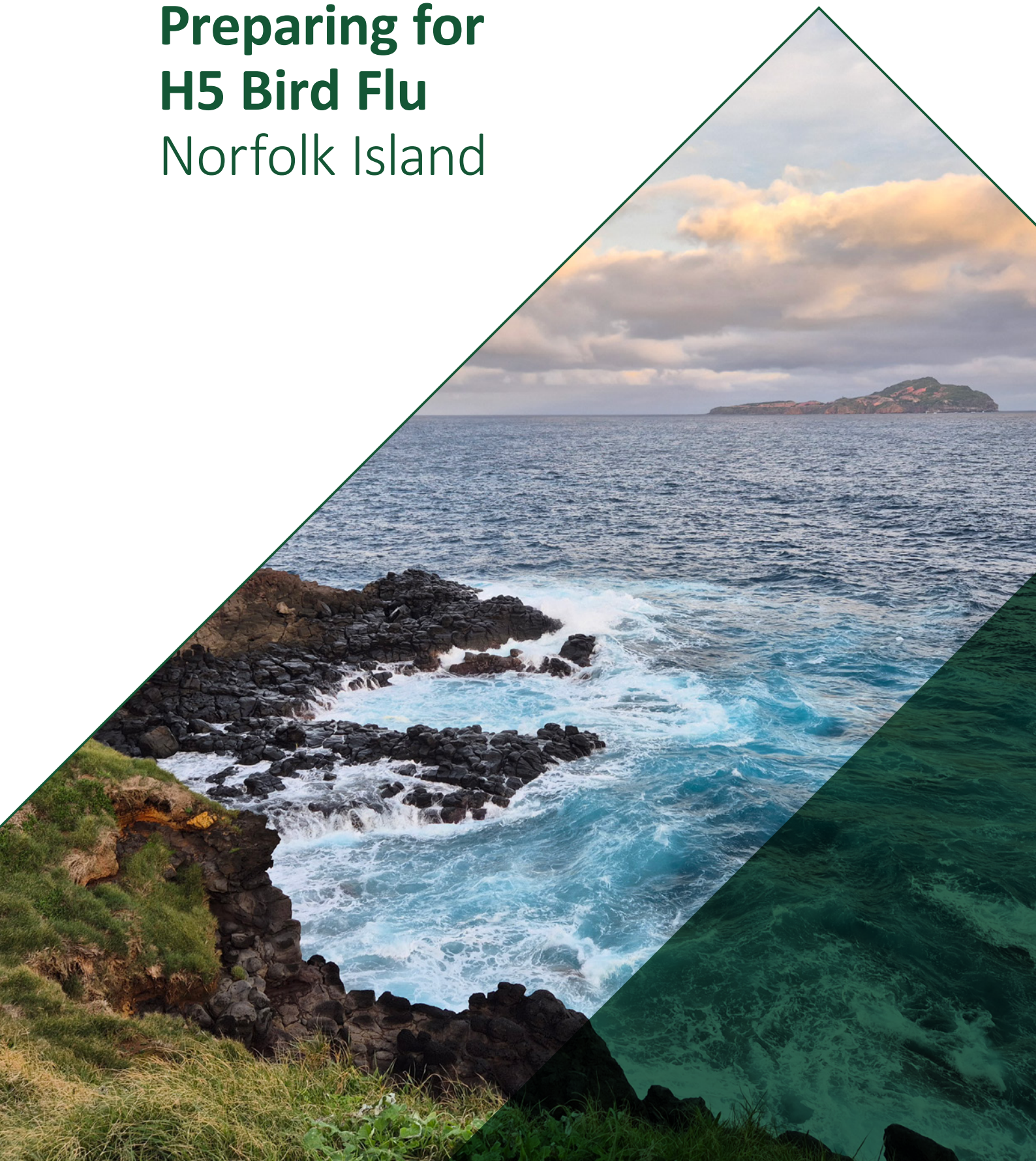
Australian Government

NORFOLK ISLAND Regional Council

Preparing for H5 Bird Flu

Norfolk Island



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About this plan

Preparing for H5 Bird Flu Norfolk Island explains what to expect, who's involved, and how everyone can play a part. It covers how to get prepared, what signs to look out for, how to report them, and what steps will be taken if H5 avian influenza (bird flu) arrives on the island.

If H5 bird flu reaches Norfolk Island, the response will focus on:

- ✓ Keeping people safe
- ✓ Protecting native birds, especially threatened species
- ✓ Safeguarding cultural traditions
- ✓ Acting fast to minimise and control poultry outbreaks
- ✓ Supporting the local egg supply

It is important to prepare for animal disease outbreaks - like bird flu.
Being ready helps keep our animals, food supply, and communities safe.

To help protect places that haven't been impacted by H5 bird flu, the Australian Government is working with state and territory governments, industry, and wildlife conservation organisations. Together, we're strengthening detection and response systems and learning from global outbreaks to help safeguard our most at-risk wildlife, farms, environment, and communities.

New Zealand is building similar preparedness activities and response planning.

Norfolk Island is unique and remote, home to many native birds found nowhere else, as well as migratory birds, and a small but vital egg industry. This information has been compiled to help the community prepare for and respond to any potential bird flu outbreak. It will continue to be reviewed and refined as required.

The following key groups are working together to help support the community in preparing for H5 bird flu:

- Parks Australia – including Norfolk Island National Park
- Norfolk Island Regional Council (NIRC)
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) – including the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy (NAQS) and Biosecurity Operations Division Maritime & Regional Ports (Norfolk Island)
- Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts (DITRDCSA)
- Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW)

About bird flu

What is bird flu?

Bird flu is a type of virus that mainly affects birds. It's highly contagious – like the flu people get – but it mostly affects wild birds, poultry, and even pet birds. Sometimes it can also infect other animals and, rarely, people.

There are many types (or strains) of bird flu, and they can change over time. Some are mild and don't cause illness, especially in wild birds. These are called low pathogenicity avian influenza (LPAI).

But sometimes, a mild strain can spread in poultry and change to become more dangerous. These harmful strains are called high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) and can cause serious illness and death.

In recent years a serious type of bird flu, called H5 bird flu, has spread fast around the world through wild birds. This strain of bird flu is already in its harmful form in the wild and can infect many types of birds, as well as marine and land mammals. On other continents it is causing illness and extensive deaths in wild birds, poultry, and other animals.

So far, Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands are the only places that haven't been affected.

There's no specific treatment for animals that have bird flu.

> Note: the H5 bird flu strain is different from the H7 strain that caused outbreaks in parts of Australia in 2024 and 2025. The H7 strain didn't affect wild birds or mammals and was successfully eradicated.

Learn more at birdflu.gov.au.

How is bird flu spread?

Birds infected with bird flu can spread the virus through body fluids, droppings and feathers. In the right conditions, the virus can stay in the environment for months.

It can also spread through contaminated clothing and shoes, animals, vehicles and equipment, and items like egg cartons.

People can sometimes get bird flu through close contact with infected birds or contaminated areas. There is no evidence that the current H5 bird flu spreads between people.

Bird flu – around the world

Since 2021, H5 bird flu has spread across the globe.

At the time of publishing, Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands are the only places still free from this strain. But outbreaks on remote islands, like those in the sub-Antarctic, the Galapagos, and Iceland, show that even isolated areas can be affected.

Wild birds most affected include waterfowl, shorebirds, seabirds and birds of prey or scavengers. Marine mammals have also been affected, with some detections in other animals like cats, goats, alpacas and pigs.

H5 bird flu has been found in some dairy cattle herds in the United States but nowhere else in the world. There have been no reports of cases in beef cattle anywhere.

Rarely, H5 bird flu can infect people. Overseas, some people have become seriously ill with bird flu and a very small number of deaths have been reported.

Could bird flu come to Norfolk Island?

Norfolk Island is currently free from H5 bird flu.

However, wild birds can carry bird flu over long distances. This is a risk, especially because many migratory birds stop to rest, feed, or breed, on Norfolk, Nepean, and Phillip Islands, and nearby rocky outcrops.

Feral chickens, rodents, free-roaming cats and introduced bird species can also spread diseases once they are on the Island.

We can't stop infected wild birds from flying to the island, but we can monitor for signs of bird flu. Early detection helps protect:

- native bird species (some found nowhere else)
- local egg farms
- the community

Since late 2024, we have done monthly testing of wild bird droppings on Norfolk Island. This is part of a surveillance program run by the Australian Government with help from Norfolk Island National Park (NINP) staff.

Bird flu surveillance also takes place in Australian states and territories, the Coral Sea Islands and New Zealand.

Reporting signs of bird flu

It is important to report any dead or sick animals showing signs of bird flu on Norfolk Island so that we can detect the virus early. This includes:

- poultry and pet birds including backyard poultry (like chickens, ducks and aviary birds)
- wild birds
- feral animals like chickens, cats or rats
- marine mammals like seals

Why reporting matters:

- helps us detect H5 bird flu early
- supports a quick and effective response
- builds our understanding of the disease

If you see sick or dead animals, report it straight away to help protect Norfolk Island's birds, farms, and community.

Signs of bird flu

Bird flu can affect wild birds, poultry, and even some mammals. Infected animals might look very sick – or show no signs at all. Sometimes, birds can die suddenly without warning.

That's why it's important to report any sick or dead birds, even if you're unsure.

Common signs of bird flu in animals

Wild birds 	- can't stand, walk, or fly properly - droopy or puffed-up appearance - breathing problems (panting or sneezing) - unusual head or neck posture - sudden death (especially in large numbers)
Poultry (chickens, ducks, etc.) 	- sudden drop in egg production - lethargy or not eating/drinking - swollen head or limbs - bruising on comb, feet, or skin - breathing issues or runny nose - sudden death
Mammals (cat, cows, seals etc.) 	- weakness or tiredness - trouble walking or breathing - seizures, tremors or walking in circles - drooling or runny nose - sudden illness or death

What to expect on Norfolk Island

- any bird species on Norfolk Island could be affected but seabirds, shorebirds, waterbirds, and birds of prey are most likely to be affected first.
- the first sign of bird flu may be a sudden increase in sick or dead wild birds.
- while Norfolk Island doesn't have any native land mammals, marine mammals like seals, and introduced mammals like cats and rodents, could be affected.
- in commercial poultry, bird flu spreads fast and can cause nearly 100% death rates. A drop in feed intake or egg production may be an early warning sign.

What to do if you see sick or dead birds

If you spot sick or dead birds keep your distance.

1. Avoid contact. Don't touch the birds, their feathers, droppings, eggs, or the area around them. Keep pets away too – don't let them sniff, touch, or eat the birds.

2. Record what you see (but don't get too close):

- date and time
- location (GPS pin, nearby roads, or landmarks)
- type or description of birds
- how many birds are sick or dead
- what they look like (e.g. freshly dead or just bones, signs of disease)
- if safe, take photos or ideally a video

3. Report multiple sick or dead birds in the same area

Call the 24-hour **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline** on **0061 1800 675 888**. This number works from Norfolk Island (international call). When prompted, choose Option 2 for your location.

Need help placing the call?
Contact **Norfolk Island Regional Council Customer Care** on **0100** (free local call, 9am to 4pm). They can help report the issue for you.

If birds are in Norfolk Island National Park: Call the park on **22695** or **53218**.

When to report

You should report if you see multiple sick or dead birds in the same area.

What happens after I call the Emergency Animal Disease hotline?

When you report sick or dead birds or animals, the details you share are carefully reviewed. Depending on the situation, this might lead to further investigation of the event, including:

- a site visit
- sample collection for bird flu testing

Even if testing isn't needed, your report still helps. Every bit of information builds a better picture of bird flu and helps guide the response.

If you share any contact details with us, we might contact you for more information. However, you won't receive updates about what happens next or the outcomes but rest assured – your report is important and will be carefully assessed.

If bird flu comes to Norfolk Island

Being ready for H5 bird flu on Norfolk Island is a shared responsibility. Many groups are working together to prepare for and respond if the virus arrives.

An effective response needs everyone's help- including the community, local producers, and all levels of government.

Testing and reporting

Right now, there are no rapid bird flu tests that can be used in the field. To confirm bird flu, samples must be sent to a laboratory in Australia. DAFF manages arrangements for sample collection and laboratory testing where required.

H5 bird flu is a nationally notifiable disease and is a listed disease by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). That means any confirmed case must be reported by DAFF to WOAH within 24 hours; this includes cases on Norfolk Island.

Roles and responsibilities – who does what on Norfolk Island?

As part of the Australian Government's crisis response arrangements, DAFF is responsible for coordinating responses to animal biosecurity crises. For Norfolk Island, DAFF works with DITRDCSA to coordinate crisis management, using the AUSBIOAGPLAN to guide coordination with other government agencies and key groups.

H5 bird flu response plans are being developed for the Island and will continue to be refined to ensure they are fit for purpose, agreed upon, and ready to activate. They will be adapted to suit any specific outbreak as needed.

During an outbreak, DAFF will lead required response actions for commercial egg farms-such as applying quarantine measures, movement controls and coordinating eradication efforts, with technical response activities guided by the AUSVETPLAN.

Norfolk Island Regional Council and other Australian Government agencies

The council and agencies listed below have important responsibilities as land managers on Norfolk Island, which will be central to any H5 bird flu response. For the land they manage, their role may include:

- managing public access to sites
- carcass management, including safe disposal where necessary

They will also play a key role in keeping the community and relevant groups informed.

- **Norfolk Island Regional Council:** responsible for council owned public reserves and other council-managed land.
- **DCCEEW** (Parks Australia / Norfolk Island National Park): responsible for the Norfolk Island National Park and Norfolk Marine Park.
  DCCEEW also helps develop strategies for at-risk native species and environmental protection, and provides expert advice for response planning.
- **DITRDCSA:** responsible for Commonwealth places like Kingston and Arthur's Vale Historic Area, public reserves, and other areas such as the school and hospital grounds.
  DITRDCSA also works with the Norfolk Island Regional Council to tailor actions in response to local needs, and helps develop recovery measures.

Norfolk Island residents

Community members also have an important part to play in any response. This includes:

- reporting any signs of bird flu
- following guidance issued by government and council
- safely disposing of bird carcasses found on their own property

Agreements and plans

Australia has 3 main plans to help manage serious animal diseases (known as emergency animal diseases (EADs)) like bird flu:

1. Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA)

This is an agreement where governments and livestock industries work together to:

- reduce the risk of disease
- respond to outbreaks
- share the costs of response

It explains who is responsible for managing and funding responses to bird flu in commercial poultry.

2. AUSVETPLAN

This is a set of technical manuals that guide how we respond to animal disease outbreaks. It supports the EADRA and includes a specific manual for dealing with bird flu.

3. National Management Agreement (NMA)

This plan details the governance and cost sharing for responses when H5 bird flu affects wildlife and eradication is not feasible. It focuses on reducing the impacts in a way that protects the environment and wildlife.

Protecting native birds on Norfolk Island

All bird species on Norfolk Island – both native and introduced – could be at risk if H5 bird flu arrives.

Some native birds might face serious population declines or even extinction. Even common bird populations could be affected.

What's being done:

- The Australian Government is working to understand and reduce the impacts of a potential outbreak. This includes creating plans for most at-risk species and places to help focus conservation efforts.
- Parks Australia is helping protect birds in the Norfolk Island National Park and on Phillip Island. Their work includes:
  - monitoring bird numbers
  - restoring habitats
  - controlling invasive species
  - checking for biosecurity threats
- Current projects focus on forest bird monitoring, ecosystem restoration, and managing invasive birds. The park also helps with research, including seabird monitoring.

Learn more about the Australian Government's work and support package to protect our wildlife.

Norfolk Island National Park response

Parks Australia has created special plans to respond to H5 bird flu in the national park. This includes a Triggered Action Response Plan (TARP).

The plan is aimed at monitoring wild birds for signs of H5 bird flu while protecting people's health and safety and reducing risks to park operations.

The TARP outlines how the response will increase step-by-step – from normal operations to higher alert levels. It covers:

- park activities and access
- research and commercial activities
- community engagement

The plan outlines clear actions for different groups and activities based on their risk and the trigger response level.

The plan will be updated regularly so NINP staff can respond with the latest information.

Note: This plan only applies to the national park, not to other areas of the island.

Norfolk Island wild bird response

Protecting wild birds from H5 bird flu on Norfolk Island is a challenge. Unfortunately, there's currently no way to stop wild birds becoming infected or from spreading the virus, but we can still take action to reduce the risks.

We will not attempt to eradicate H5 bird flu from the wild bird population on Norfolk Island. A response to bird flu in wild birds will focus on:

Keeping people safe

- public areas like reserves may be closed or restricted if sick or dead birds are found or even as a precaution.
- some activities involving wild birds may be paused or restricted- if they pose a risk to human health (or could contribute to virus spread) such as whale bird egg harvesting.

Monitoring

- monitoring birds will be important to help track the virus and its signs, see how it is spreading, and the impact on bird species and populations.
- in some cases, samples will be collected to assess the virus and its impact.

Protecting native birds

- access may be restricted to public areas, like reserves, to avoid disturbing birds- both to prevent stress and to avoid virus spread by infected birds.
- decontamination of vehicles, clothing, and gear to help reduce the spread of the virus.
- reducing threats to native species by controlling feral animals like chickens, cats and rodents.

Carcass disposal

- in some areas, dead birds may be collected to protect people and other animals.
- public access may be restricted during clean-up.
- the public will be asked not to go near, touch or move dead birds found in public places.

Whale bird egg harvesting

If there's a H5 bird flu outbreak on Norfolk or surrounding islands, the whale bird (sooty tern) egg harvest season will be closed.

This is important to help:

- keep people safe by avoiding close contact with infected birds and their environment.
- stop the virus from spreading on shoes, clothes, or equipment to other areas of the island, or between Phillip and Norfolk Islands.
- prevents additional stress on the whale bird population.

Human health and food safety

Bird flu and people

Bird flu mostly affects birds but does spread to other animals. Rarely, it can also infect people.

Right now, the World Health Organization and the interim Australian Centre for Disease Control say the risk to the public is low. Most bird flu viruses don't easily infect humans, and there is no evidence that the current H5 bird flu spreads between people. However, like all flu viruses it could change over time.

People can sometimes get bird flu through close contact with infected birds or contaminated areas. Overseas, some people have become seriously ill with bird flu and a very small number of deaths have been reported.

More information for people who work with birds is available in the CDNA national guidelines for avian influenza – protecting people who work with birds and wildlife.

Food safety and bird flu

Bird flu is not a food safety risk for chicken meat and eggs that are handled and cooked thoroughly.

Practice good food hygiene by washing your hands and utensils after handling raw food or animals.

Learn about food safety basics at Food safety basics | Food Standards Australia New Zealand.

Backyard poultry and other pet birds

H5 bird flu spreads easily and can infect backyard poultry and pet birds through:

- contact with wild birds or feral chickens
- contaminated clothing, shoes, equipment, or vehicles

If you own backyard poultry or other birds, following everyday biosecurity practices will help protect them:

- keep your birds away from wild birds and feral chickens
- keep feed and water clean
- wash hands before and after handling birds
- limit visitors near your birds
- keep pens, aviaries, and equipment clean
- quarantine new birds before adding them to your flock
- watch for signs of illness or death and know how to report it
- follow best practice biosecurity if entering birds in the Norfolk Island Royal Agriculture and Horticultural Show (Show Day)

One of the best ways to help protect your backyard poultry and pet birds is with an enclosure that wild birds and other animals cannot access. Some options include coops and aviaries. Consider how you will house your birds to help keep them safe if H5 bird flu arrives on the Island.

More details and helpful resources are available at Protecting domestic poultry and birds from emergency animal diseases - DAFF.

What happens during a bird flu response: backyard poultry and pet birds

If H5 bird flu is detected, some actions may affect backyard poultry and pet birds to help stop the spread and protect native birds, farms, and people. These may include:

- birds may need to stay in one place and not be moved.
- poultry classes on Show Day might be cancelled.
- sharing or selling uncooked eggs could be restricted.
- dead birds may be collected and tested to track the virus.
- birds not tested must be safely disposed of.
- recommendations to keep birds in areas that prevent contact with wild birds (e.g. backyard poultry in chook sheds, coops or other structures and pet birds indoors).

If your flock gets infected

Sadly, H5 bird flu is so deadly that most or all birds in a flock will likely die. If a backyard flock is infected humane euthanasia is strongly recommended to prevent suffering and stop the virus from spreading and posing a risk to human health.

Bird flu on commercial egg farms

Norfolk Island has a small but important local egg industry. If H5 bird flu is found on a commercial egg farm, a national plan (AUSVETPLAN) will guide the response steps taken to eradicate the disease from the farm.

Key steps in the response:

1. **Biosecurity measures**
   - the farm will be quarantined.
   - movement of birds, eggs, equipment, and vehicles will be restricted.
2. **Humane euthanasia of infected flocks**
   - H5 bird flu causes severe illness and death in chickens (up to 100% mortality).
   - all birds on the affected farm will be humanely euthanised to stop the virus and prevent suffering.
3. **Farm clean-up**
   - dead birds and contaminated materials will be safely disposed of.
   - the farm will be cleaned and disinfected before it can be restocked.
4. **Monitoring and testing**
   - depending on the situation, tracing and testing of other Norfolk Island birds may be undertaken.
5. **Support for farmers**
   - the government will provide support, including eligable compensation for affected farms.
   - local and national teams will help to manage and support the response.
6. **Communication**
   - we will share updates with the community.

Biosecurity plans

Experience from other countries shows that strong biosecurity is the most effective way to help prevent H5 bird flu. The everyday actions outlined in a biosecurity plan will reduce the risk of bird flu and other disease being introduced onto a farm.

Biosecurity planning is the most important step farmers can take to protect their birds and their businesses.

Free online resources are available to help farmers create these plans:

- Farm biosecurity – eggs
- Australian Eggs- biosecurity

Keeping pets safe

H5 bird flu mainly affects birds, but in rare cases, **cats and dogs** can get sick if they eat or come into close contact with infected birds.

To help protect your pets if bird flu comes to Norfolk Island:

- keep wild birds away from pet food and water
- don't let pets eat or touch sick or dead birds
- keep dogs on a leash, especially near wild birds
- keep cats indoors
- avoid taking pets to places where bird flu has been found
- if you've had direct contact with sick or dead birds, shower and change clothes before touching your pets

If your pet gets sick after interacting with wild birds, keep them away from children and other animals and contact the Norfolk Island vet.

Safe disposal of dead birds: what you need to know

Safe handling and disposal of dead birds is critical. Inappropriate handling may pose a risk to human health and to spreading the virus to other animals that interact with them or their surroundings.

At home (private land/backyards)

Landowners or tenants will be responsible for disposing of dead birds found on their property.

If there is an outbreak on Norfolk Island, the community will be provided with information and recommendations on safe and appropriate disposal methods.

On public land

The public are asked not to touch or move dead birds in public areas.

Trained staff from NIRC, DITRDCSA and Parks Australia will manage carcasses, when necessary, in the areas they are responsible for.

How decisions are made

Deciding whether to remove or leave dead birds in place depends on a case-by-case risk assessment. Managers of public land will consider many factors to choose the safest and most effective approach.

Priority 1: Human health and safety

- protecting the public, responders, and nearby communities is the top priority.
- if carcasses pose a human health risk- especially in busy areas like schools, beaches, or reserves, or or near water catchment areas and creeks- clean-up is more likely.

Priority 2: Protecting important species and places

- if dead birds are near threatened species, nesting areas, or egg farms, clean-up may be needed to prevent further spread.

Priority 3: Reducing environmental and social impacts

- managers of public land will also consider:
  - the effects on native birds and local ecosystems
  - community concerns and visual impact
  - if clean-up could cause stress to or disturb (and potentially disperse) live wild birds

In some cases, leaving carcasses to decompose naturally is safer and less disruptive – especially in remote areas or where clean-up could cause wild birds to scatter and spread the virus further.

Public access may be restricted during clean-up or decomposition to keep people safe and reduce disturbance.

Find out more

birdflu.gov.au

outbreak.gov.au

DCCEEW
https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/invasive-species/diseases-fungi-and-parasites/birdflu

Australian interim Centre for Disease Control
https://www.cdc.gov.au/topics/bird-flu

Wildlife Health Australia
https://wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au/Resource-Centre/H5-bird-flu

Norfolk Island National Park
https://norfolkislandnationalpark.gov.au/news/what-high-pathogenicity-avian-influenza-hpai/

Norfolk Island Regional Council
https://www.nirc.gov.au/Planning-Environment/Planning-and-Environment-Services/Environment/H5-Bird-Flu

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