

Date: Thursday 25 July 2024
Time: 10.00am
Meeting Room: Reception Lounge
Venue: Auckland Town Hall
 301-305 Queen Street
 Auckland

Komiti mō te Whakarite Mahere, te Taiao, me ngā Papa Rēhia / Planning, Environment and Parks Committee

OPEN ATTACHMENTS

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Note: The attachments contained within this document are for consideration and should not be construed as Council policy unless and until adopted. Should Councillors require further information relating to any reports, please contact the relevant manager, Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson.

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Memorandum

6 June 2024

To: Planning, Environment and Parks Committee and all local board members
Subject: High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza – implications for Auckland Council
From: Dr Imogen Bassett, Principal Advisor Biosecurity, Environmental Services
Contact information: Imogen.Bassett@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz

Purpose

1. To provide information on the risk of High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI) and potential implications for Auckland Council.

Summary

2. High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI) is a serious contagious disease that primarily affects birds, resulting in a range of symptoms, including mass mortality in some species.
3. While mainly a bird disease, it can also more rarely infect some mammal species, including humans.
4. Although transmission to humans is currently very rare, the current mortality rate to date is 50 per cent for people who are known to have contracted the disease. If it entered Aotearoa, HPAI would have significant health and safety implications for Auckland Council's staff, contractors and communities.
5. There has never been a case of HPAI in Aotearoa, but because it is spreading globally and in locations that our migratory birds visit it is now considered likely to reach New Zealand within the next year or two. Late summer 2025 is most likely, but it could occur sooner.
6. This memo provides information on the potential implications of HPAI for Auckland Council, and key messages that elected members can share with communities if required.
7. Once it arrives, eradication of HPAI will not be possible. The focus will be on minimising impacts, including on the economy, food supply and conservation as well as health and safety.
8. Contact with sick or dead birds or bird faeces are the highest risk ways in which the disease is spread to humans. Overseas, this has occurred most often among people who have been working with poultry or other infected animals. Further information on the disease is available in Attachment A and on the [Ministry for Primary Industries' website](#).
9. HPAI could result in large numbers of dead birds in some public places such as parks, beaches and stormwater ponds. Access restrictions, decontamination efforts and culling of waterfowl may be required in some high visitation locations to minimise public, wildlife or poultry exposure to the disease.
10. The national response will in the first instance be led by the Ministry for Primary Industries with the Ministry of Health and Department of Conservation playing key roles. Auckland Council will have a regional role, particularly in supporting national communications and managing public safety and indigenous species on council-managed land.
11. Staff are preparing for the arrival of HPAI by:
 - planning for health and safety management of public spaces
 - identifying implications for biodiversity management by council and the communities we support
 - amplifying central government advice on hygiene and response as information becomes available.
12. Elected members will receive an update if there are any substantial developments, for instance if the disease is detected in the country.



Context

High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza overview and impacts

13. High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (bird flu; HPAI) is a serious contagious disease that is spreading globally. It mainly affects birds, particularly poultry, shorebirds, seabirds and waterfowl, causing mass mortality in some species. Some strains can evolve the ability to more rarely infect a variety of mammals, including (but not limited to) humans, cows, cats, dogs, stoats and sealions.
14. Transmission to humans is currently very rare, but the mortality rate of those infected to date has been 50 per cent. Flu viruses mutate frequently, therefore increased frequency of transmission to humans in the future cannot be ruled out.
15. Infection, in any species, typically comes from close contact with infected birds (live or dead), their faeces, saliva or equipment that is contaminated with bird faeces or saliva.
16. Further information on the disease is provided in Attachment A.

High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza in Aotearoa New Zealand

17. Aotearoa has never had a case of High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI), but it is now considered likely that the disease will reach us within the next one to two years. This is because the disease has spread to parts of the world that our migratory bird species visit. Late summer 2025 is considered most probable given bird movements, but it could occur at any time.
18. It will be impossible to eradicate HPAI once it arrives. The focus will be on minimising impacts.
19. The national response will be led by the Ministry for Primary Industries with the Ministry of Health and the Department of Conservation playing key roles. Auckland Council will have a role in the regional response within Auckland.
20. The Ministry for Primary Industries has surveillance testing underway in areas at which the disease is most likely to first arrive in the country, based on migratory bird movements. The Ministry is also asking the public throughout the country to report suspicious sightings of three or more dead birds, for diagnostic testing to confirm or rule out the presence of the disease. Auckland Council will support this surveillance by communicating information to our staff and conservation volunteers.
21. Further information on the disease, including how to report sightings, is available on the [Ministry for Primary Industries' website](#).

Discussion

22. While transmission of HPAI to humans is very rare, the current human mortality rate means that the health and safety of our staff, contractors and communities will be a top priority.
23. Contact with sick or dead birds or bird faeces are the highest risk ways in which people could get the disease. It will be important to manage exposure risk for staff, contractors and communities.
24. It is anticipated that there will be national protocols on managing contact with birds and the disposal of large volumes of contaminated carcasses, including direction and training on the type and use of personal protective equipment (PPE). Staff will work with volunteers and community groups to amplify central government safety advice.
25. HPAI could result in large numbers of dead birds in some public places such as parks and beaches and access restrictions and decontamination efforts may be required in some locations to minimise public exposure to the disease.
26. Culling of exotic waterfowl may also need to be carried out to reduce exposure of people and/or indigenous species (for example, at Western Springs lakes).



27. Public communications will need to support national messaging, highlighting the health risks associated with handling sick wildlife to minimise community exposure. However, careful communications will be required to avoid panic over a disease that is currently only very rarely spread to humans.
28. A serious HPAI outbreak is likely to be distressing for community members, staff and contractors if there are large numbers of wildlife deaths and impacts on some commercial activities.
29. Because the disease cannot be eradicated, the health and safety implications will be ongoing.
30. The operations necessary for Auckland Council to respond to an HPAI incursion are unbudgeted and will require additional resourcing or reprioritisation from existing activities.

Biodiversity management

31. Some indigenous species may be severely impacted by the disease, with a risk of extinctions resulting.

While the Department of Conservation (DOC) is leading vaccination trials for select indigenous species, there are currently limited options for prevention or treatment. In many cases the focus will be on appropriate disposal of infected carcasses. There may be some opportunity to manage some threatened species populations more intensively, for example takahē at Tāwharanui Open Sanctuary.
32. Hygiene protocols for staff, contractors and the community will play an important role in reducing spread to threatened species populations, although natural bird-to-bird transmission will be the main avenue of spread. Staff will ensure central government hygiene advice is shared with those working on conservation activities supported by council.
33. Some business-as-usual conservation activities, such as captive breeding and translocations, may need to be suspended for a period of time. The reduction in these services may also result in declines in indigenous biodiversity.
34. DOC will lead development of species-specific management plans for high-risk species. Auckland Council will coordinate with DOC, for example where we are managing these species on our land.
35. DOC has signalled that enhanced management of other key pressures, such as mammalian predators, will be an important element of supporting indigenous species populations to be resilient to HPAI.
36. As a national response, central government agencies have primary responsibility for mana whenua engagement. However, Auckland Council will support aligned communications with mana whenua, as well as leading direct communications where relevant to activities on council-managed land.
37. Auckland Zoo will need long-term strategies to manage risks to zoo animals, visitors and staff. For example, bird species such as flamingos that are currently in open air enclosures may need changes to their enclosure to reduce contact with wild birds and their faeces. Management of wild birds on zoo grounds may also need to change.

Auckland Council response planning

38. Environmental Services is currently leading preparedness planning within Auckland Council. If HPAI arrives, and an emergency response is triggered, Auckland Emergency Management may have a coordination role. A cross-council working group is being set up to prepare, respond and manage the implications of HPAI, which includes staff from departments that are involved in the response as well as CCO partners, including Auckland Zoo.



39. The initial preparedness focus will include:
- supporting the Ministry for Primary Industries in raising public awareness of what to look for, how to report possible sightings and other key messages such as discouraging public feeding of wild birds
 - supporting central government agencies with mana whenua engagement
 - confirming and disseminating health and safety advice to staff, contractors and communities
 - operational planning, for example for managing dead birds in public spaces, including confirming disposal options for contaminated carcasses and PPE, and planning to enable access restrictions to be enacted rapidly if required
 - identifying feasible opportunities for indigenous species conservation.

Key messages

40. Key messages that elected members can share with communities if asked include:
- HPAI is a serious, contagious wildlife disease that is spreading globally. We expect it is likely that it will arrive in New Zealand within the next few years.
 - While HPAI can cause mass mortality in some species, especially sea birds, shorebirds, waterfowl and sealions, symptoms are very variable across species. We do not know yet how badly affected our indigenous wildlife will be.
 - HPAI is currently only very rarely spread to humans. Even if human infections become more common in the future, our health system is well set up to manage influenza viruses. Nonetheless, because it does have a high mortality rate, people do need to take hygiene precautions seriously.
 - Central government agencies have the lead role in planning for and responding to HPAI in New Zealand (specifically, Ministry for Primary Industries, supported by Ministry of Health and Department of Conservation).
 - Auckland Council has planning underway to ensure that we are well prepared to support a national response within our region, including managing hygiene at our public facilities, and continuity of our conservation efforts in the region.

Next steps

41. Work is currently underway to coordinate readiness planning across council and partner agencies.
42. Elected members will receive an update if there are any substantial developments, for instance if the disease is detected in the country.
43. Staff understand that further hygiene advice will soon be coming from central government, and will update the public as new information becomes available.

