



MPI, Poultry Industry Study Tours Webinar Meeting Minutes

Tuesday 24 September 2024 3:15pm – 4:45pm

Presenters: MPI: Mary van Andel, Chief Veterinary Officer, Maryna Sokolova, Team Manager, Animal Health Surveillance, Chris Kebbell Manager, Operational Readiness

Industry: John McKay, EPF Chair, Sophie Shaw, Tegel Foods GM Livestock EHS & Technical, Kerry Mulqueen, PIANZ Senior Executive Officer, Technical

Opening Remarks: Michael Brooks, Executive Director EPF & PIANZ

Topic	Key points
John McKay Key takeouts from UK Tour	The UK tour was highly successful and exceeded the expectations of the NZ delegation. We met with senior officials of Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (the UK equivalent of MPI) who were most generous with their time. In addition to slide notes, key takeouts were: - It was reassuring to see that early communication by UK officials that HPAI was not a food safety issue, resulted in only minor impact on product sales and enhanced public trust in the industry. - The trip helped strengthen relationships with our international counterparts in government, industry, and farming, gathering pivotal intelligence and guidance on how to navigate the path through an outbreak. - Most importantly, it strengthened key relationships between the poultry industry and MPI officials on the tour. - We are in this together, so travelling and learning together reinforced trust between regulator and industry. - We saw that even businesses with high biosecurity were impacted by HPAI. The learning from this is we can only control what we can manage. UK farmers did everything they could to protect their businesses. HPAI will still have impact, but it can be minimised.

	- We were reassured to see that the way NZ is planning to approach an AI outbreak shows we are on the right track
Mary van Andel NZ: Current state & risk level	- The way this strain (HPAI H5N1) is behaving is different to other strains, including those active in Australia. - Currently, New Zealand's risk level remains low. The H5N1 strain has been detected in the Antarctic peninsula, but recent analysis has shown that the likelihood of an infected bird travelling further than 1000kms and establishing infection is low. - If this strain reached Australia, or the Pacific Islands, that would increase the risk to New Zealand due to closer proximity. - The current HPAI strains in Australia emerged internally from low pathogenic HPAI in wild birds getting into poultry, whereas HPAI H5N1 is carried by wild birds and is far more virulent.
Maryna Sokolova Why go to UK?	- The UK was selected to observe the virus behaviour and industry response due to the many similarities between the UK and NZ. Our poultry industry sizes are similar, as are our farming styles. - Most importantly the UK has been dealing with the strain of H5N1 that has established in wild birds. - The key difference with the UK is that it is closer to Europe, whereas NZ has the advantage of being more geographically isolated. - The UK has experienced an 'over-summering phenomenon' with HPAI H5N1. In the past HPAI strains have arrived in spring, taken hold over summer, and died away in winter. H5N1 has continued through winters from 2021 – 2024, making it a year-round problem for the poultry industry. - The highest mortality rates were experienced in 2022-2023. Comparatively, the 2023-2024 period has seen the smallest recorded number of detections to date. This may be due to wild birds developing a natural immunity to the disease, and that after three consecutive years of HPAI, the UK farmers now have the best biosecurity practices possible in place. - It is important to note that all influenza viruses (including this one) continue to change and adapt, which highlights the importance of maintaining elevated levels of biosecurity for protection. - Despite the continuous outbreaks affecting the industry, consistent communications reassured people this was not a public health or food safety issue, so product sales remained unaffected.

Mary van Andel Key takeouts: Readiness	- Investing now in crisis management and business continuity plans on-farm is key. - We are standing shoulder to shoulder in this, so it is important we all understand each other's perspectives - from farmers, to industry, to regulator. Our common objectives are many, so it is important to share plans and join them together to achieve those objectives. - We learned from the UK there is no 'one size fits all' plan for business continuity. It needs to be sector specific and tailored to individual enterprises. - The UK has been fighting this strain for three years now, so farmer fatigue in attempts to maintain high biosecurity is very real. - They have introduced a tiered system to manage biosecurity fatigue so that farmers did not have to maintain the highest possible levels of biosecurity all the time. - The impact on farmer mental health was a priority. This was managed by all parties involved, making sure each farmer was able to reach out for assistance across their networks, with good contact points along the way. Industry bodies played a key role in this to ensure access to information.
Mary van Andel Key takeouts: Response	- The UK's movement control zones are aligned with EU legislative requirements. - Their depopulation tools included gassing units and foaming for larger farms. - Due to the country's history of managing mad cow disease, it has different methods of disposal available to them than NZ.(i.e. rendering), - Cleaning and disinfection was left to the farmers and industry to manage. Getting the right levels of PPE was important, as was understanding how to apply it and dispose of it correctly. - In the UK, farmers take responsibility for cleaning and disinfecting their own properties. Each had a plan on how to do so which was presented to Defra for review and approval. - Once approved and implemented, there were no cases of recurring infections for those who used these plans. - The UK found housing orders useful to decrease rates of infections. These are legislative requirements to move free range meat and egg chickens temporarily indoors, to protect them from becoming infected. - In NZ, housing orders could be implemented under the Biosecurity Act. Again, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' policy so it will be tailored appropriately. - In the UK, they used overstickering on products to convey the free range birds had been temporarily moved indoors.

	- The UK took a proactive position on farms under suspicion of infection risk by placing restriction zones around the farm immediately, as a precaution. Two days too late can be disastrous, so a precautionary approach was adopted. - The UK farms who fared the best in an HPAI outbreak were those most closely connected to industry, the regulator and the response planning. Forming strong relationships resulted in good understanding of what to do, why and when, for best results.
John McKay Aligned Communication is Key	- Cannot reinforce strongly enough the importance of early communication with the public to diffuse misinformation and initial mistrust of industry/regulator. - The UK used one source of truth for communication, not multiple. This avoided the emergence and spread of conspiracy theories – many of which can come from members of Industry themselves. - We all need to stand united on messages, plans, and educating the key stakeholders. The media in particular need educating up front and early so they can help minimise spread of misinformation. - Fast, consistent and clear messaging works best, as does keeping calm. - They utilised an online interactive map as a tool for stakeholders to find out where the hot spots were. This helped stop rumours about location and spread. - It was especially important to convey images of live birds, not very sick/dead birds, or the end products of chicken and eggs. The latter can misinform the public, and spread misinformed consumer alarm.
John McKay Contingency Plans	- Documented contingency plans are critical, right down to the farm level. Local contacts are important to include. - Industry and MPI are pulling together templates for these contingency plans. These will be circulated for each individual farm to populate. - Plans for bigger farming operations will differ from plans required for smaller, but each is equally responsible for their own biosecurity.
John McKay Depopulation	- The UK has three options to depopulate, depending on farm size, type, location etc. These are: - o CGU gassing units - o Whole house gassing - o Nitrogen foaming. - Pragmatic PPE rules are required to keep people safe.
John McKay	- 'Control what we can control' is the key message from UK trip. - Useful guides were provided (and followed) online on the

On-farm Biosecurity	government guidance site, including simple instructions on how to protect the outer shell of the shed, versus steps needed to protect the inner shell. The objective was to set people up to be commercially successful in an AI environment.
John McKay Getting the right mindset	- It's essential to get staff on board with the right mindset. That is, to care intently about what goes in and out of the sheds. - Individual accountability needs to be strong to ensure they're not 'the one person' who brings AI into the shed.
Sophie Shaw Reduce Wild Bird Risk	- Wild birds are the greatest risk to introducing the virus so keeping them out and disinterested is critical. - UK used tactics like tethering a flying kite as a 'scarecrow'. - Keeping outer areas as tidy as possible, use own mowing equipment rather than outside contractors, to remove long grass and cut back foliage that may act as shelter sources. - If ponds exist on a property, nets were placed over them so they're not used as a water source. - Reduce reasons for wild birds to land/stay such as immediately cleaning up any feed spills. - Water ingress and ducks were key problems bringing AI into farms. Bird droppings land on shed roofs, then run into leaky sheds through rain water. - Ducks are dangerous in that they transmit AI, but don't show any clinical signs of illness. Every effort must be made to discourage them from properties.
Sophie Shaw Biosecurity for the Outer and Inner Shell	- The UK has a tiered system to manage biosecurity fatigue. These steps to reduce this are summarised on slides 13 & 14
Kerry Mulqueen Australian Study Tour	- Victoria was visited by the NZ delegation while it was in the aftermath of an outbreak of HPAI H7 – the strain that emerged internally from low pathogenic avian influenza, not H5N1 that is carried by wild birds. The territory was focused on what was required to bring it back into production. - Australia is experienced in managing HPAI outbreaks having lived through 11 since the 1970s. As such, they are better resourced in terms of people, procedures and equipment to manage depopulation and disposal than NZ, which has never had an outbreak of HPAI. - Due to past outbreaks, the Government was well set up with its own washing equipment, systems and practices to

	manage the current one. - Flexibility was evident in Victoria where around seven farms were affected by an HPAI outbreak this year. For example, all seven moved their deceased birds for disposal to a singular burial area on one farm to help reduce impact. - Optimistic estimates on the timeframe to resume trade for affected farms was six months. - Those farms in an affected zone that weren't infected themselves could continue to trade. - The cost of the latest outbreaks were shared between Industry and Government.
Chris Kebble and John McKay NEXT STEPS	- The plan is for a combined approach with industry and MPI. - This means developing support to ensure on-farm readiness, making sure all levels across the sector know what to do and how. - Working groups are underway to develop planning and processes to manage the 3Ds, as well as movement, surveillance control, contact tracing and vaccination. - Communication on the progress of these workstreams to farmers will be ongoing. - MPI highlighted collaboration in readiness and response is very important. - "The response to H5N1 will not be a normal response." - It will arrive via wild birds, so we get no notice that it's here. - Industry needs to be ready to prevent it spreading if infected, through the approved containment and eradication procedures. - Once H5N1 gets into NZ, it is likely to stay. - Every farm, no matter how small, needs an on-farm biosecurity plan to keep HPAI out, a plan to manage if it gets in, and a plan to get back to business once it is eradicated. - Following this webinar there is an Industry simulation exercise on September 25th and a joint operational planning session on September 26th. The key is collaboration. The challenge is how best to work together to minimise impact on the industry.
Questions:	<i>Q. What powers does MPI have around destroying backyard flocks?</i> A. MPI would utilise the Biosecurity Act to authorise destruction of infected/exposed backyard flocks. The tactics we use will depend on the strain and the particular situation. <i>Q. What are MPI's powers when it comes to locking up free range birds?</i> A. Housing orders could be used as a legislative requirement to move free range meat and egg birds temporarily inside until the

	risk has passed. The Biosecurity Act allows for a Controlled Area Notice which can specify the region and tools to use within it. Whether or not we use housing orders will depend on the particular situation – a ‘one size fits all’ approach would not be suitable. <i>Q. What percentage of free range farms are affected compared with percentage of housed farms affected?</i> A MPI will make available a report from the UK that shows what happened there. <i>Q. Question on flock disposal on farms</i> A. On-farm burial was possible in Australia as an option, but in NZ it would depend on the specific location of the. That is, for some, the water table levels could mean on-farm burial is not possible here. Composting on or off site is another option we look at in NZ.