

NZ response to H7N6 - HPAI Webinar for Industry members

2nd April 2025

Meeting notes:

- **Introduction and Agenda:** John and Michael introduced the meeting, highlighting the significance of the event in Otago and the importance of sharing learnings for industry preparedness. John outlined the agenda, which included a situation update, operations overview, compensation, key learnings, and a Q&A session. He emphasised that the purpose of the webinar was to build the most resilient industry possible in managing an HPAI outbreak.
- **Situation Update:** John provided a chronological summary of the H7N6 detection in December 2024, the response they took to eradicate the virus, and the successful containment within the infected farm. He mentioned the completion of cleaning and disinfecting by March 28th and the planned repopulation starting May 1st.
- **Farm Overview:**
 - **Farm Layout:** John provided a detailed description of the Hillgrove farm, including the layout of the laying and rearing sheds, and the overall capacity of the farm. He emphasized the scale and complexity of the operation.
 - **Video Flyover:** John shared a video flyover of the farm to give participants a visual understanding of the farm's layout, and the extent of the operation given its scale. The video highlighted key areas such as the laying sheds, rearing sheds, and the overall farm infrastructure.
- **Outbreak Timeline:** John presented a timeline of key events:
 - **Initial Detection:** The initial detection of increased mortality rates at the end of November 2024, which led to further investigation and testing.
 - **Confirmation of H7N6:** From this, HPAI H7N6 was confirmed, and the subsequent biosecurity measures implemented by MPI, to contain the virus.
 - **Depopulation Process:** John described the depopulation process, including the timeline and the number of birds culled to prevent the spread of the virus.
 - **Cleaning and Disinfecting:** John highlighted the completion of cleaning and disinfecting by March 28th, marking a significant milestone in the containment and eradication efforts.
- **Initial Response:** John explained the initial response steps, including when they notified MPI, the involvement of an incursion investigator, and the implementation of biosecurity measures. He emphasized the importance of having detailed farm information readily available.
- **Transparent Relationships:** The relationship between farm, staff, Mainland and MPI was immediately transparent. The benefit of this was it immediately built trust between MPI and the affected farm/farm management.

- **Restricted Place Notice:** John discussed the restricted place notice issued by MPI, which placed the farm under MPI control and outlined specific biosecurity measures to be followed.
 - **Notice Issuance:** John explained the issuance of the restricted place notice by MPI, which legally placed the farm under MPI control.
 - **Biosecurity Measures:** John detailed the specific biosecurity measures outlined in the notice, including restrictions on movement in and out of the farm, and the housing of birds to control the disease.
- **Biosecurity Response:** John described the biosecurity response, including the assignment of an MPI place manager, the setup of a regional coordination centre, and the emphasised the importance of media management and security on the farm.
 - **MPI Place Manager:** An MPI place manager was quickly assigned to oversee the biosecurity measures and coordinate the response on the ground.
 - **Regional Coordination Centre:** A regional coordination centre was set up in Dunedin to manage the response and ensure effective communication and coordination among all parties involved.
 - **Media Management:** Media scrutiny was intense as this was the first HPAI outbreak in NZ. Mainland had the support of its own PR team, plus Industry support. John pointed out not every farmer will have that level of support, but they will have the same, unrelenting media interest, so need to prepare for it in their planning. Effective management of the media presence and communication is important so that misinformation does not spread, so the farm remains secure, and staff feel safe. He added that if H5N1 arrives, the media interest in the early affected farm(s) will be nothing like we have seen so far.
- **Governance and Industry Agreement:**
 - **GIA Importance:** John explained the significance of the government-industry agreement (GIA) in facilitating a coordinated response and ensuring that industry representatives have a seat at the decision-making table.
 - **Industry Representation:** John highlighted the role of industry representatives in the governance group, ensuring that the interests and expertise of the industry are considered in the response efforts.
- **Surveillance and Testing:**
 - **Geospatial Mapping:** John described the use of geospatial mapping to identify and monitor farms, ensuring comprehensive surveillance of potentially affected areas.
 - **Increased Surveillance:** John explained the increased surveillance measures on properties connected to the infected farm, including monitoring of mortalities and production records.
 - **Lab Testing:** John detailed the extensive lab testing of dead birds and PCR surveys conducted to detect the presence of the virus and monitor its spread.

He said over 5600 samples were taken in the duration of the surveillance programme.

- **Legal Instruments:** John explained the various legal instruments, which were issued throughout the response to ensure compliance with biosecurity measures.
 - **Restricted Place Notices:** The farm had a restricted place notice applied to legally enforce biosecurity measures and control the movement of people and equipment on and off the farm.
 - **Notice of Directions:** John described the notice of directions issued to mandate specific actions, such as depopulation and cleaning, to ensure compliance with biosecurity protocols.
- **Cleaning and Disinfection:** John emphasised Hillgrove was a big farm, so had on average, sixty people on the farm at any given time to manage the depopulation and Cleaning/Disinfection processes.
 - **PPE:** Learnings were taken from MBovis with PPE and applied to the H7N6 outbreak.
 - **Health and Safety:** Any staff experiencing cold or flu symptoms were referred through to the Ministry of Health for testing.
 - **Risk Assessment:** John detailed the risk assessment process to identify high-risk areas and equipment that required thorough cleaning and disinfection.
 - **Disassembly of Equipment:** He explained the necessity of disassembling of specific equipment, to ensure all parts could be cleaned and disinfected, highlighting the complexity of the process.
 - **Dry and Wet Cleaning:** John described the dry and wet cleaning stages, including the use of hot water and specialized equipment to achieve effective disinfection.
- **Depopulation:**
 - Depopulation was undertaken quickly to minimise the risk of spread.
 - The methods used were a mix of neck dislocation and gassing. MPI Animal Welfare and an independent vet were on site to ensure this was done appropriately and to welfare code standards.
- **Waste Management:** John described the waste management process, including the use of vacuum equipment to capture water and sediment, chlorination, and discharge back onto the ranges.
- **Stand Down Period:** John mentioned the 28-day stand down period, which began on March 28th, during which access to the sheds was restricted, and the farm prepares for repopulation.
- **Compensation:** Tony Hailwood from MPI explained the compensation process, eligibility criteria, and the importance of verification and mitigation in determining compensation amounts. A clear breakdown of what farmers will need to have ready for

MPI assessment in the event of a suspected incursion will be provided to all industry members shortly.

- **Key Learnings:** John summarized key learnings from the response, including the importance of preparedness, strong relationships between regulators and industry, on-farm biosecurity, and mental health support for staff.
- **Future Preparedness:** John emphasized the need for ongoing preparedness, including the use of biosecurity plans, industry collaboration, and the availability of MPI support for farmers to develop and implement biosecurity measures.
- **Next phase for Industry:** The poultry industry is now switching back to its 'preparedness' phase, planning, and preparation. The learnings taken from this outbreak will be useful, and applied to future planning, workshop and approaches going forward.
- **Q&A Session:** The meeting concluded with a Q&A session, where participants asked questions about various aspects of the response, including wild bird surveillance, vaccination, and the use of lasers or netting to deter wild birds.

Follow-up tasks:

- **Compensation Process:** Clarify the compensation eligibility criteria and process for farmers affected by biosecurity responses, including the verification requirements. (Tony)
- **Operational Agreement:** Finalize the operational agreement discussions to define the cost-sharing between PIANZ and EPF, and the fiscal cap for biosecurity responses. (John, Egbert, Michael)
- **Biosecurity Plan Assistance:** Encourage farmers to utilize the free biosecurity plan assistance provided by MPI, and ensure they are aware of the support available. (Michael)
- **Training for Key Personnel:** Develop and implement a workshop training program for key personnel to enhance readiness for biosecurity responses. (John)
- **Disposal and C&D Costs:** Analyze and finalize the costs associated with disposal, cleaning, and disinfection (C&D) for future biosecurity responses. (John)
- **Mobile Gassing Units:** Work on agreements and logistics for the use of mobile containerized gassing units across the industry to ensure readiness for depopulation needs. (Michael)
- **Wild Bird Surveillance:** Continue and enhance wild bird surveillance around the Hillgrove farm and other areas to monitor for avian influenza. (Marina)