

An update on NAWAC's review of the poultry Codes of Welfare

The National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) has, under direction of the Association Minister for Agriculture (Animal Welfare) Andrew Hoggard, initiated a review of the poultry Codes of Welfare in two phases. Phase 1 responds to the imperative for national preparedness for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). With MPI and the Minister, we identify a potential conflict between biosecurity objectives and the current Layer Hens Code of Welfare, specifically Minimum Standard 6 on Stocking Density¹. Addressing that will be the focus of Phase 1 – now initiated and expected to proceed during the first half of 2026. Phase 2 will be the comprehensive review of the Layer Hens and Meat Chickens Codes of Welfare, which must also consider breeders, as well as ducks, turkeys and farmed game birds.

Let's focus on Phase 1, since that is NAWAC's current priority. Minimum Standard 6 in the Layer Hens Code establishes a differential stocking density for layers housed in barns with (9 birds/m²) or without (7 birds/m²) outdoor access. When there is HPAI circulating in wild birds, a sensible precaution is to keep birds indoors and protect them from contact with wild birds. Under the current policy settings, farmers of birds housed in barns with outdoor access would be required to lower the stocking density to achieve the biosecurity objective. Biosecurity, animal welfare and commercial objectives are not aligned, placing farmers in a difficult situation.

NAWAC is exploring options, engaging EPFNZ and other stakeholders, and will eventually consult before making our recommendation to the Minister. We want to ensure we understand the diversity of housing types in use in the layer industry today. We suspect that the Code's definition of colony cages, and barns with or without outdoor access may not fully capture that diversity. We have asked EPFNZ to assist us in understanding housing and facilities. EPFNZ has already provided us a scientific opinion on stocking density and animal welfare. This reflects NAWAC's commitment to engagement in our processes of reviewing Codes of Welfare. Anyone wanting to understand more about our process, including our commitment to transparency and good regulatory practices, can refer to our recently updated guidelines².

NAWAC recognises the challenging environment for poultry farmers, with HPAI preparedness a key strategic priority, retailer and consumer pressure in the table egg market, and challenges in the economic and operating environment. We appreciate the importance of strategic and technical engagement with EPFNZ and PIANZ to ensure animal welfare obligations are appropriately positioned within this mix, and are committed to keeping communication channels open. Your feedback is always welcome.

Matthew Stone
Chair, National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC)
25 November 2026

¹ <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/46036-Code-of-Welfare-Layer-hens>

² [National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee guidelines | NAWAC](#)