

AUSTRALIAN EGG
CORPORATION LIMITED



**AUSTRALIAN CHICKEN MEAT
FEDERATION INC.**

Telephone 02 9955 3224
Facsimile 02 9925 0627
Email acmf@chicken.org.au

Level 7, 122 Walker Street
North Sydney NSW 2060
PO Box 579
North Sydney NSW 2059

MEDIA RELEASE (and Fact Sheet)

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AUSTRALIAN POULTRY INDUSTRY AI TASK FORCE ADVISES ON AVIAN INFLUENZA OUTBREAK IN TURKEY

Australia's leading poultry veterinarian, Dr Peter Scott of the Australian Poultry Industry Avian Influenza Taskforce, has responded to rising levels of concern in Australia following reports by the Ministry for Health in Turkey confirming additional cases of human infection with the H5N1 avian influenza virus.

Dr Scott, who has advised Turkish authorities on AI issues, said that based on experiences in Asian outbreaks, we know that the greatest risk comes from prolonged close contact with infected poultry.

"Contact between people and poultry in Turkey is likely to have increased during the present cold weather, when it is customary among rural households to bring poultry into the homes," Dr Scott said.

"It could not be more different from Australia. These people are living in extremely close contact with poultry."

"It is clear that Australia's preparation for an outbreak of avian influenza among poultry is equal to the best in the world."

"All poultry products in Australia are farmed under strict quality and safety regulations, and no unprocessed poultry products are imported from overseas."

"The message from Turkey is that upgrading biosecurity practises – like we have done in Australia – is the best way to protect commercial poultry flocks against infection with avian influenza," Dr Scott added.

Dr Scott said the poultry industry had recently participated in Exercise Eleusis, a government simulation designed to test our preparedness for an avian influenza outbreak in a poultry flock.

Dr Scott is President of the Australian Veterinary Poultry Alliance and a Senior Research Fellow, Veterinary School, University of Melbourne. He is also spokesperson for the Australian Poultry AI Industry Taskforce, established by industry and Government to ensure the Australian public is well informed about avian influenza in poultry.

CONTACT

Australian Egg Corporation Limited:
Anthony Fisk, Communications Manager
T: 02 9409 6909
M: 0414 848 125

Anna Inglis
Wilkinson Media
T: 02 8969 6255
M: 0414 256 919

AVIAN INFLUENZA FACT SHEET

Fact one: Australia does not have the avian influenza in commercial poultry – and there is an extremely low risk of an outbreak.

Fact two: Australia's preparation for an outbreak of avian influenza among poultry is equal to the best in the world.

All poultry products in Australia are farmed under strict quality and safety regulations.

The Australian Government conducts constant surveillance on migrating birds entering the country – and Customs have a 100 per cent screening policy (either by detector dogs, x-ray or physical inspection) of all bags from high-risk countries.

Further, rapid response is assured under the internationally recognised AUSVETPLAN. Infected poultry flocks would be humanely destroyed to prevent the virus from spreading to other birds – in line with World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) recommendations.

Fact three: The risk of a person in Australia catching avian influenza from poultry products in the unlikely event of an outbreak is negligible.

In cases where people have become infected, it has been the result of intimate contact with sick birds. The reported human cases have been few, demonstrating that while the virus is very pathogenic for poultry, it lacks the ability to easily infect humans.

Put simply, the H5N1 virus continues to be very inefficient in transmission from poultry to humans. The World Health Organisation has indicated that there has been no reported cases of human infections resulting from the consumption of chicken meat or eggs.

Fact four: The Government and industry are on high alert. Late last year, industry and Governments across the country tested surveillance and response to a mock outbreak of avian influenza in poultry through Exercise Eleusis.

In any event, if a pathogenic avian influenza came here, it would be difficult to miss. Once domestic poultry are infected, there is increased mortalities and egg production drops.

Fact five: Australian eggs and chicken meat continues to be nutritious and high quality – enjoyed by millions around the world. They are particularly nutritious because of several factors specific to the modern poultry farming methods we employ in Australia.

These include:

- *Biosecurity:* Most commercial flocks are raised in enclosed housing to prevent contact with wild birds, particularly water fowl, that may carry disease. Strict biosecurity measures limit exposure from all sources. Domestic flocks raised on range or in open flight pens are similarly restricted from contact with water fowl or contaminated water sources;
- *Surveillance:* Commercial flocks are under continuous surveillance for the presence of any disease;
- *Intervention:* Avian influenza is a notifiable disease. If avian influenza is found, government veterinarians will move quickly to quarantine the farm and implement humane slaughter of the poultry; and
- *Inspection:* Animal health officials are working cooperatively with the poultry industry to conduct surveillance of the Australian poultry industry.

Dr Peter Scott, BSc, BVSc, PhD