



## **MEDIA RELEASE (and Fact Sheet)**

23 November 2005

### **AUSTRALIAN POULTRY INDUSTRY ANNOUNCES AVIAN INFLUENZA TASKFORCE**

The Australian poultry industry today announced the establishment of the *Australian Poultry Industry AI Taskforce*, a high level body to help coordinate Australia's response to community concerns about avian influenza.

The Taskforce will see industry working in close partnership with Government to monitor and rapidly respond to any possible threat and to ensure that Australian families have ready access to accurate and objective information.

Taskforce members include representatives from Australian Chicken Meat Federation, Australian Egg Corporation Limited, Department of Agriculture Fisheries & Forestry, Department of Health, Animal Health Australia and Food Standards Australia New Zealand.

The Taskforce, which has forged close links with colleagues in the US and UK, also includes experts from both industry and government, as well as Australia's leading poultry veterinarians, to ensure it has the best information and resources at its disposal.

"Australia does not have Avian Influenza in poultry flocks, and there is an extremely low risk of an outbreak," Dr Peter Scott, President of Australian Veterinary Poultry Alliance said today.

"But make no mistake - the key to control would be early detection and notification.

"Avian influenza has not infected humans in Europe because of the swift and effective responses of the European Agriculture Departments.

"In Australia, a farm would immediately be quarantined to control and eradicate any further spread in line with agreed national standards" Dr Scott said.

Industry spokespeople said that some valuable lessons learnt from other another emergency animal disease outbreak, Newcastle disease, will assist Government and industry to manage this latest threat.

"The Australian poultry industry is globally recognised for its stringent poultry production protocols, food safety and quality assurance programs," Dr Andreas Dubs, Executive Director of the Australian Chicken Meat Federation said.

"Australia's preparation for an outbreak is in line with world best practice," he said.

James Kellaway, Managing Director of the Australian Egg Corporation said that all eggs in Australia are produced under strict quality and safety regulations and guidelines.

"Australia currently exports eggs to Asian countries, because we are free of AI and recognised for our stringent food safety and quality assurance programs," said Mr Kellaway

The Australian poultry industry has taken comprehensive steps to minimise the risk of an outbreak, including:

- **Establishing strict biosecurity and safety programs.** The industry secures farms using strict biosecurity practices outlined in agreed codes of practice. Practical measures include the sanitation of water for drinking or cooling and ensuring no contact of wild waterfowl with poultry.
- **Ensuring strict compliance.** Both industry and government are in regular contact with poultry farmers to ensure compliance with biosecurity practices and safety standards;
- **Continuous surveillance.** The industry is constantly checking and testing flocks for possible outbreaks in partnership with government.

Industry spokespeople said that further lessons would be learnt through Exercise Eleusis, a strategic test of Australia's ability to respond to a major disease outbreak. The exercise will run over three days, from 29 November until 1 December.

All jurisdictions and major industry bodies will take part.

Australian consumers can get further information on Avian Influenza by visiting the Australian Government's new website: [www.avianinfluenza.com.au](http://www.avianinfluenza.com.au).

#### **MEDIA INTERVIEWS:**

Dr Peter Scott – President, Australian Veterinary Poultry Alliance  
Mr James Kellaway, Managing Director, Australian Egg Corporation Ltd  
Dr Andreas Dubs, Executive Director, Australian Chicken Meat Federation

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## **AVIAN INFLUENZA FACT SHEET**

Avian influenza and human pandemic influenza are different diseases.

Avian influenza in birds does not easily cause disease in humans.

There is only the most remote possibility of a human pandemic influenza developing in Australia as a result of migratory birds carrying avian influenza virus to Australia.

Surveillance continues to show H5N1 avian influenza virus is not present in Australia.

There is little risk of people in Australia being affected by avian influenza through normal contact with birds.

Aviary birds, caged birds and back yard birds are at little risk if simple measures such as preventing them mixing with wild birds and protecting their feed and water supply are adopted.

Australia is well prepared to deal with a case of avian influenza should it occur in poultry here.

Australia has a surveillance program to detect incursions of avian influenza.

A national training exercise at the end November 2005 will better prepare Australia to respond to a case of avian influenza.

Public alarm about avian influenza and confusion between avian influenza and human pandemic influenza may unnecessarily damage the poultry industry.

Eggs, meat and poultry products in Australia remain safe.