



## THE FALKLAND ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

### Environment Department

13 October 2022

## Avian Influenza / Bird Flu – Guidance Note Falkland Islands Yacht Club Members

Dear Falkland Islands Yacht Club Member,

This note is to take the opportunity to make you aware of Avian Influenza (bird flu) and for you to help us protect the Falkland Islands wildlife. There are no confirmed outbreaks of highly pathogenic bird flu in the Falkland Islands at this stage. However, we must be prepared for possible bird flu outbreaks due to bird migration in October and increased tourism activity.

The key message at this stage is the need for awareness and vigilance and good biosecurity protocols. As yacht club members you may visit remote sites and seabird colony's, these guidelines are to ensure that you remain safe and that risk of transferring bird flu virus from one seabird colony to another is minimised. Your support in active surveillance of the remote wildlife sites that you might visit and to report any unusual bird behaviours will also be useful.

Standard information that we are putting to the general public is below, with more specific advice for yacht club owners is attached.

### What is Bird Flu?

Its full title, Avian Influenza, is a virus which causes a disease in birds, including poultry and wild birds.

### What are the typical symptoms of Bird Flu?

The symptoms of bird flu in wild birds and poultry include:

- Sudden and rapid increase in the number of birds found dead in colonies or at sea
- Loss of coordination and balance including swimming abnormally
- Trembling head and body,
- Swollen head,
- Closed and excessively watery eyes,
- Lethargy and depression, unresponsiveness, lying down, drooping wings, dragging legs,
- Twisting of the head and neck,
- Respiratory distress such as gasping, nasal snicking sneezing, gurgling or rattling,
- Discoloured or loose watery droppings, bright green in some species.

### What is the Risk to the Falkland Islands?

Since the beginning of 2022, the increasing intensity of avian influenza outbreaks has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of seabirds in the Northern Hemisphere. Migrant birds returning from the north and mixing with wild birds in the Falkland Islands could transmit the virus. This coincides with the arrival of penguins and other flying seabirds for the breeding season. This means we must be prepared for a possible bird flu outbreaks ahead of the bird migration in October.

### How does Bird Flu spread?

It is spread from bird to bird through contact with infected saliva or droppings. Domestic poultry are susceptible to the virus. Organic material containing bird flu virus and moved from one site to another can spread bird flu. This can apply to people and their dirty boots.

### Can Bird Flu affect people?

A few strains of avian influenza have been recorded as infecting humans, and those which can transmit to humans don't do so easily. The risk to public health during an outbreak is usually extremely low. However, those working in close contact with birds, such as with domestic and commercial poultry or bird researchers, have a higher exposure to risk. Bird flu is not transmitted through properly cooked food. Cooked poultry and eggs are safe to eat in areas where outbreaks have occurred. To minimise the risk further, if you do see sick or dead birds, do not touch them, their droppings, or any water nearby.

### Advice for yachts

#### Bird strikes

It is recommended that birds that would normally be nursed and released following a bird strike/landing on deck are handled as little as possible and returned to the sea as soon as possible (rather than waiting for better weather or dusk etc). Wear PPE such as gloves and face masks if available. Practice enhanced biosecurity and personal hygiene.

#### Dead birds

Birds found dead in any number at sea or showing any symptoms of bird flu should NOT be kept for examination. Any dead birds you find on the yacht should be returned back into the sea immediately. Crew handling dead birds should wear gloves and if possible, a mask worn.

#### Going ashore

All yacht crew and visitors should note the following when planning a shore excursion:

- Boot washing is obligatory for all persons prior to going ashore and again when returning to the yacht.
- Boots must be cleaned to remove dirt and seeds and then dipped in an approved biocide (e.g. Virkon S or other suitable biocide) which is used according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- All biological material should be removed from boots and outer clothing and non-porous surfaces should be treated with Virkon S
- If you are taking visitors, guests or tourists on a visit then please ensure seeds and plant material is removed from clothing – Velcro is particularly important to clean and boot washing must be completed for all individuals prior to going ashore and on return to the yacht.
- Seawater deactivates the bird flu virus and you are encouraged to wash boots before climbing back to the inflatable yacht tender. This will wash off organic material from boots. A boot dip in Virkon is still required on return to the yacht.



### **Before landing/entering a wildlife site**

- Conduct an **observation period** as described below for at least 5 minutes prior to entering an area with high seabird densities.
- Although some mortality is natural, especially of juveniles, you should note if there are unusually high levels of mortality or birds exhibiting any of the common signs of bird flu.

### **How do I report? And who do I contact?**

If you see any unusual wild bird or domestic / commercial poultry behaviour report these using the reporting template on the FIG web-site and send to the FIG Veterinary Services at: email – [tross@naturalresources@gov.fk](mailto:tross@naturalresources@gov.fk) telephone: 27366 or out of hours 55366.

Please contact the Veterinary Service for further advice or information. FAQs can be found on the Dept of Agriculture and Environment Department website.

**Thank you for your support to help protect the Falklands Islands wild life and public health.**

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