

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 191

**Division/Agency:** Australian Chief Veterinary Office

**Topic:** On farm quarantine and restocking of chickens

**Proof Hansard page:** 52

**Senator HEFFERNAN asked:**

**CHAIR:** What is the restart period for the people of Young, for instance, where hundreds of thousands of chickens were knocked over? How long until they can restart their processes? And in the meantime, are they eligible for assistance?

**Mr Read:** That question is probably best directed to the Chief Veterinary Officer.

**CHAIR:** It begs the question, does it not?

**Mr Read:** Certainly the on-farm quarantine period and the restocking and so forth would be a question better put to the CVO.

**Mr Glyde:** It depends to what extent there are agreements in place for the various industries about this to encourage people to declare they have an issue, then there is funding provided for the affected farms. I do not think the right people are at the table.

**CHAIR:** I think it would inform the committee if you were to take it on notice.

**Dr Grimes:** It certainly has been a feature of the recent response.

**CHAIR:** If you could respond to that question on notice.

**Dr Grimes:** We would be happy to do that.

**Answer:**

The agreed Australian procedures (known as AUSVETPLAN) allow properties to be restocked 21 days after full depopulation and decontamination. Restocking is to be accompanied by enhanced surveillance and testing for a further 21 days to demonstrate the freedom from disease of the properties.

Depopulation and decontamination on the two properties was completed on 21 November 2013, this date marks the commencement of the 21 day periods identified above, and of the three month waiting period prescribed by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)

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before Australia can once again be recognised as a country free of highly pathogenic avian influenza.

The Emergency Animal Diseases Response Agreement (EADRA) provides for full compensation of owners affected by emergency animal diseases such as highly pathogenic avian influenza.

Owners are compensated for direct losses (i.e. the farm gate value of culled birds) on the principle that they should neither gain benefit nor suffer loss from reporting the outbreak. An independent Efficiency Advocate has reviewed the financial aspects of the response undertaken by the NSW government, including compensation arrangements, and concluded that they were proper and diligent. Consequential losses are not covered by the EADRA.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 192

**Division/Agency:** Australian Chief Veterinary Office

**Topic:** Avian Influenza in Young NSW

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator RHIANNON asked:**

1. The Minister recently stated in the media that the outbreak of avian influenza in flock of layer hens in Young, which resulted in the destruction of over 400,000 hens, was caused by free range hens.
  - a) Is there any scientific evidence exists that the outbreak of bird flu in Young was a result of direct contact between the hens and wildlife or aquatic birds that may have carried the virus?
2. Considering water on the Young farm in question is also collected from the poultry shed roofing was this water supply tested as a possible source of the virus?
  - a) If not, why not?
  - b) If yes, what were the results? May I have a copy?
3. Of the approximate 400,000 hens that were culled, how many of those birds were from the caged production facilities on the property?
4. What was the stocking density for hens in the free range production area of the Young farm?
5. If the density is over 1,500 per hectare and given the accepted public understanding that free-range densities are 1,500 per hectare, what considerations were given in the planning approval process to approve the stocking rates for hens as "free range"?
6. Did the Young farm have any current industry recognised quality assurance program in place, for example the Egg Corp Assured?
  - a) Is stocking density recognised as a factor of risk for presence and for the spread of avian influenza? May I have details please?
7. Was the Young farm labelled by Australian Egg Corporation (Egg Corp Assured) as a free range farm in any way?

**Answer:**

1a) There is no direct scientific evidence of a wild bird source for this particular outbreak in Young, NSW. However, anecdotal evidence implicating wild birds as the source of the virus in this and previous avian influenza outbreaks in Australia is strong. Wild bird surveillance conducted over many years in locations across Australia has demonstrated that aquatic birds carry a wide range of avian influenza viruses sub-clinically (without being affected). It is unlikely this new avian influenza outbreak could have come from another poultry establishment

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through movement of poultry or risk products given there had been no reports of disease elsewhere in the preceding months.

The property in Young was reported by NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI) as having a dam which had been observed to contain aquatic bird life. A report from them at the time stated: *It is likely that the infection entered into the free range flock first through direct or indirect contact with wild birds that accessed the free-range pens.*

2a) Reports from the NSW DPI indicate that no avian influenza sampling of water sources to the poultry establishment was undertaken. A report from NSW DPI at the time stated: *Contaminated water supplies is an unlikely source of entry; town water is piped directly into sheds for drinking; tank water is used through the cooling units – tanks are fully closed and in good condition.*

2b) Not applicable

3) The NSW DPI reported that approximately 435 000 poultry either died or were culled as a result of the avian influenza outbreak on the initial affected property. Of these, 270 000 were reported to have come from the caged component of the property.

4) We do not know the stocking density on the free range production area of the Young property. We have tried to source this information from our animal health colleagues within the NSW DPI and they also did not have access to such information.

5) The Australian Government Department of Agriculture is not involved and has no knowledge of planning approval processes for free range or other livestock production enterprises at local level. Planning approvals for poultry farms are the responsibility of local government.

6) A search of the Australian Egg Corporation website at [www.aecl.org/quality-assurance/Assured-businesses/](http://www.aecl.org/quality-assurance/Assured-businesses/) includes a listing of the company that owned the first affected premises as a company with Egg Corp Assured free range status.

6a) Rather than a risk of presence or spread of avian influenza, large populations of birds allow for the evolution of some virus subtypes to more highly pathogenic forms.

7) A search of the Australian Egg Corporation website at [www.aecl.org/quality-assurance/Assured-businesses/](http://www.aecl.org/quality-assurance/Assured-businesses/) includes a listing of the company that owned the first affected premises as a company with Egg Corp Assured free range status.