

# **Avian Influenza Workshop**

## **Pirvic Attwood Victoria**

### **4-5 March 2004**

#### *Executive Summary*

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is a major exotic disease of concern to Australia, where five outbreaks have occurred since 1976. All outbreaks have been associated with the introduction of virus by wild birds through contaminating the environment close to commercial operations. Major outbreaks have also occurred overseas, including human disease and death in some countries. On a number of occasions the presence of lower pathogenic strains has led to the later emergence of a highly pathogenic poultry strain that has required drastic action to achieve eradication. It is now recognized that better knowledge concerning the presence of avian influenza viruses in Australia's wild birds is required in order to better protect commercial bird enterprises.

On 4 – 5 March 2004, a workshop was held in Melbourne to consider Australia's strategy for AI. The Wildlife and Exotic Disease Preparedness Program (WEDPP), a program administered by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) funded the workshop hosted by the Department of Primary Industries Research, Victoria (PIRVic). Special emphasis was placed on considering the potential role of wildlife in introducing and/or disseminating AI virus.

More than thirty participants from a diverse range of organisations met to share their knowledge and to improve their understanding of the current situation. Expert speakers presented information on influenza in animals and humans.

Key conclusions were:

- A multi-step pathway is required for domestic flocks to become infected with HPAI virus. It is useful to think of 'compartments' with the virus flowing from migratory birds to waterfowl to commercial operations and then between establishments if circumstances allow;
- The risks for infection with AI viruses in the three separate biological units – wildlife/waterfowl, free-range and commercial/intensive – are different and each should be treated separately, especially in relation to surveillance;
- There is credible scientific evidence that Low Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (LPAI) H5 and H7 subtype viruses do mutate to HPAI, although the drivers for this transformation are not well understood. Contingency plans for HPAI need to be updated and developed for LPAI;
- Australian response measures will need to be kept under review in the light of changing international standards and other advice from the OIE;
- Close liaison between government departments of health, agriculture and the environment/conservation need to be maintained.

A number of specific recommendations, particularly in relation to surveillance and preparedness, were developed for consideration and action by Animal Health Committee and other stakeholders.

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