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Mark Ruskell MSP
Convener
Rural Affairs Committee

BY E-MAIL - rural.committee@parliament.scot

10 November 2026

Dear Mark,

I am writing to inform the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee that, following advice from Scotland's Chief Veterinary Officer and veterinary risk assessors, I have agreed to the introduction of an Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) across Scotland from 12 noon on 10 November 2026 in response to the increasing risk posed by highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI).

The decision follows a recent increase in detections of avian influenza in both wild birds and kept birds across Great Britain, alongside a rise in outbreaks across mainland Europe. Surveillance evidence indicates that the virus is circulating in wild bird populations across the UK and that migratory movements of waterfowl continue to present a significant increasing risk of disease incursion into domestic flocks.

This season, since October 2026, there have been six confirmed cases of avian influenza in kept birds in Great Britain, including two in Scotland: one involving a backyard flock on the Isle of Lewis and another at a commercial egg production unit in the Scottish Borders. There has also been a marked increase in positive findings in wild birds across Great Britain in recent weeks.

The AIPZ is a precautionary disease prevention measure designed to reduce the risk of infection spreading to poultry and other captive birds. Therefore, from 12 noon on 10 November, all bird keepers in Scotland will be legally required to implement enhanced biosecurity measures. These include reducing contact between captive and wild birds, maintaining strict cleansing and disinfection procedures, minimising unnecessary movements into bird housing areas, and taking steps to ensure feed and water sources are protected from contamination by wild birds. At this stage we are not introducing mandatory housing of birds as part of the Prevention Zone. This a matter for Scotland's Chief Veterinary Officer and she is keeping this position under review.

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While the current risk to public health remains very low, the consequences of avian influenza for bird keepers can be severe. Maintaining strong biosecurity remains the single most effective means of protecting flocks and reducing the likelihood of disease transmission. For that reason, the Scottish Government, working closely with industry partners and delivery bodies, will continue to emphasise the importance of vigilance and compliance with all biosecurity requirements.

The Scottish Government will continue to keep the situation under close review and will continue to work with veterinary experts, industry representatives, the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and counterparts across Great Britain to monitor developments and take any further action that may be required.

You may also wish to note that PHS have published advice around the free flu vaccine being offered to certain bird and poultry handlers and swine and cattle workers to protect them from getting ill with the flu virus and a social media toolkit with assets and captions is available to download.

Public Messaging

Keepers of poultry and other captive birds in Scotland are advised to remain vigilant for signs of the disease and are reminded that any suspicion of disease in Scotland must be reported immediately to the local Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) Field Services Office. **It is a legal requirement to do so.**

Public health advice remains that the risk to human health from the virus is very low. Food standards bodies advise that avian influenzas pose a very low food safety risk for UK consumers, and it does not affect the consumption of poultry products, including eggs.

Anyone who keeps birds, even a single bird, must register on the Scottish Kept Bird Register (SKBR). This is a legal requirement.

The public in Scotland are being advised that if they find at the same place at the same time:

- a single dead bird of prey, swan, goose, duck, gull or blackbird
- five or more dead wild birds of any other species

you should report them to GB dead wild bird monitoring scheme operated by Defra. Alternatively, you can phone the GB phone helpline: 03459 33 55 77. If you wish to submit a report without providing contact details, then the telephone helpline should be used. You must be 18 or over to use this service to report dead wild birds.

More information about avian influenza, including biosecurity guidance, is available at www.gov.scot/avianinfluenza.

I trust this update is helpful to the Committee and I will ensure Members are informed of any significant changes to the situation.

Yours sincerely,



JIM FAIRLIE

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