
Information regarding High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI), and guidelines for handling and disposing of seabirds and marine mammals by vessels in CCAMLR waters.

Avian influenza is a highly contagious viral disease that affects both domestic and wild birds, and marine mammals. There are many strains of this disease, and whilst some do not result in any clinical signs, the current strain circulating in wild marine mammal and bird populations worldwide is a high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) that can cause severe clinical signs and possible high mortality rates. HPAI is transmitted through the faeces and respiratory secretions, and because of its resistant nature it has the ability to survive for long periods when temperatures are low.

Importantly HPAI does have the ability to infect humans, although the current strain does not appear to do so frequently, therefore the risk is considered to be low to moderate. Whilst it is unlikely that vessels in CCAMLR will encounter wild marine mammals and birds with HPAI, a precautionary approach should be adopted as determining if any bird landed on a vessel as HPAI positive may not be possible. The following guidelines are considered best practice for the handling and disposal of birds landed or discovered on a vessel, and do not replace any requirements from national authorities or flag state:

1. For any **live birds and/or marine mammals** encountered, staff should wear the highest level of personal protective equipment (PPE) available on the vessel (e.g., gloves, N95 mask, overalls), and immediately release the animal over the side of the vessel.
2. For **dead birds and/or marine mammals**, dispose overboard by staff wearing PPE. Where vessels are required under their domestic legislation to retain carcasses, seek guidance from the relevant domestic authority on the correct storage and/or disposal method.
3. Personnel who have touched any animals, even if while wearing gloves, should wash hands with soap and water. External clothing used when handling animals should be sprayed with disinfectant.
4. Flush areas of the vessel where faeces or respiratory fluid may have splashed with abundant seawater.
5. Bycatch mitigation procedures should be prioritized to minimize albatross and petrel, and marine mammal mortality in fisheries and avoid contact with animals that might be infected with HPAI.

In addition, vessels may encounter species behaving strangely (e.g. swimming in circles) or observe signs on shore if they are passing colonies. Vessels should report any such behaviours to their relevant domestic authority as required, as many Antarctic species have never been exposed to HPAI before and may not show typical signs.

For additional information please visit the following sites:

World Organization for Animal Health: <https://www.woah.org/en/disease/avian-influenza/>

Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels: <https://www.acap.aq/resources/disease-threats/avian-flu>