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

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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 (H5N1) 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 may survive for long periods when temperatures are low.

Importantly HPAI has the ability to infect humans. Although the current strain does not appear to do so frequently, it is an evolving situation, therefore the risk of human-transmission is considered low to moderate. While the probability that vessels in CCAMLR will encounter wild marine mammals and birds with HPAI are unknown, a precautionary approach should be adopted because real time testing for HPAI may not be possible. The following guidelines are considered best practice for the handling and disposal of birds or mammals landed or discovered on a vessel, and do not supersede 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., disposable latex gloves (ideally two pairs, N95 mask, eye protection, overalls), and immediately release the animal over the side of the vessel. Non-porous clothing, such as rain gear, is recommended for outer layers.
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 while wearing gloves, should thoroughly 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 from a bucket or low-pressure hose to avoid aerosols. If available, treat the area with a biocide such as Virkon S.
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., displaying lethargy, lack of coordination, twitching, having tremors or seizures, droopy wings, diarrhea, conjunctivitis/red or crusty eyes,) 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. If safe to do so recording video footage or photos may be helpful.

For additional information please visit the following sites:

COMNAP Updates on HPAI: <https://www.comnap.aq/heightened-risk-of-hpai-in-antarctica>

Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels:

<https://www.acap.aq/resources/disease-threats/avian-flu>