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Self-declaration of the recovery of country freedom from Notifiable Avian Influenza in poultry by the United Kingdom

Declaration sent to the OIE on 13 September 2017 by Dr Nigel Gibbens MRCVS, OIE Delegate for the United Kingdom, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The highly pathogenic avian influenza situation in the United Kingdom

On the basis of the information provided to the World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS), the United Kingdom (UK) had been free from notifiable avian influenza viruses until 16 December 2016 when the Chief Veterinary Officer of the UK confirmed, through laboratory testing, a case of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N8 on a poultry farm in Louth, East Lindsey, Lincolnshire. In total the UK confirmed disease on 13 poultry premises (see the summary table and map provided below), out of which seven premises are commercial farms and six are small backyard flocks with less than 40 birds. The last case on a commercial farm was confirmed on 14 February 2017 and the last case on a backyard flock was confirmed on 4 June 2017. All cases were promptly reported to the OIE via WAHIS and disease control measures including disinfection on the last infected premises were completed on 14 June 2017. Surveillance has been completed in accordance with Articles 10.4.27 to 10.4.33 of the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code)* and no further cases of notifiable avian influenza were identified in the UK in poultry.

A full epidemiological enquiry was carried out and the reports published under the links below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reports-relating-to-recent-cases-of-avian-influenza-bird-flu>

Routine surveillance and awareness

Awareness of avian influenza across the UK is high and an effective active and passive surveillance system is in place to aid early detection of incursion of disease. Active serological surveillance in poultry has been carried out every year since 2003 as is also required by EU Directive 2005/94/EC¹. Sampling guidelines are laid down by Commission Decision 2010/367/EU² and summary reports for EU Member States are published on the website of the European Commission:

https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/animal-diseases/control-measures/avian-influenza_en

The UK passive surveillance in poultry consists of the reporting of suspected cases of disease to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) without delay. The reporting of suspicion of avian influenza is a legal requirement in the UK. All reports in Great Britain (GB) are investigated promptly by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) which is the government veterinary service in GB and the executive agency of Defra. Approximately 120 notifications were investigated by APHA so far in 2017. Suspected cases in Northern Ireland are investigated promptly by Department of Agriculture, Environment, and Rural Affairs (DAERA) staff.

Reports of wild bird mortalities and the investigation of dead wild birds belonging to a list of species identified as higher risk and/or found dead in high risk locations forms and additional part of the UK's AI surveillance.

Disease control measures in response to the outbreak

Disease control measures were implemented promptly, including the humane culling of birds on the affected premises, disposing of the carcasses in a biosecure manner via rendering and incineration, applying cleansing and disinfection measures, declaring protection and surveillance zones around all infected premises and conducting surveillance in the zones. The last disease control zone was lifted on 5 July and no movement restrictions are in place anywhere in the United Kingdom due to notifiable avian influenza since that date.

The UK has carried out a rapid and effective disease control programme in response to the H5N8 HPAI outbreaks, following its [Notifiable avian disease control strategy](#).

A rapid, effective and humane stamping out policy was implemented in line with Chapter 7.6. of the OIE *Terrestrial Code*. Carcasses of the approximately 124,000 poultry kept on the affected premises were disposed of in a biosecure manner, via rendering and incineration. All control measures were in accordance with the OIE *Terrestrial Code* and were carried out by APHA.

In addition to the measures reactive to the outbreak, proactive enhanced biosecurity measures were implemented across Great Britain from 6 December 2016 due to a heightened risk identified by the horizon scanning activities carried out by Defra/APHA. These measures, which included a requirement to house birds and minimise contact with the wild bird population were withdrawn gradually, once the risk level was assessed to have reduced, following the APHA veterinary risk assessment for AI. All the assessments are available under the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/animal-diseases-international-monitoring>

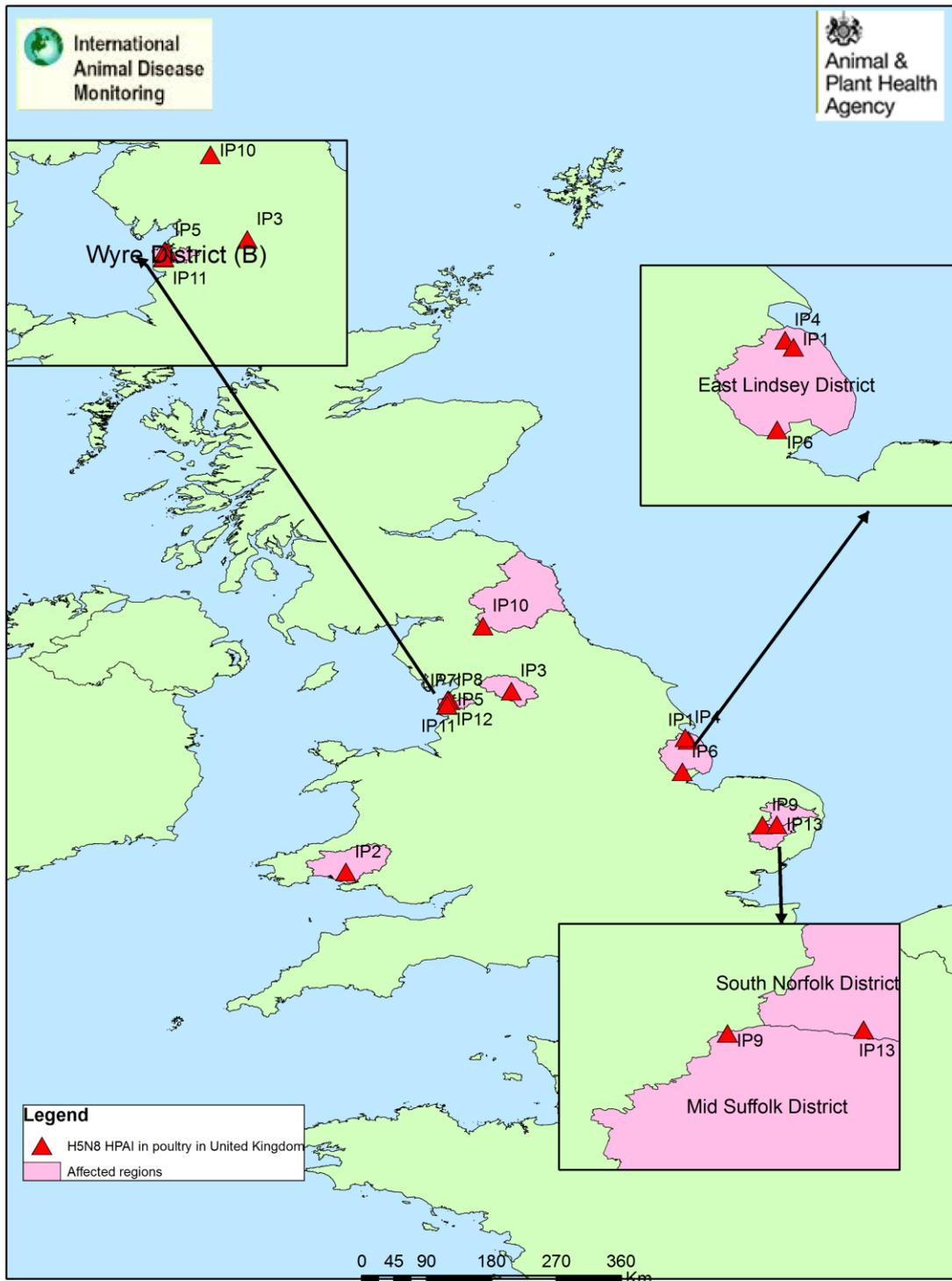
¹EU Directive 2005/94/EC:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32005L0094&from=en>

² Commission Decision 2010/367/EU:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:166:0022:0032:EN:PDF>

Summary table of HPAI H5N8 infected poultry premises in the UK 2016-17					
IP ref	Confirmed date	Location	Number and species of poultry on each infected premises	Premises type	OIE standard measures completed
1	16/12/2016	Louth, East Lindsey, Lincolnshire	2428 turkeys	Housed breeders	03/03/2017
2	03/01/2017	Meinciau, Carmarthenshire	25 chickens and ducks	backyard	16/01/2017
3	06/01/2017	Settle, Skipton, North Yorkshire	17 chickens and ducks	backyard	09/04/2017
4	16/01/2017	Louth, East Lindsey, Lincolnshire	6640 turkeys	Fattening turkeys	21/03/2017
5	24/01/2017	Pilling, Wyre, Lancashire	10,000 pheasants	Game bird rearing	13/04/2017
6	26/01/2017	Boston, Lincolnshire	19,000 turkeys	Fattening turkeys	13/04/2017
7	27/01/2017	Pilling, Wyre, Lancashire	1,000 pheasants	Pheasant breeding	31/01/2017
8	30/01/2017	Preesall, Wyre, Lancashire	62,600 game birds	Game bird breeding	13/04/2017
9	14/02/2017	Redgrave, mid-Suffolk, Suffolk	22,000 chickens	Housed broiler breeders	12/04/2017
10	23/02/2017	Haltwhistle, Northumberland	32 chickens	backyard	13/03/2017
11	04/05/2017	Thornton, Wyre, Lancashire	34 chickens	backyard	26/05/2017
12	06/05/2017	Thornton, Wyre, Lancashire	10 hens and ducks	backyard	26/05/2017
13	04/06/2017	Diss, South Norfolk, Norfolk	31 chickens and geese	backyard	14/06/2017



Date Prepared 07/07/2017

Actual Scale 1:7,000,000

Reports of H5N8 HPAI in poultry as of 7 July 2017. Areas from which exports to third countries were suspended are highlighted in pink. All disease restrictions now lifted.

The UK has adopted the EU approach to regionalisation to control HPAI in poultry, with rapid stamping out and application of the EU standard 3km Protection Zones and 10 km Surveillance Zones with detailed rules on movement controls in these zones. For countries outside of the EU that do not recognise the EU regionalisation concept, our approach to export certification and regionalisation beyond the EU rules was to extend the restriction on exports to the immediate

administrative area (districts) surrounding the infected premises in order to offer an easier way for the receiving countries of destination to identify the place of origin of the consignments.

Surveillance and epidemiology

Following the confirmation of each case, thorough surveillance was carried out by APHA in the control zones surrounding the infected premises. In the 3 km “Protection Zone”, a census of all poultry premises was taken, additional awareness raising done with all poultry keepers and commercial farms (more than 50 birds) were visited by an APHA veterinarian to carry out a clinical inspection. Premises keeping poultry that are sentinel species for HPAI H5N8, such as gallinaceous poultry were not tested if no clinical signs were observed.

Premises keeping anseriformes only were sampled and tested by APHA Weybridge to ensure any potential subclinical infections are ruled out with confidence. In the 10 km “Surveillance Zone”, all commercial premises keeping poultry were contacted to raise awareness and ensure prompt reporting of suspected cases.

Any premises which reported clinical suspicion were immediately followed up by official veterinarians and where disease could not be ruled out, samples taken and tested. All of the outbreaks were detected via this route, i.e. premises that tested positive for the presence of the virus were confirmed as infected premises.

With the exception of the cluster of game bird premises, linked by animal movements prior to serving movement restrictions, extensive epidemiological investigations did not detect the spread of infection to any further premises investigated in connection with the infected premises, either through contacts or as a result of proximity (Protection and Surveillance zones).

All the outbreaks, including the cluster of linked game bird premises in Lancashire, are considered to have arisen as independent events, resulting from direct or indirect primary incursions from wild birds.

As a result of the above surveillance in the restricted zones around the infected premises, no further cases of avian influenza were detected. The epidemiological investigations are complete and the results published in the epidemiological reports which can be accessed via the links provided above.

Laboratory analysis of the HPAI H5N8 virus

All laboratory testing were carried out by APHA Weybridge, the EU Reference Laboratory for avian influenza. Genetic analysis of the whole genome of H5N8 HPAI of all the GB viruses both poultry and wild birds reveals a very close relationship.

The virus genotype, determined by mapping all eight viral genes, indicates the GB strains are of a single genotype, but might marginally cluster differently to other European viruses, indicating the GB strains were likely to be a result of an independent introduction pathway.

All the GB viruses were assessed for zoonotic potential using previously applied genetic analyses and it can be concluded that all viruses are still essentially avian viruses, with no specific increased affinity for mammalian species including humans.

Conclusions

Considering that

- prior to the confirmation of the first case of HPAI H5N8 in the UK on 16 December 2016 the United Kingdom had been free from avian influenza in poultry;
- effective stamping out measures including a safe disposal of all carcasses and the application of effective cleansing and disinfection or measures to prevent the risk of further spread from infected premises were applied without delay following the confirmation of all cases;
- three months have elapsed as prescribed in Article 10.4.3 of the OIE *Terrestrial Code* since the end of the clean-up and disinfection operations;
- surveillance has been carried out in accordance with Articles 10.4.27 to 10.4.33 of the OIE *Terrestrial Code*,

The OIE Delegate of the United Kingdom declares that the country complies with the requirements for “a country free from infection with avian influenza viruses in poultry” as of 13 September 2017, in accordance with Article 10.4.3 of the OIE *Terrestrial Code* and the information provided in WAHIS.