

BIRD FLU WILDLIFE ADVISORY GROUP COMMUNIQUE

Bird Flu Wildlife Advisory Group Meeting 27 August 2026

The inaugural meeting of the Bird Flu Wildlife Advisory Group was held on 27 August 2026, bringing together representatives from wildlife rehabilitation organisations, veterinary and conservation sectors, local government and State Government agencies to discuss preparedness for highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5 bird flu) in Western Australia.

The meeting was chaired by David McFerran and attended by the Minister for the Environment, Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC, who acknowledged the important contribution of wildlife rehabilitators, volunteers and organisations in helping protect Western Australia's unique wildlife.

Current H5 bird flu situation

Members were advised that there had been 10 detections of H5 bird flu in individual migratory seabirds between June and July 2026, however there is currently no evidence of H5 bird flu circulating locally in Western Australian wildlife populations. Nationally, detections and local transmission remain concentrated in South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania, with surveillance and preparedness activities continuing across jurisdictions.

Bird Flu planning assumptions increasingly recognise that, should H5 bird flu establish in wildlife populations, long-term management and resilience-building measures are likely to be more effective than traditional biosecurity containment and eradication approaches.

The group noted the significant preparedness work already underway in Western Australia, including planning for priority species and sites, surveillance programs, wildlife vaccination and targeted grant programs to support wildlife sector readiness.

Wildlife sector roles and responsibilities

A key focus of discussion was the role of wildlife rehabilitators and wildlife response organisations during a potential H5 bird flu outbreak.

Members highlighted current uncertainty regarding responsibilities for responding to sick, injured or deceased birds, referral pathways, interactions with government agencies, and how routine wildlife rescue operations may be affected during different phases of an H5 bird flu response. Participants also noted that operational requirements are likely to differ between home-based rehabilitators, wildlife rehabilitation facilities and wildlife hospitals with veterinary capability.

The Advisory Group agreed that clarifying roles and responsibilities across preparedness, acute response and long-term management phases will be a priority area of work.

Communication and information sharing

Members identified a need for improved communication and information flow between government agencies and the wildlife sector.

Participants expressed support for clearer communication pathways, more timely responses to enquiries, improved feedback following reports to the Emergency Animal Disease hotline, and clearer information for local governments, wildlife organisations and volunteers.

The Advisory Group agreed that mapping current communication pathways and developing a more streamlined approach for information sharing will be a priority for future meetings.

Regional and remote preparedness

Representatives from regional and remote areas highlighted challenges associated with limited veterinary services, wildlife treatment capacity, carcass disposal options and volunteer resources.

Members emphasised that response arrangements must reflect the realities of regional Western Australia and recognise the significant differences between metropolitan and remote service delivery environments.

Vaccination opportunities

The Advisory Group received an update on work being undertaken to explore vaccination options for priority wildlife species and populations.

Members discussed current vaccination trials on black cockatoos at Perth Zoo and acknowledged that vaccination may provide an important conservation tool for selected species and populations. The group noted that vaccination is not a standalone solution and that effectiveness, feasibility, regulatory requirements and species-specific considerations will need to be carefully assessed.

Carcass management and operational preparedness

Members discussed the importance of practical guidance to support operational decision-making, including biosecurity requirements, euthanasia protocols, carcass management, disposal arrangements and responses to mass mortality events.

The group highlighted the need for clear operational guidance for wildlife responders, land managers and local governments.

Agreed priorities

The following priorities were agreed, with the Advisory Group to work with Government to:

- clarify wildlife sector roles and responsibilities during different response phases
- improve communication pathways and stakeholder engagement
- develop consistent public and wildlife rehabilitator messaging and guidance materials
- examine regional response capability and veterinary service gaps including exploring mobile triage and regional support options
- clarify vaccination eligibility and approval processes
- consider practical response exercises and scenario planning
- review biosecurity and carcass management arrangements
- examine approaches adopted in other Australian jurisdictions.

Looking ahead

Members commended the State Government for establishing the Bird Flu Wildlife Advisory Group and endorsed regular meetings to maintain preparedness and strengthen collaboration between government agencies and the wildlife sector.

There was broad agreement that Western Australia is currently well placed from a preparedness perspective, while recognising that further work is required to improve role clarity, communication arrangements and regional response capability before any further H5 bird flu incursion occurs in the State.

The next meeting of the Bird Flu Wildlife Advisory Group is scheduled for 24 September 2026.