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Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Llyr Gruffydd MS
Chair
Climate Change, Environment & Rural Infrastructure Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

04 October 2022

Dear Llyr,

Thank you for your letter of 9 August seeking an update on action being taken by Welsh Government to address the current outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in Wales.

Wales' population of seabirds are of national and international importance. I am aware of the unprecedented increase of HPAI outbreaks observed in wild bird populations this year, and the associated mass mortalities observed in many seabird species of conservational importance in the UK, Europe and North America. As noted in your letter, the confirmed outbreak of HPAI in northern gannets on Grassholm is of particular concern to us and demonstrates that the risk of this disease impacting Wales' seabird colonies remains.

In response to the positive HPAI tests on Grassholm, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have suspended all seabird ringing and seabird nest recording in Wales, effective from 5 August until further notice. The suspension extends to ringing and nest recording of non-seabirds in seabird colonies. Minimising disturbance to the birds through preventing unnecessary interaction between people and wild birds will improve their resilience and ability to survive the outbreak.

In June, recognising the risks to Welsh seabird colonies, my officials established a stakeholder working group, including NRW, Public Health Wales, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, British Trust for Ornithology, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Wildlife Trusts Wales and reserve wardens, to share knowledge and expertise, monitor the situation and develop evidence-based actions in response to the threat that HPAI presents to our wild bird populations. Actions taken have included working to raise public awareness of this HPAI through promoting and issuing advice to the public in relation to any findings of dead seabirds (<https://gov.wales/report-and-dispose-dead-birds>).

Officials are also working closely with other UK Governments, including the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) whose wild bird surveillance system provides strategic testing of suspected HPAI cases. The migratory nature and potential range of our seabirds makes collaboration and effective monitoring across administrations critical to our ability to track and understand the spread of the virus.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

On the 31 August, Welsh Government, in parallel with Defra, published a 'Mitigation Strategy for Avian Influenza in Wild Birds in England and Wales'

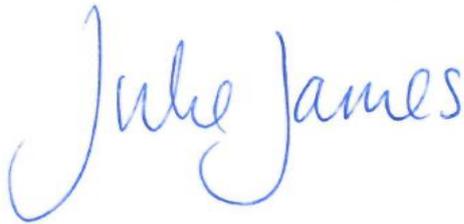
(<https://gov.wales/mitigation-strategy-avian-influenza-wild-birds-england-and-wales>).

This Strategy sets out guidance on existing policies and approaches across England and Wales, and will support stakeholder understanding of these, by providing clear scenarios related to wild birds. This will enable conservation charities and land managers to take an effective and consistent response to avian influenza in wild birds.

The likelihood that avian flu could cause similar mass mortalities in seabirds in Wales, as seen in Scotland and England, unfortunately, remains heightened. There is also the possibility that avian flu could cause mass mortalities in wildfowl and wader populations come autumn and winter.

In the longer term, I am committed to delivering a Welsh Seabird Conservation Strategy which aims to identify high-level actions to support the conservation of seabirds in Wales. Officials are working closely with stakeholders to develop actions underpinned by evidence assessing the vulnerability of seabird species to pressures and threats.

Yours sincerely



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