



Intersessional Group (IG) for the further development of ACAP's Conservation Guidelines for working with albatrosses and petrels during the ongoing high pathogenicity H5Nx avian influenza panzootic

Summary (2026)

The arrival of high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 (hereafter HPAI) in Australia in June 2026¹ and in New Zealand in July 2026² represents a critical concern for albatross and petrel populations. HPAI has caused significant wildlife mortality worldwide, with seabirds standing out as the most heavily impacted group. To date, HPAI has been confirmed in 24 species of procellariiforms, and the number continues to increase on a regular basis³. Among the most significant impacts on ACAP-listed albatrosses and petrels are the mortality of tens of thousands of Black-browed Albatrosses *Thalassarche melanophris* in the South Atlantic Ocean⁴ and hundreds of Wandering Albatrosses *Diomedea exulans* in the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans^{5,6}.

Oceania is the world's largest hotspot of seabird diversity⁷, and comprises a population exceeding 500,000 breeding pairs across 18 of the 31 ACAP-listed species⁸. Of these, 10 species breed exclusively in Oceania: Antipodean Albatross *Diomedea antipodensis*, Southern Royal Albatross *Diomedea epomophora*, Buller's Albatross *Thalassarche bulleri*, Shy Albatross *Thalassarche cauta*, Chatham Albatross *Thalassarche eremita*, Campbell Albatross *Thalassarche impavida*, Salvin's Albatross *Thalassarche salvini*, White-capped Albatross *Thalassarche steadi*, Black Petrel *Procellaria parkinsoni*, and Westland Petrel *Procellaria westlandica*. Thus, the recent arrival of HPAI in Australia and New Zealand poses a major threat to albatross and petrel populations.

In this context, **the ACAP Intersessional Group on High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza highlights the importance of continued monitoring efforts of albatross and petrel populations in Oceania**, especially at sub-Antarctic islands at this time. In particular, we emphasise the need to improve our understanding of the impacts of HPAI on albatrosses and petrels through:

- (i) Demographic monitoring: population size, breeding participation and success, direct and indirect mortality estimates, capture-recapture survival estimates, etc.
- (ii) HPAI surveillance and epidemiological research: pathological investigation and virological testing of carcasses and symptomatic birds, serological and virological testing of apparently healthy individuals, environmental sampling, etc.
- (iii) Ecological drivers and effects of HPAI: changes in animal movement and behaviour, coinfection of HPAI with other pathogens and existing conservation threats, etc.

The knowledge generated through continued monitoring, research and reporting during potential HPAI outbreaks in Oceania will be invaluable for informing long-term conservation management and responses to HPAI outbreaks globally. Where appropriate and feasible, open and timely sharing of monitoring, surveillance and epidemiological data through relevant national and international networks is also encouraged, as this can support collaborative analyses, improve understanding of HPAI impacts and transmission dynamics, and strengthen evidence-based conservation responses across regions in real time.

¹ Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/campaigns/birdflu>

² Ministry of Primary Industries <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/biosecurity/pest-and-disease-threats-to-new-zealand/animal-disease-threats-to-new-zealand/h5-bird-flu/about-bird-flu-and-the-risk-to-nz>

³ Vanstreels et al. 2024 <https://zenodo.org/records/22276493>

⁴ Kuepfer & Stanworth 2024 <https://falklandsconservation.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/20240412.pdf>

⁵ Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment https://www.dffe.gov.za/mediarelease/h5n1_marionisland

⁶ Bennison et al. 2024 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00063657.2024.2396563>

⁷ Jenkins & Van Houtan 2016 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2016.10.005>

⁸ Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels <https://www.acap.aq/resources/acap-species>