



Paramyxovirus infection in pigeons: Victoria situation report

Date: 13 October 2011 Time: 1400 hrs

Issued by the Victorian Department of Primary Industries for the pigeon and related industries.

Important – Ban of all pigeon gatherings in Victoria

The Minister for Agriculture and Food Security has issued an Order prohibiting the holding of shows, exhibitions, markets, sales, auctions, tossing and racing pigeons anywhere in the State of Victoria. The ban should assist the final containment of the disease and is made with the support of the Victorian pigeon industry.

Loft flying has been assessed as a low risk activity for racing birds and may continue. Where several lofts are within a small area, owners are encouraged to coordinate their loft flying to minimise the mixing of their birds. Tired or disorientated birds should be prevented from entering other lofts should they land there.

This ban will be in effect for up to **90 days**. A copy of the Order is available on the DPI website.

Situation Analysis

- Pigeon Paramyxovirus Type 1 (PMV1) has been confirmed in feral pigeons (*Columba livia*) in three locations that are in close proximity to a number of known affected properties; it is considered most likely that the source of infection from infection in hobby pigeons.
- No poultry have tested positive to PMV1.
- There are now 44 properties in Victoria where the virus has been confirmed in pigeons that are sick or have died, located around Shepparton and Melbourne suburbs. Nine have been resolved leaving 35 infected properties.
- The last confirmed case of PMV1 occurred on 10th October. New reports of sickness and death in pigeons received by DPI and are still being investigated. If infection is found on a property it is quarantined; surviving birds at the end of the quarantine period may be tested before the quarantine is released. Birds on infected properties are not required to be killed by DPI.
- Infection spreads by movement of pigeons between properties including via sales, races, shows and other events; to stop the disease spread, these activities must stop.
- There is no safety or efficacy data available for the use of Newcastle disease vaccine in pigeons; vaccination is not the silver bullet - stopping the mixing of pigeons will be what contains this outbreak.

Background

- Since late August 2011, a paramyxovirus not previously reported in Australia has been detected in hobby pigeons on a number of properties in Victoria causing high mortality associated with lethargy, gastrointestinal and neurological signs.
- The virus was confirmed as PMV1 by the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL).

Actions taken in Victoria

- The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) is restricting pigeon movements by banning pigeon shows, exhibitions, markets, sales, auctions, tossing and racing. The ban has been introduced given the current disease situation and at the request of racing, show and fancy

associations. Loft-flying is excluded, it poses a low risk as birds do not mix with other lofts to the extent apparently required to spread disease.

- The Incident Management Team (IMT) established at Attwood by the DPI has been operating now for the past month and continues with its primary objective of identifying the extent of the disease and limiting its spread where possible. DPI will continue to investigate reports of significant unexpected die offs of feral pigeons or other birds.
 - Investigations are ongoing by DPI to determine possible links between known infected properties and to detect other affected properties. Further movements of birds from these properties are being prevented by quarantine to limit the chances of further spread.
 - Movement of infected birds is the principal method by which the disease is spreading. Investigations to date suggest that other forms of spread, for example by feed, are not significant. Irresponsible movement of pigeons risks introducing the disease to new properties where it will kill the majority or all of the pigeons.
 - DPI has reviewed the evidence available regarding vaccination - there is no registered vaccine for pigeons in Victoria, nor any safety or efficacy data for the use of Newcastle Disease vaccine off-label by veterinarians. These and other issues are considered in information available on the DPI website. It is of paramount importance vaccinated pigeons are healthy and live within healthy flocks, that the vaccine is used in close consultation with a veterinarian, and that owners ensure high standards of biosecurity to limit the chance of introducing infection into their flocks. Flocks not introducing pigeons nor allowing contact with other pigeons would have no need for vaccination.
 - Owners have reported some birds showing mild sickness after vaccination but there have been no reported deaths.
 - An extensive media and communications effort has been undertaken to inform veterinarians, industry and the public about the incident, to increase awareness and provide information about what to look out for, who to contact and measures that can be undertaken to limit the risk to their birds. Information is being provided by media release, direct contact, the DPI website and email.
- **Suspected cases of paramyxovirus infection should be reported to the DPI by phoning 136 186 during business hours or 1800 675 888 after hours and on weekends.**

The next industry sitrep will be provided on Tuesday 18 October 2011. Further information on Paramyxovirus infection in pigeons can be obtained from www.dpi.vic.gov.au

Dr Andrew Cameron
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Attachments:
Map of the current affected properties



