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To the editor

16 February 2017

Dear Sir/Madam

Last week, the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity announced that the Avian Influenza Prevention Zone covering all of Scotland should be renewed beyond its current expiry date of 28 February 2017 to last until at least the end of April, but with important changes. This decision followed consultation with representatives of Scotland's vital poultry industry and retailers, and was informed by my advice in light of the continued spread of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N8 across Europe, including nine confirmed cases in England and Wales as well as numerous findings in wild birds all over the UK. This H5N8 strain has proven to be highly virulent and caused significant mortalities in both wild and captive birds. It is therefore in the interests of all bird keepers, whatever their size, to take steps to protect their flocks.

Within the current zone, which remains in force until 28 February, all poultry and captive birds must be either kept indoors or otherwise separated from wild birds. The Scottish Government has produced a poster providing practical tips on how keepers can achieve this, which is available via our webpage www.gov.scot/avianinfluenza.

From 28 February the requirements of the zone will change, meaning that keepers in Scotland can let their birds out provided that they have enhanced biosecurity measures in place. Keepers will still have the option to house their birds – for many this will continue to be the easiest way to protect them from AI, but they will lose free range status under EU law by continuing to house.


If keepers do intend to release their birds from 28 February then there are steps that they should begin taking **now** in order to make their range **unattractive to wild birds** for the remaining days in February – it is vital that these activities start as soon as possible:

- **Make your birds' range unattractive to wild birds:**
 - Net ponds and drain waterlogged areas of land. If this isn't possible, then can you fence them off from your birds so they cannot access it whilst ranging, or use an alternative paddock that doesn't have access to water
 - Remove any feeders and water stations from the range, or ensure that they are covered to sufficiently restrict access by wild birds
 - Consider using decoy predators or other livestock (such as sheep or cattle) on the range, or allowing dogs to accompany you on foot patrols around the range. You could also consider bird scarers if their use is appropriate for the area (see [NFU Code of Practice](#) on bird scarers)
 - Consider increasing the number of shelters on the range area



If keepers have any concerns about their biosecurity arrangements, or their birds' welfare, then I would urge them to discuss these with their private vet in the first instance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Sheila Voas', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

SHEILA VOAS
CHIEF VETERINARY OFFICER (SCOTLAND)