



3 July 2026

Joint statement from conservation and environment groups on the outbreak of H5N1 bird flu in Australia

The Australian Government has announced that a migratory Brown Skua found in southwest Western Australia has returned a positive result for the deadly H5N1 bird flu. There are now five confirmed cases, four in WA and one confirmed case of a Giant Petrel found in the Fleurieu Peninsula in South Australia.

While there have been no confirmed cases in Victoria, a Giant Petrel was found dying on a Victorian beach on Saturday June 27. A member of the public reported the bird to the disease hotline, but it was left dying on a beach overnight after the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) failed to immediately respond to the report. The bird has tested negative to the virus, but we are extremely concerned the incident raises questions about the Victorian government's preparedness to respond to the crisis should H5N1 hit the state.

Large-scale outbreaks of H5 bird flu (H5N1) have killed millions of wild birds and tens of thousands of mammals around the world. Already vulnerable species have been pushed closer to extinction. Until now, Australia and New Zealand have remained free of the virus.

The threat H5 bird flu poses to native birdlife is terrifying. We could see whole populations of native bird species, like black swans which are highly susceptible, wiped out. [According to experts](#), other species, including endangered marine mammals like elephant seals, are also at risk.

This could become a genuine wildlife emergency, and it must be treated with emergency funding and immediate action to protect native bird species and their habitat. The best thing the Victorian state government can do now is strengthen the resilience of native species before outbreaks occur.

Healthy habitats support stronger bird populations. Restored wetlands, protected breeding sites and well-connected landscapes give birds the best possible chance to withstand disease outbreaks and recover when disaster strikes.

This potential emergency raises serious concerns about whether the Victorian Government is adequately prepared to respond, following significant cuts to environmental agencies and frontline staff at Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), the Office of the Conservation Regulator and Parks Victoria, and planned cuts to Zoos Victoria and the Australian Wildlife Centre.

DEECA, as the lead agency, has established an Incident Management Team (IMT) to coordinate Victoria's preparedness and response, with a focus on scenario planning, public awareness and some coordination and guidelines on dealing detection wildlife potentially affected, but this falls far short of what is required to address the impending crisis.

It is now critical that all stops are pulled out to bolster the resilience of native bird populations by urgently:

- Implementing a dedicated bird flu response team to undertake coordinated surveillance, monitoring and early detection across Victoria, with the capacity to respond rapidly to outbreaks and manage this emergency at the scale it demands.
- Removing all avoidable threats (e.g. cancelling current and future duck and quail hunting seasons in Victoria, halting any habitat destruction such as the Nyah Vinifera SDLAM projects, etc.).
- Ensuring viable water breeding events (e.g. delivering prolonged environmental river flow events this spring and next), and restoring wetlands by recovering environmental water, progressing constraints relaxation in river systems like the Murray, and expediting purchase and protection of wetlands.
- Reversing the planned cuts to Zoos Victoria Staff, and previous cuts to the Office of Conservation regulators, as well as restoring funding to key government agencies and departments, like Parks Victoria and the biosecurity team so that the state government is prepared to address this crisis when it hits.
- Pausing ATCW (Authority to Control Wildlife) permits, particularly for susceptible species such as Black Swans.
- Ramping up funding and efforts to tackle invasive species and reduce predation pressure.
- Protecting and restoring critical bird habitats, like Western Port Bay which is home to 65% of Victoria's threatened bird species.

Introduction of the virus will be catastrophic for waterbirds and other wildlife populations – and we are calling on the Victorian state government to take immediate action to prepare for a likely outbreak in Victoria, to safeguard Victoria's wild bird populations, already under threat from extinction.

Signed,

Environment Victoria
Victorian National Parks Association
Murray Darling Conservation Alliance
BirdLife Australia
Marine Mammal Foundation
Dolphin Research Centre