

# Poultry farmers urged to watch out for avian flu

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The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries have called on poultry farmers in coastal areas to be on high alert and improve their biosecurity amid fears of a fresh outbreak of the deadly avian flu.

Last week, the Department of Environmental Affairs confirmed the spread of H5N8 avian flu to African penguins along the coast of the Western Cape, particularly Boulders Beach. There are fears this could affect poultry farms in coastal areas.



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The poultry industry had largely managed to contain the disease, first detected in 2017, with no new outbreaks reported on farms in recent months.

The South African Poultry Association told MPs recently the culling of birds to contain the outbreak of avian flu had resulted in a loss of R954m.

## Little can be done to control infection in wild birds

Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries spokeswoman Bomikazi Molapo said at the weekend the department had received reports of avian flu in penguins and other wild water birds.

"This is of concern as these serve as reservoirs for the virus over seasons. There is very little that can be done to control the infection in wild birds - the only thing is for the poultry farmers in the coastal areas to be on alert and improve their biosecurity in order to prevent infection from entering the poultry houses and causing massive losses in their chickens," said Molapo.

## African penguins an endangered species

Parliament's portfolio committee on agriculture also expressed concern about the spread of avian flu to penguins. "This concerns the committee as the [African] penguins are an endangered species," said the committee's chairwoman, Rosina Semanya.

"The committee further awaits a response from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries following a statement by an avian veterinarian alleging that avian flu and listeriosis may be attributed to the low quality of grain that is being fed to birds, which affects their immune system."

Semenya said the department must continue to monitor bird populations and the testing of sick birds and carcasses must be done regularly as bird colonies were at risk.

"The public are warned that cross-contamination occurs when people are not in the habit of disinfecting or washing their hands after touching raw meat and are urged not to touch dead birds. The public must also be vigilant and report the deaths of groups of wild birds to the nearest state veterinarian."

In a statement, the Department of Environmental Affairs said it was managing seabird colonies and stringent biosecurity measures were being implemented at seabird rehabilitation centres.

*Source: Business Day*

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