

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

**Green Party MEP
for the South East of England**

Commissioner Kyprianou
Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection
European Commission
Rue de la Loi, 200
Bruxelles, 1049

19th February 2007

Dear Commissioner Kyprianou,

URGENT: DEFRA's handling of the Avian Flu outbreak.

I am writing to express my serious concern over DEFRA's handling of the Avian Flu outbreak at the Bernard Matthews farm in Suffolk, UK.

Please find below an article confirming that DEFRA is surveillance testing neither live wild birds nor commercial poultry, as they are specifically required to do under the EU directive.

I would be grateful if you could inform me urgently of which steps the Commission is taking to address this breach, and to ensure the immediate containment of the deadly H5N1 virus.

I look forward to your response,

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Caroline Lucas
Green Party MEP for South East England

Defra investigators fails to test live wild birds for flu despite risk of infection

Gulls feeding on waste meat at infected farm could spread H5N1 to other poultry farms, officials admit

By Geoffrey Lean

Published: 18 February 2007

Bird flu investigators have failed to perform tests to see if gulls and other wild birds are spreading the deadly H5N1 virus from the stricken Bernard Matthews farm in Suffolk, although they accept that it is a threat.

Officials admitted late last week that they have not tested a live wild bird in Britain since the outbreak began three weeks ago. This appears to contradict repeated assurances from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) that "wild bird surveillance" in the area has been "enhanced".

Opposition environment spokesmen yesterday described the revelation as "staggering" and astonishing, and undertook immediately to raise it with David Miliband, the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Defra investigators published an official report on Friday, showing that gulls specifically flocked to the Bernard Matthews site to gorge themselves on waste trimmings of meat in open-topped bins outside the processing plant, as revealed by this newspaper last Sunday.

The report said they were "clearly attracted to the site" by the bins and added that they were "observed feeding on these trimmings and taking them away from the processing plant and into the area containing the finishing units" where live turkeys are raised. It suggests that this is one of the ways in which H5N1 could have infected the poultry.

Fred Landeg, the Government's deputy chief vet, admitted at the launch of the report that there was a "risk" that gulls could have picked up the virus from infected meat in a bin, and be spreading it around the countryside. He added that this was a reason "why we are carrying out additional surveillance of wild birds".

Another official report, published at the same time, said the surveillance programme "has been enhanced in the locality of the Suffolk outbreak". And Defra added: "Extensive surveillance from the infected premises and the surrounding area has not isolated any trace of H5N1 in wild birds."

Yet when asked for details by The Independent on Sunday, Defra admitted: "There is no live bird sampling in Suffolk." The nearest was being done at Welney in Norfolk, some 50 miles away.

Testing live birds is important, experts agree, because many carry the virus without it killing them, and it is those individuals that are most likely to spread it around the country or to other poultry farms.

In all, investigators have only tested some 93 dead wild birds from the area since the beginning of the month; so far none has been found to be infected.

Yesterday, Peter Ainsworth, the Tory shadow environment secretary, said: "I am absolutely amazed by this. It shows staggering complacency, and I will personally raise it with Mr Miliband as soon as possible."

And Chris Huhne, the Liberal Democrat environment spokesman, added: "It is astonishing. Defra needs to take the threat of wild birds spreading this disease much more seriously."

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