

Minister for Primary Industries and Water

Minister for Veterans' Affairs

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Dr Rosalie Woodruff

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2 SEP 2026

Dear Dr Woodruff

Thank you for the below constituent question you asked in Parliament on 13 August 2026.

'Last week, Bruny Island residents were shocked to find a dead Australian fur seal on Little Nebraska Beach. Community members observed a patch of blood and small round hole in the skull and are concerned the seal may not have died from natural causes. Out of concern for the reason of death, and also mindful of H5N1 risks, they reported the seal death to the NRE. No follow-up has been given to residents. Minister, can you confirm whether NRE staff visited the corpse, whether an autopsy was done to assess whether it was bird flu or bullet wounds that contributed to the fur seal's death, and whether a response has or will be given shortly to residents, please?'

I can confirm that a report was received and assessed through the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE Tasmania) and was triage by the Department's Incident Management Team.

I am advised that the photographs provided by the reporter were reviewed by the departmental veterinarian and identified the animal as an Australian fur seal in an advanced state of decomposition. Based on that assessment, the carcass was considered unsuitable for either viable sample collection or a post-mortem examination. Meaningful pathology and diagnostic testing are generally only possible on relatively fresh carcasses, typically within approximately 48 hours of death. As a result, an autopsy was not undertaken, and it was not possible to determine the cause of death from the available remains.

At the time of assessment, the likelihood that the animal had died from H5 avian influenza was considered very low. The carcass was in southern Tasmania, while all confirmed cases of H5 avian influenza in Tasmania at that time had occurred in the North West of the state. There was also no evidence of H5 avian influenza infection in mammals anywhere in Australia at that time.

Consistent with standard practice for a carcass in this condition, the seal was left in situ to decompose naturally.

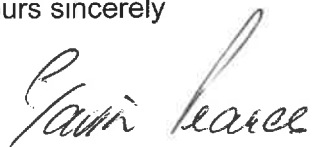
Reports of deceased fur seals on Tasmanian beaches are relatively common, reflecting the large populations of Australian fur seals and long-nosed fur seals that breed and aggregate around Tasmania. In most cases, deaths are attributable to natural causes.

In relation to communication with residents, the Department is currently receiving a high volume of wildlife mortality reports through the EAD Hotline. Generally, direct follow-up is provided where H5 avian influenza is confirmed or where specific public, stakeholder or community risks have been identified. That was not the case in this instance.

The Department continues to adapt its surveillance, investigation and response procedures as the H5 avian influenza situation evolves, ensuring that resources are directed according to the best available evidence and the current risk profile.

Thank you once again for raising this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gavin Pearce". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'G'.

Hon Gavin Pearce MP
Minister for Primary Industries and Water