

Minister for Primary Industries and Water
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Ms Jen Butler MP
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3 SEP 2026

Dear Ms Butler

Thank you for the below constituent question you asked in Parliament on 12 August 2026.

'My question is from a Bridgewater constituent. We acknowledge Tasmania's proud pigeon fancier racing fraternity and the long tradition of Bass Strait racing. However, racing pigeons released in Victoria and South Australia regularly fly across Bass Strait back to lofts in Tasmania. Biosecurity authorities acknowledge pigeons can become infected with avian influenza (bird flu) and may act as carriers of the virus. Given Bass Strait racing is still taking place, has the government undertaken a specific risk assessment of Bass Strait pigeon racing, and what measures are in place to prevent avian influenza being inadvertently brought into Tasmania?'

The Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE Tasmania) completed a risk assessment for racing pigeons travelling between Victoria and Tasmania during the 2026 racing season on 11 August 2026. This assessment was undertaken in response to the bird flu situation in Victoria and the ongoing movement of racing pigeons across Bass Strait.

I am advised that the risk assessment determined the risk of introducing H5 avian influenza into Tasmania via interstate racing pigeons before the end of October 2026 was negligible. While pigeons are susceptible to H5 avian influenza, I am advised they are poor hosts, with experimental studies showing low susceptibility, low virus shedding and no demonstrated transmission to in-contact pigeons or chickens.

Available evidence also indicates that racing pigeons have limited opportunities for exposure to infected birds while in Victoria as they remain confined both during transport and while in Victoria until released for racing and there is reportedly no contact with Victorian racing pigeons and minimal opportunity for contact with wild birds while racing.

No cases of H5 avian influenza have been detected in racing pigeons in Australia. Surveillance, reporting and stakeholder engagement arrangements are in place to support early detection and response should the risk profile change.

Thank you once again for raising this matter.

Yours sincerely

Hon Gavin Pearce MP
Minister for Primary Industries and Water