

DISCLAIMER

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Self-declaration of the recovery of country freedom from infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza viruses (HPAI) by Ireland

Declaration sent to WOAH on 21 December 2022 by Dr Martin Blake, WOAH Delegate for Ireland, Chief Veterinary Officer, Veterinary Services, Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine

1. Introduction

The objective of this declaration is to regain disease freedom status from high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) for the entire territory of Ireland from 21 December 2022 in accordance with Chapter 10.4. Infection with High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza viruses and Article 1.6.3. Procedures for Publication by the WOAH of a self-declaration of animal health status by a Member, of WOAH *Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code)*.

This declaration describes two outbreaks of HPAI subtype H5N1 in poultry in Ireland, the first of which was confirmed on 14 November 2022 (start date: 12 November 2022), with the last outbreak confirmed on 22 November 2022.

Ireland formally requests WOAH to publish this self-declaration for the recovery of country freedom from high pathogenicity avian influenza. The start date of the self-declaration is 21 December 2022. A statement of responsibility for this self-declaration is contained in Annex I.

2. Avian Influenza Situation in Ireland

Ireland's previously self-declared disease freedom was published by WOAH on 21 January 2022, in accordance with the provisions of Article 10.4.3. of the *Terrestrial Code* (2021), following six outbreaks of HPAI subtype H5N1 in poultry flocks confirmed during the period 20 November 2021 to 20 December 2021.

The self-declared disease freedom was maintained until 12 November 2022, when an outbreak of HPAI H5N1¹ was confirmed in a fattening turkey flock following investigation by the competent authority (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)) into reports of increased mortalities in the flock. A second outbreak of HPAI subtype H5N1² was confirmed on the 22 November 2022, also in a fattening turkey flock.

¹ [WOAH-WAHIS Report ID 157870](#)

² [WOAH-WAHIS Report ID 158217](#)

In total, two outbreaks of HPAI subtype H5N1 were confirmed on poultry premises in Ireland during 2022. Both outbreaks were promptly reported to WOAH via the World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS). Both outbreaks were confirmed by Real-Time Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) and gene sequencing for determination of pathogenicity in the DAFM Central Veterinary Research Laboratory, which is Ireland's National Reference Laboratory for avian influenza situated at Backweston Campus, Stacumny Lane, Celbridge, Co. Kildare.

A map illustrating the locations, and associated restricted zones, of the HPAI outbreaks in Ireland in 2022 is provided in Annex II to this document, with details of the individual outbreaks in Annex III. The two outbreaks occurred in close proximity, and so the resulting restriction zones were merged.

During 2022, two outbreaks of HPAI subtype H5N1 occurred in flocks of captive birds in Ireland following investigation by DAFM into reports of mortalities in the flocks. The first outbreak was confirmed on the 13 October 2022³ and the second on the 19 October 2022⁴; both occurred in small backyard flocks of captive birds kept for non-commercial purposes with no direct or indirect contact with poultry or poultry facilities. The outbreaks were promptly reported to WOAH via WAHIS.

3. Control and eradication measures in response to avian influenza outbreaks

Avian influenza is a notifiable disease in Ireland as per [Statutory Instrument No. 130 of 2016 \(Notification and Control of Diseases affecting Terrestrial Animals \(No. 2\) Regulations 2016\)](#). A stamping out policy is implemented. Vaccination against avian influenza is not permitted for poultry in Ireland but can be permitted in zoo animals on a voluntary basis, subject to compliance with [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/429 'Animal Health Law'](#). No poultry were vaccinated in 2022. Some captive birds kept in zoo collections were vaccinated in accordance with licences issued by DAFM in 2022.

Ireland carried out a rapid and effective disease control programme to control the outbreaks and eradicate the virus in accordance with the *Terrestrial Code*, [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/687](#) and national legislation measures. A rapid stamping out policy was implemented on all infected premises, with all carcasses disposed of in a bio secure manner via Category 1 rendering. Cleaning and disinfection procedures of premises, vehicles, equipment and any other objects which may have been directly or indirectly contaminated were carried out in order to destroy avian influenza virus in accordance with the *Terrestrial Code* and [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/687](#). Any materials which could not be appropriately cleaned and disinfected were destroyed. The cleaning and disinfection of the last infected premises was completed on 22 November 2022.

Following the confirmation of each outbreak of HPAI in poultry, a Protection Zone (PZ) with a minimum radius of 3km, and a Surveillance Zone (SZ) with a minimum radius of 10km were established around the infected premises. Disease control measures consistent with the *Terrestrial Code* and [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/687](#) were implemented within the restriction zones including movement restrictions, a system of licencing authorised movements subject to conditions and specified biosecurity measures in relation to the movements of poultry, poultry products including live birds, hatching eggs, and equipment or materials likely to transmit virus to, from or within the zones. Personnel, vehicles and equipment entering or leaving poultry or captive bird premises within restricted zones were required to observe appropriate biosecurity measures as laid down by DAFM in order to mitigate against the risk of spreading avian influenza virus.

The restricted zones (PZs & SZs) imposed around the two outbreaks in poultry in Ireland (IE) extended into the territory of Northern Ireland (NI). Veterinary services in DAFM liaised closely with colleagues in the competent authority in NI, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), to coordinate the placement and subsequent removal of zones. Close communication between the two authorities ensured that all required surveillance was completed prior to simultaneous removal of the restricted zone which spanned both jurisdictions.

A census of all poultry establishments, including backyard flocks situated within the restricted zones were carried out by DAFM officials. Following establishment of the restricted zones, flock owners were contacted by DAFM to inform them of restrictions that applied, enquire as to the health status of the flock, collect epidemiological information, and advise them to contact the DAFM Regional Veterinary Office if they had any concerns regarding the health of their poultry or avian influenza. 10 active commercial poultry flocks and 1 backyard flock were identified within the PZ, with a further 76 commercial and 6 backyard flocks identified within the SZ. All poultry

³ [WOAH-WAHIS Report ID 157397](#)

⁴ [WOAH-WAHIS Report ID 157527](#)

premises within the PZ were visited by a DAFM official veterinarian where a clinical examination on the poultry was conducted. Based on risk assessment, a proportion of flocks within the SZ were visited.

Subsequently all commercial flocks within the PZ were sampled for laboratory analysis, unless the entire flocks were slaughtered out at the end of their production cycles whilst the zones were in place. In such flocks, pre-movement examinations were conducted by official veterinarians to ensure that all birds were clinically healthy and production records showed no evidence of disease. Any such movements were licenced by DAFM, subject to stringent biosecurity measures with movement direct to the slaughter plant. In addition, a proportion of flocks representative of all poultry categories within the SZ were sampled for laboratory analysis. No evidence of HPAI was identified during the clinical examinations or laboratory testing.

Extensive epidemiological investigations at each infected premises were conducted, for the purpose of identifying possible sources and spread of infection through personnel contacts, vehicles, equipment, poultry, poultry products and equipment. No further outbreaks were identified through epidemiological investigations. It was concluded that the most likely route of introduction of virus into infected premises was via direct or indirect contact with wild birds due to the known presence of HPAI H5N1 in wild birds in the area leading to high infection pressure.

In light of increased risk of an avian influenza outbreak in Ireland following the detection of HPAI H5N1 in wild birds, additional national legislation was introduced to help mitigate risk of spread into poultry and captive bird populations.

On 19 September 2022, DAFM introduced [Statutory Instrument No. 462 of 2022 \(Avian Influenza \(Biosecurity Measures\) Regulations 2022\)](#) for poultry and captive bird owners. The biosecurity regulations require all poultry or captive bird owners to implement additional biosecurity measures on their holdings including for example, restricting access to poultry to essential visitors, establishing disinfection points and storing feed and bedding in a manner to prevent wild bird access.

In addition, a confinement order was introduced on 7 November 2022 [Statutory Instrument No. 551 of 2022 \(Avian Influenza \(Precautionary Confinement of Birds\) Regulations 2022\)](#) requiring all poultry and other captive birds to be housed or confined in a manner which prevents access by wild birds.

Regular disease updates and biosecurity advice are emailed to poultry industry stakeholders, competent authority veterinarians and are posted online at www.gov.ie/birdflu. Press releases issued by DAFM in relation to avian influenza awareness and control measures are widely reported on by local and national media outlets. In addition to the legislative powers which DAFM used to mitigate the risk, DAFM held regular update meetings with key industry stakeholders to address their queries and to emphasise the importance of high biosecurity standards. This stakeholder engagement helped ensure industry cooperation and clarity in relation to the disease control measures in place.

Due to the fact that the higher risk period for avian influenza (November-April) continues, the national legislation outlined above will remain in force until risk assessment considers that removal is appropriate.

4. Surveillance programme and early detection system

Ireland carries out an extensive surveillance programme to rapidly detect early incursions of disease and to demonstrate freedom from infection with HPAI and LPAI subtypes H5/H7. The programme includes both active and passive elements in accordance with both Chapter 1.4. and Articles 10.4.26. to 10.4.30. of the *Terrestrial Code* and Annex II of [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/689](#). The national strategy in relation to AI surveillance is to prevent establishment of disease by monitoring for the presence and early detection of the virus, through active and passive surveillance of domestic poultry and wild birds.

4.1. Passive surveillance in poultry

Avian influenza is a notifiable disease in Ireland in accordance with national legislation [Statutory Instrument No. 130 of 2016 \(Notification and Control of Diseases affecting Terrestrial Animals \(No. 2\) Regulations 2016\)](#) meaning that anyone who suspects the disease is legally obliged to notify DAFM without delay. This forms part of Ireland's early warning system. In the event of a suspicion of avian influenza in poultry, the requirements of [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/687](#) as regards rules for the prevention and control of certain listed diseases are implemented in line with DAFM's specific written procedures. In summary, a DAFM official veterinarian (OV) visits the suspect establishment and carries out a clinical examination of the suspect animal or animals based on a specific

protocol. Where disease cannot be ruled out on clinical grounds, samples are taken from the suspect animal or animals and from in contact animals or a representative sample of animals in the establishment and submitted for analysis. While awaiting the results of the laboratory tests the suspect establishment is placed under official restriction so that movement of susceptible animals, animal products and by-products are prohibited.

In addition, any poultry that die on farm but where avian influenza is not suspected can be submitted for general post-mortem to the country's network of Regional Veterinary Laboratories where they will be screened for avian influenza as part of a general diagnostic panel. This forms another element of Ireland's Early Warning System for avian influenza.

4.2. Active surveillance in poultry

a) Avian influenza H5 and H7 serology testing of poultry under the EU Poultry Surveillance Scheme

Ireland's avian influenza surveillance programme is based on representative sampling, which takes into account criteria in Annex II of [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/689](#). Sampling and serological testing are carried out for the purpose of detecting the presence of antibodies to avian influenza. Sampling is stratified throughout Ireland so that it is representative of the whole country. On farm and slaughter plant sampling is carried out for different categories below and coincides with seasonal production for certain categories e.g., fattening turkeys. Up to 2018 the results were reported to the European Commission, and from 2019 onwards results are submitted to the European Food Safety Authority. The categories sampled for the EU Poultry Surveillance Scheme can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories of poultry sampled for the EU Poultry Surveillance Scheme.

Laying Hens (caged)*
Free Range Laying Hens**
Chicken breeders
Turkey Breeders
Duck Breeders
Geese Breeders
Fattening Turkeys
Fattening Ducks
Fattening Geese
Broilers (kept in free range production)

*Includes caged and barn

**Includes free-range and organic

b) Avian influenza serology testing in poultry for the national Poultry Health Programme (PHP)

The Poultry Health Programme is a DAFM surveillance programme to support safe trade in poultry, and to comply with [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/429 \(Animal Health Law\)](#) and [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/688](#).

The PHP also includes testing for Mycoplasma and Salmonella. From 1 January to 19 December 2022, 11,913 samples were tested for avian influenza within the programme using either the Agar Gel Immunodiffusion (AGID) or enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA). Up until 2021/early 2022 the AGID method was set up to detect AI antibodies within the National Poultry Health Programme. However, the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory (CVRL), Ireland's National Reference Laboratory for Avian Influenza has been transitioning to AI ELISA and currently AI ELISA is the general screening method to detect Influenza A antibodies. All of the tests returned a negative result. In the event of a positive ELISA being returned, an official investigation into the flock would be carried out by DAFM and further sampling and testing would occur.

All positive avian influenza PCR detections go forward for virus isolation, enabled by a continuous access to embryonated eggs provided by our institute farm. When an avian influenza virus is isolated, material is then transferred to the EU Reference Laboratory and the national reference laboratory engages with them on the subsequent sequencing process.

4.3 Wild bird monitoring

DAFM has an early warning system in place for reporting of unusual mortalities in wild birds with Birdwatch Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), and the National Association of Regional Game Councils (NARGC). This

early warning system ensures DAFM is informed if there is any increase in numbers of dead wild birds or large wild bird die offs in the country. DAFM also implements training programmes for staff at NPWS, in conjunction with medical doctors, on avian influenza which includes various occupational health measures such as seasonal flu vaccination and training on how to use appropriate personal protective equipment should they be involved in an outbreak of AI in the wild bird population.

Members of the public are encouraged to report moribund or dead wild birds and can contact a dedicated Avian Influenza hotline phone number or use the Avian Check App to report sick or dead wild birds.

DAFM also has a dedicated avian influenza webpage at www.gov.ie/birdflu which provides a wide range of information, advice and publications on AI for poultry industry stakeholders and other interested groups.

Any birds to be tested are collected by trained DAFM personnel and submitted to the DAFM Regional Veterinary Laboratories (RVL) for sampling. Samples are then submitted to the DAFM Central Veterinary Research Laboratory (CVRL) where avian influenza testing is carried out.

The list of species of wild birds to be targeted for surveillance for avian influenza is available on the website of the [EUURL for Avian Influenza](#) in accordance with the scientific opinion provided by European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) which is adapted in Ireland by ornithologists regarding wild bird species found in Ireland and is updated regularly.

In the event of a confirmed case of avian influenza, as defined in Annex I of [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/689](#) in a wild bird, notification will be made to the Animal Disease Information System (ADIS) by the National Disease Control Centre (NDCC) within 24 hours of confirmation. An immediate notification will also be submitted by the NDCC to the WOAH within 24 hours of the first case of an avian influenza subtype in the country and follow up reports submitted for all subsequent similar cases in accordance with Chapter 1.1 of the *Terrestrial Code*.

The total number of wild birds confirmed with Avian Influenza in 2022 (up to 19 December) can be found in the Table 2.

Table 2. Numbers of wild birds tested for avian influenza in 2022 (up 19 December).

Year	Total tested- AI M gene PCR	Positives- AI M gene PCR	Positives- H5 gene PCR	Pathogenicity by cleavage site sequencing	Virus Isolation in SPF eggs**
2022	165	90	88 x H5N1 2 x H5Nx	68 x HPAI, 22 x undetermined	1 x H5N1

5. Measures implemented to maintain freedom

Both European Union (EU) legislation and national legislation are enforced in addition to strategies for effective risk management, risk communication to stakeholders, and enhanced on-farm biosecurity to safeguard the Irish poultry industry from the risk posed by notifiable avian influenza. Imports of poultry and poultry products into Ireland are carried out in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 10.4.7. to 10.4.22 on infection with High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza Viruses of the *Terrestrial Code*. All imports of poultry, poultry products and hatching eggs are subject to veterinary certification in accordance with the provisions of EU legislation, including Regulation (EU) 2016/429 (Animal Health Law) and [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/688](#).

The control measures for high pathogenicity avian influenza are laid down in EU legislation [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/687](#) and in national legislation including [Statutory Instrument No. 15 of 2013 \(Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013\)](#). The registration of all poultry holdings in Ireland with DAFM is a national legislative requirement in accordance with [Statutory Instrument No. 114/2014 \(Control on places where poultry are kept Regulations 2014\)](#). The requirement to register applies to all poultry premises, from large commercial poultry holdings to premises with only 1 or 2 birds such as hobby or “backyard” poultry flocks.

[Statutory Instrument No. 130 of 2016 \(Notification and Control of Diseases affecting Terrestrial Animals \(No. 2\) Regulations 2016\)](#) categorises avian influenza as a high priority notifiable disease. This means that any person who suspects the presence of the disease is legally obliged to report it to DAFM without delay. DAFM operates a 24/7 on-call rota involving veterinary staff for the notification and investigation of all suspect former OIE List A diseases including avian influenza.

DAFM has implemented a comprehensive biosecurity awareness programme for avian influenza which involves the publication of regular disease updates to a wide range of stakeholders which can be accessed on the dedicated www.gov.ie/birdflu page. During high-risk periods DAFM hold regular meetings with poultry stakeholders to heighten awareness of the importance of biosecurity. Avian influenza clinical signs factsheets and tailored biosecurity leaflets have been produced for different categories of production including for example backyard flocks, turkey flocks etc. DAFM also operates a text alert service to communicate quickly with registered flock owners during a high-risk period. Online social media platforms and advertising sites for poultry are used to communicate with poultry and captive bird owners to raise awareness of the risk and mitigating measures that they can take to prevent avian influenza.

6. Conclusion

Considering that:

- High pathogenicity avian influenza is a notifiable disease in Ireland
- Prior to the two outbreaks of HPAI subtype H5N1, which were confirmed on the 14 and 22 November 2022, Ireland has been free from high pathogenicity avian influenza viruses in poultry (self-declaration published on 21 January 2022)
- A stamping out policy, cleaning and disinfection has been applied to all infected premises following confirmation of the virus in poultry. The final date of cleaning and disinfection was certified on 22 November 2022
- 28 days have since elapsed from the certified date of cleaning and disinfection at the most recent confirmed infected premises as prescribed in Article 10.4.6. of the *Terrestrial Code*
- Surveillance has been carried out in accordance with Articles 10.4.26. to 10.4.30. of the *Terrestrial Code*
- A continual awareness programme in relation to avian influenza is in place, and
- Commodities are imported in accordance with Articles 10.4.7. to 10.4.22. of the *Terrestrial Code*.

The Delegate of Ireland to WOAH declares that the country complies with the requirements for a country free from infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza viruses (HPAI) in poultry as of 21 December 2022, in accordance with Chapter 1.6. and Article 10.4.6. of *Terrestrial Code* (2022) and consistent with the information provided to the WAHIS system.

Annex I

I, the undersigned, Dr Martin Blake, Delegate of Ireland to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), take responsibility for the self-declaration of freedom from highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in accordance with the provisions of Article 10.4.6 of the WOAH Terrestrial Animal Health Code.

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Drawn up on 21 December 2022

Signature of the Delegate:

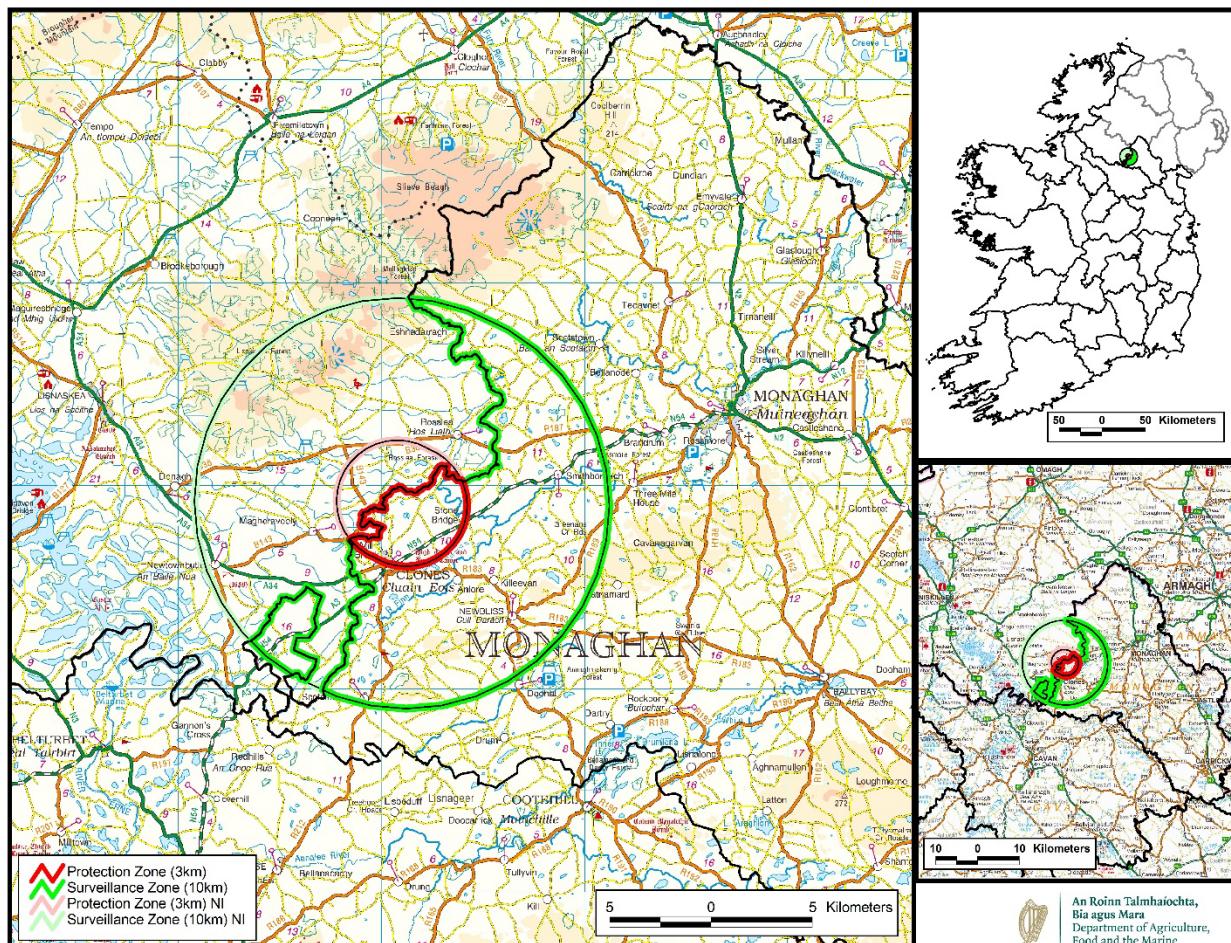
21/12/2022

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Dr Martin Blake
Chief Veterinary Officer | WOAH Delegate
Signed by: Martin Blake CVO

Annex II

Figure 1. Location of Protection Zone (red outline) and Surveillance Zone (green outline) imposed following the two HPAI H5N1 outbreaks in Ireland in 2022. Due to the proximity of the two outbreaks, the resulting restriction zones were merged.



Annex III**Table 3. Summary of HPAI outbreaks in poultry in Ireland in 2022**

Outbreak number	WOAH WAHIS event ID	WOAH WAHIS outbreak number	HPAI confirmation date	Sub-type	Location	Premises type	No. of birds on site	Cleansing and disinfection approval date
AVI-2022-001	4724	OB_108849	14/11/2022	H5N1	Clones, Co. Monaghan	Fattening turkeys	3816	16/11/2022
AVI-2022-002	4724	OB_109179	22/11/2022	H5N1	Clones, Co. Monaghan	Fattening turkeys	4100	22/11/2022

Annex IV**Table 4. Summary of HPAI outbreaks in captive birds in Ireland in 2022**

WOAH WAHIS event ID	WOAH WAHIS outbreak number	HPAI confirmation date	Sub- type	Location	Number of birds	Premises type
4524	OB_107512	13/10/2022	H5N1	Sutton, Co. Dublin	6	Backyard/ non-commercial Hens
4524	OB_107941	19/10/2022	H5N1	Greystones, Co. Wicklow	48	Backyard/ non-commercial Hens, turkeys, ducks, ornamental birds