

**POLICY BRIEF: Survey Report: Understanding Backyard Poultry Keepers and their Perspectives on Bird Flu.
August 2020**

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Date: 14th October 2020

1. KEY MESSAGE

Although some backyard poultry keepers may be aware of the financial implications of Avian Influenza (AI) for the commercial poultry sector, few seem to understand the consequences of an outbreak of AI in a single backyard bird or flock. Many believe that they are disconnected and do not see themselves as a risk to commercial enterprises.

2. MAJOR FINDINGS

The majority (97%) of study respondents stated that they were either slightly or not at all worried about their birds contracting AI, believing themselves to be far enough away from any outbreaks and/or in a remote location. This was interesting given that half of the respondents were aware of wildfowl regularly feeding within 2km of their flocks and nearly all stated that wild birds and/or their droppings could enter their enclosures. Of the respondents to the survey, 63% had poultry during the 2016/17 UK outbreak of AI. Of these, approximately three quarters stated that they housed their flock as required, following government regulations to the best of their ability. Some of those who did not house their flock said, “it didn’t seem necessary”, “it’s too much effort” and it’s “unfair on the birds”. This suggests that there is likely to be a large number of backyard keepers who either did not or would not follow regulations.

3. OBJECTIVES

Previous research (Kyle and Sutherland 2017, Understanding Backyard Poultry Keepers and their Attitudes to Biosecurity) suggested that although some backyard keepers were aware of the financial implications of Avian Influenza (AI) to the commercial sector in Scotland, many do not see themselves as a risk to commercial enterprises. Gomes, Adam and Sparks (Assessing the disease biosecurity of backyard keepers 2017) noted that “Backyard poultry keepers in Scotland were found to be relatively poorly informed about disease and may warrant specific consideration in the event of an AI outbreak. Engaging with [backyard] keepers is important for optimisation of contingency plans”. This study was designed to build on these findings and gauge the awareness of backyard keepers of the consequences of an AI outbreak in their flocks. The study also assessed whether further highlighting these consequences would influence their likelihood of adapting their behaviour during future AI outbreaks.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Due to the nature of backyard flocks, unregistered birds - which are in the majority - are difficult to access and police. Despite substantial attempts to inform backyard keepers of the guidelines and regulations around an AI incursion, it appears that in many cases the message was not received, was poorly understood, or simply ignored. Backyard keepers do not appear to make the link between a single kept bird contracting AI and the impact on the commercial poultry industry.

This suggests that a varied communications strategy along with a stronger message regarding the rationale for lockdown regulations may be required to persuade some small-scale poultry keepers of the importance of housing their birds in the event of future outbreaks.

5. IMPORTANT ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

A survey of 46 questions was developed online (Qualtrics XM) and promoted through Facebook from 8th April until 30th June 2020. In addition, paper copies were distributed at a poultry sale in Aberdeenshire in March. In total 132 responses from people aged over 18 and who were keeping small-scale poultry in Scotland were received. Unfortunately, due to the COVID -19 outbreak, plans to engage with breed groups and distribute paper copies at other Scottish shows and sales did not take place, thus limiting the number of respondents. However, the survey still attracted a broad demographic of backyard poultry keepers from across Scotland.

6. LINKS TO EXISTING PUBLICATIONS OR REPORTS

Kyle and Sutherland 2020: Survey Report: Understanding Backyard Poultry Keepers and their Perspectives on Bird Flu. <https://www.epicscotland.org/media/1841/epic-backyard-ai-survey-report-final-240920.pdf>

Kyle and Sutherland 2017: Understanding Backyard Poultry Keepers and their Attitudes to Biosecurity <https://www.epicscotland.org/media/1559/final-report-smallflocks-and-biosecurity.pdf>

Gomes, Adam and Sparks 2017: Assessing the disease biosecurity of backyard keepers https://www.sruc.ac.uk/downloads/download/1303/assessing_the_disease_biosecurity_of_backyard_poultry_keepers