



JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

**The Hon Tony Abbott MHR
Minister for Health and Ageing**

**The Hon Warren Truss MP
Minister for Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry**

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National exercise to test avian influenza preparedness

A national exercise to strengthen Australia's preparedness to tackle an outbreak of avian influenza will be held later this year, Agriculture Minister Warren Truss and Health Minister Tony Abbott announced today.

Mr Truss said *Exercise Eleusis* will employ a hypothetical scenario to test how well agriculture and health departments, across all levels of government, can work with industry to identify, contain and eradicate a zoonotic disease (an animal disease which can be transferred to humans).

Avian influenza is a disease carried by birds, and has caused the deaths of 53 people and the destruction of millions of birds throughout Asia.

Mr Abbott said *Exercise Eleusis* is an opportunity to identify areas where Australia can improve its emergency response systems.

The exercise will run between 29 November and 1 December 2005, with a series of pre-cursor activities being held throughout the year to evaluate specific aspects of national preparedness.

For example, *Exercise Hermes*, on public communication, was held in Sydney on 19-20 May, and *Exercise Adventurous Goose* was underway in South Australia this week.

Mr Truss said this lead-up activity involved the South Australian Government and the National Rapid Response Team to look at disease control at a local level.

"*Adventurous Goose* will explore the issues of coordination, safety of personnel, humane destruction and disposal of livestock, and integration of external assistance," he said.

Other pre-cursor activities include:

- **20-21 June — Exercise Hydra.** Resource Management will look at key deployment issues for a zoonotic response — such as personal protective equipment, antivirals, destruction and disposal material, and disinfectants.
- **September 2005 — Exercise Asclepius II.** Agricultural and health integration looking at plans to ensure that there is a ready fit between these sectors across the country.
- **October 2005 — Exercise Olympus.** Activation of the peak coordination groups across the agriculture sectors, the National Management Group and the Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases to explore the technical and broader strategic policy decision-making processes that will take place during such an emergency.

Mr Truss said *Exercise Eleusis* will build on the efforts of 2002's Exercise Minotaur. Minotaur evaluated government and industry responses to a hypothetical outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease.

“*Exercise Minotaur* has resulted in significant improvements to our preparedness for a major pest or disease emergency, particularly in the areas of control, legislation, trade and public communications,” Mr Truss said.

Mr Abbott said *Exercise Eleusis* would provide a timely test of Australian health plans to combat an outbreak of avian influenza that also infected humans.

“The Howard/Anderson Government has committed more than \$150 million to ensure Australia is well prepared to respond to avian flu.

“The government has one of the world's largest per capital stockpiles of antivirals, and recently announced it will establish an independent World Health Organization (WHO) flu centre to enhance Australia's capacity to deal with any outbreak.

“WHO has said that Australia is as well prepared as any country in the world to respond to avian flu,” Mr Abbott said.

“This exercise provides an ideal opportunity for health authorities to work through our national response plans in close collaboration with our counterparts in agriculture.

“Avian influenza is a real threat to Australia, and has the potential to significantly damage our agriculture industries and affect human health,” Mr Abbott said.

Mr Truss said that, while *Exercise Eleusis* will help improve Australia's pest and disease preparedness, it is vital that people working with birds remain ever vigilant and report anything unusual to agriculture authorities or vets as a matter of priority.

Further information on *Exercise Eleusis*, and avian influenza, is available by following links at — www.outbreak.gov.au and www.health.gov.au

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