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### **Pacific Seabird Group Statement**

## **Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is a devastating wildlife disease that impacts seabird populations worldwide and warrants our attention and response**

The Pacific Seabird Group is releasing this statement in response to the devastating and ongoing worldwide circulation of clade 2.3.4.4b H5N1 viruses and derived reassortants. The resulting Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) has caused mass mortalities in wild birds, including seabirds, on all continents except for Oceania.

Historically, HPAI has been considered a poultry disease. Today it is also a wildlife conservation issue. This fact has been recognized by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), among others.

This statement is a call to action for the seabird community, to highlight the following important activities:

- Addressing significant gaps in our understanding of the epidemiology of this disease.
- Establishing a global reporting system on mass mortality events in seabirds associated with HPAI.
- Conducting population monitoring to evaluate the impact of the disease including quantifying mortality rates and assessing population-level impacts.
- Addressing significant gaps in wild bird HPAI surveillance programs (e.g., sampling of sick and dead seabirds).
- Developing emergency response plans *before* mass mortality events occur. These plans should consider human safety, HPAI disease surveillance and mortality monitoring, and management and mitigation measures response.
- Improving communication, coordination, and information sharing within the international marine wildlife community, including those focused on both marine birds and marine mammals. This could include using digital capabilities in collecting, processing, and sharing data, information, and knowledge across multisectoral domains. These data can be diverse and include information on best surveillance and response practices to information on virus detection and distribution across space and time.

- Considering the potential impacts of diseases like HPAI when developing or revising conservation and management documents and models.
- Recognizing the links between the drivers of seabird population declines (e.g., habitat loss and fragmentation/degradation, climate change, etc.) and disease emergence.
- Adopting a One Health collaboration/approach for addressing this disease. This approach works at the local, regional, national, and global levels with the goal of achieving optimal health outcomes while recognizing the interconnection between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment. Information on One Health: [CDC](#); [IPAC Canada](#); [WHO](#); [G7](#).

Many of these activities will require financial resources and investments of personnel time. Reallocation of resources from other conservation programs will come at significant costs to the success of those programs.

This statement is motivated by the direct experiences of international seabird managers, biologists, veterinarians, and researchers who participated in a symposium on HPAI in seabirds at the 51st meeting of the Pacific Seabird Group in Seattle, Washington, USA on February 23, 2024. Given our first-hand experience dealing with the ramifications of HPAI in seabirds, we feel compelled to make a statement to bring vital awareness to the issue.

For more information, please see the most recent FAO/CMS Scientific Task Force report on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds:

<https://www.cms.int/en/publication/h5n1-high-pathogenicity-avian-influenza-wild-birds-unprecedented-conservation-impacts>

**Photo media:** [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/17cJ8BWAmzZWQdSK\\_2p-vGAoGprBFm4Wv?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/17cJ8BWAmzZWQdSK_2p-vGAoGprBFm4Wv?usp=sharing) If you have any .jpeg files you can share for circulation, please copy them here. Please set the file name to include: **YYYY-MM-DD Species Location Photo Credit name.**