



Avian influenza: H5 HPAI

Prelude: For the past two months, Australia has been responding to outbreaks of H5 HPAI, presenting particularly as large numbers of dead shearwaters and poultry (layers and broilers) across Tasmania and Victoria. Control areas have been declared, including quarantine of infected properties and movement restrictions on poultry properties. Local communities have been advised to avoid areas where shearwaters are known to congregate and to practise good biosecurity should they accidentally come in contact with wild birds or potentially contaminated areas.

Now at 26 January 2026, response activities are continuing across Tasmania and Victoria and, today, confirmation is received of H5 HPAI detections in shearwaters in New South Wales. There are trending social media posts citing a detection of H5 HPAI in a Victorian farm worker.

Weather

Prelude: Since November 2025, eastern New South Wales and Queensland have been impacted by severe storms which are typical for the season. The northern wet season is well underway. A tropical cyclone impacted parts of far north Queensland, including Cairns, Mareeba, and Townsville in December. The monsoon is active and the trough sits across the north of the Northern Territory to the Kimberley in Western Australia and across to near Christmas Island. Southern areas of Australia are dry and hot, and there has been ongoing fire activity across much of western Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.

Now at 26 January 2026: In the north, the monsoon is active with the Kimberley region expecting particularly heavy rainfall (severe weather warning is current) as well as over the border in the Northern Territory due to a low pressure system lingering within the monsoon trough. There is a heatwave across the south, extreme in parts of southern Western Australia and South Australia creating demand on the energy grid. Yesterday a line of thunderstorms formed across south-east Western Australia bringing squally winds that brought down power lines and even power poles. Today similar thunderstorms are forecast across the border in south-west South Australia. Fire danger ratings over the next few days are at HIGH and there are concerns in Western Australia that the lightning from thunderstorms may result in more ignitions while no rain is expected.

Fuel supply

Prelude: A disruption occurred that reduced all crude and refined fuel imports to 75% of normal volumes. It is not expected that normal deliveries will resume for a minimum of 8 weeks, but a more realistic estimate is 12-14 weeks.

Now at 26 January 2026: It has been 10 weeks since the disruption occurred and all crude and refined fuel imports are now down to 60% of normal volumes. Deliveries are delayed and not expected for another 6 weeks at minimum. The lack of imported products has been impacting Australia for several weeks and retail petrol prices increased significantly, with average prices across the 5 largest cities at \$4.00 per litre.

Consequences

- Fuel supply limited
- Fuel prices increase significantly
- Delays in freight
- Supply of chicken and eggs decreased
- Businesses lose income (e.g. agriculture, transport and tourism operators)
- Heatstroke and dehydration cases
- Increased hospital presentations and admissions
- Increased energy demands for cooling
- Power system security at risk and load shedding
- Public trust in government questioned
- Potential for disability transport to have reduced or no availability
- Increase in anxiety and psycho-social illness impacting behaviours and decision making





A trough has been sitting off southern Queensland and northern New South Wales coasts bringing heavy rain to coastal areas for the past 3 days. Major flooding is expected in the rivers around Brisbane, Gold Coast and Northern Rivers regions. Storms yesterday damaged critical power infrastructure from the Sunshine Coast to southern Gold Coast. There have been reports of people with disabilities and care requirements being dropped off by their carers at evacuation centres in the Gold Coast.

On 29 January, a tropical low started forming in the monsoon trough to the west of the Kimberley. On 31 January the tropical cyclone sat near Western Australia's coast with winds around 220km/hr persisting for much of the day. It crossed Port Headland on 1 February in the early hours of the morning with a significant storm surge. The tropical cyclone then lost energy as it moved inland where it brought very heavy rain from 2-4 February extending east across the Kimberley region. A trough through the north of the Northern Territory is also bringing heavy rain through the region over this time period. This has resulted in the Katherine River rising to 20m at Katherine, causing flooding and severe damage to the Stuart Highway on the outskirts of Katherine township. Fires in the south-west of Western Australia have continued over the past week as the cyclone fails to deliver rain further south. Fire danger ratings for much of south-west Western Australia (including Bunbury, Margaret River and Witchcliffe) have been EXTREME due to hot and gusty north-east winds. A front crosses the south-west today (4 February) bringing slightly cooler air but windy conditions, and the region remains dry making fire control still difficult. This cooler reprieve is only temporary as the hot temperatures will build up again in the next few days.

2 February was a catastrophic fire day with strong westerly winds in eastern South Australia across into Victoria. Numerous fires ignited, including in the Ngarkat Conservation Park and Victoria's Big Desert Wilderness Area. Inland areas around central and southern New South Wales, as well as the Australian Capital Territory have been experiencing severe heatwave conditions from 31 January until now with nighttime temperatures at record highs. Power supply has become intermittent due to excessive demand and hospitalisations have increased. Hospitals in Canberra and surrounding regions report an overwhelming number of presentations experiencing heat-related illnesses, as well as psychosomatic symptoms related to H5 HPAI driven by information that is circulating in various channels. Hospitals are over capacity.

3 February in Tasmania was a particularly extreme fire day with strong hot northerly winds and an approaching front. An unstable atmosphere enables many fires to plume to high levels in the afternoon and embers are travelling long distances. The wind does not ease overnight and on 4 February there is a fire on the northern and western outskirts of Hobart. During the afternoon, the wind which is north-west, shifts to the north and containment lines are broken and the fire moves through the northern suburbs of Hobart with embers starting new fires ahead of the main one. A PyroCu formation to the west is causing erratic winds and making air operations impossible. The fire damages the main transmission lines into Hobart.

Avian influenza: H5 HPAI

In the past week confirmation is received of H5 HPAI detections in shearwaters on Phillip Island in Victoria. Mass mortalities in public places continue to be reported in common wild birds, such as silver gulls and black swans across Victoria and Tasmania, and now in New South Wales. There are reports in the media querying the potential for a wide range of native Australian wildlife, including koalas, emus and kangaroos, becoming extinct due to the H5 HPAI outbreak. Now on 4 February 3 farm workers in Tasmania and 2 in Victoria are confirmed to be infected with H5 HPAI. All are showing mild symptoms, and all have been working on infected properties with known exposure to infected poultry. There are images circulating on social media of poultry in trucks with claims that they are being disposed of in the vicinity of a residential area. There are also posts claiming that COVID-style restrictions are being imposed across the nation due to the confirmed mild human cases.

Fuel supply

Fuel supply is still disrupted with all crude and refined fuel imports now reduced to 56% of normal volumes. Fuel supplies are very restricted, there is still fuel, but not enough to go around for normal volumes. Stocks all along the Australian supply chain from domestic refineries (including crude and refined product), import terminals, resellers, distributors and wholesalers, and at service stations are very low and there are widespread incidences of product unavailability.

Repatriation

A 7.9-magnitude quake occurred yesterday (3 February) in New Zealand's west coast Alpine region on the south island. Casualties and injuries are reported. Roads, bridges, rail and power lines have been damaged. Buildings have collapsed particularly older or unreinforced masonry structures. Australian citizens and tourists are requesting help from the Australian Government. Social media posts include tourists in Queenstown and Greymouth unable to find accommodation. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is working with the New Zealand government to repatriate Australian citizens and approved foreign nationals - potentially over 15,000 people. Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide are identified as likely ports of entry.

Consequences

- Delays in freight
- Supply of chicken and eggs decreased
- Public anxiety around transmission to humans
- Public/volunteer access limited to some locations during response for mass mortality H5 HPAI events.
- ACT hospitals beyond capacity
- Increased energy demands for cooling
- Road access restricted in flooded areas
- Public trust in government questioned
- Evacuation centres are not accessible or suitable to cater to essential care services.
- Illness or death in vulnerable cohorts due to restricted road access and inability of providers to deliver essential care
- Repatriation efforts do not consider Australian citizens living with disability and any associated accessibility needs
- Increased energy demands for life-dependent equipment



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Mass mortalities of various species of shearwaters, terns and gulls are reported at a public beach in Tasmania and on Phillip Island. There is also a confirmed detection of H5 HPAI in a mammal (Australian fur seal) in New South Wales as well as detections in egrets and plumed whistling ducks in the Northern Territory's Kakadu National Park. A popular podcaster questions the safety of Australia's chicken meat and eggs.

Weather

Over the past 2 days a strong east-coast low system has been impacting coastal areas from the New South Wales border down to Sydney. The Hawkesbury and Nepean rivers are forecast to flood, potentially reaching record highs.

The daily high temperatures are reducing in Western Australia and its now eastern parts of South Australia, western Victoria and Tasmania that responding to the effects of these hot conditions.

Fuel supply and energy

Fuel supply disruptions continue. The hot summer has increased the bushfire danger and the demand for electricity to run air conditioning across the country, therefore placing the power system security and reliability at risk, particularly for supply-demand imbalances triggering blackouts/load shedding. In addition, energy costs across the board continue to be impacted by higher fuel as well as transportation costs.

Repatriation

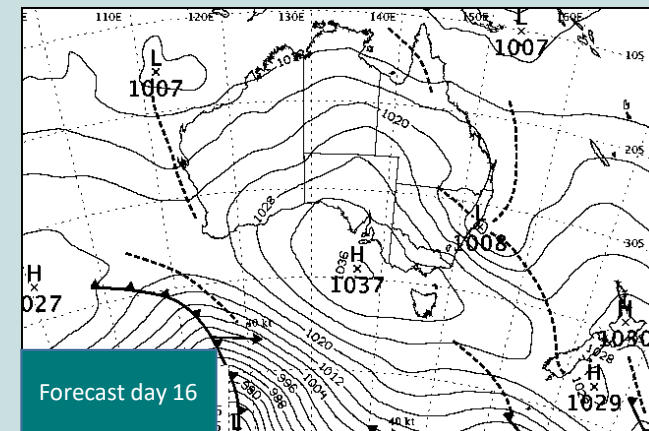
Repatriations are underway from New Zealand and up to 10,000 people have arrived in Australia. Damaged infrastructure (roads and bridges) from the earthquake is complicating efforts while pressure builds from families and media for governments to move faster.

Mis/disinformation

Protests are occurring in all capital cities fuelled by claims about government negligence, bioterrorism conspiracies and accusations of foreign sabotage. Clashes with police occur in Melbourne and Brisbane. Public trust in official sources is at an all-time low, with confusion around the scale of the H5 HPAI outbreak, fuel supply, fires, and emergency management efforts.

Consequences

- Fuel supply reduced
- Delays in freight
- Price inflation of goods and services
- Visitor numbers to affected areas decrease
- Supply of chicken and eggs decreased
- Public/volunteer access limited to some locations during response for mass mortality H5 HPAI events
- Loss of income
- Increased hospital presentations and admissions
- Access restricted in flooded areas
- Public trust in government diminished
- Protesters disrupt capital city CBDs
- Increased presentation of psycho-social disability due conspiracy and conflicting interpretation of communications





Centrelink MyGov outage

At 10:30PM AEDST on 15 February, Services Australia's IT system supporting the Centrelink and MyGov portal went down and the outage is expected to last for at least 3 days. Users are unable to access their Centrelink accounts and Services Australia can't make payments. All major news outlets have reported on the incident, suggesting that MyGov accounts have been "hacked," and sensitive information might be compromised. The news is circulating widely on social media, and public concern is growing which has result in a large volume of enquires coming through from customers with concerns about their accounts.

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The response to H5 HPAI infections and deaths in birds and wildlife continues, in the Northern Territory, New South Wales, Tasmania, Victoria. In the preceding weeks, there have been more severe human cases reported overseas, with heightened media interest. There is an increase in patients presenting to hospitals with flu-like symptoms but no bird contact. Hospitals are near capacity due to this influx of patients and other concurrent events.

Fuel supply

Fuel supply disruptions continue. The airline industry has stated that with the increase in costs to operate their routes, they have no choice but to increase the price of airfares. Subsequently, all travel is down, and many Australians are not flying and limiting domestic travel which is having an impact to tourism and local economies.

Tsunami warning

An undersea earthquake of magnitude 9.0 occurs at 10:00AM AEDT near the south of Kermadec Island. Joint Australian Tsunami Warning Centre (JATWC) issues a Tsunami Watch and advises there is a potential tsunami threat to Australia's east coast at 10:15AM AEDT. A tsunami is observed at the New Zealand Deep-ocean Assessment and Reporting of Tsunami (DART) at 10:25AM AEDT, confirming one has been generated. A Tsunami Warning is issued by the JATWC for potential Tsunami threat to New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania, Lord Howe Island and Norfolk Island.

At 10:45AM AEDT Geoscience Australia issues updated earthquake information, assessing the earthquake as a magnitude 9.4. The tsunami threat is upgraded and the entire east coast of Australia is now under a land threat. A tsunami National Warning is issued by the JATWC. Large tsunami waves could begin arriving at the Australian mainland within four and half hours. Emergency Services authorities on Norfolk Island and Lord Howe Island are being contacted by JATWC staff. The expected times of arrival are 12:15PM in local DST for Norfolk Island and 12:45PM AEDT for Lord Howe Island. COMDISPLAN has been activated for the whole of Australia in anticipation of requests for assistance from jurisdictions. People in areas with threat of land inundation and flooding are strongly advised by emergency authorities to go to higher ground, at least 10 metres above sea level, or at least one kilometre inland from all beaches and the water's edge of marinas, harbours and coastal estuaries. In areas with a threat to the marine environment only, emergency authorities advise people to get out of the water and move away from the immediate water's edge of harbours, coastal estuaries, rock platforms and beaches.

Misinformation about the tsunami spreads quickly on social media, with some claiming the event is a government fabrication or a cover-up for other disasters. Others push wild theories about chemical weapons linked to the bird flu outbreak, further splintering public confidence in official sources.

Consequences

- Australian Government payments can't be paid by Centrelink
- Welfare recipients don't have access to support
- NDIS participants and providers are unable to access NDIA Participant Portal to make and claim payments
- Flooding in tsunami impacted areas
- Damage to infrastructure
- Casualties and injuries
- Health system in high demand
- Public anxiety around H5 HPAI transmission to humans
- Visitor numbers to affected areas decrease
- Public/volunteer access limited to some locations H5 HPAI
- Public trust in government diminished
- Community fatigue from cumulative, multi-hazard pressures
- Short Term Accommodation capacity exceeded for vulnerable cohorts.
- An increased need for formal intervention for people with a disability is required

