



Inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2026–2027 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026–2027

Answer to question taken on notice

Asked by: Mr Taimus Werner-Gibbings MLA

Addressed to: Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water

In relation to: Clear and present threats to fish in the ACT

Hearing: 31 July 2026

Uncorrected Proof Transcript pp 74

Transcript provided: 4 August 2026

Answer Due: 11 August 2026

Dr Brawata took on notice the following question(s):

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I cannot remember when because every day is the same, at some point in the past 10 days I mentioned that avian flu is a biosecurity issue and obviously there is—well, presumably there is aquatic biosecurity risks as well. Does the compliance officer do any work, or is the fisheries team doing any work on aquatic biosecurity?

Mr Burkevics: All the time, and Dr Brawata's team has a dedicated riparian and aquatic team that regularly review biosecurity risks to fish in the ACT.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Are there any clear and present threats?

Mr Burkevics: There are indeed. Dr Brawata.

Dr Brawata: I would have to take that one on notice, although I can say it is well managed, particularly in relation to translocations and moving fish around. And that we know of a few current diseases that occur within populations. But in terms of emerging threats from the avian flu, I am unaware of any emerging threats.

Suzanne Orr MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

ACT Biosecurity is responsible for managing biosecurity risks in the ACT, supported by specialist scientific and operational expertise from across the ACT Government.

Biosecurity risks to aquatic ecosystems are broadly similar to those affecting terrestrial environments and include invasive species, aquatic weeds and diseases. The ACT Government undertakes operational readiness planning, training, surveillance, investigation and on-ground incident response to address a range of aquatic biosecurity threats.

These activities are undertaken in collaboration with key stakeholders, including Icon Water, the National Capital Authority and the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

The City and Environment Directorate's Riparian and Aquatic Conservation Team provide specialist advice and support on aquatic biosecurity threats and incidents. This includes assisting with fish kill investigations, quarantine arrangements, pest management, fisheries management and regulation, aquatic ecosystem monitoring, training exercises, incident responses and participation in national coordination arrangements. The Fisheries Compliance Officer also plays an important role through compliance activities, education and engagement with the recreational fishing community.

The ACT is a known location for Epizootic Haematopoietic Necrosis Virus (EHNV), a disease that affects pest Redfin Perch as well as native fish species. To protect high-value waterways such as the Cotter Catchment, the ACT Government has implemented a range of biosecurity measures, including sterilisation requirements for firefighting equipment, quarantine protocols for conservation translocations, restrictions on the use of bait, declared closed areas and ongoing monitoring programs.

The national AQUAVETPLAN framework, supported by reportable aquatic disease arrangements and the National Priority List of Aquatic Animal Diseases, coordinates responses to aquatic animal disease incursions. While diseases such as Crayfish Plague and Whirling Disease are not known to occur in Australia, diseases including White Spot Syndrome and Epizootic Ulcerative Syndrome are present in other Australian jurisdictions. These, together with EHNV and other locally recorded bacterial and fungal outbreaks, present ongoing risks to aquatic ecosystems and fisheries in the ACT. Continued management of aquatic biosecurity is critical to minimising impacts from established diseases and protecting against new threats.

H5 bird flu does not pose a direct risk to fish, aquatic invertebrates, reptiles or amphibians. However, it may significantly affect waterbird populations and some mammal species. Indirect impacts, such as changes to food webs or localised water quality deterioration associated with mortality events, may also affect aquatic ecosystems.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2026-2027

Signature:



Date: 13/08/26

By the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Suzanne Orr MLA