Dear Madame Speaker,

An outbreak of H5 variant bird flu (Avian Influenza, AI) was confirmed on 15 November 2014 at a poultry farm in Hekendorp (municipality of Oudewater). The outbreak has been identified as the H5N8 strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). Prescribed control measures must be enacted under European regulations in the event of HPAI being detected.

I am writing to inform you of this infection and of the measures I have taken.

**Monitoring and early warning**

Regular samples are taken from commercial poultry farms in the Netherlands, which are tested for the presence of avian influenza (regular monitoring). In addition, a system is in place whereby veterinary surgeons submit samples for testing when certain disease symptoms appear which could suggest the presence of avian influenza (early warning). Avian influenza is notifiable when the presence of the disease is suspected but has not yet been confirmed.

Last Friday, 14 November 2014, samples taken from a poultry farm in Hekendorp (municipality of Oudewater) were submitted for testing because the hens were exhibiting signs of disease which was suspected to possibly be avian influenza. It was confirmed yesterday that the infection was the H5 variant of avian influenza, and it became clear this morning after laboratory tests that the avian influenza virus found on this farm is the highly pathogenic variant. It was also confirmed that it is the H5N8 strain of the disease. This is the same strain which was confirmed in Germany in early November.

**Measures**

The Netherlands National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) reports that, in rare cases, some virus strains may be transmitted from poultry to humans. This only happens where there is direct and intensive contact with infected poultry. People who become ill with avian influenza display the same symptoms as with normal winter influenza; bird flu is generally a mild disease in
humans. Protective measures are being taken to prevent those involved in clearing the affected farm from becoming infected.

The affected farm is an egg farm with six housing units containing a total of around 150,000 laying hens. There are no free range areas at this farm. Clearance of the farm began today, Sunday 16 November. The hens will be culled at the farm and removed for destruction. The farm is being cleared by personnel from the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA).

The highly pathogenic variant of avian influenza is extremely contagious in poultry. This variant is fatal for hens. Avian influenza is a zoonotic disease, which means that it can be transmitted from animals to humans.

In view of the high risk of infection, a total transportation ban (standstill) was imposed from 11.30 hrs on Sunday, 16 November 2014, including for poultry and other live birds, eggs, poultry manure and litter. For mixed farms whose operations include poultry farming, this ban also applies to other animals and animal manure.

In addition to the standstill, a nationwide order has been issued requiring that poultry and other live birds be housed indoors and isolated, and visitor controls have been instated at all poultry farms and mixed farms with poultry operations throughout the Netherlands. A total ban on hunting all animals has also been imposed throughout the Netherlands. Finally, an order banning the gathering and exhibiting of poultry and other live birds is in force. These measures also apply for amateur keepers of poultry and other live birds.

European regulations prescribe that a 3km protection zone and a 10km surveillance zone must be instated. Currently, the same measures apply within these zones as in the rest of the Netherlands.

The 10km zone contains 16 other poultry farms. Samples will be taken from these farms and tested for avian influenza. Contacts with the affected farm are also being investigated.

Efforts in the next few days will be concentrated on identifying the origin and means of transmission of the virus and preventing its further spread.

I will of course keep you informed of developments.

(p.p.) Sharon A.M. Dijksma
Minister of Economic Affairs