



Tuesday 13 March 2007

## **UPDATE # 2: Esperance Bird Deaths**

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The Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) recognises the high level of interest in the Esperance community following mass bird deaths over the past few months. The Department appreciates the information about the birds being provided so promptly by the local community. A list of questions and answers about the issue is provided below.

### **Q. How many birds have died?**

A. Up to 4000 birds are estimated to have died during December 2006 and January 2007. Eight birds were collected and submitted to the Department of Agriculture and Food for testing.

Over the past week, 187 bird deaths were reported in the Esperance townsite and most of the dead birds have been submitted for testing.

### **Q. What did the birds die from?**

A. Tests conducted by the Department of Agriculture and Food's Animal Health Laboratory on a small sample of birds collected in December and January found it was likely they died from lead poisoning.

Results of testing on last week's bird samples were received on 13 March and have indicated the birds died of lead poisoning.

### **Q: Which bird species have been affected?**

A: Species most affected in December and January were wattle birds, honeyeaters and miners. Most of the recent reported deaths were purple-crowned lorikeets.

### **Q: What do the latest results mean?**

A: It means the Department now needs to identify the source of the lead and how the birds are getting it into their systems.

### **Q: Where does the lead come from?**

A: The tests do not provide direct evidence of a lead source and the Department is investigating all potential sources, including the movement of lead carbonate through Esperance Port.

### **Q. Is the Port still shipping lead carbonate?**

A: No, the Esperance Port Authority has advised it has suspended the movement of lead into and out of the Port until the source of the lead that was responsible for some bird deaths in January has been identified.

**Q: What is DEC doing?**

A: DEC officers in Esperance are collecting native plant blossom samples for testing to help determine if local birds might have ingested any toxins through their main food source. Any possible feeding and drinking sources will be checked.

DEC is also sending investigation and sampling teams from Perth to Esperance this week to carry out further investigations on the bird deaths to determine any potential sources of toxins.

With regard to the Port, DEC recently undertook a licence audit inspection and the Port was essentially in compliance with its licence conditions. The Port Authority was requested to repair some gaps in the shed storing lead carbonate.

DEC has also requested the Port Authority develop a revised air quality monitoring plan incorporating high-volume air samplers in both the port area and the town.

**Q: Are there any health effects for humans?**

A: The Department of Health has advised that it has been monitoring the investigations into bird deaths in the Esperance region and has not seen any evidence to suggest the general population has been exposed to a health risk. If anyone has concerns they should see their local medical practitioner.

DoH has posted an information sheet about this issue on its website at [www.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.health.wa.gov.au)

**Q: How will the community be advised of future information?**

A: DEC will continue to inform the Esperance community through the local newspaper and information on the Department's website at [www.dec.wa.gov.au](http://www.dec.wa.gov.au) Follow the "Department of Environment" link to the "current issues" page.

**Q: Who do I contact about this issue?**

A: If you would like to talk to someone about the bird deaths and DEC's investigation into this matter, please contact the DEC information centre on 1800 353 866.