



9 March 2007

Media Statement

ESPERANCE BIRD DEATH TEST RESULTS

Testing to determine the cause of mass bird deaths in the Esperance area suggests the small number of birds tested died of lead poisoning.

Up to 4000 birds were estimated to have died in Esperance between early December and January, and more than 100 bird deaths have been reported in the Esperance townsite this week. Samples of these birds have been submitted for testing.

The Department of Health has been monitoring the investigations into bird deaths in the Esperance region and Environmental Health director Jim Dodds said the Department had not seen any evidence to suggest the general population has been exposed to a health risk.

Department of Environment and Conservation spokesman David Mell said the test results do not provide direct evidence of a lead source, however lead carbonate is transported into Esperance for shipping through the Esperance port.

“The Esperance Port Authority undertakes regular environmental monitoring of its operations as part of licence conditions,” Mr Mell said.

“Dust monitoring results for lead, recently received by DEC as part of the port’s air quality monitoring program, have detected lead dust at some monitoring stations.

“DEC has directed the port authority to increase its air quality monitoring program before making any further shipments of lead carbonate. The department will also observe loadings over the next few weeks to confirm that there are no dust emissions from the port during loading.

“If we have any concerns about dust concentration during the loading process, we will take immediate actions with the port authority.”

Most of the bird deaths recorded in Esperance this week were purple-crowned lorikeets, a nomadic species not reported in the earlier mass deaths.

Species most affected in December and January were wattlebirds, honeyeaters and miners.

Ends

DEC media: 6364 6499

DoH media: 9489 2888