



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Agriculture  
and Water Resources**

# **Mortality Investigation Report 61**

## **Cattle exported by sea to Vietnam in March 2016**

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May 2017



## Summary

On 17 March 2016, North Australian Cattle Company Pty Ltd (NACC) exported a consignment of slaughter cattle by sea from Townsville to Vietnam.

There were 25 mortalities in this consignment of 1,764 cattle, a mortality rate of 1.42 per cent. This exceeds the reportable mortality level of 1.0 per cent for cattle on voyages greater or equal to 10 days duration as prescribed by the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock* (ASEL).

The main cause of mortalities on this voyage was that 14 cattle were unable to stand or walk (downer animals) and were euthanased, one additional downer animal was not euthanased and died overnight. Five cattle died from pneumonia, one from a broken leg and four others were reported as due to 'misadventure' due to unknown causes possibly smothering.

## Information reviewed

The department investigated the mortalities by reviewing the following information:

- report from the exporter
- end of voyage report and daily voyage reports
- documents from the Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) who prepared the consignment
- report from the Master of the vessel
- documents from the regional department veterinary officer (DVO)
- records from the registered premises
- the department's records from previous and subsequent voyages.

## Background

NACC is experienced in preparing cattle for export to Vietnam. For the 12 months before this incident (1 March 2015 – 28 February 2016) NACC exported a total of 23 consignments of cattle to Vietnam, comprising 59 995 cattle. The overall mortality rate for these consignments is 0.12 per cent (73 mortalities). In comparison, during the same period (1 March 2015 – 28 February 2016), other exporters sent a total of 82 consignments of cattle to Vietnam comprising 278 091 cattle. The overall mortality rate of all of these consignments is 0.14 per cent (381 mortalities).

In the 12 months before this incident (1 March 2015 – 28 February 2016), the vessel used for this voyage completed 10 voyages to Vietnam carrying 23,352 cattle, with an average mortality rate of 0.20 per cent (47 mortalities).

As at 30 April 2017 there have been six reportable mortality incidents (including this incident) recorded for cattle and buffalo exported to Vietnam since exports commenced in 2012.

## Investigation findings

### The livestock

Cattle in this consignment consisted of 1253 Brahman cross slaughter steers with an average weight of 560kg and 511 Brahman cross slaughter bulls with an average weight of 530kg. The majority of the cattle were sourced from two properties a short distance from the registered premises near Townsville.

### Preparation in the registered premises

Most of the cattle arrived at the registered premises between 12 and 13 March 2016. However some had been held at the registered premises from 1 March 2017. On arrival cattle were health checked and prepared for export.

The Townsville region experienced significant rainfall in the days before the voyage which caused flooding in low lying areas and access issues across the region. Approximately 174mm of rain was recorded at the registered premises between 12 to 16 March 2016 (BOM - 2016). Additionally, in the weeks prior to the cattle arriving into the facility the management of the registered premises had undertaken a significant cleaning of the facility. In doing this the floor was taken back to bare ground and this exposed a number of rocks in most pens.

There were four mortalities reported while the cattle were at the registered premises. An Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) and a departmental veterinary officer completed a final inspection of the cattle at the premises on 16 March 2016. Ten lame bulls were removed from the consignment at the final inspection. At the same time the department's veterinary officer made the decision to close the yards, due to heavy rain and muddy conditions.

### **Loading onto the vessel**

While loading the livestock onto trucks at the registered premises on 17 March 2016 the AAV and department veterinary officer removed a further 107 steers and bulls from the consignment due to lameness. These cattle had become lame overnight due to the prolonged wet conditions.

Cattle were loaded onto the vessel in accordance with ASEL and loading was completed in just over six hours. Fodder was loaded in excess of ASEL requirements. In addition, one tonne of saw dust and one tonne of chaff (above ASEL requirements) was also loaded.

### **Mortalities and treatments**

On this voyage, the Australian Livestock Export Corporation Limited (LiveCorp) accredited stock person was responsible for reporting to the department and works with the Master of the vessel and the crew to maintain the health and welfare of the livestock on board

By day five, a total of eight mortalities had occurred on the second, third and fourth decks. The stockperson reported it appeared some animals had fallen asleep on top of others early on in the voyage which may have resulted in smothering. The stockperson took action on day two of the voyage to loosen up pens with downer/lame cattle, to provide them more space. The accredited stockperson provided medical treatments, spread cattle out and used sawdust or chaff as bedding where needed.

Downers and cattle presenting with lameness, swollen legs and pneumonia were treated with antibiotics and anti-inflammatories and were assisted to stand at least once daily. Feed and water was placed close to the downer cattle as well as extra bedding. The stockman noted the rough seas further compromised these cattle.

On day five the stockperson contacted the Operations Manager for NACC to advise them of the mortalities and issues on board. The AAV responsible for the preparation of the cattle was also contacted to review treatments and provide advice on further treatment. The AAV agreed the treatments being administered were appropriate.

Daily voyage reports submitted by the accredited stockperson recorded treatments and mortalities that occurred throughout the voyage.

The table 1 provides information on mortalities.

Voyage Days	Mortality #	Deck Temperatures	Deck/s	Reason
1	0	26 - 27	N/A	N/A
2-3	4	26-28	3 & 4	3 x Misadventure (smothering) , 1 x Downer
4	0	27-28	N/A	N/A
5-9	12	27 - 29	1,2,3 & 4	6 x Downer, 5 x Pneumonia, 1 x Misadventure (found in awkward position)
9	0	27-29	N/A	N/A
10 -11 Discharge	9	27-28	2, 3 & 4	Unfit to discharge - euthanased

*Table 1: Daily mortalities and weather conditions during the voyage.*

On arrival in Vietnam on 27 March 2016, a total of 16 mortalities had occurred during the voyage. The nine remaining mortalities occurred in port with eight euthanased as they were unable to stand, or struggled to stand and walk. One animal broke its leg during discharge and was euthanased.

Mortalities occurred on all decks in both bulls (6) and steers (19).

### **Australian Maritime and Safety Authority evaluation of the vessel**

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) conducted an investigation on 10 April 2016 and concluded there was no apparent evidence of failure of livestock services that could be attributed to the cause of high livestock mortality.

### **Exporter's Actions**

NACC concluded that the mortalities were a result of the wet conditions causing softened hooves resulting in infection and lameness. In addition, the vessel experienced rough conditions on the last few days of the voyage.

Following discharge from the vessel the NACC Vietnam manager followed the livestock through to the importer's feedlots and monitored their health and welfare over the next four-five days following arrival. NACC worked closely with the importer to ensure the full recovery of the livestock.

As a result of this incident, NACC have reviewed their policies for monitoring weather patterns to better prepare for adverse weather conditions. NACC will continue to load additional sawdust and chaff (above ASEL requirements) for heavy cattle.

### **Conclusions**

The department agrees with the exporter findings that the wet conditions during preparation of this consignment contributed to lameness and downer animals resulting in euthanasia.

The department's veterinary officer closed the registered premises due to the wet conditions until the yards dried out. No further action was taken by the department.

For the period since this incident (19 March 2016) to 31 March 2017, NACC has completed eight voyages to Vietnam for cattle, with a total of 20 155 cattle exported and 37 mortalities, a mortality rate of 0.18 per cent.