

Mortality Report 86

Cattle exported by sea to Vietnam in July 2021

December 2021

Summary

On 16 July 2021, Halleen Australasian Livestock Traders Pty. Ltd. (Halleen) exported 2,902 feeder cattle to Vietnam. The journey was completed in 8.9 days and discharged in Vietnam on 24 July 2021.

A mortality rate of 0.72% (21 head) was reported for the cattle, this exceeded the notifiable level of 0.5% as prescribed by ASEL.

Of the 21 mortalities, 20 were reported by the shipboard accredited stockperson as being a result of bovine respiratory disease (BRD) and one was the result of musculoskeletal disease.

Information reviewed

The department reviewed the incident by assessing the following information:

1. reports from the exporter
2. daily reports and the end of voyage report from the accredited stockperson
3. property of origin details
4. load plans and ship space calculations from the exporter
5. reports from the Master of the vessel
6. documents from the Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) who prepared the consignment
7. records from the registered establishment (RE)
8. department records from previous and subsequent voyages
9. the exporter's approved arrangement and approved management plans
10. weather records from the Bureau of Meteorology

Background

Prior to this voyage, Halleen had exported 27 consignments of feeder/slaughter cattle to Vietnam with a total of 50,708 cattle. This is the first notifiable mortality incident for Halleen.

Investigation Findings

The livestock

The consignment consisted of 2,902 feeder cattle averaging 415kgs. The cattle were sourced from 14 properties of origin located in the Northern Territory and Queensland.

Preparation in the registered establishment (RE)

One RE was used for the cattle in this consignment. It is located in the Northern Territory and is routinely used to prepare livestock including cattle for export. The cattle were delivered to the RE between 9 and 16 days prior to loading.

The required time for cattle to be held in an RE for short haul voyages (voyages under 10 days) with a single port of discharge is 24 hours. The cattle in the consignment met the ASEL requirements of minimum length of time that livestock must remain in an RE.

The original application for the consignment gave a departure date of 8 July 2021 but the departure had to be postponed due to delay in receiving the necessary paperwork from the importer in Vietnam. The consignment instead departed on 16 July 2021.

Halleen reported 'that weather conditions at the RE were hot and dry. There was a significant amount of wind which is not unseasonal for August weather in the Northern Territory, however it is believed this played a factor in the development BRD through cattle living in dustier than normal conditions.'

In their final inspections 2-4 days prior to departure, the AAV rejected 8 cattle - 7 for lameness, one for other sickness.

In the 48 hours prior to departure, a further 28 cattle showing respiratory signs were rejected. During this period, under the direction of the AAV, treatment of all remaining cattle was commenced with antibiotics mixed with the feed or water.

The vessel

The vessel involved in this incident is a purpose-built livestock carrier used to export livestock to a range of markets. There has been one previous notifiable mortality incident on this vessel involving cattle exported to China in May 2019 (#79).

Loading onto the vessel

Loading was completed in 7 hours on 16 July 2021. No issues were reported during loading.

Conditions during the voyage

An accredited stockperson accompanied the voyage and was responsible for reporting to the department. The stockperson works with the Master of the vessel and crew to manage the health and welfare of the livestock on board.

The Master reported slight to moderate and heavy seas and swell, passing rain showers, temperature ranging from 28 to 31°C and 78-79% humidity during the voyage.

Mortalities and treatments

There was a total of 21 cattle mortalities in the consignment of 2,902, leading to a final mortality rate of 0.72%. The first mortality was recorded on day 2 of the voyage. The remaining cattle mortalities occurred from day 3 to day 10. The notifiable level for voyage mortality rate (0.5%) was reached on day 8.

Post-mortem examinations were carried out on all 21 mortalities. Based on the post-mortem examinations, the accredited stockperson attributed 20 of the 21 mortalities to bovine respiratory disease (BRD).

On day 2 of the voyage, the stockperson reported 13 cattle showing signs of respiratory disease. Of these, 11 were treated with corticosteroids (dexapent®) and 2 with antibiotics (draxxin® – tulathromycin). Increasing numbers of cattle with suspected respiratory infections were observed during days 3-9 of the voyage (80 head in total). From day 3, all affected cattle were treated with antibiotics (draxxin® until it ran out on day 7 and then alamycin® - oxytetracycline).

On day 7, based on information received from the on-board stockman, the land based AAV advised that all affected cattle be treated with antibiotics and the worst affected animals also be given an anti-inflammatory (meloxicam). The AAV also recommended that special sick pens be created, feed be dampened down to reduce dust exposure and water troughs be cleaned daily.

The AAV commented that the organism causing these infections appeared to act quickly and severely. Often animals appearing clinically healthy during the evening round of checks will present with severe clinical signs in the morning round.

Department's Actions

The department required Hallee to develop and implement a BRD management plan and engage an AAV for future consignments. The approved BRD management plan included:

- Increased inspections at the RE specifically focused on signs of BRD, with stricter rejection criteria when symptoms of BRD are observed.
- Additional veterinary medicines in excess of ASEL requirements to be carried on board the vessel.
- Proposed treatment regime for cattle displaying signs of bovine respiratory disease in the registered establishment and during the voyage

Conclusions

After review and analysis of the reports from the on-board stockperson and exporter which detailed the clinical signs of the cattle on board, the department determined that the suspected causes for the mortalities raised by the stockperson and AAV were plausible. There is no evidence to suggest any breaches of ASEL that may have led to the mortalities.