**Mortality Report 85 - Cattle exported by sea to the Philippines in November 2020**

[**Summary**](https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/export/controlled-goods/live-animals/livestock/regulatory-framework/compliance-investigations/investigations-mortalities/cattle-philippines-report-85)

On 2 November 2020, South East Asian Livestock Services Pty Ltd (SEALS) exported 1,607 feeder cattle to the Philippines. The journey was completed in 12.46 days and discharged in the Philippines on 15 November 2020.

A mortality rate of 0.56% (9 head) was reported. The mortality rate exceeded the notifiable level of 0.5% on cattle voyages as prescribed by the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock* *3.0* (ASEL). Of the 9 mortalities, 3 were found dead in their pens and 6 were euthanased. The 6 euthanased cattle were recumbent and unable to stand, and euthanased on welfare grounds.

[**Information reviewed**](https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/export/controlled-goods/live-animals/livestock/regulatory-framework/compliance-investigations/investigations-mortalities/cattle-philippines-report-85)

The department reviewed the event by assessing the following information:

1. reports from the exporter
2. daily reports, the end of voyage report from the accredited stockperson who accompanied the consignment on board the vessel
3. load plans and ship space calculations from the exporter
4. documents from the Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) who prepared the consignment
5. reports from the Master of the vessel
6. documents and information from the regional department veterinary officer (RVO)
7. records from the registered premises (RP)
8. department records from previous and subsequent voyages
9. the exporter’s approved arrangement and approved management plans
10. report from the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) regarding its investigation into the vessel
11. weather records from the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM)

[**Background**](https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/export/controlled-goods/live-animals/livestock/regulatory-framework/compliance-investigations/investigations-mortalities/cattle-philippines-report-85)

Prior to this voyage, SEALS has exported 38 consignments of feeder cattle to the Philippines with a total of 60,830 cattle.

SEALS has had 10 prior notifiable mortality incidents. The notifiable incidents in 2011 (report #41) and 2014 (report #50) occurred on the same vessel as this incident.

| Table 1: Previous notifiable mortality incidents for SEALS  |
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| **Year** | **Report #** | **Species** | **Market** |
| 2011 | 41 | Cattle | Brunei Darussalam |
| 2014 | 50 | Cattle | Vietnam |
| 2014 | 55 | Cattle | Vietnam |
| 2014 | 57 | Buffalo | Vietnam |
| 2017 | 68 | Cattle | Brunei Darussalam and Sarawak |
| 2018 | 76 | Cattle | Philippines |
| 2018 | 77 | Buffalo | Indonesia |
| 2019 | 81 | Buffalo | Vietnam |
| 2020 | 82 | Buffalo | Vietnam |
| 2020 | 83 | Cattle | Brunei |

[**Investigation Findings**](https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/export/controlled-goods/live-animals/livestock/regulatory-framework/compliance-investigations/investigations-mortalities/cattle-philippines-report-85)

**The livestock**

The consignment consisted of 1,607 feeder cattle averaging 316kg. The cattle were sourced from 12 properties located in Queensland.

**Preparation in the registered premises**

One RP was used for this consignment. It is located in Queensland and is routinely used to prepare livestock for export. The cattle entered the RP between 15 and 30 October 2020.

During this period, the weather was fine with a maximum temperature of 32.7°C and a minimum temperature of 17.1°C recorded at the nearby Townsville weather station (Bureau of Meteorology, 2020). There was a total of 2.4mm of rainfall during this period.

The RVO inspected the cattle on 1 November 2020 (the day before export). The RVO rejected 3 cattle due to horn infection, lameness, and respiratory issues respectively.

**The vessel**

The vessel involved in this incident is a purpose-built livestock carrier used for livestock export to a range of markets in South East Asia including Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Sabah, Sarawak, Thailand and Vietnam. There have been two previous notifiable mortality incidents on this vessel (Report #41 in 2011 and #50 in 2014).

**Loading onto the vessel**

On 2 November 2020, the cattle were transported to Townsville for loading. One steer was dead on arrival and one steer was lame due to a trucking injury. The lame steer was returned to the RP for treatment.

**Conditions during the voyage**

An on-board accredited stockperson was engaged for this shipment. The stockperson is responsible for reporting to the department and works with the Master of the vessel and crew to manage the health and welfare of the livestock on board.

The Master and stockperson reported that sea conditions were slight to moderate throughout the voyage.

The temperature ranged from 29 to 31°C and humidity between 74 and 76%. The ventilation system was effective and no evidence of heat stress was noted. The stockperson reported that the respiratory character and faeces were normal throughout the voyage.

**Mortalities and treatments**

The stockperson treated 16 cattle during the voyage – 8 for respiratory/breathing concerns and 8 for recumbency/injuries. Treatments administered to the cattle during the voyage included Meloxxi (meloxicam), Benacillin (Procaine penicillin 150 mg/ml, Benzathine penicillin 150 mg/ml, Procaine hydrochloride 20 mg/ml), and Draxxin (tulathromycin).

There was a total of 9 mortalities in the consignment of 1,607, leading to a final mortality rate of 0.56%. The first mortality was recorded on day 4 of the voyage. The notifiable level for mortalities (0.5%) was reached on day 11.

The mortalities occurred across 4 decks with no pens recording multiple mortalities. Neither the load plan nor stocking density appeared to be a contributing factor to the mortalities.

The stockman reported that an unusual condition appeared in some animals where a minor wound (i.e. severe bruising) would become infected and would spread rapidly through the body into the lungs and liver, resulting in death.

The 9 mortalities were attributed to a variety of causes (injury/infection, gastroenteritis, bloat). No single cause was reported for a majority of the mortalities.

SEALS suggested that the use of bull catchers could have been a contributing factor to the mortalities, as many of the animals showed clinical signs of injury. SEALS reported that some of the cattle from the consignment were caught with bull catchers and may have had an underlying internal injury/infection which manifested after a number of days resulting in their death.

[**Exporter’s Actions**](https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/export/controlled-goods/live-animals/livestock/regulatory-framework/compliance-investigations/investigations-mortalities/cattle-philippines-report-85)

The department required SEALS to provide details of how they will mitigate the risk of another mortality event on any future voyages of cattle.

In response to this notifiable incident, SEALS advised that they will reject any cattle that have been caught with a bull catcher from its consignments.

[**Department Actions Taken to Date**](https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/export/controlled-goods/live-animals/livestock/regulatory-framework/compliance-investigations/investigations-mortalities/cattle-philippines-report-85)

In response to this event and previous notifiable incidents, the department required an AAV for future SEALS voyages and required additional monitoring and reporting for subsequent voyages.

[**Australian Maritime and Safety Authority Evaluation of the Vessel**](https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/export/controlled-goods/live-animals/livestock/regulatory-framework/compliance-investigations/investigations-mortalities/cattle-philippines-report-85)

AMSA did not conduct an investigation as the reportable mortality level under [Marine Order 43 (MO43)](https://www.amsa.gov.au/vessels/standards-regulations/marine-orders/) was not reached (for cattle on a voyage of at least 10 days, the notifiable level is the greater of 1% or 3 animals).

[**Conclusions**](https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/export/controlled-goods/live-animals/livestock/regulatory-framework/compliance-investigations/investigations-mortalities/cattle-philippines-report-85)

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 of the mortalities raised by the stockperson were plausible. There was no evidence to suggest any breaches of ASEL that may have led to the mortalities.