Independent Observer summary report on MV *Girolando Express*

Cattle and buffalo exported to Vietnam in August 2019

Report 167, February 2020

Voyage summary

A consignment of 1,629 cattle and 809 buffalo was loaded on the MV *Girolando Express* in Darwin between 5 and 6 August 2019. The vessel departed on 6 August 2019. The livestock were discharged from the vessel at the Port of Hon La, Vietnam, on 13–14 August 2019, and the Port of Phu My, Vietnam, on 17 August 2019, making this a 13-day voyage.

An Independent Observer (observer) boarded the vessel at Darwin and remained on board until completion of discharge.

The mortality rate for the cattle was 0.31% (5 mortalities). The mortality rate for the buffalo was 0.74% (6 mortalities). The mortality rate for the buffalo exceeded the reportable mortality rate of 0.5% for a voyage of less than 10 days duration (buffalo were discharged at the Port of Hon La) provided by the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock 2011 (version 2.3)* (ASEL) requirements.

The following comments are a summary of key observations and have been approved by the observer who accompanied the voyage.

Independent observations of the implementation of procedures to ensure health and welfare of livestock

Exporter documentation

The stockperson complied with the Stockman's Instructions provided by the exporter.

Loading

Although the overall stocking density of the vessel was in accordance with the ASEL requirements, a number of buffalo pens contained stock numbers greater than the ASEL stocking densities. This impacted on the health and welfare of the animals in the more densely packed pens as access to feed and water and their ability to rest was reduced. After day 3 when the buffalo had settled sufficiently, adjustments were made to pen densities although some pens remained overstocked for the remainder of the voyage.

The stocking issue arose in part due to the sequence of trucks with different lines of cattle and buffalo arriving at the Darwin loading wharf. The temperament of the buffalo also contributed to stocking densities in some pens on Decks 4 and 5 being too high as they were difficult to handle during the loading process. The higher pen densities potentially impacted on the livestock health

and welfare by reducing the ability to rest. During the first few days of the voyage it was difficult and dangerous to handle the buffalo and cattle because of their temperament.

During loading an injured buffalo was placed into a pen on its own. The condition of the animal did not improve so it was euthanased. One animal had an untipped horn that was turned inwards that made an impression on the skin, although it had not yet penetrated the skin. The observer did not observe any other livestock that should have been rejected prior to loading.

The livestock were provided with water from the time of loading. The first feeding of Decks 1–4 occurred 16 hours after the commencement of loading which meant it was longer than the 12 hours specified in ASEL, however no animal health or welfare issues were noted.

Personnel

An experienced LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson (stockperson) accompanied the voyage and was responsible for implementing the exporters' procedures to ensure the health and welfare of the livestock throughout the voyage.

The livestock crew were experienced in the handling of the livestock and were calm and quiet when moving through the livestock.

Daily routine

A cattle management meeting was held each day at 10:00am and was attended by the bosun, Chief Officer (CO), and stockperson to discuss feeding, watering and management of overstocked or tight pens. On this voyage, an additional daily report for the heavy cattle was required.

The livestock crew fed the livestock pelletised feed twice daily and chaff once a day with a top-up feed provided on request by the stockperson.

Each morning and afternoon, the stockperson moved through the cattle observing and standing all animals and noting any that required treatment. After the initial inspection, the stockperson returned to administer treatments and/or move cattle around to lighten pen densities.

The nightwatch comprised one crew member for each of two watch periods between 6:00pm to midnight, then midnight to 06:00am. The duties of the nightwatch included ensuring that water troughs and feed troughs were filled and kept clean and to monitor the cattle and report if any animals were injured or trapped.

Feed and water

Pelletised feed was stored in silos on the vessel and were gravity-fed from silos to outlets distributed along each deck. The livestock crew then manually filled bags from the outlets and distribute the pellets to troughs.

Water was supplied to pens via automatic nose troughs. There were between one and two nose troughs per pen.

The pelletised feed was in good condition with minimal fines present, and was palatable to the livestock. Some reduced access to fodder and water was noted by the observer in the first few days (see Loading).

Water was available ad lib throughout the voyage via the nose bowls. Additional water troughs were provided to the cattle to ensure sufficient access to water. The cattle and buffalo used the nose bowls effectively. A livestock crew member was assigned to clean nose bowls on a continuous basis throughout the day, and the nightwatch was responsible for this task through the night.

Ventilation

The ventilation was consistent and effective on all decks. Pad conditions on the lower decks held well for the voyage, and most were in reasonable condition by the end of the voyage. Some individual pens became very thick by day 8, however stocking densities were reduced in these pens as a result of discharge of some cattle at the Port of Hon La. A few pad areas on Decks 4 and 5 were dry and friable. Cattle in these pens did not exhibit any symptoms of heat stress.

At 5:30am on day 2, the vessel's engines were shut down so that the vessel was dead in the water for about one hour. During this time, the backup generator was used to run the ventilation system. The ventilation system came back to full capacity once the vessel was back under power from the main engines. The cattle did not appear to be adversely effected by this reduced ventilation period.

Daily temperature readings were taken by a sling psychrometer. The maximum dry bulb temperature was 33 °C, maximum humidity was 80%. The cattle and buffalo did not exhibit signs of heat stress during the voyage.

Pen conditions

The buffalo took a long time to settle down and remained difficult to move. After day 3 the stockperson and livestock crew drafted some buffalo in an attempt to reduce buffalo stocking densities. Although the stockperson was able to reduce the stocking densities in some of the worst-affected pens, because of the manner in which the vessel was stocked, the discharge sequence, and the temperament of the buffalo, the stockperson was unable to reduce the stocking density in all pens that required it. The observer reported that this impacted on the health and welfare in these pens due to deeper pad conditions making movement difficult and reduced ability for the buffalo to access feed and water.

Pad conditions in the cattle pens were reasonable for the voyage until discharge of the buffalo at the Port of Hon La on day 8. After that, pen conditions began to impact on the health and welfare of the cattle by reducing their ease of movement. To improve the conditions, the cattle pens on Decks 4 and 5 were loosened off to compensate for pad build up, which improved their welfare.

Deck washing did not occur on this voyage, as the stockperson assessed at the beginning of the voyage that it would not be required.

Health and welfare

The buffalo and cattle were agitated and aggressive at the start of the voyage, which made in the observer's opinion human movement down the alleyways difficult and dangerous. The observer noted that this appeared to impact on the ability of the livestock crew and stockperson to monitor the cattle and buffalo during the first 3 days until the animals settled down somewhat.

There were six buffalo and five cattle mortalities on this voyage. Three buffalo were euthanased: two because of injuries; and one because of illness that did not respond to treatment. The captive bolt gun did not kill two of the buffalo it was used on. These buffalo were subsequently euthanased by injection. The observer witnessed the stockperson using the captive bolt gun effectively on other occasions, but was unable to determine why it was ineffective on these two occasions.

One of the cattle was euthanased because of a dislocated or broken leg. Three buffalo and four head of cattle were found dead in their pen, six of these animals possibly because of pneumonia, and one buffalo possibly because of trampling. No post mortems were undertaken.

There were numerous treatments administered during the voyage, most commonly for symptoms of pneumonia, such as nasal discharge and lethargy. Other treatments were for infected wounds and lameness.

All injured cattle and buffalo were treated, were able be discharged, and did not appear to be in excessive discomfort.

The crew, nightwatch and stockperson were diligent in monitoring the cattle and buffalo. The crew would report animals of concern to the stockperson, who would then respond.

The observer noted that veterinary kits from a number of different exporters were on board. None of these kits individually contained the minimum veterinary equipment for slaughter or feeder cattle and buffalo included in Table A4.1.8 of ASEL 4.1.9. However, when combined there were sufficient veterinary drugs for this voyage.

Discharge

The discharged of the livestock at both ports proceeded smoothly and no issues were observed.

Conclusion

Although there were some stocking density issues during the voyage, the observer noted the crew were well organised and their livestock management and handling techniques considered the welfare of the animals.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Pen showing over-stocking of buffalo

Day 1: Alleyway – no issues

Day 1: Cattle in pen – no issues

Day 2: Cattle in pen – no issues

Day 3: Pad – no issues

Day 3: Cattle in pen – no issues