

Independent Observer summary report on *MV Gloucester Express*

Cattle exported to China in August 2018

Report 17, March 2019

Voyage summary

The *MV Gloucester Express* is an enclosed five deck vessel which was purpose built for the carriage of cattle.

The *Gloucester Express* departed Geelong on 24 August 2018 carrying 3 579 cattle. The final animal was discharged at Dongying, China, on 12 September 2018 making this a voyage of 20 days.

The Independent Observer (IO) joined the vessel in Geelong.

The overall mortality rate for the voyage was 0.03 per cent (one mortality). This does not exceed the reportable mortality rate as stated in the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (Version 2.3) 2011* ([ASEL](#)).

The following comments represent a summary of key observations from the IO from loading in Geelong until discharge at Dongying, China. The summary has been approved by the IO who accompanied this voyage.

Implementation of procedures to ensure health and welfare of livestock

Exporter documentation

Consignment specific export plans (CSEPs) were available for cattle addressing procedures relating to provision of fodder, water, bedding, medication, humane destruction, livestock officer instructions from loading through to discharge and contingencies. The instructions included in the CSEPs were observed to be implemented during the voyage and to be compliant with ASEL requirements.

Loading

Cattle were loaded in Geelong without incident, and the health and welfare of animals was maintained throughout the process. The exporter load plan was submitted to the department prior to departure as required. Livestock were in general loaded onto the vessel in accordance with the load plan, noting some adjustments were made in the first few days to ensure livestock pen densities were satisfactory. Some cattle had some initial difficulty in operating the nose water bowls.

Personnel

There was a very experienced LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson (stockperson) on-board with 25 years of experience in both short and long haul voyages of cattle, and overseeing cattle feedlot management.

The vessel's crew was led by the Captain (Master), Chief Officer (CO), 2nd and 3rd Officers and the Bosun; all of whom were actively involved in the daily monitoring and surveillance of all decks. A total of 29 livestock crew performed the manual feeding and oversight of water bowls, as well as aisle cleaning and identification of any health risks.

Daily routine

The Bosun worked closely with the stockperson and organised any relocation of animals as required. A daily meeting was held on the Bridge and was attended by the Master, CO, stockperson, the IO and crew to discuss daily tasks and any problems which emerged.

Crew were assigned to night watch duties to check ventilation and feed troughs, flush water bowls, and to report any urgent maintenance issues and unwell animals. This was arranged through two shifts between 6.00pm and 6.00am, with reports provided to the Bridge every two hours.

Feed and water

The volume of pellets and chaff loaded at Geelong was sufficient to cover the feeding of cattle for the estimated 15 days journey to China, with an additional three-day contingency as required under ASEL. Feed and water was available at all times and was checked before each feeding time.

Most of the pen accommodation was a combination of two or three smaller pens with gates removed, allowing animals to move around and access feed troughs. Feed troughs were located on a lower rail for all cattle to gain access. There were no shy feeders identified during the voyage.

Livestock crew monitored the troughs throughout the day for any contamination with faeces, which was found to be minimal. Feed troughs were filled manually by the livestock crew from sacks and it took around thirty minutes to complete the task.

Water was provided for crew and livestock by two desalination plants on-board. Cattle accessed water continuously from nose-pressure bowls at the rate of one bowl per six head of cattle.

Ventilation

The forced ventilation system provided downward directed air flow directly into the pens. Although there was an increase in respiration rates when travelling north of the equator, no animal exhibited panting or any signs of respiratory distress. There was adequate lighting of decks at all times.

Pen conditions

The progression of the pen pads from dry and crumbly to muddy and boggy was a gradual process, and the crew did a wash down of pens on day 11. Sawdust was spread over pen flooring and there were no health and welfare issues arising from the pen environment.

Health and welfare

Hospital pens were allocated on each deck and hold, with sawdust bedding provided. Some cattle were treated for lameness in hospital pens during the voyage and were monitored daily by the stockperson and crew. Good quality chaff was fed to hospital pen patients. Veterinary drug use was in line with the ailments being treated and the vessel was more than sufficiently supplied with medications.

The vessel's crew and stockperson managed the health and welfare of animals well. The welfare of the animals were their key priority at all times. The voyage had a very low mortality rate, with one pregnant heifer needing to be euthanised while trying to give birth to a dead, full-term calf. This constituted a breach of the ASEL Standard 1.10 for selection of pregnant females that should be certified as no more than 190 days pregnant at the time of departure. The non-compliance with s1.10 was raised with the exporter who attributed the issue to human error during pregnancy testing. The exporter has implemented procedures to minimise the likelihood of a recurrence of this error. The IO on the exporter's following voyage did not observe any breach in ASEL S1.10c.

Discharge

The *Gloucester Express* berthed at Dongying Port on 11 September 2018. Cattle remaining on-board were fed while discharge was undertaken. The last animal was discharged from the vessel on 12 September 2018. The IO noted some inexperienced Chinese handlers on the wharf occasionally prodding cattle unnecessarily during the process of loading cattle from the vessel's raceway onto waiting trucks. Overall, all cattle were discharged and loaded safely with no animal suffering an injury.

Other

The provision of food to the cattle on board went beyond the maximum time frame of 12 hours after loading as required by ASEL (Standard 5.4).

The non-compliance with S5.4 was raised with the exporter. The exporter has implemented procedures to ensure this requirement is complied with for future voyages. The IO verified compliance with this requirement during the exporter's next voyage.

Conclusion

Other than the non-compliances with ASEL requirements detailed above, the IO determined that the relevant procedures relating to the management of livestock exported by sea were consistent with ASEL.

The IO found that from the timing of loading to discharge, the processes, procedures and attention to the maintenance of pens and facilities was commendable. The Master, all the vessel's officers and crew were dedicated and diligent in performing their duties to ensure the well-being of the cattle. The experienced stockperson communicated well with the crew in order to maintain the health and welfare of the cattle.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 2 Cattle being fed—no issues identified



Day 2 Cattle in pen—no issues identified



Day 6 Cattle in pen—no issues identified



Day 6 Cattle in pen—no issues identified



Day 17 Cattle in pen—no issues identified



Day 18 Cattle being fed—no issues identified

