Independent Observer summary report on MV *Ocean Ute*

Cattle exported to China in September 2019

Report 182, February 2020

Voyage summary

On 8 September 2019, a consignment of 4,593 breeding heifers was loaded on the MV *Ocean Ute* at Portland. Discharge of the cattle was completed at Weifang, China on 30 September 2019, making this a 23 day voyage.

The mortality rate for the cattle was 0.04% (2 mortalities), which does not exceed the reportable mortality rate provided in the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (Version 2.3) 2011* (ASEL). The causes of the mortalities were not considered to be linked to any systemic failure by the exporter.

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

The following comments represent 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 exporter's documentation was compliant with the procedures in their voyage instructions; however, only instruction for a land-based, not ship-based AAV are contained in the approved exporter program (AEP).

Loading

No welfare incidents were observed during the loading of the vessel. Sawdust was spread on ramps to prevent cattle from slipping, and the cattle handlers followed good animal welfare practices.

Personnel

The master, chief officer (CO), bosun, livestock crew, AAV and LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson (stockperson) were excellent in relation to cattle handling and management of their welfare. The stockperson in particular demonstrated great experience and commitment in the management of welfare of cattle at sea.

Daily routine

A management meeting was held at 10:00am each day between the master, CO, bosun, stockperson, AAV and observer. The meeting discussed the past 24 hours of activities, and the plan for the next 24 hours, including deck washing if required, feed times and amounts, and whether any cattle needed to be moved to hospital pens.

The stockperson and AAV did daily inspections at 5:00-11:00, 13:00-14:00, and 15:00-18:00. All cattle were inspected at rest before feeding and then during feeding. The CO did daily checks pre-feed, and the bosun was on the decks as required 24/7, with all issues found by crew members reported directly to the bosun.

A nightwatch crew member was on duty 18:00-06:00, plus three other crew members who rotated every three hours over this period. Their duties were to check the water supply; clean the nose bowls in each pen; and manage the welfare of the cattle overnight. This nightwatch crew member was very experienced in handling livestock, and showed care for the cattle during the voyage.

Feed and water

Adequate feed was loaded to meet ASEL requirements for a voyage of 18 days plus 3 days reserve. The predicted length of this voyage was 14 days but the actual duration was 22 days; there was concern part way through the voyage that there would not be sufficient fodder. Cattle were initially fed ad lib, but between days 10-17, the feed rate was reduced to 1.6%-2.1% of body weight, which is below the ASEL-mandated rate of 2.5% kg/head. The rate of feed was restored from day 18. At discharge, the cattle showed no signs of weight loss.

The chaff, sawdust and drinking water were of good quality. Feed was manually fed to troughs by buckets, and the livestock crew checked all water bowls 24/7 as part of their normal duties.

Ventilation

There were no animal welfare issues observed related to ventilation. Air was circulated to all enclosed decks via overhead pipes which had evenly spaced holes that directed airflow into the cattle pens. The ventilation was sufficient on the voyage to keep the cattle comfortable.

A wet and dry bulb hygrometer with a relative humidity table located on each deck of the vessel in different locations was used to measure temperature and humidity, which ranged between 15-33°C, and 69-93% respectively during the voyage. No indicators of heat stress were observed in the cattle.

Pen conditions

The pen stocking density, sufficient space to rest, and access to feed and water were compliant with ASEL. Surplus bedding was loaded for the voyage and pad condition was managed by washing cattle decks. Decks were washed down 3 times during the voyage, with an extra wash on Deck 6. Deck washing was conducted in such a way that no stress indicators were observed for its duration.

Health and welfare

Cattle were monitored throughout the day and night. Any shy feeders or animals in need of care were moved to the hospital pens where the AAV would assess and treat as necessary.

There were two mortalities – on day 4 a heifer was found dead in its pen, and post-mortem examination revealed it had fluid-filled lungs. The second mortality, on day 15, was a heifer that the AAV euthanased on welfare grounds due to a grossly swollen left foreleg which was not responding to treatment.

Discharge

No welfare incidents were observed during discharge of the vessel. Sawdust was spread on ramps to avoid slipping, and the animal handlers followed good animal welfare practices.

Conclusion

The cattle were observed to be managed in accordance with the exporter's arrangements and ASEL apart from a period of feeding cattle at a rate less than that mandated by ASEL. This matter has been addressed with relevant parties and will be monitored on an ongoing basis.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 1 Cattle in pen—no issues identified

Day 5 Cattle in pen—no issues identified

Day 10 Cattle in pen—no issues identified

Day 15 Cattle in pen—Deck wash required

Day 17 Cattle in pen—After deck wash. No issues identified.

Day 21 Cattle in pen—No issues identified