

Independent Observer summary report on *MV Al Messilah*

Sheep and cattle exported to Kuwait, UAE and Qatar in
September–October 2019

Report 189, December 2019

Voyage summary

A consignment of 54,390 sheep and 467 cattle was loaded on the *MV Al Messilah* at the Port of Fremantle between 22 and 23 September 2019. The vessel departed on 23 September 2019. The first discharge was at the Port of Kuwait between 6 and 8 October 2019. The second discharge was at the Port of Jebel Ali, United Arab Emirates between 10 and 11 October 2019. The final discharge was the Port of Hamad, Qatar, on 12 October 2019, making this a 21-day voyage.

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

The mortality rate for the sheep was 0.24% (132 mortalities) which does not exceed the reportable mortality rate. The causes of the sheep mortalities were not considered to be linked to any systemic failure by the exporter. There were no cattle mortalities during the voyage.

The following comments are a summary of key observations and has 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

Exporter arrangements were available to address procedures relating to livestock management from loading through to discharge and contingencies.

Loading

A sufficient number of competent stock handlers loaded the vessel in a manner that minimised stress to the livestock. Adequate feed and water was available for the livestock during loading which complied with the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock 2011 (version 2.3)* (ASEL) requirements.

The exporter submitted an initial load plan for 56,779 sheep and 467 cattle to be loaded. When the loading finished only 54,390 sheep were loaded, leaving numerous pens on the ship vacant.

A departmental regional veterinary officer boarded the vessel prior to departure and observed some pens to be empty and others were overstocked. The observer noted that the number of

sheep loaded was lower than expected and that due to time constraints for departure animals were loaded into pens. The observer was aware of the pen density issues and was advised the animals would be routinely redistributed over the next 24-48 hours. A few days into the voyage the observer was advised that a non-compliance notice was issued to the exporter on this issue.

The observer confirmed the sheep were moved around over the first two days of the voyage to correct the stocking densities to comply with the ASEL requirements. There were no animal welfare issues observed.

Personnel

There was an experienced Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) and a LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson (stockperson) on board responsible for implementing the exporters' procedures to ensure the health and welfare of the livestock throughout the voyage. The AAV was suitably qualified and had over twenty years' experience in live animal exports, including on vessels, feedlots, and auditing in the Middle East. The stockperson was experienced and had worked on many livestock voyages.

The bosun and livestock crew were experienced in handling the sheep and cattle. The master, Chief Officer (CO) and other crew were responsive to issues raised by the AAV, stockperson, and observer. The CO and master communicated well with the livestock crew to ensure good outcomes for animal health and welfare.

Daily routine

The AAV and stockperson inspected the decks before 8:00am each day to ensure all the animals were able to stand up and to assess them for any health conditions such as lameness or bloating. Animals requiring attention were moved to the hospital pens for review and treatment.

A management meeting was held each day at 10:00am and was attended by the CO, AAV, stockperson and the observer to discuss voyage progress, stock condition, feed and water requirements, treatments and mortalities and any other health related issues.

Three night watch crew were rostered on four-hour shifts between 6:00pm and 6:00am to detect injured stock, identify water leaks, and identify issues that could impact on health and welfare such as a ventilation breakdowns.

Feed and water

Pelletised feed was loaded in accordance with the ASEL requirements and was supplied to the feed troughs by conveyors on all livestock decks. The exception was Deck 6, forward section, where livestock were manually fed.

The livestock were fed twice a day and the cattle were also fed chaff in the afternoons.

There were adequate feeding and drinking troughs for each pen to allow access to feed and water. The sheep and cattle were able to access to good quality water throughout the voyage via troughs fitted with float valves. Food and water troughs were regularly cleaned, emptied and refilled as required.

Ventilation

The ventilation system was efficient and effectively maintained air circulation to all areas of the vessel. The livestock decks had 32–58 air changes per hour. Ventilation was supplemented with ancillary fans to cover known ‘hotspots’ and areas containing stagnant air.

Two Kestrel meters were installed in each of the ten livestock decks to measure the temperature and humidity. The wet bulb temperature ranged from 26 °C to 32 °C, and humidity ranged from 65% to 93%.

Pen conditions

Sawdust was used in cattle pens at loading and after deck wash or shovelling. Sawdust was also used in the marshalling area and ramp during discharge.

Deck 7 in which cattle in the mid-section were surrounded by sheep, was washed on day 9. The sheep pens were surrounded by bags of sawdust to prevent water inflow. The process was effective in cleaning the deck, and significantly improved the quality of air, as well as lowering the deck temperature. On day 10, seven cattle pens with 94 head nested among sheep pens were shovelled out.

Noise levels were 85–108 dB. The higher readings were noted at large fans installed for air circulation. The lights were left on in the cargo hold during the entire voyage.

Health and welfare

There were 132 sheep mortalities spread across decks and pens. The AAV performed post mortems which ascertained the main causes of death to be enteritis, inanition or no determined cause of death, there were no systematic cause of deaths identified. There were no cattle mortalities on the voyage.

Two sheep were placed in hospital pens for treatment of an injury, and lameness. The hospital pens were well managed by the stockperson and AAV.

During periods of high humidity sheep in some pens were observed to be panting (pant score3), which were estimated at between 3% and 5% of the sheep.

The observer noted there were no issues with the overall health and welfare of the sheep and cattle during the voyage.

Discharge

Saw dust was used in the marshalling area and on the ramps and no animal health or welfare issues were observed as a result of the discharge of the consignment.

Conclusion

The observer noted that the stockperson and the crew ensured that the health and welfare of the sheep and cattle were maintained during the voyage.

Apart from the non-compliance issued for over-stocked pens during loading, the exporter arrangements were observed to be implemented during the voyage, and to be compliant with ASEL requirements.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 6 Cattle pen – no issues identified



Day 7 Sheep pen – no issues identified



Day 12 Sheep pen – no issues identified



Day 15 Sheep pen – no issues identified



Day 18 Sheep pen – no issues identified



Day 19 Sheep pen – no issues identified

