

Independent Observer summary report on *MV Al Shuwaikh*

Sheep and Cattle exported to the Middle East in
December 2019

Report 211, July 2020

Voyage summary

A consignment of 64,737 sheep and 532 cattle for a single exporter was loaded on the *MV Al Shuwaikh* at Fremantle from 22 December 2019. The vessel departed on 23 December 2019. The first discharge was at Shuwaikh, Kuwait, between 7 and 8 January 2020. The second discharge was at Doha, Qatar, between 10 and 11 January 2020. The final discharge was at Jebel Ali, United Arab Emirates, between 13 and 14 January 2020, making this a 24-day voyage.

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

The mortality rate for the sheep was 0.35% (232 mortalities). This does not exceed the reportable mortality rate. There were no cattle mortalities on this voyage.

The following comments are a summary of the key observations made and has been approved by the observer who accompanied this 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, including contingencies.

Loading

The vessel was not strictly loaded according to the supplied load plan. Livestock in overstocked pens were spread out over the first six days of the voyage. The vessel eventually reached stocking densities in accordance with [Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock 2011 \[version 2.3\]](#) (ASEL). The observer noted no negative impact on the health of the sheep or cattle as a result of this.

Personnel

An experienced Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) and two LiveCorp Accredited Stockpersons (stockpersons) accompanied the voyage, and were responsible for implementing the exporter's procedures to ensure the health and welfare of the livestock throughout the voyage.

The vessel's officers were experienced and were actively engaged in daily stock management. The observer reported that there were sufficient crew available to manage the livestock appropriately. Crew were observed to work cooperatively to ensure the health and welfare of the livestock.

Daily routine

Management meetings were held daily, following morning rounds, between the Chief Officer (CO), AAV and two stockpersons. The observer was not informed of any meetings held from Day 20 onward during the discharge period. The AAV reported that flexible daily meetings were held during the discharge period.

The night-watch comprised one crew member for each shift, between 6:00pm and 9:00pm and 9:00pm to 7:00am.

Feed and water

Fodder was loaded in accordance with ASEL requirements, including contingencies.

The vessel had water generation capacity in addition to stored water in tanks, which automatically replenished water troughs through a float system. Water troughs in hospital pens required manual filling by crew. Water troughs were cleaned twice a day and livestock crew were observed to frequently inspect the water troughs, with maintenance performed in a timely manner. One hospital pen on Deck 7 was without water as labour was diverted to pad maintenance on Day 6. The observer noted no health impacts upon the sheep over this period of time and water supply was restored after approximately 2-3 hours.

Feeding was mostly automated, the exceptions were the hospital pens, which required manual feed distribution by crew. Additional pelleted feed and chaff were provided to the livestock by the crew as required. Livestock were routinely fed in the mornings and afternoons. Chaff was supplied to cattle once daily from Day 2 and to the lambs from Day 7 following the morning feed.

A delivery and build-up of feed dust ('fines') from breakdown of pellets was significant on this voyage. Nearly all pens on all decks were reported to be affected by this, however the severity ranged with 25-75% of trough contents affected. Management strategies, including mixing and/or removal of fines, were time-consuming and improved but did not resolve the issue for the duration of the voyage. Sheep were observed to prefer the pellets over the fines.

Sheep on the lower decks were not supplied feed on Day 20 due to a delay in discharge, meaning ASEL was not met. The observer reported that the lambs demonstrated vocalisation and increased competition for feed when this feed was missed. No adverse health outcomes occurred as a result of this.

Ventilation

The ventilation system functioned without interruption on this voyage. Decks 1-5 were enclosed and decks 6-9 were open.

Wet bulb temperatures averaged 26°C and reached a maximum of 30°C as the vessel crossed the equatorial region. On Day 6 and Day 7, the observer reported that less than 1% of sheep were observed with a heat stress score of 3. This had resolved, with all animals displaying a heat stress score of 0, on Day 8.

Pen conditions

Sheep pad conditions were seen to soften by Day 5. The observer noted that the sheep, particularly on decks 1 and 2, displayed coat contamination on Day 6, but that the level of soiling was light and was not observed to impact the sheep's ability to thermoregulate. As the humidity decreased, the pad conditions were observed to improve. Water leaks occasionally occurred on the voyage and the observer reported that affected pads were treated effectively with sawdust.

Cattle pen conditions were managed well over the voyage. No wash-down of the cattle pens was performed on this voyage. Instead, the pad material was manually removed by shovelling. The observer reported that these pen clean-outs were time and labour intensive, however were effective at maintaining pad conditions.

Pad depth and moisture levels in cattle pens increased steadily and pads became muddy by day 6. Sawdust was applied to pens following cleaning on days 6 and 7. Stocking density of the cattle was temporarily increased to facilitate pen cleaning. Pens were cleaned out again on days 14 and 15 and pads were observed to remain dry until discharge. Greater than 50% of the cattle were observed able to lie down at one time and were stocked in accordance with ASEL.

Sheep and cattle were able to access feed and water troughs throughout the voyage. The observer commented that access was suited to the stocking density, with no adverse welfare outcomes observed.

Health and welfare

A total of 232 sheep mortalities occurred on this voyage. The observer reported that a third of these sheep were euthanased, mostly for pneumonia and inanition. Approximately 40% of the total mortalities were attributed to inanition and 20% for pneumonia. No cause of death was identified for 20% of the mortalities and the remainder were due to enteritis or shearing wounds.

Over 500 sheep demonstrated signs of scabby mouth on this voyage. Sheep affected by scabby mouth on decks 1-4 and deck 7 were removed from pens and isolated. Exporter arrangements relating to the management of scabby mouth cases were not strictly complied with, as sheep on other decks remained in their home pens. It was the observer's opinion that the double tier pens sometimes delayed the identification of affected sheep. Some unwell sheep were jointly hospitalised with otherwise well sheep infected with scabby mouth and were at times observed competing for food.

The observer identified approximately 26 sheep with shearing wounds on this voyage. All sheep received treatment for shearing wounds, including five sheep that required euthanasia.

Some sheep, predominantly younger lambs, were identified by the observer with mild symptoms of pink eye during the voyage and most were not hospitalised or treated. Three sheep demonstrated severe pink-eye symptoms and were hospitalised and received treatment.

Discharge

Discharge was supervised by the CO and assisted by the stockpersons and AAV.

Livestock had longer intervals between feeds during discharge, however water was available *ad lib*. On infrequent occasions while waiting for trucks to return, some sheep calmly waited a maximum of 45 minutes in the aisle without access to feed during discharge. No impact on the health and welfare was observed for these sheep.

The observer reported that one sheep experienced a delay in euthanasia as the captive bolt was not accessible to stockpersons. This sheep was later found deceased.

Discharge ramps were lined with non-slip surfaces. Most sheep were observed to slip on a small un-lined section of the ramp, whereas cattle were unaffected by this and no injuries occurred for the sheep. One incident of a movement aid being used in a non-compliant manner was observed. The crew did not demonstrate low-stress stock handling techniques at times during the discharge period. Otherwise, the AAV and stockpersons were observed to use appropriate animal handling methods.

Four pilot sheep were used to assist with discharge and the observer commented that both stockpersons were proactive in ensuring their health and welfare. On the final day of discharge, one pilot sheep was housed in a pen that contained the bodies of three euthanased sheep. The observer commented that this pilot sheep did not exhibit any overt signs of distress during this time.

Conclusion

The observer reported that a positive working environment was maintained between the officers and crew to achieve positive outcomes for the livestock. The AAV and stockpersons monitored and managed the stock well.

The issues raised on this voyage have been addressed with the exporter and the shipboard AAV. The department addressed the issues identified by the observer with the relevant party.

Day 1 Sheep in pen—no issues identified



Day 4 Sheep in pen – no issues identified



Day 5 Pellet fines in sheep feed troughs



Day 13 Cattle in pen – no issues identified



Day 16 Cattle in pen prior to clean-out. No issues identified.



Day 17 Sheep pen conditions —no issues identified

