Independent Observer summary report on MV *Al Kuwait*

Sheep exported to Kuwait in June 2020

Report 219, August 2020

Voyage summary

A consignment of 33,341 sheep was loaded onto the MV Al Kuwait at Fremantle from 16 June 2020. Loading completed on 17 June and the vessel departed on 18 June 2020. The vessel discharged at Shuwaikh Port, Kuwait from 2 to 3 July 2020, making this a 17-day voyage.

An Independent Observer (observer) boarded the vessel in Fremantle and was approved to disembark prior to the completion of discharge at Kuwait due to COVID-19 travel requirements.

The mortality rate for the sheep was 0.08% (28 mortalities). This did not exceed the reportable mortality rate.

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 consignment-specific management plans.

Loading

Sheep were loaded as per the load plan, which was in accordance with *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock 2011 (version 2.3)* and complied with additional space requirements for this voyage under an allometric stocking density of k=0.037. Loading at Fremantle proceeded well with no issues observed. The vessel departed, but was then anchored off the coast of Fremantle for approximately 28 hours due to poor weather conditions.

Personnel

An experienced Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV), a LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson and one junior Stockperson (stockpersons) accompanied the consignment, and were responsible for implementing the exporter's procedures to ensure the health and welfare of the sheep throughout the voyage.

All vessel staff from the master to members of the livestock crew were observed to have active involvement in the positive health and welfare outcomes for the sheep. The AAV, stockpersons and crew communicated effectively and worked well together.

Daily routine

A daily meeting was held at 10:00am each day with the AAV, stockpersons, Chief Officer (CO), bosun and observer. Topics discussed generally included a summary of the previous day's activities, observations, issues, voyage updates and the next day's plans including any required changes to routines.

The AAV, stockpersons, bosun and livestock crew monitored sheep pens during their daily activity routines across all decks. The night watch comprised three crew members on rotating four-hour shifts over a 12 hour period who were responsible for monitoring livestock, ensuring access to water and replenishing feed troughs.

Pellets were fed to sheep twice daily, at 7:00am and 3:00pm. Hay was fed initially once daily following the morning feed and then every second day as the voyage progressed.

Feed and water

Fodder, in the form of pelletised feed and chaff, was observed to be loaded in excess of ASEL requirements, including required contingencies. The observer reported that all sheep were supplied enough time and opportunity to satisfy their feed and water intake requirements throughout the voyage.

Pellets were delivered from automatic feeding pipes twice daily, however some feed troughs were manually replenished by the crew. Where required, pellets were manually spread through troughs to encourage delivery of additional feed through pipes overnight. The observer reported little to no competition for fodder at the troughs during the morning feed.

Feed troughs were cleaned and broken down pellets ('fines') removed before feed delivery. Shy feeders were identified in very low numbers and were transferred to a hospital pen to receive treatment and supportive feeds.

The observer commented that the AAV and crew performed targeted monitoring of smaller lambs early in the voyage to prevent any stock becoming stuck in a space around feed troughs. A handful of sheep were found to be caught on this voyage and were released. The observer commented that the consistent availability of feed in troughs, together with preventative monitoring resulted in positive outcomes for the sheep.

The vessel was able to produce water, in addition to having water storage capacity. Clean water was available to livestock *ad lib*. Troughs were refilled automatically and were regulated by an enclosed float valve mechanism.

Ventilation

Ventilation was observed to be consistent and functioned without interruption. Each pen on enclosed decks was ventilated by two supply fans, with the exception of one pen adjacent to the engine bulkhead that had only one ventilation supply fan. The observer reported a perceived reduction of air movement within this pen. Especially on warmer days, approximately half of the sheep in this pen were observed to be one heat stress score higher than sheep in other areas of the vessel.

The outermost pens on open decks relied on external air movement for ventilation. Despite having adequate space available in the shade, some sheep in these pens were observed to be

lying in the sun with heat stress scores ranging from 2 to 4 during the warmest period of the several days recorded. Those lying in the shade appeared more relaxed and with lower heat stress scores generally observed.

The observer reported that increased heat stress scores aligned with increases in wet bulb temperature and humidity readings. Environmental logger data showed the maximum wet bulb temperature (WBT) was 32°C recorded at 8pm local vessel time on Day 15 (30 June 2020). Highest percentage estimates of heat stress scores provided by the observer on this day were 3% of sheep at score 4, 12% at score 3, 84% at score 2 and 1% at score 1. The next morning, humidity levels dropped significantly and the observer commented that sheep on all decks were observed to be more comfortable with reduced heat stress scores.

Heat stress scores were observed to fluctuate during the day, and between days when cooler and/or less humid air was circulated. Although sheep on the upper decks experienced lower local temperatures than other decks, the heat stress score percentages observed each day were similar among all decks. The observer commented that no sheep were observed to be in severe heat stress or distress from heat during the voyage.

Pen conditions

Pen condition management was observed to be adequate for this voyage. During humid conditions, sheep were observed to drink and expected to urinate more. Some pads on the lower decks then developed a higher moisture content, became sticky and were observed to result in minor coat contamination for some sheep. This was managed by crew applying sawdust or wasted pellet fines to the pads as directed by the AAV and bosun. Conversely, in drier conditions, the pad surface was observed to become dusty. Dust levels were managed appropriately by crew members strategically applying small amounts of water to the pad surface and storing dry waste fodder away from pens.

Water tended to pool continuously at the end of decks 1 and 2, but did not encroach into sheep pens. This issue was observed to be managed successfully by crew using discarded feed pellets to soak up the excess water and direct flow into drains.

The observer commented that sufficient space was provided to allow all sheep to rest at any one time. Two areas, Deck 5 Special and Deck 9, were observed to have no livestock loaded and remained empty for the duration of the voyage. No issues with pen space allocation were observed.

Health and welfare

A total of 28 mortalities occurred on this voyage. The AAV reported that eight sheep were euthanased on this voyage, for difficulty walking, liver disease, cardiac disease and trauma. Post-mortems were performed by the AAV on the majority of mortalities, with the main causes identified by the AAV as lung disease in eight sheep, liver disease, *Salmonella*, wound infection and organ failure due to crush injury. No cause of death was attributed for eight sheep as the AAV reported that no post-mortem was performed.

The AAV identified concurrent signs of trauma and crush injuries in seven post-mortems and in up to 57 sheep hospitalised for signs including discoloured urine, bruising, stiffness or dehydration. These sheep were identified from two to three days after loading. The observer

reported that the AAV believed these cases to be linked to the rejection processes applied to sheep at the registered premises before departmental inspection and loading.

A total of 103 sheep were hospitalised for treatment on this voyage, mainly for stiffness or dehydration in up to 57 sheep and pink-eye in 30 sheep, as identified by the AAV. Other reasons for hospitalisation included lameness, neurological disease, infected wound, suspect urinary obstruction. The observer reported a total of 102 hospitalised animals recovered and were discharged. One sheep receiving treatment died from infection secondary to a wound.

Three pregnant ewes were identified and transferred into a hospital pen for observation. A total of four healthy lambs were born among the three ewes and were observed to be managed appropriately.

The observer reported large sea swells after departure and again through monsoonal conditions on days 9 and 10. These conditions were not observed to impact the sheep. Water and fodder consumption remained unaffected during these periods and the observer commented that the cross-winds passing over the upper pen decks improved conditions for sheep.

Discharge

The sheep were discharged at Shuwaikh Port, Kuwait, with a 155 negative head count discrepancy noted in the master's report. Discharge of sheep was completed in two separate sessions, to avoid hotter periods of the day. Port staff were generally observed to use low stress stock handling techniques and discharge proceeded uneventfully. The observer reported that some crew were noisy during discharge.

Conclusion

Exporter arrangements were observed to be implemented during the voyage, and to be compliant with ASEL requirements. The observer stated that the causes of the mortalities were not linked to any systemic failure of the exporter. The observer described that the AAV, stockpersons, vessel's officers and crew carefully monitored sheep during their daily activity routines and were committed to the positive outcomes for sheep.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 2 Sheep in pen – no issues identified

Day 4 Sheep in pen – no issues identified

Day 9 Sheep in pen – no issues identified

Day 12 Sheep in pen – no issues identified

Day 14 Sheep in pen – some individual sheep at heat stress score 3

Day 16 Sheep in pen – no issues identified