

Independent Observer summary report on *MV Bison Express*

Cattle exported to China in December 2018

Report 48, September 2019

Voyage summary

A consignment of 1,477 cattle were loaded onto the *MV Bison Express* in Fremantle on 10 and 11 December 2018. The vessel was delayed in Fremantle with mechanical issues but departed the afternoon of 16 December 2018. Cattle were discharged at Huanghua, China on 1 and 2 January 2019, making this a 24 day voyage.

The mortality rate for the cattle was 0.14% (two mortalities). This does not exceed the reportable mortality rate. The causes of the mortalities were not considered to be linked to any systemic failure by the exporter.

The following comments represent a summary of key observations and have been approved by the independent observer (observer) that accompanied the voyage.

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 cattle were loaded without incident and in accordance with the load plan. Health and welfare of the cattle was maintained throughout the process. In the early part of the voyage, the stockperson and crew moved cattle around to make better use of the available space whilst ensuring *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (Version 2.3) 2011 (ASEL)* requirements were met. Overall, the cattle in the majority of pens were able to lie down and rest.

Personnel

The master had overall responsibility for the vessel, the cattle and all personnel. The master checked the cargo holds on a daily basis. The master was very experienced at working on livestock vessels. The 12 personnel that delivered livestock services were experienced and competent when working with the cattle.

An experienced LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson (stockperson) accompanied the voyage responsible for the health and welfare of the livestock, who had worked on livestock vessels for many years. The stockperson provided appropriate care and management of all livestock whilst on the vessel.

Daily routine

A meeting was held every day with the chief officer (CO), bosun and crew. The meeting covered fodder rations, chaff rations, pad conditions, daily reports, and instructions regarding the welfare of the cattle.

The stockperson inspected all decks containing cattle in the morning and afternoon.

The crew worked a four-hour night watch shift and duties included checking the water bowls, monitoring the welfare of the cattle and updating the officer on watch. The observer verified night watch activities during the voyage.

Feed and water

Pellets were held in two large silos. The vessel feeding system moved the pellets to each deck and the crew manually transferred the fodder from the chutes to the pen troughs.

The cattle were fed pellets twice a day at 7am and 3:30pm. Chaff was fed once per day at 10:30am. In addition, shy feeders were addressed through the provision of additional chaff throughout the voyage. All livestock had adequate access to feed troughs whilst on board the vessel.

Fresh drinking water was produced by reverse osmosis. Water is supplied by 2 automatically filling nose bowls in the corners of all pens. During the voyage, the water bowls were rinsed and sanitised by the crew and night watch person routinely every four hours. All cattle had access to the water bowls and did not hesitate to use them.

Ventilation

All decks are enclosed on the *Bison Express*. The ventilation system functioned consistently without incident during the voyage. The lower 2 decks were very well ventilated and comfortable during the voyage. Deck 4 (upper most deck) was the warmest deck. From 20 December 2018 until 25 December 2018, some cattle on Decks 3 and 4 appeared to have an increased respiratory rate but at no stage were showing signs of panting or signs of extreme heat stress.

The temperature readings were taken twice per day in the morning and afternoon using a hand held device.

The environmental conditions varied greatly during the voyage. The vessel departed with temperatures in the low 20's. The warmest part of the voyage was between day 11 and day 17 when the temperature was around 31°C dry bulb and 80% humidity. The temperature at unloading was below 0°C.

Pen conditions

For most of the voyage, pads remained dry and appeared acceptable. Fodder and chaff that was not consumed or spilt into the walkways was emptied into the pens to assist with keeping the pads dry.

On day 3, one pen with wet pad was observed and the cause of the wet pad was a leak in the floor plate. The cattle were promptly removed from the pen and distributed into other pens.

The decks were washed on days 11 and 12 and sawdust was applied to all pens at the completion of the wash. During the wash, the affected pen was able to be cleaned and the floor repaired. Cattle were returned to the pen and no further leaks were detected.

Health and welfare

Two mortalities were recorded for the voyage. The first mortality occurred on Deck 4 on day 13. A post mortem was not conducted and the cause of the death was not determined. The second mortality involved a steer that was found recumbent at the time of discharge. At the time of detection, the steer did not have an obvious ailment or be suffering. The steer had died by the time the unloading was completed. A post mortem was not conducted and there was no obvious external cause.

During the voyage a small number of cattle were identified with lameness, weight loss, respiratory disease, a laceration and pink eye. Affected cattle were medicated in a timely manner and routinely monitored. In addition, approximately 6 steers appeared to have haematomas. The steers with haematomas were not treated as no infection was detected.

Discharge

The vessel and crew were very well prepared for discharge. Fresh sawdust was applied to walkways and ramps to prevent slipping as part of the preparation. The observer noted some instances of rough handling by less-experienced stevedores but the livestock were discharged from the vessel without incident, with the health and welfare of livestock maintained throughout the process.

Conclusion

The master, officers and stock crew worked well together to maintain the highest possible standard. The exporter arrangements were observed to be implemented during the voyage and to be compliant with ASEL requirements.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 2 Cattle in pen — no issues identified



Day 10 Cattle in pen — no issues identified



Day 13 Cattle in pen — no issues identified



Day 16 Cattle in pen — no issues identified



Day 19 Cattle in pen — no issues identified



Day 20 Cattle in pen — no issues identified

