Independent Observer summary report on MV Bahijah

Sheep and cattle exported to Israel in December 2018

Report 50, February 2020

Voyage summary

A consignment of 7,660 sheep and 4,391 cattle were loaded on the MV *Bahijah* at the Port of Fremantle between 14 and 15 December 2018. The vessel departed on 15 December 2018. The vessel discharged the livestock at the Port of Eilat, Israel on 3 January 2019 making this a 21 day voyage.

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

The mortality rate for sheep was 0.23% (18 mortalities) and the mortality rate for the cattle was 0.27% (12 mortalities). This does not exceed the reportable mortality rate for either species.

The following comments represent a summary of the key observations made 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, although the observer commented that there did not appear to be documented contingency arrangements to address procedures in the event of bad weather available.

Loading

An additional space requirement was imposed on the sheep consignment, which allowed each animal 17.5% extra space than that required under in the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (Version 2.3) 2011* (ASEL).

At the time of loading, in the observer's opinion, many of the bulls in some pens on Deck 5 appeared to be significantly heavier than the average body weight listed in the load plan (identified as medium bulls on the load plan) resulting in pens that appeared to be visibly overstocked. The observer raised concerns related to these observations without any visible response. Later in the voyage an amended load plan was supplied that indicated that heavy bulls were in the relevant pens. The amended plan also included an increased average weight across all classes of sheep and cattle.

The observer commented that the apparent overstocking in these pens was progressively made worse as large amounts of pen space were required for the hospitalisation of lame cattle and as cattle loaded in lean condition gained weight during the voyage.

Personnel

There was an on board Australian Authorised Veterinarian (AAV) and two LiveCorp Accredited Stockpersons (stockpersons) accompanying the livestock consignment. The senior stockperson was very experienced and has accompanied livestock on many export voyages. The second stockperson had also completed multiple voyages.

The master was very experienced in the carriage of livestock and was actively involved in all aspects in the livestock husbandry especially the washing of the cattle decks. The Chief Officer (CO) was observed inspecting the livestock decks multiple times per day.

Daily routine

A meeting was held daily chaired by the master and attended by the CO, the bosun, the AAV and the two accredited stockpersons. The CO provided daily data and facilitated the completion and distribution of the daily report.

Each deck had at least one crew member assigned to livestock duties and the large decks had several crew. Whilst at sea the crew duties were mostly trough and aisle maintenance with some disposals of cattle carcases.

Feed and water

Fodder was stored in paired silos and was in the main fed out automatically via large angled delivery pipes to the troughs. Manual filling and topping up of cattle fodder troughs was undertaken by the crew and stockperson.

Sheep fodder troughs were in some instances moved out from under delivery pipe outlets to mitigate the risk of head entrapment and to allow greater access.

Water troughs were poorly maintained during loading but improved after the vessel journey commenced. Occasional fouling of sheep water troughs was observed. The majority of the pens (often amalgamated pens) had at least 2 water troughs. The command were actively monitoring the water trough cleanliness throughout the day.

Ventilation

3 lines of ventilation shafts are spaced along the sundeck to provide supply ventilation to the open decks (5, 6 and 7) and to provide supply and exhaust ventilation to the enclosed decks (1, 2, 3 and 4).

The observer noted a number of structural features, which, in the observer's opinion, had potential to disrupt airflow in some areas of the vessel. Throughout the voyage the aft open deck space of Deck 7 was noticeably warmer and more humid with visibly wetter sheep pads. The smell of ammonia was easily detected in this area and was stinging to the eyes.

The observer noted that the environmental conditions were relatively mild due to the time of the year and the ventilation system was not stretched to capacity during the voyage.

The daily temperatures were collected by using a hand held recording device and the observer did not note any concerns with the temperature recording procedure.

Pen conditions

Prior to departure, a very small amount of sawdust was scattered on cattle decks. The observer stated that only a relatively small amount of the total amount of the sawdust loaded onto the vessel was used throughout the voyage with most of the sawdust being used in preparation for discharge. The sawdust that was used during the voyage was predominantly used in the hospital pens.

There was a rapid build-up of manure in the cattle pens and the cattle decks were washed six times during the voyage. Prior to washing, the conditions were very boggy in some pens. Sawdust was not used in the pens after the deck washes except the wash prior to unloading.

The sheep pads built up over the course of the voyage from bare deck with a mix of manure and spilt fodder to form a variably dry to moist, sometimes wet, pad to a depth of less than 15cm. the dampest sheep pads were confined to the very front of Deck 7. Detectable amounts of ammonia were evident in this area causing eye irritation in both personnel the sheep in this area. No other sheep pad related issues were observed.

Health and welfare

During the first 2 days of the voyage, the vessel was impacted by severe weather that flooded Decks 5 and 6 and left the stowed pallets of chaff and bedding in disarray. Activities were undertaken to identify clinically lame cattle following the rough conditions and to transfer them to hospital pens for treatment. The daily reports included that 3 cattle were euthansed as they were unable to stand with bilateral sole ulcers on day 11. Day 12 included a mortality due to septic arthritis. The daily reports did not reflect the observer's observation of a situation of deteriorating lameness between days 1 and 11 following the rough weather.

The lesions detected by the observer as causing lameness in the cattle included ulcerated hoof and subsolar tissues, ulcerated/lacerated /necrotic soft tissues of the leg and marked swelling of the distal limbs.

The sheep were in average condition at the time of loading and in excellent body condition at discharge. 18 mortalities were recorded for the voyage with the majority attributed to smothering despite only 1 post mortem being performed that found haemorrhagic enteritis during the voyage. The stockperson was effective in euthanasia of unwell and lambs with ill thrift. Some scabby mouth was detected during the voyage. Very mild heat stress was observed in some of the sheep as the vessel approached the equator.

Discharge

Thirty cattle recorded as hospital cases were discharged in Israel. The observer noted a number of lame cattle scattered throughout the flow of discharged cattle.

Conclusion

The observer found the vessel command to be professional and accommodating in allowing full, unimpeded and unaccompanied access to all relevant areas.

The vessel was subject to severe weather conditions on days 1 and 2 of the voyage that caused flooding on Decks 5 and 6, a factor contributing significantly to the number of cattle observed with lameness. 8 of the 12 cattle mortalities were euthanased, and of these 7 were identified on the End of Voyage report as being euthanased due to lameness.

The observer was not aware as to whether or not a specific documented contingency arrangement to address procedures in the event of bad weather was available to the AAV and stockpersons.

The observer believed that a number of pens were overstocked as some cattle loaded into the relevant pens were visually of a greater weight than the average weight used to calculate the pen numbers in the load plan.

Other than issues relating to detection of ammonia in the front part of Deck 7, management of the sheep during the voyage was largely uneventful.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 1 Observer concern with heavy visual stocking density

Day 2 Cattle in wet pen

Day 5 Sheep in pen—no issues identified

Day 12 Cattle in pen—no issues identified

Day 12 Sheep in pen—no issues identified

Discharge—Cattle leaving lower decks