

VALE COMMENT ON Mortality Report 78 Townsville to Vietnam 2019

Causes

After investigation by the department, it was found there were two discrete causes for this mortality incident:

- Mortalities early in the voyage were due to heat stress/pneumonia in *Bos taurus* bulls.
- Further mortalities were in the heavier *Bos indicus* steers attributed to difficulties during loading resulting in leg injuries with associated complications.

REPORT: NACC has reported two prior mortality incidents, both in 2016, on the same vessel (reports #61 and #64). The cause of the mortalities for these voyages could not be definitively determined, however both involved lameness and downer cattle.

VALE COMMENT: Report 61 states the vessel as being *Bison Express*

Consignment

REPORT: The consignment consisted of 1,845 slaughter cattle averaging 520 kilograms.

VALE COMMENT: heavy cattle

Vessel

REPORT: The vessel involved in this incident is a purpose-built livestock carrier ... There have been three reportable mortality incidents on this vessel (Report #10, #61 and #64) involving cattle exported to Israel in December 2006 and Vietnam in March and May 2016.

VALE COMMENT: vessel at least 14 years old and report later states that it is an old vessel

Loading

REPORT: Based on the information received from NACC, all animals were loaded through the top door of the vessel due to the tide level.....NACC reported that the entrance to the ship was too wide, with animals occasionally getting caught or turning around. Loading was stopped after the second truckload to add extra panels to narrow the entrance.

VALE COMMENT: it is unfathomable why a vessel that has been used for at least 14 years should have this problem

REPORT: Some larger steers were observed to be weak during loading with some falling regularly. This was confirmed by the Master. The on-board stockperson reported that this was mentioned in discussions on board, but not during sign off or loading.

VALE COMMENT: if the steers were weak then they were definitely not fit to load and this is a contravention of ASEL. The high mortality report made no mention of this non-compliance.

Conditions during the voyage

REPORT: The vessel experienced mostly smooth sailing throughout the voyage with the exception of day 8 when rough seas were experienced. Two animals sustained broken legs at this time and were subsequently euthanised.

VALE COMMENT: rough seas again a cause of animal mortality

REPORT: The vessel experienced one breakdown for a short period during the voyage, however livestock services were not affected.

VALE COMMENT: yet another voyage with mechanical breakdown

REPORT: "The stockperson noticed animals on deck 4 in hold 2 near the engine casing suffering from heat stress early in the voyage.

VALE COMMENT: the Dept did not address this issue or stipulate that cattle were not to be loaded into this area of the ship on subsequent voyages.

Mortalities and treatments

REPORT: The majority of the mortalities that occurred prior to day 8 in the voyage were attributed to heat stress in 10 *Bos taurus* bulls penned on deck 4 near the engine casing.

VALE COMMENT: heat stress again a cause of cattle high mortality

REPORT: The stockperson and some of the crew conveyed that several of the heavy steers were in a weakened condition at the time of loading, resulting in a number of steers falling down and having difficulty getting back up during the loading and penning up process. I

VALE COMMENT: ASEL non-compliance

REPORT:it was noted that numerous injuries were sustained at this time [loading] especially around the hips and lower legs. The stockperson noticed a number of animals lying down. In order to prevent further injury the stockperson sought to stand the animals up, but in the process several animals sustained leg injuries, including five suffering leg breaks – these animals were immediately euthanised by the bosun.

VALE COMMENT: no comment was made about stockperson competence in this section but later in the report it is stated that NACC will conduct assessments of all stockperson's capability and competency to perform required tasks prior to engagement on NACC voyages. The report does not comment on 5 animals breaking legs due to stockman actions nor does it explain why a bosun had to euthanase the animals rather than the accredited stockman.

REPORT: The remainder of the mortalities occurred in the heavier *Bos indicus* steers starting around day 7 due to leg injuries and subsequent secondary illness which was unable to be determined due to the lack of post mortem kit. The vessel did not have a knife suitable to conduct post mortem examinations so none were conducted during the voyage.

VALE COMMENT: unacceptable that no post-mortem kit onboard but a veterinarian did perform 15 PMs on discharge.

REPORT: Injectable treatment of animals was difficult as both of the two Westergun pole syringes on board were malfunctioning and unable to be repaired, there was however a working MasterJect pole syringe on board.

VALE COMMENT: lack of basic equipment on board unacceptable

REPORT: The report provided by the veterinarian [on 15 PM at discharge] concluded that there were injuries mainly of the lower legs which progressed onto major tissue infections (cellulitis), fever, weakness and the inability to stand. The report stated that these findings supported the evidence of the stockperson that some of the larger steers were weak during loading and falling which may have manifested in these mortalities seven to eight days later.

VALE: 8 or more days of suffering that was due to ASEL non-compliance

REPORT: The department required NACC to provide details of how they will mitigate the risk of future mortality incidents on their next four voyages of cattle from Townsville to Vietnam....NACC advised the department that they will implement the following actions for future cattle....Any clinical signs of heat stress or pneumonia prior to loading will result in the animals being rejected for loading.

VALE COMMENT: ASEL states that only healthy cattle can be loaded onto any vessel. This should not be an "optional extra"!

Exporter's Actions

REPORT: NACC will conduct assessments of all stockperson's capability and competency to perform required tasks prior to engagement on NACC voyages.

VALE COMMENT: don't that do that anyway?

REPORT: The department required an Independent Observer to accompany the next voyage however a statutory declaration was provided by NACC stating an observer could not be accommodated on that vessel. As such, additional monitoring activities were required of the stockperson.

VALE COMMENT: and that when there appear to be issues with NACC stockperson competency. Unacceptable.

REPORT: After review and analysis of all reports including NACC's investigation which detailed the clinical signs of the cattle on board, the department determined that the likely causes of mortalities were heat stress/pneumonia and leg injuries sustained during loading resulting in secondary issues and euthanasia. The department accepted the actions implemented by the NACC.

VALE COMMENT: the Dept made no comment about ASEL non-compliance with loading animals that were not healthy.