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Vets Against Live Export has criticised the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service over its investigation in to the deaths of cattle on a live export voyage.

AQIS, which table a biannual report on livestock export mortality in each house of Federal Parliament, investigated a voyage in which more than 55,000 cattle were shipped from Portland, Victoria, to Turkey, via Western Australia, mid last year.

The journey took place between June 14 and July 21, and VALE claims it is one of the longest live export voyages on record. There was a total mortality level of 1.19 per cent.

The latest report revealed a number of failures in live export management systems on the voyage and led to a series of recommendations, including one that the AQIS refer the matter to assess whether the on-board veterinarian's failure to keep proper records justified seeking a prosecution.

VALE spokesperson Sue Foster said it was inappropriate that the veterinarian should be the target of the investigation.

"There should be more questions

asked about the loading conditions of these cattle, because one of the source premises had just gone through 14 days of rain in the time the cattle were prepared for export," Foster said.

"The rain can create a number of issues for livestock health, and there were reports many of the animals were liberally coated with fecal material, so one would seriously have to question their fitness for voyage."

VALE also claimed many of the cattle had thick winter coats when they embarked on the journey which took them from the southern winter to the northern summer.

"The exporter is responsible for what appears to be a series of breaches of the law which led to animals being loaded on this ship that should never have been loaded," she said.

"There is evidence only one vaccination was administered to the animals - for bovine respiratory disease - instead of the manufacturer's recommended two, and the exporter moved cattle from one paddock to another without prior approval with no slap on the wrist." Though many of the cattle received

treatment on the export voyage, records of the treatments were not kept. According to the AQIS, most of the cattle mortality on the voyage was attributable to pneumonia.

"This is clearly an example of using an onboard veterinarian as a scapegoat for the failure of the exporter to comply with the law and to have proper regard to the welfare of these animals," Foster said.

She added that the size of the task the veterinarian faced could have been a contributing factor in the lax record keeping.

"From the report, it would appear that the onboard veterinarian, who was in charge of upward of 50,000 animals, did everything he or she could to help these animals, including moving cattle to more appropriate locations despite difficult sea conditions," she said.

"Checking all of those cattle, treating the sick ones plus post mortems; one has to wonder if the vet had much time to sleep, and to say they should possibly be prosecuted for not keeping proper paperwork is outrageous and deflects from the real issues causing suffering and death on this voyage."

Foster said records for live export voyages have traditionally been "ordinary".

"This person is being taken to the cleaners for it, which misses the point that these cattle should not have been going in the first place."

An AQIS spokesman said the record keeping failures for possible prosecution was one of many recommendations, including an audit of the operators manual of the exporter with reference to onboard management as well as livestock identification and selection.

Though the report concluded that the lack of a detailed treatment history was a hindrance to analysis, it states the cattle were likely to have been stressed by continuous cold and wet weather while in pre-export quarantine, potentially predisposing them to pneumonia.

It also says the vaccination of cattle against respiratory disease may not have been effective due to a disregard for the manufacturer's directions. The full report can be read at [dafq.gov.au](http://dafq.gov.au)

## ■ SAM WORRAD

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