



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture

CHIEF VETERINARY OFFICER

Dr Sue Foster
Vets Against Live Animal Export
info@vale.org.au

Dear Dr Foster

Thank you for your further correspondence relating to the Department of Agriculture's (the department) Mortality Investigation Report 46. I again sought advice from the department's Live Animal Export Operations Branch on the information you have provided. I regret the inordinate delay in responding.

The Live Animal Export Operations Branch (LAEOB) has advised me that they have considered the points raised by you in your letter of 14 December 2014.

LAEOB has reviewed the information relating to this incident. There is no evidence to substantiate the claim that there was a failure of the mechanical ventilation on the enclosed decks. The diagnosis of heat stress as the cause of death in the majority of mortalities reported in this consignment is based on; the weather conditions reported in the daily voyage reports, the diagnosis reported by the shipboard Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) in the daily voyage reports and in a subsequent phone interview and additional report provided to the department. Information was obtained via telephone interview with the shipboard AAV that humidity had built up in the lower decks in the days prior to the heat event and that faecal pad on these decks had become moist and boggy. The department believes that this contributed to the heat and humidity on the enclosed decks.

In a further written submission to the department on this incident the AAV indicated that throughout the voyage ventilation was working in accordance with statutory requirements in all parts of ship. As you are aware, despite there being a number of reviews and investigations into this incident no evidence has been found of a failure of the mechanical ventilation on the enclosed decks, nor has there been any suggestion from those involved that there was a failure of the mechanical ventilation.

As advised in my last letter the department is aware of the inaccuracies and discrepancies in the shipboard AAV reporting. The timing and quality of the reporting was investigated separately by the department's Investigations and Enforcement Program (IEP). The IEP investigation determined that there was a failure in the shipboard AAV's reporting of this incident, however, when all factors were taken into account, further investigation or preparation of a brief of evidence were not justified. A number of factors are considered when deciding whether to proceed with prosecution, these include, but were not limited to: Commonwealth Department of Public Prosecutions guidelines, the likelihood of conviction, the circumstances of the incident and events flowing from the incident.

IEP investigations are typically undertaken to determine whether further investigation or preparation of a brief of evidence is warranted. IEP reports involve criminal not regulatory investigations, the information in these reports is sensitive and therefore these reports are not published.

As previously advised, the department is committed to improving the quality of reporting by shipboard AAVs. This is being undertaken by greater engagement with AAVs including a regular AAV teleconference and newsletter, information on AAV roles and responsibilities, establishment of an auditing framework for shipboard AAVs and improved feedback on daily and end of voyage reports provided to the department.

The department has noted your comments about inaccuracies with recording of the date and time within different time zones as detailed in the complex maritime data you provided. The department has previously acknowledged the deficiencies in the shipboard AAV reports and will continue to address this in-line with its commitment to improve the quality of shipboard AAV reporting.

Regarding the health of sheep post discharge, the department did not request information about the health of the sheep after discharge in Qatar. Any concerns about the health status after discharge would normally be reported to the department by the overseas government. The Qatar authorities did not advise the department of any health concerns post arrival.

The veterinary registration requirements for AAVs are defined in the *Export Control (Animals) Order 2004 Part 4A.04(2)(h)*. If the veterinarian has applied for shipboard accreditation they must provide a declaration that they are an Australian citizen and proof of registration as a veterinarian in Australia. For accreditation as a pre-export AAV the applicant must be registered in the relevant state for which they wish to be accredited.

In response to this incident, the department continues to closely monitor the performance of the MV Bader III and requires additional conditions for consignments using this vessel in the period May to October each year. This includes a condition that the sheep be provided with 10 per cent additional space over minimum requirements. There was no evidence of heat stress during a November 2013 voyage and voyages in 2014 to the Middle East.

Thank you again for your continuing correspondence, however there is little more I can add to the response provided to you previously.

Yours sincerely



Dr Mark Schipp
Chief Veterinary Officer (Australia)

12 May 2015