

Mortality Investigation Report 64 Cattle exported by sea to Vietnam in May 2016

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Summary

On 27 May 2016, North Australia Cattle Company (NACC) exported a consignment of 2,451 feeder cattle on a vessel from Geraldton to Thai-Vai, Vietnam.

There were 15 mortalities in this consignment, a mortality rate of 0.61 per cent. This exceeds the reportable mortality level of 0.5 per cent for cattle on voyages of less than ten days duration as prescribed by the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock* (ASEL).

A definitive cause of the mortalities in this consignment could not be identified. Eleven cattle died during the voyage; two of pneumonia, two due to bloat, one of unknown causes and six were unable to stand (downers) and were euthanised. On arrival in Vietnam, a further four animals could not stand or struggled to stand and walk and were euthanised before discharge.

Information reviewed

The department investigated the mortalities by reviewing the following information:

- report from the exporter
- end of voyage report and daily voyage reports from the accredited stockman on board
- documents from the Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) who prepared the consignment
- report from the Master of the vessel
- documents from the regional department veterinary officer (DVO)
- records from the registered premises
- the department's records from previous and subsequent voyages.

Background

Including this incident, there have been seven reportable mortality incidents recorded for cattle and buffalo exported to Vietnam since exports to Vietnam commenced in 2012. There were 74 voyages, comprising 231,565 cattle exported to Vietnam in the 12 months before this incident. The overall mortality rate of these consignments is 0.21 per cent.

In the 12 months before this incident (28 May 2015 to 27 May 2016), NACC exported 19 consignments comprising 43,850 feeder and slaughter cattle to Vietnam, with an overall mortality rate of 0.14 per cent.

During the period December 2013 to August 2016, the vessel used in this voyage completed 19 voyages to Vietnam with an average mortality rate of 0.24 per cent. There was one other voyage during this period which recorded a mortality rate of 1.42 per cent (report # 61).

The department does not routinely require an Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) to be on board for feeder/slaughter cattle exports to Vietnam. On voyages where there is no AAV on board, the Australian Livestock Export Corporation Limited (LiveCorp) accredited stock person is responsible for reporting to the department and works with the Master of the vessel and the crew to maintain the health and welfare of the livestock on board.

Investigation findings

The Livestock

Cattle in the consignment were brahman cross feeder bulls (360) and feeder steers (2091) with an average weight of 422 and 392 kg respectively. These animals were sourced from 12 properties in Western Australia and complied with Vietnam's import requirements.

Preparation in the registered premises

All cattle were assembled at three registered premises near Geraldton for periods of between 4 to 40 days before export. Out of these 2451 cattle; 628 were held at Premises A for more than 30 days, 1523 and 300 were held at Premises B and C respectively for a period of 4 to 7 days. During this period the weather in the area around Geraldton was cold and wet. The average daily minimum temperature of 11.1 was recorded for May 2016¹. The area received greater than average rainfall in April (55.2 mm vs 23.8 mm). The wet conditions in the area were exacerbated with more than 90% of the rainfall for the month of May falling within three days prior to the departure date of the consignment². According to the report from the exporter, the wet conditions softened hooves and this resulted in infection, lameness and later some secondary illness including pneumonia, causing five mortalities in Premises A. No mortalities were recorded in Premises B and C.

The AAV, the DVO and the exporter's operations manager inspected the cattle at the premises on 26 May 2016. Seven lame cattle (three and five from Premises A and B respectively) were removed from the consignment. Before loading, one animal from Premises B was removed from the consignment as it had become lame overnight.

Premises	# Prepared	Mortality # during preparation	Removed # from the consignment	Mortality # during voyage	Mortality # before discharge
A	628	5	3	13	4
B	1523	-	5	2	-
C	300	-	-	-	-
Total	2451	5	8	15	4

Loading onto the vessel

Loading of cattle started on 27 May 2016. Cattle were loaded onto the vessel in accordance with ASEL standards. Fodder, sawdust and chaff were loaded above ASEL requirements.

The vessel has four decks and the exporter's consignment of 2,451 cattle was loaded onto all four decks. Loading was completed in eight hours with no other issues reported.

Conditions during the voyage

Daily voyage reports recorded effective ventilation. Daily temperatures during the voyage were between 24 to 33 °C (dry bulb) with an average humidity of 78.2 per cent throughout the journey. On day six, the crew washed the decks. On day seven, the deck temperature was 33 °C (dry bulb) and a few cattle were observed breathing heavily. The exporter noted that some of the animals had winter coats and struggled with the higher temperatures during the voyage. The stockman reported two mortalities due to pneumonia.

Mortalities and treatments

The following table provides information on mortalities. There were no mortalities from days one to five of the voyage. On arrival at the port, four animals were unable to stand or walk and were euthanised on board. Out of

the 15 mortalities during the voyage, 13 were prepared at Premises A, two at Premises B and none at Premises C.

Voyage Days	Mortality #	Cumulative	Deck Temperatures (Dry Bulb)	Deck/s	Reason
1-5	0	0	24 - 32	N/A	N/A
6	1	1	32 - 33	4	Bloat
7	4	5	31 - 33	2	Pneumonia
				1	Bloat, Unknown cause, Pneumonia
8	6	11	30 - 33	1, 2 & 4	Downer
Discharge	4	15		1, 2 (2 each)	Unfit to discharge - euthanised

[Australian Maritime and Safety Authority Evaluation of the Vessel](#)

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) did not conduct an investigation because the voyage length did not meet the requirement of reportable levels as per Marine Order 43.

[Exporter's Actions](#)

NACC staff in Vietnam followed the livestock through to the Importer's feedlots to monitor their health and welfare and progress over four days after their arrival. The cattle were given additional space and bedding in the feedlots to help them recover from the voyage.

Following the incident, NACC implemented the following strategies:

- No cattle with more than 50 per cent *Bos taurus* genetics will be exported out of southern ports (South of 26th Parallel) to Vietnam between May and August.
- Continue to load additional sawdust and chaff for any voyage longer than seven days.
- Liaise with the operator of registered premises to consider yard condition, actual and predicted rainfall before finalising the booking of yard for an export consignment.

NACC has incorporated these strategies in their Approved Arrangements (AA).

[Conclusions](#)

A definitive cause of the mortalities in this consignment could not be identified. All five mortalities recorded during preparation and 13 out of 15 mortalities reported during the voyage were prepared at Premises A. The cool and wet conditions and a prolonged stay of cattle in Premises A (up to 40 days) may have contributed to the lameness, downers and subsequent mortalities during the voyage.

Between this incident and 21 September 2017 NACC exported 18,722 feeder and slaughter cattle to Vietnam by sea with 21 mortalities reported, a mortality rate of 0.11 per cent. Between the completion of this voyage and 21 September 2017 the vessel shipping this consignment completed 14 voyages carrying a total of 37,264 cattle with 38 mortalities reported. The overall mortality rate on these voyages was 0.10 per cent.

[References](#)

¹ Refer Bureau of Meteorology - [Monthly mean minimum temperature](#)

² Refer Bureau of Meteorology - [Climate Data Online](#)

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