

Independent Observer summary report on MV *Bahijah*

Cattle exported to Israel in April/May 2019

Report 118, October 2019

Voyage summary

A consignment of 6,285 cattle was loaded onto the MV *Bahijah* at Portland on 30 April 2019. The vessel departed on 1 May 2019. The cattle were discharged in Israel on 22 May 2019, making this a 23 day voyage.

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

The mortality rate for the cattle was 0.1% (6 mortalities). This does not exceed the reportable mortality rate. The causes of these mortalities were not considered to be linked to any systemic failure by the exporter.

The following comments represent a summary of key observations and has been approved 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.

The exporter Heat Stress Risk Assessment and load plan were submitted to the Department of Agriculture prior to departure as required. Load plan calculations are based on the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock 2011 (version 2.3)* ([ASEL](#)) requirements.

Loading

There were sufficient competent and experienced stockpersons and crew available to load the ship in a manner that prevented injury and minimised stress on the animals. There were no mortalities during loading and no welfare incidents observed. Cattle were provided with feed and water within 12 hours as required under ASEL.

The load plan was generally followed during loading. Adjustments were planned to be made within the first 3 days of the voyage to ensure all pens complied with the ASEL minimum space requirements, but due rough conditions it was not safe to do so until day 10 of the voyage. Approximately 50% of cattle could lie down at any one time in pens where adjustments were completed. At the end of the voyage, a number of pens still had cattle with less than the minimum space requirements in the ASEL.

Personnel

An experienced Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) and 2 LiveCorp Accredited Stockpersons (stockpersons) accompanied the voyage. The AAV and stockpersons accompanying the voyage were experienced and competent in managing the health and welfare of the cattle. The AAV and stockpersons worked cooperatively with the Chief Officer (CO) and master of the vessel, and bosun and crew. The CO and master were observed on the cattle decks daily and took an active role in planning and decision making.

The boson and crew handled stock calmly and were observed using low stress stock handling methods to load, unload and move cattle around the vessel.

Daily routine

The cattle were fed pellets twice daily at 6:00am and at 3:00pm. Chaff was fed between the pellet feeds. The crew cleaned the troughs and walkways twice daily. At 6:00am the AAV and stockpersons commenced review of overnight findings and inspection of the livestock. At 8:30am the AAV and stockpersons moved and treated cattle or conducted post mortems as required. The AAV repeated the inspection, movement and treatment process in the afternoon.

A management meeting was held each day at 10:00am and was attended by the master, AAV, two stockpersons, CO and bosun. The meeting discussed health and treatments, pen conditions, fodder and water consumption, estimated time of arrival, and management issues.

A night watchperson patrolled the decks addressing or reporting to the stockperson or bosun any issues as they arose and kept a log for the vessel's bridge.

Feed and water

Due to the rough sea conditions experienced during the first week and apparent lack of familiarity with the pelleted fodder not all cattle began eating immediately. The stockpersons encouraged these cattle to eat the pellets by mixing in chaff. There was some competition in the more heavily stocked pens. The stockpersons identified cattle which were not eating and removed these to hospital pens where they had easy access to feed and water.

Sufficient fodder was loaded for the voyage and cattle were adequately fed each day.

Clean water was available ad lib during the voyage with very few troughs observed empty or dirty. Water troughs were observed to remain full during the night.

Ventilation

The cattle decks had mechanical ventilation through large column air vents providing good air flow to most parts of the vessel for most of the voyage. Ventilation was supplemented by natural wind ventilation on the open decks.

As heat and humidity built in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden during the third week of the voyage, the ventilation system continued to perform well. However, there were pockets across the vessel with noticeably poorer air circulation. These included spots on the forward sections of Deck 7 and the lower, rear enclosed Deck 4. During this period approximately 10 cattle penned in these areas were observed to be lethargic and open mouth breathing.

The observer commented that no animal welfare issues were observed that were directly attributed to inadequate ventilation on this voyage. However, increased temperature and humidity were observed to adversely affect some cattle.

Temperatures were recorded using a mobile digital thermometer every 4 hours with a daily average calculated. Early into the voyage, the conditions were 22°C and 65% humidity. At the equator the conditions were averaging 30°C dry bulb and 75% humidity. However the hotter pockets noted above were recorded with conditions around 32 – 33°C with humidity 88 – 90%.

Pen conditions

Sawdust was laid in all pens before loading and used in wet pens, hospital pens and laneways as required during the voyage. A soft, cushioning, manure pad to about 20cm formed in the majority of pens across the ship early in the voyage. The manure pad was supplemented by fouled fodder pellets which the crew emptied from troughs or shovelled from the laneways into the pens.

During the first week of the voyage, some pens in the rear half of Deck 5 and some pens on Deck 6 were flooded five times by sea water during heavy sea conditions. Cattle were exposed to waves, sea spray and afterwards 20 to 30cm (or more) of water in the pens. The AAV and master were proactive in moving animals from pens known to be adversely affected by big sea swells. Once the pens had drained and new sawdust had been applied, the cattle were returned to the pens. However, despite the best efforts of the AAV, stockpersons and crew, pens were repeatedly flooded and cattle in them were observed to be wet, cold and windblown. These pens then remained waterlogged or sloppy for approximately one week. Foot tenderness was observed in some of these cattle later in the voyage.

All decks were washed on days 9, 15, 19 and 21 when pen pads become boggy. However, many pens did not drain properly after the wash downs on days 15 and 19. Without a reapplication of sawdust to absorb moisture, scores of these pens remained wet and quickly became sloppy in the humid conditions. Sawdust was applied to all pens following the final wash on day 21 before arrival in port.

The combination of rough sea conditions, flooding and wet decks from consecutive wash-downs contributed to the number of cattle identified with and treated for leg soreness on the voyage.

Health and welfare

The voyage encountered rough sea conditions in the Great Australian Bight and hot and humid conditions in the Indian Ocean. These events mildly impacted the health and welfare of some cattle on the voyage. The AAV's assessment, record-keeping and daily reporting on cattle health and welfare was accurate and comprehensive.

The stockpersons identified approximately 35 cattle which were not eating and removed these to hospital pens where they had easy access to feed and water. The causes of the 6 mortalities included enteritis and pneumonia. Fifty-three head were treated in hospital pens for lameness, respiratory disease, ataxia, haematoma, bloat, scours and pink eye.

Cattle on all decks were observed to have a slightly increased respiratory rate during the hottest days of the voyage. The observer noted that the *Bos Taurus* portion of the consignment were observed to have an elevated respiratory rate of 80-100 and a heat stress of 2 during the last

week of the voyage. The *Bos Indicus* portion of the consignment cattle, had a much lower respiratory rate and appeared less affected by increased heat and humidity.

Discharge

The cattle were discharged at the port of Eilat in accordance with ASEL requirements. There were sufficient competent and experienced stockperson and crew available to unload the vessel in a manner that prevented injury and minimised stress on the animals. All cattle on the ship were provided continuous feed and water during discharge. There were no welfare incidents observed.

Conclusion

The cattle were provided with adequate feed, water and supervision during the voyage and the crew handled the cattle calmly and humanely. The AAV was particularly conscientious in his duties preferring to move sick or injured cattle to hospital pens rather than treat in-pen. Sick or injured animals were provided care in a timely and appropriate way, and humanely euthanised when required.

Overall, the cattle were delivered in good condition with their health and welfare taken into account by the AAV, stockmen, officers and crew throughout the voyage.

The voyage encountered rough sea conditions in the Great Australian Bight and hot and humid conditions in the Indian Ocean. These events mildly impacted the health and welfare of some cattle on the voyage. Water logging from this event and wet decks from repeated wash downs without sawdust application contributed to a number of cattle with sore or tender feet.

The exporter arrangements were observed to be implemented during the voyage and to be compliant with ASEL requirements.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 3 Cattle in pen below ASEL density



Day 6 Cattle well cared for in hospital pen



Day 6 Cattle in pen – no issues identified



Day 7 Cattle in pen – rough sea water inundation



Cattle in pen – above ASEL density



Day 10 Cattle in pen – Panting

