

Independent Observer summary report on *MV Gelbray Express*

Cattle exported to China in August 2019

Report 166, January 2020

Voyage summary

A consignment of 3,942 cattle was loaded onto the *MV Gelbray Express* at Portland on 3 August 2019. The vessel departed on the same day. The cattle were discharged at the Port of Yantai, China, between 19 and 20 August 2019, making this an 18-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 0.02% (1 mortality). This does not exceed the reportable mortality rate. The cause of the mortality was not considered to be linked to any systemic failure by the exporter.

The following comments are a summary of key observations, and have 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, including contingencies; however, the observer noted that the voyage instructions were written generically and not specifically for this voyage on this vessel.

Loading

The cattle were loaded according to the load plan, which was compliant with the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock 2011 (version 2.3)* (ASEL) requirements. The cattle had sufficient space to access feed and water that was available during loading. No animal welfare issues were observed during loading.

Personnel

A LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson (stockperson) accompanied the voyage and was responsible for implementing the exporter's procedures to ensure the health and the welfare of the livestock throughout the voyage.

The vessel's officers and livestock crew were professional and courteous.

Daily routine

An all-crew briefing was held daily at 7:00am, primarily for livestock crew. Cattle management meetings were held each day at 10:00am and were attended by the stockperson, Chief Officer

(CO) and observer. The master attended on several occasions, but the bosun did not attend these meetings.

The nightwatch crew were assigned duties in two shifts from 6:00pm to midnight, then midnight to 6:00am. Nightwatch crew were responsible for the maintenance of water supply in the nose bowls, and the timely repair of water leaks.

Feed and water

Pelletised feed and chaff were loaded in accordance with the ASEL requirements for the classes of cattle in this consignment. Feed was provided in troughs and also directly in the deck aisles. This practice appeared to be very useful in maximising the fodder access for the dairy cattle.

There were no issues observed with provision of feed and water during the voyage.

Ventilation

Ventilation on this vessel was supplied via ducts to all areas of the livestock decks, and vented exhaust extraction.

Livestock deck temperatures were collected each day by a sling psychrometer between 9:30 and 10:30am. The ambient humidity through the equatorial zone was consistent with that generally experienced during this time of year.

The observer noted that there appeared to be areas on the livestock decks that were relative hotspots that would not be identified through the collection of a single daily measurement using a sling psychrometer, particularly on the starboard side of the engine room in Hold 3, affecting that portion of Decks 4 and 5.

The stockperson made repeated requests to the master to increase ventilation in the cattle decks because of unsatisfactory pad drying. The master agreed to this request after voyage day 12, but then reduced ventilation three days later. Despite these concerns, the stockperson rated ventilation as 'good' in each of their daily reports.

Pen conditions

In some pens, cattle of a wide range of body weight were penned together, which can lead to stocking density irregularities, and smaller animals potentially missing out on trough access. Stocking density in a small number of individual pens exceeded ASEL requirements, although some cattle classes were penned below the ASEL stocking rate.

Sufficient bedding was loaded and used during the voyage.

The livestock decks were washed out during the voyage. Following the initial wash, and with the increase in humidity at the equator, the pads did not dry out effectively, which meant that many of the pens were maintained with a slurry of up to 5 cm deep.

Health and welfare

There was one mortality on the voyage when an animal died after getting its head caught in a gate railing. A small number of cattle were treated for swollen legs, or conjunctivitis.

There was mild elevation of average respiratory rates on two days of the voyage in the equatorial zone, possibly related to heat and humidity.

Some of the veterinary medicines were not stored securely or hygienically.

There were no issues with the overall health and welfare of the cattle.

Discharge

The discharge process went smoothly and no animal health or welfare issues were observed.

Conclusion

Apart from the voyage instructions being written generically, not specifically for this voyage on this vessel, the exporter arrangements were observed to be implemented during the voyage, and to be compliant with ASEL requirements.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 1 Cattle in pen – no issues identified



Day 5 Cattle in pen – no issues identified



Day 8 Cattle in pen – no issues identified



Day 10 immediately after deck wash – no issues identified



Day 16 Muddy pad



Day 16 Cattle in pen – no issues identified

