

Independent Observer summary report on MV Al Messilah

Sheep and cattle exported to Kuwait, Qatar, UAE and Oman in December 2019

Report 206, March 2020

Voyage summary

A consignment of 62,443 sheep and 731 cattle was loaded on the MV *Al Messilah* at the Port of Fremantle between 6 and 7 December 2019. The vessel departed on 7 December 2019. The first discharge was at the Port of Kuwait between 20 and 21 December 2019. The second discharge was at the Port of Hamad, Qatar, between 23 and 24 December 2019. The third discharge was at the Port of Jebel Ali, United Arab Emirates between 25 and 26 December 2019. The final discharge was the Port of Muscat, Oman, between 27 and 28 December 2019, making this a 23-day voyage.

An Independent Observer (observer) boarded the vessel at Fremantle, and remained on board until completion of discharge in the third port of Jebel Ali. Due to a last minute adjustment, discharge was completed at a fourth port (Muscat, Oman), with the observer disembarking at Jebel Ali.

The mortality rate for the sheep was 0.32% (201 mortalities) and that for cattle was 0.27 (2 mortalities), which do not exceed the reportable mortality rates. The causes of the sheep and cattle 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.

Loading

A sufficient number of competent stock handlers loaded the vessel in a manner that minimised stress to the livestock. Adequate feed and water was available for the livestock during loading which complied with the [Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock 2011 \(version 2.3\) \(ASEL\)](#) requirements.

Pen density was observed to be compliant with ASEL. Pen adjustments were made during the initial stages of the voyage and by Day 3 the Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) and Accredited Stockperson (stockperson) advised that initial pen adjustments were complete. Throughout the voyage minor adjustments were made in preparation for discharge at the multiple ports.

Personnel

The vessel carried crew in sufficient numbers with experience in the care of the livestock to provide satisfactorily for their tending, feeding and watering, as well as assisting the AAV and Stockperson.

Daily routine

The AAV inspected the livestock at 7am, followed by AAV and stockperson's joint inspection at 7:30am and 1pm each day to ensure the livestock were fit and healthy. Those animals requiring attention were moved to the hospital pens for review and treatment.

A management meeting was held each day at 10am and was attended by the Chief Officer (CO), AAV, stockperson and the observer to discuss voyage progress, stock condition, feed and water requirements, pen density management, treatments and mortalities and any other health related issues.

Four night watch crew were rostered on four-hour shifts from 6pm to 10am. No incidents were reported during nightwatch on the voyage. Night watchpersons were observed walking the lanes and cleaning the water troughs.

Feed and water

The fodder loaded on the vessel was in excess of ASEL requirements. The feed was supplied to the feed troughs by conveyors on all livestock decks. The exception was Deck 6 forward section, where livestock were manually fed. Food and water troughs were regularly cleaned. If found to be contaminated, fodder troughs were emptied and refilled.

There were adequate fodder and water troughs for each pen to allow sufficient access to feed and water. The livestock were able to access good quality water throughout the voyage via troughs fitted with float valves. Sheep averaged 1.6kg of fodder and 5 litres of water per head each day, whilst the cattle averaged 12kg and 10 litres respectively.

On Day 14 of the voyage, the IO observed that water troughs in approximately 6 pens of Deck 7 were dry and non-operational for approximately 6 hours. This was followed up by the stockperson and was deemed to be human error with a crew member failing to turn the water system back on after carrying out repairs. This issue was observed to impact approximately 80 cattle in these pens as they showed signs of thirst after the water supply was restored. They were drinking it in a fast manner and troughs were required to be refilled multiple times until the livestock had their fill of water and settled back down. This was not observed to occur again throughout the voyage.

Ventilation

The ventilation was operational throughout the voyage. The ventilation system was supported with ancillary fans to cover known hotspots and areas prone to containing stagnant air.

During periods of high temperatures and humidity (Days 8 to 10 of the voyage), an estimated 1% of sheep was observed to be panting at a higher rate than usual, with heat stress scores assessed as 2-3. Rapid nasal panting with an open mouth was observed, in less than 0.1% of the sheep, in the afternoon on Days 8 to 10 of the voyage. During these periods, the AAV requested that movement of the sheep and inspecting livestock in the pens be restricted to early morning periods to reduce the stress on the animals and to allow them to manage their temperatures more easily. The IO reported that this request did not impact the AAV or stockperson's ability to effectively monitor, identify and report on the issues related to the welfare of exported livestock. All the sheep had continuous access to water and the ventilation systems were operational. The cattle were not observed to show any signs of heat stress during the whole voyage.

Pen conditions

Pads were well maintained throughout the voyage. The sheep pads were mostly dry, except during the middle of the voyage where increased humidity caused top layer of some of the pads to appear damp. However, the base of these pads was dry.

The cattle pads were managed well with sawdust and all cattle pads were shovel cleaned by the crew on Days 10 and 11, with sawdust laid in the pens after cleaning.

Health and welfare

The sheep and cattle were closely monitored during the voyage. The AAV was observed to be very attentive to the animals and was observed to be inspecting the hospital pens and providing treatments all throughout the day. All treatments were recorded in the daily reports.

The mortality causes for the sheep included inanition, enterotoxaemia, pneumonia, pulpy kidney, enteritis, congested heart failure, urinary tract obstruction, malignant oedema. Thirty sheep were euthanised, with the majority due to being non-responsive to treatment.

The mortality causes for the cattle included enterotoxaemia and a broken leg which was euthanised. Animals were observed to be euthanised humanely by the AAV with a captive bolt gun.

Discharge

Discharge was observed to be carried out in a safe manner and all animals were managed appropriately. As per the voyage instructions, solid panelling was positioned in corner areas and the discharge ramps were operational and positioned correctly. Sawdust was laid along the discharge ramp and some laneways prior to discharge and during discharge. All livestock had access to fodder while waiting to be discharged and during the discharge period, as required in ASEL standard S5.5(b).

Conclusion

The observer determined that animal health and welfare outcomes for livestock on the voyage were satisfactory, and that exporter arrangements relating to the management of livestock exported by sea were consistent with ASEL and observed to be implemented during the voyage.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 4 Sheep in pen—no issues identified



Day 8 Cattle in pen—no issues identified



Day 12 Sheep in pen—no issues identified



Day 16 Cattle in pen—no issues identified



Day 17 Sheep in pen—no issues identified



Day 19 Cattle in pen—no issues identified

