

Independent Observer summary report on *MV Al Messilah*

Sheep and cattle exported to Kuwait, Qatar and United Arab Emirates in January 2019

Report 67, October 2019

Voyage summary

The *MV Al Messilah* was loaded with 64,548 sheep and 176 cattle in Fremantle between 17 and 18 January 2019. The vessel departed on the evening of 18 January 2019. The first discharge was at Kuwait between 1 and 2 February 2019, the second discharge was at Qatar between 3 and 5 February 2019, making this a 20 day voyage.

The mortality rate for the sheep was 0.21% (140 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. There were no cattle mortalities.

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

The following comments represent a summary of key observations and has been approved by the observer who accompanied this voyage.

Independent observations of the implementation of procedures to ensure health and welfare of livestock

Exporter documentation

The exporter Heat Stress Risk Assessment (HSRA) and load plan was submitted to the department prior to departure as required. Load plan calculations are based on the average weight of each breed/type being allocated to a particular deck and area based on the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (Version 2.3) 2011* ([ASEL](#)). An additional space requirement for the sheep was imposed for this consignment, which allowed each animal 17.5% extra space than that required under ASEL.

Exporter arrangements were available to address procedures relating to livestock management from loading through to discharge and contingencies.

Loading

Sufficient competent personnel were present at loading to ensure the welfare of the livestock. The observer noted that the crew treated the livestock with respect and due care for their welfare. The Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) and LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson (stockperson) walked the decks after loading to confirm that the load plan had been followed. In all pens between 75 and 100% of livestock were observed to lie down

simultaneously. The observer noted that some sheep had wool length longer than 2.5 cm and should have been drafted out.

Personnel

The AAV accompanying the livestock had extensive experience on livestock voyages. The AAV frequently checked the pens for health and welfare issues, stocking density, ventilation, treated animals as required, moved animals to the hospital pens as required, performed post mortems and provided daily reports.

A stockperson accompanied the consignment and had considerable experience with sheep, was diligent, hardworking and was concerned with animal welfare. The stockperson monitored pens for stocking density, ventilation, was able to identify shy feeders and animals with injuries and lameness.

The AAV and stockperson demonstrated sound judgement and good animal handling.

The master had commanded the ship for many years, was very knowledgeable, was willing to listen to suggestions for improving animal welfare and was observed walking the animal decks daily. The Chief Officer (CO) was very experienced and continually monitored the efforts of the crew. The crew were diligent and hard working.

Daily routine

A management meeting was held each day at 10:00am and was attended by the CO, AAV and stockperson and observer. The attendees discussed the mortality numbers for the day and any other concerns raised that day.

The AAV frequently walked the decks and frequently checked the pens for health and welfare issues.

Feed and water

The vessel's feeding system delivered pellets throughout all the decks. The troughs on one part of Deck 6 were filled manually by the crew. Fodder was available almost continuously so there was no evidence of undue competition.

Water was loaded in Fremantle and supplemented by the production of drinking water by reverse osmosis. Water was continuously available via water troughs with a float valve. The water system worked well and required minor ongoing maintenance other than cleaning by the crew.

Trough space for fodder and water was considered acceptable. Feed and water was available to the livestock during unloading.

Ventilation

Ventilation was supplied through a system of supply and exhaust ducts which passed through each deck to provide and evacuate air from all decks.

The observer considered the ventilation for the voyage was acceptable. No animal showed any evidence of heat stress as a cause of death. The vessel has thermometers on each deck and daily recordings were made to include in the daily report. In addition, the observer recorded

environmental conditions separately and found the data was broadly similar to the vessel's temperature readings.

Pen conditions

Some sawdust was added to pens prior to loading. The sheep pads were monitored and there was little variation from dry to moist.

The cattle pads became deeper more quickly than for the sheep. The pads in the pens that held cattle were shovelled out on day 8. This strategy resulted in good pen and pad conditions for the cattle for the entire voyage.

Health and welfare

During the voyage some animals were found to have longer fleece than 2.5cm.

Hospital pens were located on most decks. Poor doers and those livestock requiring treatments were placed in nearby hospital pens. Shy feeders were separated from others in the pen to enable improved access to feed and water. The hospital pens provided acceptable space for confining the unwell animals for the voyage.

A selection of pens were subject to detailed assessment for heat stress. Panting score 1 was evident after day 1 but the percentage of animals with pant score 1 dropped once the equator was crossed. There was no significant evidence of sheep with heat stress score 3 (open mouth). No sheep showed any evidence of heat stress as a cause of death. The sheep had excellent appetites at all times.

The AAV performed post mortem inspections where possible. Most of the sheep were found to have died from enterotoxaemia or pneumonia. Other causes of death included inanition, pizzelle rot and blackleg.

The observer considered the AAV and stockperson showed sound judgement when deciding if euthanasia was necessary.

Discharge

Sawdust was spread in alleyways during unloading. Feed and water was available to livestock during discharge. The observer noted that the crew treated the livestock with respect and due care for their welfare.

Conclusion

The supply of fodder, water and the ventilation was considered in accordance with the ASEL requirements. The welfare of the animals was always a high priority. The AAV and stock person were experienced and worked diligently to maintain animal health and welfare. The stocking density and animal welfare was considered acceptable for this voyage.

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 Sheep in pen—no issues identified



Day 13 Cattle in pen—no issues identified



Sheep pen—no issues identified



Day 13 Sheep in pen—no issues identified



Day 17 Sheep in pen—no issues identified



Day 18 Sheep in pen—no issues identified

