

Independent Observer summary report on *MV Al Messilah*

Sheep and cattle exported to Kuwait, Qatar and United Arab Emirates in June 2018

Report 9, January 2019

Voyage summary

The *MV Al Messilah* is a closed-deck ship for the carriage of livestock.

The *Al Messilah* departed Fremantle on 6 June 2018 carrying one consignment of livestock for one exporter with a total of 57,428 sheep and 104 head of cattle to the Middle East. The vessel discharged animals in Kuwait on 20 June 2018, Qatar on 24 June 2018, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on 26 June 2018. This constituted a journey of 21-days.

The overall mortality rate for the voyage was 0.53 per cent for sheep (306 mortalities), and no cattle mortalities. This does not exceed the reportable mortality rate as stated in the [Australian Meat and Live-stock Industry \(Standards\) Order 2005](#) and the [Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock \(Version 2.3\) 2011](#) (ASEL). The causes of the mortalities were not considered to be linked to any systemic failure on behalf of the exporter.

The following comments represent a summary of key observations from the IO from loading in Fremantle until discharge at the Port of Jebel Ali, UAE. The summary has been approved by the IO who accompanied this voyage.

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 of Agriculture and Water Resources 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 ASEL. An additional space requirement for animals was imposed on the sheep consignment, which allowed each animal 17.5 per cent extra space than that required under ASEL.

Consignment-specific export plans (CSEPs) were available to address procedures relating to provision of fodder, water, bedding (cattle only) medication, humane destruction, livestock officer instructions from loading through to discharge and contingencies. The instructions included in the CSEPs were observed to be implemented during the voyage and to be compliant with ASEL requirements.

Loading

The IO did not note any animal welfare concerns at loading.

Personnel

The Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) had substantial qualifications and experience relevant to the role. They actively applied their expertise through data analysis of the sheep mortalities and the production of comprehensive daily reports.

A LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson (stockperson) also accompanied this voyage and was involved in the overall functional management of the husbandry and intensified care of the livestock.

The Master indicated that they have been a Master Mariner on board the *Al Messilah* since the conversion to a livestock carrier, and is therefore very experienced in the carriage of livestock to the Middle East.

The Chief Officer (CO) had close contact with the AAV and stockperson and a firsthand knowledge of the condition of the livestock. The IO often observed the CO on the sheep decks accompanied by the Bosun and occasionally the stockperson. The CO's activities appeared to be integral in the supervision of discharge at all three ports.

Daily routine

Meetings occurred daily at 10 am with the CO, AAV and stockperson.

Each deck had at least one crew member assigned to livestock duties and the larger decks had several. The staff appeared to take great pride in ensuring that the deck space they were responsible for was cleared of debris in the walkways, the water troughs cleaned of silt and that powdered feed was removed off the surface of the fodder troughs.

The crew recorded temperatures twice a day and logged these at the bridge.

Feed and water

Water on the *Al Messilah* is automatically and continuously supplied.

The provision of fodder to the livestock was of the highest standard and the IO did not observe sheep or cattle without feed during the entire voyage. Feed troughs in the hospital pens and those in the forward portion of deck 6 were manually filled. Elsewhere a pipe and chain delivery system automatically dispensed the feed into troughs.

Pens were well serviced by water and feed troughs with the majority having at least two of each. A small number of pens had only one water with two feed troughs or one feed trough with two water troughs. The set-up of these pens seemed to be limited by the available fence space upon which troughs could be attached.

Ventilation

Ventilation is supplied through a grid pattern of alternating vertical supply and exhaust shafts throughout the *Al Messilah*. The position of the ventilation shafts appears evenly distributed across the pen area with no apparent correlation to pen layout.

In addition to the integrated ventilation system there are fans installed overhead of sheep pens to further circulate air. Smaller fans are sited against walls, corners and headspace of the larger

decks to redirect and enhance airflow. Six of these large fans were obtained following the previous voyage and were installed during this voyage.

Each of the decks has just one thermometer. These are located in a position that is generally central and handy to access for reading, but are unlikely to be representative of the worst environmental conditions on the particular deck.

Pen conditions

Pine shavings and sawdust were loaded according to the load plan, with shavings used for cattle bedding and sawdust used predominantly to dry up excess pad wetness. The IO recorded this technique as being effective after a breached water pipe leaked water across two pens on deck 3 early in the voyage.

Health and welfare

The IO did not observe anything that concerned them with respect to stocking density and noted there was the ability to spread stock out with empty pens available using the [allometric spacing model](#). More than half of the stock in any pen were able to lie down at any one time.

The AAV, stockperson and the vessel's crew managed the health and welfare well, including the treatment of animals in hospital pens or humane euthanasia when required. The experience and commitment of the stockperson resulted in the early identification and care of shy feeders. This had a substantial impact in reducing morbidity and therefore ensured that many didn't become mortalities.

Observations of the crew handling sheep during early pen adjustments and discharge indicated to the IO a general lack of experience in animal handling. On several occasions the IO observed attempts to move baulking sheep by physically handling them by the forelimbs.

Discharge

The IO noted an escape at port due to large unguarded gap between the race and the truck gates.

Conclusion

The IO found that from the commencement of loading to discharge, the processes, procedures and attention to the maintenance of pens and facilities was good. The Master, all the vessel's officers and crew were dedicated and diligent in performing their duties to ensure the well-being of the animals. The experienced AAV and stockperson collaborated with the vessel officers' well to maintain the health and welfare of the livestock in line with ASEL requirements.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 3 Cattle in pen—no issues identified



Day 5 Sheep in pen—no issues identified



Day 3 Cattle in pen—no issues identified



Day 8 Sheep in pen—no issues identified



Day 14 Cattle in pen—no issues identified



Day 14 Sheep in pen—no issues identified

