VALE COMMENTS on Report 2 on MV *Al Messilah* Kuwait, Qatar and UAE, May 2018

Report 2, December 2018; 6 months after voyage

Voyage summary
The MV *Al Messilah* is a closed-deck vessel
65,334 sheep and 228 cattle Kuwait on 14 May 2018, Qatar on 18 May 2018, and completed discharge in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on 19 May 2018. This constituted a journey of 19 days. The overall mortality rate for the voyage was 0.34 per cent for sheep (222 mortalities), 0 cattle

VALE COMMENT: both mortality percentages much lower than historic averages.

Stock:.
IO SUMMARY: All animals were in good condition with a body condition score equal to or greater than score three. This was due to extended time spent in the preparation feedlot because of changes to voyage schedule.
IO FOI DOCUMENTS: “I have no hesitation in declaring that no healthier and better conditioned sheep have departed Australian ports in recent times…
“the component of “skinnys” that normally make up a portion of most sheep consignments and have a higher than normal mortality were not included

VALE COMMENT: it is possible that the very low mortality was due to better adaptation to feedlot rations with longer time in the feedlot. The IO noted that primary inanition, [the major cause of deaths historically] was not recorded in one sheep. Clearly the historical feedlot holding times have been too short and contributed significantly to onboard mortality. In addition, clearly despite ASEL directives, a portion of “skinnys” are routinely loaded on live export ships.

Daily routine
IO SUMMARY “There was only one dry and wet bulb thermometer per deck. Temperatures were recorded once daily by the crew between 10:00 and 11:00 am “
VALE COMMENT: this is clearly inadequate and inappropriate and will have failed to capture the true deck conditions at the hottest parts of each day and in a variety of areas on the deck.

IO FOI DOCUMENT: “it must be concluded that the official recordings for each deck are unlikely to be the hottest temperature experienced during any particular day
VALE COMMENT: this comment was not included by DAWR in the official summary. VALE have maintained that the recordings on ships such as the *Al Messilah* have never been representative of the hottest conditions. This report verified VALE’s claims.

Ventilation
IO SUMMARY “Although there was an increase in respiration rates when travelling north of the equator, no animal was observed panting or demonstrating any signs of respiratory distress.”
IO FOI DOCUMENT: “From day 3…there was a noticeable increase in the respiration rates, but not accompanied by open mouthed, tongue lolling behavior ie progressing to Pant Score 2 and 3. Even though this increased respiration rate looked to be energy draining, most just sat or laid down and relaxed…..Humidity levels were higher in the lower decks 4,3 and 2 and this is there the increased respiratory rates were most obvious”

VALE COMMENT 1: The panting score included indicated that Pant Score 2 included open mouth breathing (usually regarded as Panting Score 3). The IO's comments on heat stress with panting scores was not included in the IO Summary. In addition, this is one of the few IO reports where temperatures and humidity were not detailed. Did the IO not record it or did the government remove the observations from this summary as they removed the comments on panting?
VALE COMMENT 2: the IO noted that the increased panting, which was likely continuous from Day 3 to Day 19 (16 days with perhaps some respite in Kuwait due to low humidity), appeared "energy draining" . This is a clear indication that animal welfare was not good and that poor animal welfare was due to continuous high wet bulb temperatures.

IO FOI DOCUMENT: "air flow was in need of a boost particularly pens next to the engine room (identified for added fan installations)
VALE COMMENT: this vessel has been a livestock carrier since 1995 (over 30 years) and has been the subject of high mortality investigations on a number of occasions with the most recent being in 2016, yet it was only in 2019 with an independent observer on board that a hot spot was noted in the engine room.

Pen Conditions
IO SUMMARY: "It varied from dry to moist over the journey. Very few reached the condition of moist and sticky, and none were deemed wet. Moist pen pads can result from a combination of increased ambient temperatures, increased drinking and urination or leaking water troughs. Continual maintenance of the water troughs eliminated this source of wetting. The IO noted that there were a few moist pads in deck locations where air flow was low".
VALE COMMENT: this highlights the inadequacy of having only one monitoring station per deck as it is not representative of all pens.

Health and welfare
IO SUMMARY: animals were getting their turn at the feed trough"
VALE COMMENT: this highlights the difficulty in individual animal monitoring and the impracticality of some of the proposed measures of animal welfare onboard ships.

IO FOI DOCUMENT: 15-20 pregnant ewes were identified with stage of pregnancy not detailed. No lambs were born.
VALE COMMENT: the fact that these pregnant ewes could be visibly detected would suggest that they were in late stage of pregnancy and that there may have been a breach of ASEL. This record was not included by DAWR in the IO SUMMARY.

IO FOI DOCUMENT: "Not all dead animals underwent a post mortem, with many having died overnight and the ambient heat accelerating tissue degeneration rendering many as unsuitable subjects for post mortem.
VALE COMMENT: ambient conditions that result in such rapid autolysis overnight (potentially cooler) are likely to be associated with some degree of heat stress in the animals

IO FOI DOCUMENT: the 17.5% increase in space "allowed enough space for at least 50% of the sheep in 85% of the pens to sit or lie down but certainly not all
VALE COMMENT: for basic animal welfare, every animal should be able to lie down at one time. As suspected, even with a 17.5% increase in space (to a k value of .0.33), space is inadequate to provide basic sheep comfort