

VALE COMMENTS ON REPORT 189: Al Messilah, Fremantle to Kuwait, UAE and Qatar Sept-Oct2019

Loading

IO REPORT: The exporter submitted an initial load plan for 56,779 sheep and 467 cattle to be loaded. When the loading finished only 54,390 sheep were loaded, leaving numerous pens on the ship vacant.

A departmental regional veterinary officer boarded the vessel prior to departure and observed some pens to be empty and others were overstocked. The observer noted that the number of sheep loaded was lower than expected and that due to time constraints for departure animals were loaded into pens. The observer was aware of the pen density issues and was advised the animals would be routinely redistributed over the next 24-48 hours. A few days into the voyage the observer was advised that a non-compliance notice was issued to the exporter on this issue.

The observer confirmed the sheep were moved around over the first two days of the voyage to correct the stocking densities to comply with the ASEL requirements. There were no animal welfare issues observed.

VALE COMMENT: It is odd that knowing that pens should have been so poorly loaded when 3000 less sheep accommodated. Encouraging that the exporter was given a non-compliance notice but these have no consequences.

Ventilation

IO REPORT: The wet bulb temperature ranged from 26 °C to 32 °C, and humidity ranged from 65% to 93%.

VALE COMMENT: A WBT of 32 is above even the government's HST for all classes of sheep. and well above a scientifically validated HST for inter-acclimatised Merino sheep. Voyages to the ME should not be allowed in September as per Australian Veterinary Association recommendations – recommendations that now have strong evidence to back their validity.

Pen conditions

IO REPORT: Noise levels were 85–108 dB. The higher readings were noted at large fans installed for air circulation. The lights were left on in the cargo hold during the entire voyage

VALE COMMENT: 80 dB is about that experienced under the flight path, 3 miles from an aircraft at take off. 100 dB is about that experienced on a platform with a passing train (Ref: <https://www.noisequest.psu.edu/noisebasics-basics.html>). Animals are exposed to these noise levels continuously for up to 21 days. Animal welfare assessments of live export have not assess impact of these noise levels.

Health and welfare

IO REPORT: There were 132 sheep mortalities spread across decks and pens. The AAV performed post mortems which ascertained the main causes of death to be enteritis, inanition or no determined cause of death, there were no systematic cause of deaths identified.

VALE COMMENT: No cause of death is usually due to carcase autolysis so deaths due to heat stress are invariably under-reported.

IO REPORT: During periods of high humidity sheep in some pens were observed to be panting (pant score3), which were estimated at between 3% and 5% of the sheep. The observer noted there were no issues with the overall health and welfare of the sheep and cattle during the voyage.

VALE COMMENT: if 3-5% of sheep had Panting Score 3 heat stress then there clearly were significant health and welfare issues on this voyage. Either the IO is incompetent, unobservant or has been forced to accept this statement by the Department of Agriculture. Note the words "heat stress" do not appear in this report indicating that the report has almost certainly been sanitised by the Dept of Agriculture.

Representative photographs of the voyage

IO REPORT: Day 19 Sheep pen – no issues identified.

VALE COMMENT: one of the sheep has its mouth open, possibly due to panting and heat stress. Other photos and footage would be required to verify this. It is concerning that the Dept found "no issues identified" without clarifying this.