

VALE COMMENTS on Report 40, Ocean Ute, China Nov 2018

General

VALE COMMENT: An Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) was not required to accompany the consignment: this was a 22 day voyage, AAVs should be required on all ships from Australia to China. The voyages to China all exceed 10 days and many are similar to or exceed the voyage lengths of "long haul" voyages to the Middle East.

Daily routine:

No mention of routine for taking WBT, one of the few reports that does not provide detail on this issue.

Feed and water

IO SUMMARY: "Sufficient pellets and chaff were loaded in accordance with .. ASEL.. to cover feeding of the loaded cattle on the exporter's projected 16 day voyage, along with the required three day contingency. However the voyage went longer than expected at 22 days..... A longer than expected voyage and competition for fodder resulted in reduced intake for cattle that were shy feeders or lame."

VALE COMMENT: see need for veterinarians on all voyages to China. This voyage highlights the extreme risk of live export voyage. There was inadequate food for ill animals. This would be contrary to OIE recommendations.

Ventilation

IO SUMMARY: "Early in the voyage, the pad condition appeared to be comfortable but particularly the lower decks became wet and very sloppy from day eight as the temperature and humidity increased. The first deck wash had to be pushed out to day 10 due to proximity to land. The decks appeared to be in an acceptable condition the rest of the voyage. All decks were washed twice during the voyage. The deck washing improved the pad condition and the cattle appeared to be more comfortable."

VALE COMMENT: it is clear that conditions were not comfortable for these breeder cattle on this long voyage. Vessel washing could not be conducted when necessary because of maritime rules – a repeated risk issue on live export voyages.

Health and welfare

IO SUMMARY: "Over the course of the voyage, the cattle were subject to a wide variation of weather and sea conditions. The weather during loading at Portland was wet and cold (temperature below 10 degrees Celsius). The temperature and humidity increased as the vessel travelled north. Humidity reached a maximum of 86 per cent (in conjunction with 32 degrees Celsius) on Day 6. The initial pen wash occurred on day 10 and improved the conditions for the cattle. The temperatures and humidity remained similar (without any relief at night) until day 15 of the voyage. After day 15 of the voyage, the temperature decreased on a daily basis. By day 17, the temperature on the deck was around zero. The heat/humidity and subsequent cold temperatures appeared to adversely affect the health of some of the cattle, particularly those in poorer condition. The sea conditions were rough for the first two days and nights improving as the vessel travelled north. The conditions were calm through the tropics but were rough between days 12 and 17."

VALE COMMENT: that breeder cattle from winter Victoria should be expected to cope with such extreme temperature variations <10 degrees Celsius on leaving to a WBT of 30 degrees Celsius for 5 continuous days with no respite from Days 6 to 15, dropping to 0 degrees Celsius between Days 15 and 17. Not surprisingly significant health issues occurred, especially as these cattle were subject to rough sea conditions also.

IO SUMMARY: "A significant number of cattle became lame during the voyage. The stockperson treated the lame cattle with varying success. Some of the lame cattle were unable to rise or seemed to develop Bovine Respiratory Disease (BRD). The main causes of the mortalities were mainly lame cattle that were unable to rise and BRD.

VALE COMMENT: Lameness treatment potentially inadequate. There is no mention of heat stress and its contribution despite winter acclimatised southern breeder cattle being exposed to WBT of 29-30 degrees Celcius. It is unlikely that this IO left out such information so it may have been expunged from the official summary.

IO SUMMARY: Overall the vessel was loaded in accordance with the stocking densities in the ASEL, although some pens were not available for holding cattle because they were used for fodder storage. Throughout the voyage the stockperson amended the number of cattle in pens to optimise space and improve animal welfare as best as possible.

VALE COMMENT: this statement suggests that cattle were not all provided with adequate space allowance and that animal welfare was sub-optimal for many animals.

IO SUMMARY: Whilst the vessel was discharging, the cattle appeared not to have been fed.

VALE COMMENT: from this and other IO summaries it is clear that there are inadequate personnel to deal with appropriate food and water provision during the discharge period.

IO SUMMARY: The cattle were subject to adverse environmental conditions that included cold and wet conditions at loading, rough seas for approximately seven days in total, increased temperature and humidity in the tropics and conversely very cold conditions on arrival in China. The adverse vessel management factors include the availability of fodder, sloppy pen conditions whilst subject to humid tropical environmental conditions and reduction of availability of some pens because of fodder storage. Overall the environmental and vessel factors appeared to result in some lameness and subsequent mortalities, poor condition of the pad before the first wash and some loss of condition of shy feeders and lame cattle.

VALE SUMMARY: animal welfare was poor on this difficult, prolonged voyage. No reasons were provided to explain the extra 6 days required above expected. Animals suffered due to length of voyage in addition to extreme conditions on this voyage. Again, mortality is an inadequate indicator of animal welfare with this IO clearly detailing significant animal welfare issues. VALE will be applying for the IO Report under FOI.