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PRESS RELEASE

Vet the scapegoat for latest live export catastrophe

The most recent investigation by the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) into the deaths of 72 cattle shipped from Portland, Victoria, to Turkey has revealed gross failures in the live export management system and has led to an unprecedented recommendation for a criminal investigation into the record keeping of the onboard veterinarian.

Dr Sue Foster, spokesperson for Vets Against Live Export, said: "It is wrong that the onboard veterinarian should be the target of this investigation. It is obvious that these animals should never have been sent on this journey."

The journey, from loading on 14 June 2011 to unloading on 21 July 2011, took 37 days, making it one of the longest live export voyages on record. Many cattle had thick winter coats and were transported from a cold wet winter to the height of the northern summer when temperatures and humidity were very high. Temperatures on board ship exceeded the level reported by scientists to cause heat stress in cattle for 17 days of the voyage and contributed to the mortalities.

There is evidence from the AQIS report that the exporter did not comply with the legal requirements for pre-export preparation of the cattle. The report also notes that the exporter used an "off-label" dose of vaccine, stating that one dose was better than the two recommended by the vaccine manufacturers.

Dr Foster said: "The exporter is responsible for what appears to be a series of breaches of the law which led to animals being loaded on this ship that should never have been loaded."

Although animals received treatment during the voyage, there were no records of any of those treatments. Many cattle died of pneumonia. The report recommended that AQIS should refer the matter to assess whether there were grounds for seeking a prosecution relating to the failure of the onboard veterinarian to keep proper records.

Dr Foster stated: "This is clearly an example of using an onboard veterinarian as a scapegoat for the failure of the exporter to comply with the law and to have proper regard to the welfare of these animals. From the report, it would appear that the onboard veterinarian, who was in charge of 55,510 animals, did everything he or she

could to help these animals, including moving cattle to more appropriate locations despite difficult sea conditions. To say that the veterinarian should possibly be prosecuted for not keeping proper paperwork is outrageous and deflects from the real issues causing suffering and death on this voyage.”

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