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MEDIA RELEASE

Heat stress is a major contributor to poor animal welfare on long-haul live export voyages

A [paper published in *The Veterinary Journal*](#) provides evidence that animals shipped from Australia to warm regions such as the Middle East are prone to severe heat stress, and that it is likely that the current industry risk assessment model for limiting mortality from heat stress is grossly inadequate.

In the paper, the authors (who are all members of VALE) describe thermoregulation pathways in sheep and cattle, analyse measures of heat load and resulting heat stress, and discuss variables such as stocking density (higher than any comparable land code) and ventilation. They conclude that typical onboard conditions during voyages to the Middle East can indeed cause significant distress to the animals.

Vets Against Live Export spokesperson Dr Sue Foster said that while the live export industry uses a computer model to assess the risk of heat stress (the heat stress risk assessment model, HSRA) it is not made available for independent scrutiny.

“In addition to the lack of explanation of how the model works, the parameter used to measure animal welfare in the HSRA model is death, which ignores the distress the animals experience when subjected to severe and unremitting heat stress over many days,” she said. “Mortality percentage alone does not reflect the true extent of suffering.”

The paper also describes experiments designed to mimic the temperature and humidity levels likely to be encountered on live export voyages.

“Results from a series of hot-room experiments suggest that conditions onboard live export ships cause elevated core temperatures and very high respiratory rates indicating that the animals cannot cope with shipboard conditions typical of a Middle East summer,” said Dr Foster.

The paper further highlights inadequacies with monitoring and reporting in the current system, including the severe limitation of once-daily onboard temperature readings which are unlikely to reflect the maximum.

“The HSRA model should be made available to allow independent evaluation of its effectiveness compared to the available data. VALE is also pushing for more effective monitoring and reporting of onboard temperature and humidity with appropriately located automatic data loggers. This data, in addition to simple measurements such as respiratory rates, should be made available for scrutiny on every voyage and assessed by an independent scientific body.”

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For more information contact Dr Sue Foster on 0423 783 689, info@vale.org.au