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**MEDIA RELEASE**

## **TOWNSVILLE DISASTER VOYAGE EXPOSES MORE MYTHS**

In March 2016, the Bison Express travelled from Townsville to Vietnam losing 1.42% of its load of cattle, mostly due to lameness and injury. Appalling conditions prior to loading and rough seas were the cited causes.

Documents retrieved under FOI show that despite Townsville yards receiving about 170 mm rainfall in 4 days causing boggy and stony conditions (closed by the Department vet subsequently), a heavy consignment of slaughter cattle, and the rejection of 107 cattle (6% of the consignment) before loading, the cattle were still allowed to load.

Dr Sue Foster from Vets Against Live Export (VALE) said “The Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL) forbids loading if there has been 0.5% mortalities in the feedlot prior to loading but says nothing about having a high rate of significant illness that is likely to impact a voyage. Critically, this high mortality voyage is very similar to that of Voyage 39, where inappropriate cattle were also loaded for a difficult voyage. ASEL stipulates that animals must be fit and healthy to load. The cattle for Voyages 39 and 61 were clearly not”.

These vulnerable heavy cattle were loaded with only 176 g of bedding/head/day as there is still no legal requirement for bedding on these voyages.

Foster continued “Somehow bedding is not required for any cattle loaded from Brisbane or a port north of latitude 26° south and exported to Southeast Asia or Japan. What is evident is that the exporters recognize that bedding is important even when ASEL doesn't as they did load 1 tonne of sawdust. The stockman then improvised and used uneaten food to provide bedding to these suffering animals.”

Foster says “The exporters report that they will look into loading additional sawdust and chaff for heavy cattle particularly where cattle have been in wet yards. Bedding costs reduce profit. Why would they do this if ASEL is adequate?”

The true horror of the voyage is only revealed in the stockman's report. Some animals smothered each other to death as they tried to stretch out and time was spent making sure “downers/lame cattle were not too badly banged up the by the rolling” placing food and water close by so they “could still eat/drink without having to battle the sea”. However, this journey pales into insignificance compared to the latest disaster in which lack of bedding will have compounded the issues that resulted in 7.79% cattle deaths due to slipping between Darwin and Malaysia/Brunei.

*ENDS*

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*For industry research and recommendations for bedding on live export ships see next page*

## **Background information from Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA)**

### **Management of Bedding during the Livestock Export Process. Banney S et al 2009.**

"The ASEL does not make any recommendations on the qualities of bedding material to be used, in particular the degree of absorbency. **The bedding requirements were transferred directly from the original Australian Livestock Export Standards – March 2001 (amended August 2003), so the basis for the bedding requirements (or lack thereof) for 'Brisbane or a port north of the 26th parallel and exported to South-East Asia or Japan' is not clear.**"

"Bedding management is a less critical issue for short haul voyages, except for the more **vulnerable animals such as heavy bulls**, pregnant cows and heavy steers."

"Industry reports that the hygiene of bedding is important for a number of reasons including:....**Reducing the risk of leg infections in livestock that have injured feet or legs;**"

"The observation by stockpersons and veterinarians that cattle lie down almost immediately after fresh bedding is laid, supports the claims of improved welfare benefits provided by providing dry bedding. Cattle prefer not to lie on wet manure. Also, the physical act of lying down and standing up in a relatively clean and dry environment allows the ship stockperson and veterinarian to better detect lameness and abrasions."

"It was commonly reported to the authors that **heavy cattle (over 380 kg)** will, depending on the surface of the pen floor and the stability of the ship, **incur more leg injuries than other cattle**.... Cattle originating from southern parts of Australia during the normally wet winter [or in torrential rain in Townsville!!!] will have relatively soft feet that are prone to abrasion and lameness."

"Industry has observed that **the heavier the animal**, the greater the impact on the pressure points of its limbs during lying and standing, and the less agile it will be, resulting in greater **difficulty for the animal in adjusting to the relatively hard and abrasive pen flooring**. Non-pastoral cattle sourced during wet winters are also reported by industry to often have problems adjusting to the floor surface due to the relative softness of their feet.

Industry has observed the following benefits associated with appropriate flooring and bedding material: Improved steadiness and less slippage particularly during loading and rough seas;.."

"Long haul voyages – recommended best practice

#### 6.3.1 Pre-loading

·**Avoid loading cattle with relatively soft feet** because of environmental reasons and cattle that are showing signs of lameness or tenderness of the feet. Sometimes, cattle can be assembled and prepared for export on hard surfaces that cause the

feet to become tender.”

“In addition to providing bedding material to pens, bedding should be carried to specifically reduce the slippage of cattle during loading and discharge on both on the ship and on the loading/unloading ramps. An allowance should be made for bedding material to be provided in ship hospital pens. Bedding is applied in hospital pens at much higher rates than the suggested minimum rate as many of the animals in these pens are severely lame and require a softer surface. The softer flooring will allow lame animals to lie down and stand up with more comfort.”

"6.4 Short haul voyages – recommended best practice

6.4.1 Pre-loading

For cattle that are transported to any destination where the voyage duration exceeds **10 days**, the **provision of bedding at loading should be considered depending on the vulnerability of the loaded livestock to abrasions and lameness.**

Voyages to destinations, which are classified as short haul voyages and involve multiple loading and discharge ports can necessitate the use of bedding material if vulnerable livestock spend more than 10 days on ship.”

**"Bedding should be provided on all voyages as a minimum to reduce slippage during loading/unloading and to improve hygiene and the quality of rest in hospital pens."**