



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture

CHIEF VETERINARY OFFICER

Dr Sue Foster
Vets Against Live Export
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Dear Dr Foster

Thank you for your letter of 14 August 2014 providing the Vets Against Live Export (VALE) review of information relating to the Department of Agriculture's Mortality Investigation Report 46. I have sought advice from the department's Live Animal Export Operations Branch on VALE's analysis of this incident.

The department undertakes investigations into livestock reportable mortality incidents in order to determine the cause of the mortalities and suggest future corrective action. The department also investigates reports of regulatory non-compliance.

Since 2012 the department has released 36 regulatory compliance investigations, including investigations that result from a self-report of non-compliance by exporters and reports from third parties. There are a further 7 finalised reports soon to be released. A further 6 mortality investigations were undertaken during the same period. In addition the department is now conducting investigations into 6 regulatory non-compliance self-reports, 6 third party reports and 3 reportable mortality events.

On 16 January 2014, the department released the results of its review of the livestock mortality incident of sheep exported on the MV Bader III to Qatar and the United Arab Emirates - Mortality Investigation Report 46. As you are aware, the department concluded that the main cause of mortalities for this voyage was heat stress due to extreme weather conditions. The report details how the department arrived at this conclusion.

I note your concerns about the discrepancies in the records from this voyage, the possibility of a mechanical ventilation break-down and your request that these be investigated further.

The department is aware of inaccuracies and discrepancies in the Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian's (AAV) reporting. The timing and quality of the reporting was investigated separately by the department's Investigations and Enforcement Program (IEP). The reporting issues were not highlighted in the department's public report as those matters did not directly contribute to the mortality incident or to the findings of the review.

There was a delay in confirming with the department the occurrence of the reportable mortality event on this voyage. The AAV daily voyage reports indicated that high mortalities were occurring but only estimates were available as the actual number of mortalities was yet to be confirmed. The likelihood of a mortality event occurring was reported immediately, the delay was to the provision of verified numbers due to discharging in Doha before heading back to sea to accurately count and dispose of the mortalities.

The department is committed to improving the quality of reporting by shipboard AAVs. This includes establishing a regular AAV teleconference and newsletter, articles on AAV roles and responsibilities, the development of standardised reporting forms and planned auditing of shipboard AAVs.

As you are aware the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) also conducted an investigation into this incident including an assessment of the operation of the mechanical ventilation of the ship. The AMSA investigation covered all aspects of Marine Orders Part 43 including a review of records and random ventilation tests. The AMSA investigation found no clear evidence to indicate that the mortality incident was the consequence of a failure to comply with the Marine Orders requirements. The department does not have evidence to substantiate the claim that there was a failure of the mechanical ventilation on the enclosed decks.

In addition to the AMSA investigation and the Regulatory Compliance Unit review, this incident was also investigated by the department's Investigation and Enforcement Program (IEP). The IEP investigated a number of alleged breaches of the relevant legislative provisions including the delay in advising the department of a notifiable incident. The IEP investigation concluded that further investigation or preparation of a brief of evidence was not justified.

You also provided an addendum to the VALE Analysis of High Mortality Voyage 46. The addendum contains maritime data purporting to relate to the MV Bader III for 5 and 6 September 2013. The department is not able to confirm the veracity of this information.

There have been three separate investigations into this voyage of the MV Bader III. Based on currently available information the department does not intend to undertake further investigation into this matter. I have requested that the Live Animal Export Operations Branch consider an addendum to the Regulatory Compliance Unit report clarifying details of the cattle and camel mortalities and delays in reporting. If further evidence comes to light, it will be taken into consideration by the department.

In response to this incident, the department required additional conditions for the exporter's next consignment using the MV Bader III in November 2013. This included a condition that the sheep be provided with 10 per cent additional space over minimum requirements. There was no evidence of heat stress during the November 2013 voyage to Qatar.

The department will continue to investigate any future reported mortality incidents to examine causes and suggest future corrective action.

Thank you again for your correspondence.

Yours sincerely



Dr Mark Schipp
Chief Veterinary Officer (Australia)

23 October 2014