

6 October 2021

MEDIA RELEASE

Animal welfare issues on cattle voyages to China exposed

[An analysis of 37 live cattle export voyages from Australia to China](#) between July 2018 and December 2019 instigated by Vets Against Live Export (VALE) has revealed a multitude of animal welfare issues.

The study reviewed Australian Government summaries of reports submitted by independent observers (IO). Independent observers were appointed in response to public outcry over media footage of shocking animal suffering on the *Awassi Express* in April 2018.

VALE Spokesperson Dr Sue Foster said, “Ten risk factors were identified and problems were recurrent on many ships.”

“There is evidence of cattle suffering from hunger, thirst, heat stress and rough seas, and the conditions described indicate that the industry is not even meeting the minimum guidelines set out by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), of which Australia and China, along with around 180 other countries, are members. Australia’s own standards for the export of livestock (ASEL) were also breached on a number of voyages and proved an inadequate safeguard on others.

“For example, ASEL food provisions were found to be inadequate with some ships needing to ration food or running out of food altogether. In addition, the ASEL standards for space allocation do not allow cattle to simultaneously lie down and stretch their limbs on these 3-week voyages, contrary to the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Cattle.

“Cattle were often not provided with sufficient bedding until just before their arrival in China and were routinely forced to endure wet pens with sloppy or boggy slurry.”

Dr Foster highlighted the huge temperature variations which cattle are exposed to during some of these voyages with 16% having 28-42^oC difference between minimum and maximum temperatures.

“Crossing the equator and sailing to northern China means the animals can experience both heat and cold stress, particularly as they sail from southern hemisphere summers to northern hemisphere winters. We have no information on how that affects their survival once unloaded in China”.

Nearly 60% of voyages did not have an onboard veterinarian. This is despite most voyages taking at least 20 days, essentially the same duration as voyages to the Middle East, which all carry a veterinarian.

Dr Foster said “Veterinarians play an essential role in ensuring the welfare of exported livestock especially for extended journeys in difficult conditions. Stockpersons are simply not a substitute for veterinarians with respect to disease diagnosis and treatment.”

“This trade is particularly challenging for many reasons. It is unlikely that it is commercially viable or even possible to adequately address these recurrent and significant animal welfare issues but unless they are fixed, cattle should not be exported to China.”

ENDS

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

See abstract: <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/11/10/2862>

See Full Paper: <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/11/10/2862/pdf>