

Independent Observer summary report on *MV Gloucester Express*

Cattle exported to China in April 2019

Report 106, October 2019

Voyage summary

A consignment of 3,649 cattle were loaded onto the *MV Gloucester Express* at Portland between 5 and 6 April 2019. The vessel departed on 6 April 2019. The vessel discharged the cattle at the Port of Dongying, China, between 22 and 23 April 2019, making this a 19 day voyage.

An Independent Observer (observer) boarded the vessel at Portland and remained on board until completion of discharge.

The mortality rate for the cattle was 0.14% (5 mortalities). This does not exceed the reportable mortality rate. The causes of these mortalities were not considered to be linked to any systemic failure by the exporter.

The following comments represent a summary of key observations and has been approved by the observer who accompanied this voyage.

Independent observations of the implementation of procedures to ensure health and welfare of livestock

Exporter Documentation

Exporter arrangements were available to address procedures relating to livestock management from loading through to discharge and contingencies.

Loading

The observer noted that a pre-load inspection was undertaken of all the decks and ramps and sawdust was applied to all pens and ramps. The exporter and the livestock crew loaded the cattle in accordance with the load plan and ensured there was adequate fodder and veterinary provisions loaded onto the vessel before departure.

Throughout the voyage, minor adjustments were made to some pens to ensure livestock pen densities were satisfactory and in accordance with the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (Version 2.3) 2011 (ASEL)* requirements. The majority of cattle in pens were able to lie down and rest. Fodder and water was available to the cattle within 12 hours of loading.

Personnel

An experienced LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson (stockperson) accompanied the voyage and provided appropriate care and management of the livestock in accordance with the ASEL requirements at all times.

The master had overall responsibility for the vessel, cattle and personnel. The livestock management crew were dedicated to caring for the cattle.

Daily routine

The stockperson inspected all five decks of livestock in the morning and afternoon including ensuring the cattle were able to stand, the pad condition and observations of their legs.

A management meeting was held each day at 7:00am and involved the Chief Officer (CO), bosun, stockperson and the observer. Matters discussed included fodder and chaff feeding, pad conditions and instructions regarding the welfare of the cattle.

In the cargo hold, the bosun supervised and worked alongside the crew. The crew were experienced and competent when working with livestock as evidenced by the use of low stress handling techniques.

Night watch duties were assigned to 2 crew members who each worked a single six hour shift between 6:00pm until 6:00am. The night watch duties included checking the nose water bowls, monitoring the welfare of the cattle and updating the officer on duty of any issues. The observer verified the night watch activities during the voyage.

Feed and water

The fodder was held in silos and the feeding system delivered the pellets to chutes located on all decks. The crew manually filled the 3 to 5 troughs that were available for each pen. All livestock had access to feed and water during loading, discharge and for the duration of the voyage.

The livestock were fed twice each day at 6:00am and 3:30pm. Chaff was provided to the cattle from day 4 on a daily basis.

Two reverse osmosis plants produced fresh drinking water. The water was provided to the cattle by nose bowl that fills when the animal's muzzle activates the fill trigger. The crew cleaned and sanitised the nose bowls routinely every four hours. The observer noted that water pressure and access to water bowls by the cattle were considered acceptable throughout the voyage.

Ventilation

All 5 decks on the vessel were enclosed and the ventilation system was monitored through a computer on the bridge. The ventilation system functioned quietly, consistently and effectively from loading through to discharge.

Temperature readings were taken daily on all decks at around 11:00am using a hand held device. The observer noted that some locations on the vessel were slightly warmer due to their proximity to the engine room however, no heat stress related signs were observed in the cattle. The temperature and humidity remained consistent between days 5 to 15 as mild equatorial conditions were experienced.

Pen conditions

The pad conditions varied from dry and crusty to wet and boggy. Spilt fodder or chaff was emptied back into the pens on a daily basis to assist with the management of the pad conditions.

On days 9 and 10 the pen conditions on Decks 2 to 5 appeared boggy. All decks were washed down on days 11, 12 and 14. Sawdust was spread in the pens after the day 14 wash down.

Some pad conditions were difficult to maintain to optimum levels however, the crew and stockperson worked well together to maintain them to the highest possible standard under the circumstances.

Health and welfare

The hospital pens were empty after loading so some of these pens were utilised to provide additional space for the healthy cattle.

The main conditions noted during the voyage were respiratory disease and eye conditions. The stockperson administered eye treatments at feeding time. A majority of the eye issues were in one area adjacent to the engine room in the *Bos taurus*.

Animals identified with respiratory disease were transferred to a hospital pen where they received treatment.

A stockperson and a crew member released 2 cattle without injury or incident when their heads were lodged between pen rails.

Five mortalities occurred during the voyage. Three were attributed to pneumonia and two were attributed to smothering during discharge. No post mortems were performed.

Discharge

Prior to discharge, all decks and ramps were inspected by the stockperson. All walkways and ramps were covered with sawdust prior to unloading. Two mortalities occurred during discharge when the cattle were moved up the ramp to be loaded into load the final truck. The cause of death was attributed to smothering.

The observer noted the discharge was completed in a timely manner with the health and welfare of the cattle maintained during the process.

Conclusion

The master, vessel officers and crew were dedicated in performing their duties to ensure the welfare of the animals. The stockperson worked well with the crew to maintain the health and welfare of the cattle in accordance with ASEL requirements.

The exporter arrangements were observed to be implemented during the voyage and to be compliant with ASEL requirements.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 4 Cattle in pen – no issues identified



Day 6 Cattle in pen – no issues identified



Day 11 Cattle in pen - no issues identified



Day 11 Cattle in pen – no issues identified



Day 16 Cattle in pen – no issues identified



Day 18 Cattle in pen – no issues identified

