

Independent Observer summary report on *MV Bison Express*

Cattle exported to Malaysia and Brunei in May 2019

Report 130, October 2019

Voyage summary

A consignment of 2,224 cattle were loaded onto the *MV Bison Express* at Darwin between 22 and 23 May 2019. The vessel departed on 23 May 2019. The first discharge was at the Port of Bintulu, Malaysia, between 29 and 30 May, the second discharge was at the Port of Muara, Brunei, between 31 May and 1 June 2019, making this an 11 day voyage.

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

The mortality rate for the cattle was 0.13% (3 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 LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson (stockperson), crew and wharf staff were observed to handle the animals humanely and with minimal use of electric prodders. The loading process was conducted well and provided good animal welfare outcomes. The vessel was loaded to approximately 84% of its capacity and there were no welfare incidents observed.

The observer noted that the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (Version 2.3) 2011* ([ASEL](#)) loading requirements were met. Adjustments were made to the load plan to provide more pen space for the cattle. These adjustments were finalised on day 3.

Personnel

An experienced stockperson accompanied the voyage. The stockperson was capable and competent, applied the ASEL requirements and voyage instructions, and was active in the husbandry and management of the livestock.

The crew provided care for the livestock during the voyage that included manual feeding of pellets, chaff distribution, ensuring water bowls were clean and functioning, cleaning of passageways and identifying and reporting animals that required treatment to the stockperson or bosun.

Daily routine

Daily management meetings were held and attended by the stockperson, the crew managing the cattle and the observer. Issues discussed included feed and water calculation, temperature readings, feeding strategy, sawdust application, cleaning and repair of water troughs, veterinary medicine use, general pen conditions and adjustments, and the load plan.

Two night watchpersons were on duty between 6:00pm and 6:00am and each worked a 6 hour shift. Their duties included repairs and maintenance of the feeding and watering system and general animal welfare checks.

Feed and water

Fodder was stored in tanks and delivered to chutes on each deck via gravity. The crew manually filled the troughs. The cattle were fed two main feeds per day with a top up feed in between. The *Bos taurus* cattle were fed chaff to assist with the management of the heat. The crew replaced feed troughs if they became dislodged. Overall the nutritional management was good.

Fresh water was generated using a reverse osmosis plant. Ad lib water was provided by the intra pen water bowls and plastic troughs. The crew appropriately maintained the water bowls with regular cleaning. There were instances when water was not ad lib for approximately 30 minutes whilst repairs were undertaken.

Ventilation

Supply and exhaust fans were installed in chutes on the upper deck. The air was distributed via horizontal PVC ducts on each deck and air flow was checked daily. An alarm system on the bridge indicated the status of the ventilation system. The observer noted some variation in the effectiveness of the ventilation system in certain areas on certain decks. The temperature was hot and humid during most of the voyage and at the discharge ports however, the ventilation system was considered to have worked effectively.

Temperatures were recorded each day at around 9:30am using a hand held device. The temperatures recorded ranged from 30 – 31°C dry bulb and around 79% humidity.

Pen conditions

Bedding was laid out for the heavy bulls and in the hospital pens. The *Bos taurus* cattle were also provided with bedding as they were observed to be laying down frequently. Sawdust was used to absorb water that leaked from the water supply system.

The pad conditions were good and varied in consistency from dry, friable to muddy. The dry to friable pads were evident in the pens containing the *Bos indicus* cattle and the pens containing the *Bos taurus* cattle had more muddy pads. No pen washout occurred during the voyage.

Health and welfare

There were periods in the equatorial region where some heat stress was observed mainly in the consignment of *Bos taurus* cattle. The observer noted that approximately 8 cattle were rated 2 – 2.5 on the heat stress scale. The heat stress was recognised early by the stockperson and measures were implemented including reducing stocking density, feeding chaff, laying bedding, change of location for the *Bos taurus* cattle to a cooler area and closer monitoring. These strategies minimised the physical heat stress indicators. The *Bos taurus* cattle were also treated with an antibiotic. No heat issues were observed in the *Bos indicus* cattle.

Intervention by the stockperson and crew when livestock were showing illness, stress or injury was timely and effective. Hospital pens were effectively utilised to make animals under treatment for closer observation more comfortable and to facilitate treatment administration.

The cattle were handled well and without causing undue stress.

Five cattle were treated for lameness or respiratory diseases. Ailments were quickly identified and intervention was swift. There were 3 mortalities during the voyage that the stockperson attributed to internal injuries from road transport, heat stress and pneumonia.

The use of veterinary medicines was effective, targeted and documented.

Discharge

Prior to discharge, sawdust was spread on the ramps and areas used to unload the cattle. Local staff in Malaysia and Brunei assisted with the discharge and there were no welfare incidents observed.

The observer noted the discharge process was completed in accordance with the ASEL requirements.

Conclusion

The observer noted the positive animal welfare outcomes achieved by the stockperson and crew contributed to the discharge of healthy cattle at their respective destinations.

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

Representative photographs of the voyage

Cattle in pen - no issues identified



Angus cattle - mild heat stress observed



Cattle in pen – no issues identified



Cattle in pen – no issues identified



Cattle in pen – no issues identified



Cattle in pen – no issues identified

