

Independent Observer summary report on MV *Bison Express*

Cattle exported to Philippines in June 2019

Report 142, January 2020

Voyage summary

A consignment of 2,488 cattle was loaded onto the MV *Bison Express* at the Port of Darwin between 7 and 8 June 2019. The vessel departed on 8 June 2019. The cattle were discharged at the Port of Subic Bay, Philippines between 15 and 17 June 2019, making this an 11 day voyage.

The mortality rate for the cattle was 0.12% (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 have been approved by the observer who accompanied this voyage.

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

Exporter documentation

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

Loading

The overall stocking density for the vessel complied with *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock 2011 (version 2.3)* (ASEL) requirements although some pens were initially loaded in excess of the load plan. Within the first couple of days of the voyage the pens stocked at the higher densities were adjusted. There were a number of pens which remained in excess of the load plan for the entire voyage. The observer noted the cattle in these pens were able to access feed and water and there were no negative health and welfare impacts.

There were two issues regarding stock movement during loading. The first issue was with the loading ramp where it met the ship. The area was too wide which allowed cattle to double up or turn around, and there was a large step down from the ramp to the deck which contributed to cattle falling down.

The second issue was with the ramp from the top deck onto Deck 4 which was very slippery, with little to no grip for the cattle. The observer commented that sawdust had been applied on several occasions during loading, but that the sawdust slid down the ramp with the cattle.

The observer noted that feed and water was provided to the cattle 16 hours (other than Deck 4) after the commencement of loading. This does not comply with ASEL which requires livestock to be provided feed and water within 12 hours from the commencement of loading.

As a follow up to loading ramp issues, the department advised the exporter of an upcoming voyage of the potential issues with the ramps. The exporter has since advised the department that loading was completed without incident.

Personnel

An experienced LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson (stockperson) on-board the vessel was responsible for implementing the exporters' procedures to ensure the health and welfare of the livestock throughout the voyage.

The crew had varying degrees of expertise and experience in the handling of cattle, with some being very experienced while others were very inexperienced. Communication between the stockperson, bosun and the Chief Officer (CO) were clear.

Daily routine

Management meetings were held each day at around 10:00am and were attended by the bosun, CO, the stockperson and the livestock crew. Issues discussed included feeding, watering and any other issues.

The nightwatch consisted of 2 crew, one from 6:00pm to 12:00am and the other from 12:00am to 6:00am. The responsibilities of the night watchman were to maintain water bowls and to monitor cattle.

Feed and water

Fodder quantities loaded were in excess of the ASEL requirement for the planned voyage. Due to a delay in the berthing of the vessel at the discharge port, the majority of the fodder on board was utilized.

Feed availability was reduced in pens where troughs were contaminated by refuse from the deck above. The observer noted the crew attempted to rectify this issue by placing troughs on the upper rails to catch the falling debris. However, this was not consistently applied and was not effective in stopping contamination.

Access to feed was acceptable. Most pens had at least two feed troughs per pen with those containing fewer animals containing one trough.

Each pen had two automatic water nose bowls with an additional manually filled water trough added from day 2. Drinking water quality was good for the duration of the voyage.

Ventilation

Ventilation was generally effective on all decks however the pad condition was variable across and within the decks. Ventilation to pens was fair. Pens to the rear of the vessel, particularly on Deck 4, were notably hotter and the pads in these areas indicated the higher heat by their dryness. Cattle in these pens were not displaying any visible signs of heat stress.

Pen conditions

The pad conditions varied throughout the ship and for the majority of the voyage, most pads were in reasonable condition. No deck wash out occurred due to the short duration of the voyage.

Bedding was loaded to be used during ramps and alleyways for loading and discharge, and was also used to maintain the pads.

On day 7 the ship was delayed at anchor in Subic Bay as no berth was available. A number of pads deteriorated rapidly, and were in bad condition by the time of discharge. One wet pen in particular was impacting on the welfare of the stock. The animals in this pen were not seen to lie down once the pad condition reached this stage. Wash down of the pens was not permitted, as the vessel was too close to shore. However, neither the application of bedding, nor any other action, was undertaken to improve the pad condition in these pens.

There were a number of gates which could not be done up properly and gate hinge points that had sheared off completely which had the potential to injure the cattle, although no specific health or welfare issues were noted.

Health and welfare

The stockperson continuously monitored the stock for unwell cattle and administered treatments as required.

There were 3 mortalities during the voyage. The mortalities included an animal injured during loading, another animal was found with splayed legs and a downer. Each animal was humanely euthanased.

Some cattle presented with lameness and wounds. This included over 20 cattle with hematomas observed after Day 4. Most of these were located on the hip area, particularly on the point of the rump. One had a puncture wound associated with it. These cattle were able to be discharged.

Discharge

Discharge commenced at 8:30pm, 15 June 2019, and was completed at 1:05 am, 17 June 2019. The stockperson was not present on the vessel between approximately 9:00pm 15 June 2019 and 6:00am 16 June 2019. This is a non-compliance with ASEL standard S5.1 which requires the stockperson to remain on-board the vessel until the completion of discharge at the final port. The non-compliance is currently under review by the Department of Agriculture. The IO reported that there were no animal welfare issues observed while the stockperson was absent from the vessel.

During discharge feed and water were maintained to the cattle, other than during one period when repairs were being made due to a water leak. No other issues were reported.

Conclusion

Although the voyage was successful, there were some area requiring further improvement.

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

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 2 Cattle in Pen – no issues



Day 3 Cattle in pen— no issues



Day 5 Broken gate blocking access to nose bowl



Day 6 Cattle in pen – no issues



Day 8 Cattle in pen – no issues



Day 10 Cattle in pen—no issues

