

Independent Observer summary report on *Al Messilah*

Cattle and Sheep exported to Kuwait, Qatar and UAE in Oct/Nov 2019

Report 199, January 2020

Voyage summary

A consignment of 58,800 sheep and 468 cattle for a single exporter was loaded onto the MV *Al Messilah* at the Port of Fremantle between 31 October and 1 November 2019. The vessel departed on 1 November 2019. The first discharge was at the Port of Shuwaikh, Kuwait, between 16 and 18 November 2019. The second discharge was at the Port of Hamad, Qatar, between 19 and 20 November 2019. The final discharge was at the Port of Jebel Ali, United Arab Emirates (UAE), between 21 and 22 November 2019, making this a 23-day voyage.

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

The mortality rate for the sheep was 0.17% (100 mortalities). This does not exceed the reportable mortality rate. The causes of the mortalities were not considered to be linked to any systemic failure by the exporter.

There were no cattle mortalities during this voyage.

The following comments are a summary of key observations and have been approved by the observer who accompanied the 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, including contingencies.

Loading

Some of the sheep were penned adjacent to the cattle pens and were not strictly loaded in accordance with the species separation requirements under the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock 2011 (version 2.3)* (ASEL). This was not rectified during the voyage. The observer noted no negative impact on the welfare of the sheep or cattle.

Overall, no animal welfare issues were observed during loading.

Personnel

An experienced Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) and a LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson (stockperson) accompanied the voyage, and were responsible for implementing the exporter's procedures to ensure the health and welfare of the livestock throughout the voyage. They were well respected by the crew.

The vessel's officers were experienced and had a visible presence on deck and were engaged in stock management. The livestock crew communicated well with the bosun and managed the health and welfare of the livestock in a calm manner.

Daily routine

A management meeting was held daily at 10:00am between the Chief Officer, AAV, stockperson and the observer. Topics discussed included daily mortalities, issues relating to health and welfare of livestock including feed and water consumption, treatments, pad management and daily scheduling.

Feeding was automated on all decks, except on the forward section of Deck 6 and a section within Deck 10, where manual feeding continued throughout the day as required. Automated feeding commenced at 4:00am. A second feed began at 1:00pm.

The nightwatch comprised of four shifts, each of 3 hours between 6:00pm and 6:00am, with any issues identified to the bridge as required.

Feed and water

Pelletised feed and chaff was loaded in excess of the ASEL requirements for the voyage.

Feeding was mostly automated, the exceptions were the forward section of Deck 6 and a small subsection of Deck 10, which required manual feed distribution by crew. In addition, pelleted feed and chaff were provided ad lib to the livestock by the crew as required.

The automated feed system led to the delivery and build-up of feed dust ('fines') from pellet breakdown. The observer noted the accumulation of fines occurred in less than 5% of troughs, and that the affected troughs were regularly cleaned and refreshed. The presence of pellet fines on the voyage had no observable impact on animal welfare and was managed effectively.

At times, troughs at the end of the automatic distribution line did not receive pellets before the end of feed delivery. The crew successfully rectified this situation by providing feed manually. This issue had no negative impact on the welfare of the cattle and sheep during the voyage.

The vessel was fitted with reverse osmosis units which could produce up to 350 tonnes of water per day. This amount exceeded the ASEL requirements. Water was replenished through automatic float valves in water troughs. The livestock crew maintained the water troughs in a clean condition throughout the voyage.

The stocking density for the cattle and sheep enabled all stock to lie down and provided good access to feed and water troughs. Chaff was fed to the cattle and sheep in the hospital pens and pens containing shy-feeders identified by the stockperson.

Ventilation

There were no issues with the ventilation system during the voyage. All 10 decks were enclosed, with a combination of ventilation supply fans and exhaust fans. Ancillary fans were placed in potential 'hot spot' areas, identified by the observer, which appeared to assist in the air flow in those areas of the vessel.

On the days that the vessel approached the equator (8-10 Nov 2019), a small number of pens reached a maximum wet bulb temperature of 30°C. During this time, there was some elevation in pant scores of sheep to 1 and 2. The observer estimated approximately 20% of sheep exhibiting a pant score of 2. On one afternoon, when the maximum recorded humidity reached 91%, some sheep displayed signs consistent with pant score 3. While the observer noted that sheep were heat affected during this period, the onset of heat stress was transient and not associated with a significant level of stress. Cattle demonstrated no indication of heat stress during the voyage.

Pen conditions

Pen conditions were monitored throughout the voyage and managed acceptably.

The cattle pens were located on Deck 7, adjacent to the sheep pens, with wash-down occurring once during the voyage on days 10 and 11. The observer noted that the sheep were removed from their pens during the cattle wash-down period, with sawdust bags placed along sheep pen margins to ensure that wash-down materials did not encroach into the sheep pens. The observer was satisfied that no negative health or welfare implications occurred and deck washing was managed well.

The observer noted that in some pens, sheep of varied weight ranges were housed together. After vessel departure, the observer reported that the stockperson and AAV adjusted the stock to reduce the size variability within pens. The observer verified that the vessel stocking density was within ASEL requirements and did not observe any negative health or welfare issues involving stocking of pens for cattle or sheep on this voyage.

Health and welfare

The cattle and sheep were closely monitored during the voyage. Animals exhibiting signs of lameness, illness or shy-feeding were quickly identified and moved to hospital pens to receive appropriate treatment. There were a total of 100 sheep mortalities on this voyage, attributable to infected shearing wounds, pleuritis and inanition.

The observer noted that up-to-date veterinary treatment records were maintained for the cattle. However, the treatment records for the sheep were not available to the observer. The observer commented that the sheep received appropriate medical treatment and that the standard of treatment provided by the AAV and Stockperson was acceptable. No negative impact on the health and welfare of any stock occurred as a result of this record-keeping oversight.

Discharge

The discharge of the livestock was completed successfully at all three ports. The cattle and sheep were provided with uninterrupted feed and water and were handled in a quiet, patient manner.

The observer noted that the inter-deck ramps were designed with elevated ridges to prevent slippage. This was observed to be effective for cattle, however, a small number of sheep were seen slipping on the surface between ridges. No injuries or negative animal health or welfare issues were identified in relation to this issue.

Conclusion

The observer commented that the performance of the vessel's management, crew, AAV and the stockperson was satisfactory throughout the voyage. Although a number of non-compliances were identified during the voyage, overall there were no negative health or welfare consequences for the sheep and cattle.

The Department has addressed a breach of the procedures with the exporter to ensure veterinary treatment records for sheep are maintained on future voyages.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 2 Sheep of differing sizes in pen prior to pen re-arrangement



Day 9 Sheep in pen—no issues identified



Day 11 Sheep in hospital pen—no issues identified



Day 12 Adjacent sheep and cattle



Day 17 Sheep in pens during Kuwait discharge—no issues identified



Day 19 Cattle in pens—no issues identified

