

Independent Observer summary report on *MV Rahmeh*

Cattle exported to Vietnam in January 2019

Report 63, October 2019

Voyage summary

A consignment of 4,877 cattle were loaded onto the *MV Rahmeh* at Fremantle on 12 and 13 January 2019. The vessel departed in the evening of 13 January 2019. The first discharge was at Phu My, Vietnam on 23 January and the second discharge was at Hon La, Vietnam between 30 and 31 January 2019, making this a 20 day voyage.

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

The mortality rate for cattle was 0.23% (11 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 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 and contingencies. The exporter arrangements were observed to be implemented during the voyage and to be compliant with *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (Version 2.3) 2011* ([ASEL](#)) requirements.

Loading

There were sufficient competent and experienced LiveCorp Accredited Stockpersons (stockpersons) and crew available to load the vessel in a manner that prevented injury and minimised stress. There were no mortalities or serious injuries to cattle whilst loading. The cattle were provided with fodder and water well within 12 hours of loading.

The cattle were loaded in accordance with the load plan. Where possible, the number of cattle in the pens was adjusted during the voyage. The observer noted that some pens on the lower decks were more tightly penned than those on Decks 5 – 8 where the cattle were allocated more space. The observer added that overall, ASEL's minimum requirements had been met, but that some pens were close to the ASEL limits.

Personnel

The two stockpersons were experienced and made decisions on the health and welfare of the cattle.

The master and the Chief Officer (CO) had overall responsibility for the vessel, personnel and livestock. Under the direction of the bosun, the 27 crew assisted the stockpersons during loading and discharge, feeding and watering the cattle, cleaning duties, moving cattle as required and maintenance and repair of equipment.

Daily routine

A management meeting was held each day at 10:00am and involved the CO and the stockpersons. The bosun attended the meetings on an ad hoc basis. The issues discussed covered animal care and welfare, time of arrival, route logistics, temperature recording, pen conditions, cattle condition, fodder and water. The master did not attend the daily meetings but liaised with the CO and inspected the cattle decks on one occasion.

The CO was actively on deck, helping the stockperson inspect, move cattle, make decisions and relay information back to the master. Information was not always available or clearly communicated due to the language barrier between the stockperson and the vessel officers.

A crew member performed night watchpersons duties on each night of the voyage.

Feed and water

The crew maintained full troughs of feed and clean drinking water daily. The cattle were fed pellets at 7:00am, 10:30am and 3:30pm, chaff was also fed at 3:30pm each day. The observer noted that no water troughs were found to be empty at any time.

As the cattle were on board the vessel for longer than planned, the feed was rationed for the last few days of the voyage. The observer noted that on these days competition for feed increased when the rationed portion was delivered. Some cattle continued to look for food when the troughs were empty but most appeared satisfied.

Ventilation

The enclosed lower decks numbered 1 to 3 were well ventilated by ducted air and industrial fans and the cattle did not exhibit any signs of heat stress. At one end of Deck 2 the temperature was felt to be warmer as the pens were adjacent to the engine room.

Deck 4 recorded higher temperatures at around 30°C dry bulb. This was partly due to a large exhaust air duct from the engine room blowing hot air into one part of the deck. The *Box taurus* cross type cattle stowed in pens adjacent to the duct on Deck 4 displayed respiratory characteristics between normal and slight panting during the voyage except when the vessel was in port and the engine was idling.

The upper, open decks (5, 6, 7 and 8) were also ventilated by ducted air and industrial fans. Combined with natural airflow, the upper decks did not record temperatures above 29°C dry bulb during the voyage.

There was one fixed thermometer per deck which was read at 12:00pm each day by the CO or his representative.

Pen conditions

Pens in Decks 4, 5, 6 and 7 became wet and sloppy from sea water inundation resulting from the large swell during the voyage. Decks 4 and 5 were first washed on day 2.

The pad on most decks built up during the first six days of the voyage and developed to about 15cm depth before wash down on day 7.

Decks 4 - 7 were washed down on day 7. Decks 1 - 3 were washed down on day 8. By the final discharge, the pads were 25 – 30cm deep and were boggy.

Health and welfare

There were 11 mortalities during the voyage. Most mortalities were attributable to sudden death with unexplained causes. Two cattle died from injuries received when their heads were caught in pen rails.

The two stockpersons inspected the cattle twice daily and were diligent in observing any lameness or other illness during the voyage.

Approximately 200 cattle were treated for lameness during the voyage. Affected cattle were showing signs very early in the voyage. The factors contributing to the large number of lame cattle was not definitively determined but was attributed to a combination of the slightly abrasive pen surface, bouts of rough weather and water inundation, grain-rich feed pellets, confinement, extended voyage length and preload factors. Adequate veterinary drugs were available for stockpersons to administer.

Fourteen animals were separated in hospital pens to provide additional care on wood shavings as bedding. Treatments were also administered for eye conditions.

Deck 4 was hotter than the other decks and some slight increase in respiratory rate was observed in the *Bos Taurus* cross breeds.

Towards the end of the voyage, some of the cattle had difficulty getting up and moving about in the confined pen space when the pad became boggy.

The stockpersons and crew were observed using low stress stock handling methods. They were patient and skilled while working with cattle. One exception was noted when crew members were observed to temporarily force cattle from two pens into one to remove a carcass.

Discharge

Low stress handling was observed during discharge and no issues were noted.

Conclusion

The voyage was scheduled as a short haul voyage. Due to delays experienced by the vessel on entering the ports of discharge, the cattle spent a longer period of time on the vessel than anticipated. The observer noted that rationing of fodder in the last few days of the voyage resulted in increased competition for fodder.

Adverse pen conditions were observed early in the voyage on Decks 4 and 5 due to sea inundation. Later in the voyage the pad became deep and boggy. Some cattle had difficulty getting up and moving about in the confined pen space when the pad became boggy.

Throughout the voyage, around 200 cattle were treated for leg or lameness issues. The stockperson was diligent in identifying the cattle and there was adequate veterinary medication available for administration. The lameness issue was evident early in the voyage but the factors that contributed to the lameness was not definitively determined. Whilst the mortality rate was below the reportable level specified in the ASEL, the high incidence of lameness and leg issues may have been a factor in the voyage mortality rate.

Bos taurus type cattle on Deck 4 showed increased respiratory rate. A large exhaust air duct was noted as blowing hot air into one part of Deck 4. No other signs of heat stress were noted by the observer.

Overall, the observer noted that the management of the cattle during the voyage met the ASEL requirements for the class of cattle exported.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 3 Cattle in pen – at full stocking density



Day 6 Cattle in pen – no issues identified



Day 9 Cattle in pen - no issues identified



Cattle in pen - wet pens inundation by swell



Day 15 Cattle in pen – full stocking density



Day 16 Cattle in pen - low stocking density

