

Independent Observer summary report on *MV Ocean Swagman*

Cattle exported to China in March 2019

Report 94, September 2019

Voyage summary

A consignment of 5,012 head of cattle was loaded on to the *MV Ocean Swagman* at Portland on 10 and 11 March 2019. The vessel departed on 11 March 2019. Cattle were discharged at Tianjin, China on 28 and 29 March 2019 making this a 20 day voyage.

The overall mortality rate for the voyage was 0.14% (seven cattle). This does not exceed the reportable mortality rate as stated in the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (Version 2.3) 2011* ([ASEL](#)).

The following comments represent a summary of key observations from the independent observer (observer). The summary has been approved by the observer who accompanied the voyage.

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

The cattle were loaded reasonably close to the load plan, and in accordance with ASEL requirements. The moving of cattle, and removing of gates in the lower three aft decks, continued for a week into the voyage. This was mainly due to the heat coming off the engine room walls on Decks 2 and 3 aft, where the AAV had identified panting, or mild heat stress, on Days 6, 10 and 12 of the voyage. The observer considered that lightening numbers, in these pens, was good practice.

Personnel

The master had overall responsibility for the vessel, all personnel and livestock. The bosun supervised the crew, taking direction from the chief officer (CO).

Two LiveCorp Accredited stockpersons (stockpersons) and an Australian Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) accompanied the voyage and were responsible for the health and welfare of the cattle. The master and CO interacted very well with the observer, AAV and stockpersons. The stockpersons were observed to be very experienced having worked on many livestock vessels for a number of years. The observer noted that the stockpersons were highly competent and had the welfare of the animals as the number one priority.

The chain of command worked well with all feed, water and wash down procedures carried out in an effective and timely manner.

Daily routine

The crew usually commenced the feeding plan at approximately 7am each morning. The bosun informed the crew of the daily work schedule, which was based on previous daily meeting outcomes.

The AAV, stockperson, CO and bosun discussed pen conditions at each daily meeting.

Duties were usually completed in three hour blocks of time. The bosun supervised the crew well, with minimum discomfort caused to the cattle. Other duties included, but were not limited to, the cleaning of aisles, cleaning feed and water troughs, and distributing sawdust as required.

Several random overnight observations were completed by the observer during the voyage. The overnight watchman worked in split shifts of four hours each and checked in with the bridge via radio every hour. The voyage instructions did not require feeding to be carried out overnight.

Feed and water

Fodder and chaff was fed out as per stockpersons and AAV's recommendations. Lower enclosed decks were observed to be too deep for the number of cattle in these pens, not all cattle were able to access sufficient fodder. It was observed that, on average, 14 cattle per pen (approximately 50%) were waiting their turn to feed. When they finally got to the trough there was usually nothing left. Staff rectified this issue by removing skinny and weak cattle and transferring them to the hospital pens where they were able to feed without competition.

There were ongoing issues with empty water troughs throughout the voyage. For example, on one late night occasion the observer found four pens throughout the vessel without access to drinking water. Two of these pens troughs had the valve turned off and the other two had problems with the ball float valve. It was determined that the crew had turned the valves off so they could clean the troughs. In the meantime, the cattle had consumed the water. Empty troughs were also caused by float valves being incorrectly set.

On day 9 of the voyage, Decks 6 and 7 were observed to be out of water. The cause was determined to be higher demand for water on the lower decks than the supply allowed for upper decks. The observer noted 45 minutes without water.

Ventilation

Ventilation ducts were located in positions to allow maximum airflow on each deck. However, ventilation, humidity and temperature did become an issue during the voyage. Temperature readings were recorded by the CO numerous times per day on each of the seven decks.

Temperature readings recorded during the voyage gave an overview of the variance of temperatures on the vessel, including for the pens that backed onto the engine room wall. Temperatures seemed to be higher at these locations. Numerous precautions were taken by the AAV and stockpersons to minimise the threat of heat stress.

In the lower aft decks, there were a few areas observed in which the ventilation was minimal. Extra wash-downs were requested along with the hosing down of the cattle. This seemed to assist in the cattle becoming much more comfortable.

Pen conditions

The majority of the pens on the open decks could have been left for a longer period before the first washing. These pens remained dry and comfortable, and held up well. Aft lower enclosed decks required more regular washing due to increased temperatures, less ventilation and humidity caused by the engine room wall heat. Washed decks usually had sawdust distributed after wash down, except when there was only a two day period between washes.

Usually, on the first observations of the day, the observer found wet pens that were due to overnight rain or water leaks. Wash downs, although affective on cleaning pens and lowering temperatures, also created problems with wet pens.

Health and welfare

There were many cattle put through hospital pens during the voyage. Eight cattle experienced lameness, and 14 were found to be skinny. These cattle were isolated to hospital pens to improve their recovery time. There were also a number of animals treated within the main pens for lameness, respiratory and eye conditions.

The observer informed the senior stockperson, and the AAV, that the assistant stockperson had been observed exhibiting behaviour towards some cattle that was non-compliant with ASEL requirements regarding the implementation of procedures to ensure the health and welfare of the livestock during the morning procedure of standing the cattle up. The senior stockperson and AAV discussed the issue with the assistant stockperson, which resulted in no further instances observed during the voyage.

Apart from the incident outlined above, the stockpersons were observed to undertake their roles in a manner that caused minimal disturbance to livestock. Treatments and medications were administered as required by the AAV and senior stockperson daily at 1pm. Most treatments were administered within pens or hospital pens.

There were 7 mortalities during the voyage. Two of these were euthanized for leg trauma (clean breaks). One was euthanised for being down and unable to rise and determined by post mortem inspection to be suffering from septic pneumonia. One animal was found to have a severe infection with the onset of gangrene. The cause of the other mortalities was determined by the AAV to be pneumonia after post mortem inspection.

Discharge

The discharge was supervised for the duration by the stockpersons and the AAV. There was also 2 other exporter representatives at the port on arrival to assist in the discharge. The crew continued to tend to the cattle on board the vessel, ensuring clean feed and water were supplied until they were loaded on trucks. Discharge was undertaken professionally, with animal welfare a priority.

Conclusion

The exporter arrangements were observed to be implemented during the voyage and to be compliant with ASEL requirements. The stockpersons were considered professional and vigilant in ensuring that the crew were informed of what was required, and that the crew undertook their duties on board the vessel. The master of the vessel and his officers were very helpful in assisting the observer. The welfare of the cattle was always observed to be priority one. The observer noted this was a successful voyage.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 5 Cattle in pen- no issues identified



Day 8 Cattle in hospital pen- no issues identified



Day 10 Cattle in pen- no issues identified



Day 12 Cattle in pen- no issues identified



Day 15 Cattle in pen- no issues identified



Day 17 Cattle in pen- no issues identified

