

VALE COMMENT ON IO 210 Yangtze Fortune Portland to China Dec 2019

IO SUMMARY: "The observer was approved to disembark the vessel prior to the completion of discharge at Huanghua, China, for personal reasons."

IO SUMMARY: The causes of these mortalities were not considered to be linked to any systemic failure by the exporter.

VALE COMMENT: one animal died of ketosis and there was inadequate food being provided for pregnant cattle.

Loading

IO SUMMARY: Cattle were not loaded strictly in accordance with the load plan. A group of 70 animals from differing lines which had been treated for various reasons in the registered premises but deemed fit for loading were segregated and loaded as a group for monitoring purposes.

VALE SUMMARY: animals are only fit for loading if they are healthy under ASEL. If further monitoring was required, then were they totally healthy?

IO SUMMARY: During the first 7 days, stock were shuffled to even out variations in stocking density and line mixing...No adverse animal health or welfare issues were observed as a result of the loading process. The final load plan was observed to be compliant with Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock 2011 (version 2.3) (ASEL) requirements.

VALE COMMENT: this comment suggests that for 7/21 days (1/3 voyage), the loadplan/stocking density was not compliant with ASEL for all cattle.

Feed and water

IO SUMMARY: Although fodder was loaded in accordance with ASEL requirements, feeding rates did not meet ASEL requirements for cattle in the first 6 days of the voyage. Despite a consignment of pregnant cattle being provided chaff twice daily, feed provided to this group was below ASEL requirements for the duration of the voyage.

VALE COMMENT: this is ASEL non-compliant and yet another instance of inadequate food for cattle on voyages to China. The report does not detail why the animals had insufficient food despite having adequate fodder loaded.

IO SUMMARY: The observer reported that 95% of feed troughs were licked clean by the cattle within 1-2 hours after feeding. A considerable clamour for access to feed was witnessed by the observer during feeding times..... Cattle were frequently observed bullying and pulling hoses, chains and deck structures. No adverse animal health effects were observed as a direct result of this reduced feed provision.

VALE COMMENT: insufficient food is by definition an animal welfare issue. Careful wording by the Dept has ensured that the usual line "this did not impact on animal welfare" has been replaced with "No adverse health effects were observed as a **direct** result". Did inadequate food contribute to one animal dying of ketosis **indirectly**?

IO SUMMARY: The observer reported multiple water leaks from the cattle disconnecting trough supply hoses. Leaks were mostly repaired within the hour by crew members, however some leaks were not rectified for 3-4 hours.

VALE COMMENT: this comment reads like a "cracked record" for this particular ship. VALE has raised the issue with the Dept of Agriculture and AMSA but seemingly no action is required despite this being a repeated issue.

Ventilation

IO SUMMARY: On Day 6, while ambient conditions were quite favourable, a considerable decline in the lower deck pad conditions was observed. Relatively higher humidity was noted on these decks with animals consequently demonstrating signs consistent with a heat stress score of 1, with increased water consumption and urine production observed. This, along with the environmental conditions, was determined to be contributing to the decline in pad conditions. It was subsequently identified that the ventilation system had been running at less than full capacity since departure on those decks. The AAV had an active role in ensuring that this matter was resolved. An improvement in pad conditions and wet bulb temperatures was observed following an increase in ventilation function to full capacity.

VALE COMMENT: unacceptable ventilation

Pen conditions

IO SUMMARY: Following the redistribution of cattle in the early part of the voyage, the observer reported that the stocking density met ASEL requirements. It was noted by the observer that 90-100% of cattle were able to lie down at once.

VALE COMMENT: presumably stocking density did not meet stocking density prior to the redistribution, meaning that it may have been ASEL non-compliant for up to 7 days for some of the cattle. It is inappropriate that the Dept of Ag did not release adequate information about this in the report.

IO SUMMARY: There were numerous water flood events on all decks early in the voyage that created localised sloppy pad conditions. These conditions were observed to be predominantly due to the cattle on decks 1-4 chewing and disconnecting the supply hoses to water troughs, however also resulted from leaking hoses, overflow of wash-down water from decks above, or the occasional ingress of sea spray through deck openings.

VALE COMMENT: repeated problems on this ship.

IO SUMMARY: These leaks, coupled with reported poor drainage capacity of the vessel, resulted in localised sloppy pad conditions for some animals for several hours.

VALE COMMENT: poor drainage capacity on this ship should have been addressed by AMSA and Dept of Ag. AMSA found issue with drainage on this vessel in August 2018. Drainage issues identified by independent observers in 2018 also (see IO 12).

IO SUMMARY: The observer noted that although overflow of wash-down water encroached on the pens below, the crew ensured that water troughs remained clean. Free water was brushed off the decks following subsequent wash-downs to reduce the accumulation of water in certain areas of the vessel.

VALE COMMENT: it is difficult to understand why an initial washdown was required to alter subsequent practice when drainage problems on this vessel have been repeatedly noted in IO Reports.

Health and welfare

IO SUMMARY: Six mortalities were reported by the observer on this voyage. A total of 7 mortalities occurred on this voyage, with a resultant mortality rate of 0.15%. One animal was euthanased on Day 8 for an orthopaedic injury. Post-mortems were performed in three animals, identifying causes of mortality as ketosis, pneumonia and dehydration. One animal died of bloat and one animal from pulmonary thromboembolism.

VALE SUMMARY: Ketosis is a metabolic disorder that occurs in cattle when energy demands (e.g. high milk production, pregnancy) exceed energy intake and result in a negative energy balance. It is hard to believe that ketosis would not have been linked to inadequate food provision on this voyage.

IO SUMMARY: A total of approximately 500 animals received treatments during the voyage for shy-feeding, lameness, respiratory disease and ill-thrift.

VALE COMMENT: 500/4657 (11%) animals required treatment for illness – this is a very high number and suggests that animals were not all healthy at loading as required under ASEL OR that the stress of their conditions (inadequate food, pen conditions, drainage, ventilation etc) resulted in severe adverse health effects. Skin diseases (see next point) are not included in the list of diseases requiring treatment which means that the actual number of diseased cattle was >11%.

IO SUMMARY: Cattle experienced damp pen conditions due to water leaks and poor drainage for the majority of the voyage. The IO observed an increase in visible ringworm lesions as the voyage progressed. Other than the increase in dermatitis lesions in the cattle, no obvious negative health consequences were seen in the animals affected by the poor pad conditions.

VALE SUMMARY: This conclusion may be possible with a full report but is not possible from the IO Summary. 11% of cattle required treatment for diseases other than skin disease. Were all of these unrelated to the adverse conditions reported for the ship?

Discharge

IO SUMMARY: The observer was approved to disembark the vessel prior to the completion of discharge at Huanghua, China, for personal reasons. One mortality occurred after this time, accounting for the discrepancy between 6 reported by the observer, and the 7 official mortalities occurring on this voyage.

Conclusion

IO SUMMARY: The majority of exporter arrangements were observed to be implemented during the voyage, and to be compliant with ASEL requirements.

VALE COMMENT: lack of adequate food is a major non-compliance.

Action

IO SUMMARY: The department has addressed a breach of procedures with the exporter to ensure the health and welfare of the livestock in relation to the feeding of cattle to their requirements. Considering available information, the issues identified by the observer did not result in poor health outcomes for the cattle.

VALE COMMENT: If the department thinks that procedural breaches did not cause poor health outcomes, why did >11% cattle have clinical illness (with 1 animal dying of ketosis and 11% requiring treatment)?