

VALE COMMENT ON IO 212 Bahijah Fremantle to Israel Jan 2020

Voyage summary

IO SUMMARY: The mortality rate for the cattle was 0.36% (16 mortalities) and the mortality rate for the sheep was 0.6% (54 mortalities). This does not exceed the reportable mortality rate for either species. The causes of these mortalities were not considered to be linked to any systemic failure by the exporter.

VALE COMMENT: given that some ASEL breaches were directly responsible for mortalities, this is an interesting comment. What constitutes a “systemic failure”?

IO SUMMARY: The observer commented that pens on the final load plan supplied did not accurately reflect the available pen area on the vessel at loading. The shipboard Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) commented in the end of voyage report that several areas on Decks 5, 6 and 7 were not available for livestock. The observer noted that these areas were subsequently made available to livestock and reported that animals were reshuffled to correct the stocking density for affected pens. Following redistribution of livestock, the stocking density of the vessel allowed each animal 17.5% more space than required by the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock 2011 (version 2.3) (ASEL) and the consignment’s Heat Stress Risk Assessment plan. No negative impact on the health of the affected animals was observed as a result of this.

VALE COMMENT: space allowances directly affect animal welfare, thus why space allowances are mandated in ASEL and why this is a clear breach (as occurs with so many voyages). The IO summary states that it has no negative impact on health (they carefully exclude their usual comment of no impact on welfare) but provide no evidence or justification for that comment. And why weren’t the areas of Decks 5,6 and 7 available initially but could be used later?

IO SUMMARY: Some of the sheep were penned adjacent to the cattle pens and were not strictly loaded in accordance with the species separation requirements under ASEL. This was not rectified during the voyage. The observer noted no negative impact on the health of the sheep or cattle as a result of this pen arrangement.

VALE SUMMARY: as the sheep pad is formed of faeces, sheep can be directly impacted by this housing arrangement. Cattle pens need to be washed down and if no separation was present, then water from washdown had the potential to flood the sheep pens.

Feed and water

IO SUMMARY: Sheep had reasonable access to feed and water for the duration of the voyage, however were not supplied all scheduled feeds at discharge.

VALE SUMMARY: no comment that this had very deleterious sequelae.

Ventilation

IO SUMMARY: Two additional portable fans were installed in an area with perceived reduced air flow on Deck 4 special from Day 8 and were observed to be effective in improving air flow in this area.

VALE SUMMARY: has the Dept noted this for subsequent voyages?

IO SUMMARY: The highest recorded wet bulb temperature reached 29.5°C on Day 8 as the vessel crossed the equatorial region. A second peak in wet bulb temperatures up to 27.5°C was reported on Day 16 as the vessel entered the Red Sea. During both these occasions, up to 20% of sheep were mildly heat affected, displaying a heat stress score ≤2. The cattle displayed a maximum heat stress score of 1.

VALE SUMMARY: rather disingenuous wording as one is not sure how many of the sheep were in Heat Stress Score 1 and how many in 2. That this % of summer-acclimatised sheep were affected by some degree of heat stress is consistent with the wet bulb temperatures (as per Stockman's thesis).

Pen conditions

IO SUMMARY: Sea water splashed into open Decks 5 and 6 during rough weather on Day 11 resulting in water accumulation in some pens. The crew were observed to respond in a timely manner by installing splash panels and distributing sawdust bedding to affected pens.

VALE SUMMARY: wet pens a routine sequel to rough seas

IO SUMMARY: Deck washing was performed on days 6-7, 10-11, 14 and 17-18. Cattle and sheep pens on Deck 6 were not separated by a passageway, empty pen or impermeable barrier as required under ASEL. The observer noted that the sheep were moved to be separated from cattle by an empty pen during deck wash down and there was no negative impact observed upon their health during the voyage.

Health and welfare

IO SUMMARY: 12/16 cattle mortality attributed to enteritis possibly linked to aflatoxin (mould), however this diagnosis was not conclusively confirmed.

VALE COMMENT No visible evidence of mould was observed in the feed provided to livestock but there doesn't need to be to result in aflatoxicosis.

IO SUMMARY: 54 sheep mortalities occurred on this voyage. The observer reported that the cause for the mortalities of the sheep were enteritis in 13 animals, pneumonia in 20, an infected wound in one sheep and no cause of death was determined for 13 sheep. Seven sheep died from misadventure on this voyage, **six of which all occurred during discharge after scheduled feeds were not provided, in breach of ASEL.**

VALE COMMENT: Breach of ASEL led to 10% of the mortalities and yet department concluded no fault of exporter

Discharge

IO SUMMARY: Adequate feed was not supplied to sheep during the discharge period, in breach of ASEL. A lack of communication from the CO to the AAV and stockpersons resulted in feed not being supplied to sheep during the discharge period. As the lambs had been accustomed to being fed between three and four times per day, the observer described that, by the late afternoon, they appeared hungry and restless.

VALE SUMMARY: adverse animal welfare state

IO SUMMARY: Rough weather conditions and a change in the discharge order resulted in delays in discharging the sheep. The observer believed that these delays worsened the feed aggression and vocalisation amongst the sheep. The AAV reported that they decided to not feed at this late stage to reduce the risk of injury or death if sheep rushed to pellets. Six mortalities occurred during the discharge period due to misadventure from lambs catching their heads between troughs to reach spare pellets or from smothering.

VALE SUMMARY: it appears the decision not to feed may have, in hindsight, been unwise.

Other

IO SUMMARY: Approximately 30% of sheep were observed on Day 6 to have a wool length of greater than 10mm but less than 25mm. This was not compliant with the Heat Stress Risk Assessment plan for this consignment, which required sheep to be newly shorn to 10mm. The observer commented that this wool length did not impact on the health of the sheep at any time during the voyage, particularly considering the vessel was entering winter in Israel.

VALE SUMMARY: given that there were 2 periods of heat stress and that wool length will affect heat stress, this is an extraordinary conclusion for the IO to have been made....or was it that the Dept made this with their usual "did not impact on the health" comment

Conclusion

IO SUMMARY: The observer stated that the performance of the vessels livestock crew, AAV and stockpersons was satisfactory throughout the voyage and demonstrated a commitment to the health of the animals.

VALE SUMMARY: the description satisfactory is interesting as could suggest that performance was not optimal OR that it was perfectly adequate. As per usual, a reader is left uncertain.

IO SUMMARY: The department has addressed the issues identified on this voyage with the exporter, including a breach of ASEL to feed sheep at discharge.

VALE SUMMARY: what about the wool length breach? Sheep housing breach? Space allowance breach? And what sanctions? None of course.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 6 Sheep in pen – Wool length >10mm

Day 18 Sheep in pen adjacent to cattle after wash