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VALE COMMENTS ON THE FIRST INDEPENDENT OBSERVER SUMMARY

VOYAGE

MV Baihjah (formerly *Ocean Outback*)

Date: 9 June 2018-30th June; 22 days

Fremantle to Haifa, 9227 sheep, 3695 cattle. Mortalities 17(0.18%) sheep; 1(0.03%) cattle.

VALE COMMENTS

Sections taken directly from the report are in italics. VALE's comments for each of the relevant comments follow each IO comment.

1. *The causes of the mortalities were not considered to be linked to any systemic failure on behalf of the exporter.*

VALE COMMENT: No cause of the deaths is given but given this comment and those on heat stress, it is possible that deaths may have been largely related to the conditions. Those conditions are unavoidable at this time of year and highlight why sheep should not be exported between 1 May and 30 October.

2. *An additional space requirement for animals was imposed on the sheep consignment which allowed each animal 17.5 per cent extra space than that required under ASEL.*

VALE COMMENT: in this low mortality voyage with only 9227 sheep, heat stress occurred in all sheep from the Equator to the Suez Canal (approximate duration 10 days for most ships). This is unacceptable as heat stress is a welfare issue and it is evident that the conditions resulted in discomfort and morbidity for numerous consecutive days. McCarthy¹ recommended that the Heat Stress Risk Assessment(HSRA) Model needed to be adjusted to ensure that there was less than 2% probability of 5% percent of the sheep becoming affected by heat stress (Heat stress score 3—see Table 1). In addition to some degree of undefined heat stress affecting all sheep for many days, the report indicates that Heat stress score 3 of an unspecified sheep number (but seemingly, the majority) was attained on this ship on one afternoon.

3. *There was a small percentage of sheep in the consignment (less than 2%) with wool in excess of the HSRA submitted to the department for this consignment.*

¹ See: <http://www.agriculture.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/biosecurity/export/live-animals/mccarthy-report.pdf> Accessed 28 Nov 2018

VALE COMMENT: There were only 9227 sheep yet it appears that not all sheep complied with the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL)² regarding wool length. The actual sheep number was not specified but the IO then noted that these particular sheep (presumably more than 90 (1%) and less than 180 (2%) experienced worse heat stress. For these sheep, excessive wool length had negative welfare consequences.

4. More than half of the stock in any pen were able to be recumbent at any one time. As the voyage progressed more sheep remained recumbent and often nearly all the sheep would be recumbent.

VALE COMMENT: sheep clearly preferred to be recumbent as the voyage progressed thus it is imperative that adequate space be provided such that all sheep can lie down at one time. Even with 17.5% space increase, the report suggests that not all could lie down at one time ('more than half/'nearly all').

5. There was a lack of veterinary supplies noted a couple of days into the journey and drugs were not always stored in accordance with manufacturers specifications.

VALE COMMENT: even with an IO and close scrutiny after a major exposé, the ship was not stocked adequately with veterinary supplies. It is also concerning that drugs were stored incorrectly.

6. Temperatures were recorded every four hours by the crew with a handheld device and averages were collated for the daily report. There were also wet/dry bulbs on each deck to observe real time temperature. The IO felt that given an average was being reported that this did not reflect the daily maximum temperature and humidity levels.

VALE COMMENT: routine practice has always been to measure the temperature only once daily in the morning and welfare organisations and veterinary organisations have claimed that the recorded temperatures on daily voyage reports are not representative of the maximum temperature and humidity. This IO noted that even with 4 recordings daily, the average did not reflect the daily maximum temperature and humidity, validating these complaints and also demonstrating that the basis for the HSRA has likely been fundamentally flawed.

7. Water - the troughs were empty during small periods before plumbing issues were identified.

VALE COMMENT: whilst it is obvious that issues were quickly rectified, mechanical issues could have jeopardised the livestock occurred on multiple occasions. This is a relatively new ship and there were multiple (more than one) plumbing issues in a 22-day period.

^{2 2} See ASELv 2.3 Sheep must only be sourced for export if they:(a) have wool not more than 25 mm in length, unless approved by the relevant Australian Government agency based on an agreed heat stress risk assessment model;

8. *Smaller fans were also used to increase air flow in particular areas in times of individual supply breakdowns, which occurred twice on this voyage.*

VALE COMMENT: whilst it is obvious that issues were quickly rectified, mechanical issues could have jeopardised the livestock. In addition, this supports the information relayed to VALE that ventilation malfunction occurs frequently on routine long-haul voyages. Again, it should be highlighted that this is one of the newer ships and that there were two malfunctions of this critical equipment in a critical season in 22 days.

9. *Seaspray resulted in flooding at one point late in the journey on Deck 6 and these pens were vacated until their condition could be rectified.*

VALE COMMENT: had the stocking rate not been reduced under the new regulations, this may have resulted in issues of increased stocking density pressure throughout the ship. In addition, the fact that seaspray was so severe that flooding occurred indicates that animals would have been uncomfortable and in an adverse welfare state for some unspecified time period. It is yet another issue of the problems that can occur at sea any time, making every voyage so unpredictable for livestock.

10. *Sawdust was laid for presentation purposes after the final wash and subjectively the cattle benefited greatly from its application.*

VALE COMMENT: this subjective comment bears out VALE's long held complaint that it is inappropriate under ASEL v2.3, that bedding is not required for all cattle voyages.³

11. *The experience and commitment of the stockperson resulted in the early identification and care of shy feeders, for both sheep and cattle. This had a substantial impact in reducing morbidity.*

COMMENT: ASEL states that only healthy animals are fit to load. It has long been known that shy feeders are not identified in the pre-export phase. Whilst it is encouraging that these issues were addressed so expertly by the stockperson, it is disappointing in such a small consignment that these animals were not identified prior to export. It gives one little confidence that larger consignments would have adequate pre-export identification of individual animal health problems (as borne out by most daily voyage reports in the public domain). This voyage should highlight to the ASEL committee why 1 clear day for cattle is inadequate to identify shy feeders and 2 days likely to be so also.

12. *There was a spike in pink eye cases early in the journey but most cases resolved by date of discharge.*

VALE COMMENT: this is a painful condition and will have contributed to morbidity.

³ Bedding is not required for cattle and buffalo loaded from Brisbane or a port north of latitude 26° south and exported to Southeast Asia or Japan.

13. *A degree of heat stress existed for the sheep on board the vessel from the equator until passage of the Suez Canal. There was a low level of discomfort and elevated respiratory rate of almost all sheep during this time. There was only one afternoon where this was observed to progress to open mouth panting and higher levels of heat stress existed across the ship.*

VALE COMMENT: it takes approximately 10 days for an average ship to travel from the Equator to the Suez Canal. It is not known how many days it took on this ship. However, continuous heat stress has occurred for many days with no respite. Whilst the heat stress was described as mild, heat stress that corresponded to McCarthy's Panting Score 3 has occurred across the ship on one afternoon in addition to the reportedly milder continuous heat stress observed. There is no doubt that this ship exceeded 5% of sheep exhibiting heat stress (McCarthy 2018⁴) as probably 100% experienced heat stress. In addition, the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) state in their 2018 Heat Stress Risk Assessment Submission that Sheep should not be exposed to McCarthy's Panting Score 2 for more than 3 consecutive days where there is no diurnal variation in temperature. It is clear that this "generous" summer space allocation has failed to prevent heat stress. This is not surprising. When the ambient conditions exceed the heat stress threshold for sheep and cattle, no amount of space can help.

14. *There was an instance of poor animal handling by one of the importing country stock people when discharging the cattle which was swiftly, and professionally, addressed by the AAV.*

VALE COMMENT: discharge is the last point at which Australians have any control over our sheep. After this they are at the mercy of any of any improper handling in the importing country, circumstances over which we have no control.

15. *The IO noted that a degree of heat stress occurred on part of the journey, and was unavoidable in the conditions.*

VALE COMMENT: Both VALE and the AVA have highlighted that sheep should not be transported between 1 May and 31 October. This routine low mortality voyage with low sheep numbers but 100% heat stress for numerous days highlights the validity of that recommendation. These sheep suffered but survived. They had unacceptable morbidity.

16. *Sheep were under more heat stress with increasing amounts of wool.*

VALE COMMENT: ASEL specifies the wool length permitted for these voyages. The sheep that were in excess of the specified wool length had more severe morbidity (no information on mortality).

VALE SUMMARY

⁴ See: <http://www.agriculture.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/biosecurity/export/live-animals/mccarthy-report.pdf> Accessed 28 Nov 2018

This was a low mortality but high morbidity voyage. It exceeded the parameters set in the McCarthy Review for acceptable heat stress. There appears to have been a failure to comply with ASEL. There were mechanical issues on board and there were adverse sea conditions.

The government has indicated that morbidity is a concern in addition to mortality and that compliance will be policed. The IO summary provides clear evidence for high level morbidity on this ship and possible evidence of compliance issues.

ENDS