Independent Observer summary report on MV *Yangtze Harmony*

Cattle exported to Vietnam in September 2019

Report 180, December 2019

Voyage summary

A consignment of 2,836 cattle was loaded on the MV *Yangtze Harmony* at the Port of Townsville between 6 and 7 September 2019. The vessel departed on 7 September 2019. The vessel discharged the cattle at the Thi Vai General Port, Vietnam between 19 and 20 September 2019, making this a 15-day voyage.

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

The mortality rate for the voyage was 0.25% (7 cattle), which does not exceed the reportable mortality rate. The causes of the 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.

Loading

The cattle were loaded according to the load plan, which complied with the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock 2011 (version 2.3)* (ASEL) requirements. No animal welfare issues were observed during loading.

All the cattle had access to fresh water and fodder within eight hours of being loaded. Sufficient competent personnel were available at loading to ensure the welfare of animals. No visible signs of stress were observed during loading.

Personnel

There was an experienced LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson (stockperson) on board responsible for implementing the exporters' procedures to ensure the health and welfare of the livestock throughout the voyage.

The master, Chief Officer (CO) and the bosun inspected the decks each morning, and showed a genuine concern for the welfare of the cattle. The livestock crew were observed to be competent stock handlers, diligent, hard-working, and treated the cattle with due care for their welfare.

Daily routine

From 6:30am, the stockperson inspected all livestock pens, made every animal rise, and then attended to any health and welfare issues. The stockperson repeated the stock patrol activities throughout the afternoon and moved stock as required.

Management meetings were held each day at 10:00am, and were attended by the CO, bosun, stockperson, and the observer. The topics discussed included feed, chaff, climatic conditions, bedding, and the daily report.

The cattle were fed three times per day in early morning, late morning and mid-afternoon with top-ups as required.

Two nightwatch crew patrolled the livestock decks from 6:00pm to midnight, then one nightwatch crew patrolled the decks from midnight to 6:00am. The nightwatch duties included checking for misadventure; water spills; ventilation failures; livestock illness and welfare issues; and manual filling of water troughs. The nightwatch crew were effective.

Feed and water

The vessel carried more than enough feed pellets and chaff for the duration of the voyage. Feed troughs were occasionally knocked off the pen rails; however, access to feed was adequate because livestock crew constantly moved around each deck to re-attach the troughs to the rails and refill them.

Water supply was adequate with sufficient pressure to service the float-valve water troughs on all eight decks. The crew repaired in a timely manner any of the plastic water pipes or fittings that were broken. The water supply was constant with one exception at 12:10am on day 10. At that time there was no water on all eight decks while maintenance crew shut down water for approximately two hours to repair a valve in the water pump. The observer checked again at 6:00am and confirmed that water supply was back on to all decks. There were no adverse health and welfare effects on the cattle observed.

Crew constantly moved around the decks to strain out or empty and re-fill any water troughs that became contaminated with feed or manure. Feed and water access was ad lib and unhindered. The stockperson identified shy feeders, and placed them into hospital pens and treated them as required.

Ventilation

All pens received good air flow from the ventilation tubes that were ducted over all pens. All supply and exhaust towers functioned at full power.

Fixed dry bulb and wet bulb thermometers located on Deck 7 and sling psychrometer readings were taken daily across all decks at 8:30am. These 8:30am temperatures were observed to be approximately 1 °C lower than the hottest part of day. The maximum deck temperature during the voyage was 33 °C dry bulb, 30 °C wet bulb, 80% humidity at 4:00pm on day 12 in the South China Sea.

Pen conditions

Pen densities were in accordance with, or lower than, ASEL requirements, with most cattle able to lie down simultaneously in their pens.

The lower Decks 1–3 were washed down on day 11. The upper Decks 4–8 were not washed down due to their lower stocking density. The pads on the upper decks were adequately maintained by the livestock crew and did not require a deck wash.

Pads were observed to gradually build up as the voyage progressed. The crew added pine shavings and wasted feed into the pens to manage any areas of sloppy pads.

Health and welfare

The stockperson patrolled the decks at all times of the day, checking pens for health and welfare issues, stocking density and ventilation. The stockperson maintained appropriate records of their observations; identified, assessed, and treated animals as required, ensured that sick cattle were moved to hospital pens, stored and used veterinary drugs as per manufacturer's label instructions and treated hospital cases with care.

The stockperson identified cattle that required attention in a timely manner. The stockperson's daily reports to the Department of Agriculture stated that that treatments were applied for illnesses attributed to lameness (22), shy feeders (8), and bloat (1). All cattle that were placed in sick pens were satisfactorily discharged with the exception of 1 shy feeder mortality that occurred after the vessel had berthed at its destination.

Four mortalities were attributed to pneumonia, one to bloat, one to misadventure during the sea voyage, and one to inanition whilst in a sick pen after the vessel had berthed at the destination port.

In general, the livestock displayed no stress indicators such as open-mouth panting or vocalisation; however, four of the heavy bulls occasionally had elevated rates of breathing, probably due to heat conditions at the time. All these four bulls were discharged without appearing to have lost condition.

An estimated 95% of cattle appeared to at least hold their condition throughout the voyage, with a proportion gaining weight.

Discharge

All cattle were observed being fed and eating well, with access to water while waiting to be discharged. Discharge proceeded smoothly, with no issues.

Conclusion

The observer noted that the stockpersons and the crew ensured that the health and welfare of the cattle was maintained during the voyage.

The exporter arrangements were observed to be implemented during the voyage, and to be compliant with ASEL requirements.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 2 Cattle in pen – no issues identified

Day 5 Feeding – no issues identified

Day 8 Cattle in pen – no issues identified

Day 11 After deckwash – no issues identified

Day 13 Cattle in pen – no issues identified

Day 13 Discharge – no issues identified