

Independent Observer summary report on *MV Al Messilah*

Sheep and cattle exported to Kuwait in May 2018

Report 2, December 2018

Voyage summary

The *MV Al Messilah* is a closed-deck vessel for the carriage of livestock.

The *Al Messilah* departed Fremantle on 1 May 2018 carrying two consignments for two exporters, with a total of 65,334 sheep and 228 cattle to the Middle East. The vessel discharged animals in Kuwait on 14 May 2018, Qatar on 18 May 2018, and completed discharge in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on 19 May 2018. This constituted a journey of 19 days.

The Independent Observer (IO) joined the vessel in Fremantle.

The overall mortality rate for the voyage was 0.34 per cent for sheep (222 mortalities) and no mortalities for 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 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 from the IO from loading in Fremantle until discharge at the Port of Jebel Ali, UAE. The summary has been approved by the IO who accompanied this voyage.

Implementation of procedures to ensure health and welfare of livestock

Exporter documentation

The exporter Heat Stress Risk Assessment (HSRA) and load plan was submitted to the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources prior to departure as required. Load plan calculations are based on the average weight of each breed/type being allocated to a particular deck and area based on the ASEL. 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 was imposed on one exporter following some previous voyage issues. The original load plan submitted was for 67,845 sheep, whereas the final approved number was for 65,334.

Consignment specific export plans (CSEPs) were available for cattle addressing procedures relating to provision of fodder, water, bedding (cattle only) medication, humane destruction, livestock officer instructions from loading through to discharge and contingency stockmen. The instructions included in the CSEPs were observed to be implemented during the voyage and to be compliant with ASEL requirements.

Loading

The livestock were loaded in Fremantle without incident and the health and welfare of animals was maintained throughout the process. All animals were in good condition with a body condition score equal to or greater than score three. This was due to extended time spent in the preparation feedlot because of several changes to the voyage schedule. Livestock were in general loaded onto the vessel in accordance with the load plan, noting some adjustments were made in the first few days to ensure livestock pen densities were satisfactory.

Personnel

There was an experienced Accredited Australian Veterinarian (AAV) and LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson on board responsible for implementing the exporters' procedures to ensure the health and welfare of the livestock throughout the voyage, until completion of discharge.

The vessel's crew was led by the Captain (Master) and Chief Officer (CO). Between them, they inspected all decks twice daily in respect of feed, water and pen condition. There was a bosun and 23 other crew assigned to duties on the 10 livestock decks. They looked after the supply and maintenance of the food and water troughs, cleaned the aisles and removed any dead animals to the holding area on deck 7. Three crew were allocated one of four hour shifts for night watch duties and were required to report to the Bridge every hour. The IO assessed the crew to be mindful of the welfare of the animals when carrying out their tasks.

Daily routine

There was only one dry and wet bulb thermometer per deck. Temperatures were recorded once daily by the crew between 10:00 and 11:00 am and the reports were forwarded to the bosun, the CO and the Master.

Feed and water

All animals were fed twice daily in the morning and afternoon from ad libitum automatic feeders. Pellets were provided for both sheep and cattle, plus the cattle received excellent quality hay each day. Pellets were available in the troughs at all times and the trough space was adequate with all animals able to gain access. The feed troughs were maintained continuously by the designated crew.

Water was generated by three reverse osmosis plants and delivered by an automatic ball-cock system. The troughs were never observed to be empty and the crew regularly cleaned them.

Ventilation

The ventilation system provided a downward directed air flow directly into the pens. Although there was an increase in respiration rates when travelling north of the equator, no animal was observed panting or demonstrating any signs of respiratory distress. There was adequate lighting of decks at all times.

Pen conditions

Cattle were housed on a deck shared with sheep. There was no hosing of cattle pens but their pens were cleaned every five days by the crew using wheelbarrows and shovels. Each pen was then replenished with copious good quality dry wood shavings. Spare clean cattle pens were available at all times.

Sheep pens were generally in good condition with the pad base providing a cushion. It varied from dry to moist over the journey. Very few reached the condition of moist and sticky, and none were deemed wet. Moist pen pads can result from a combination of increased ambient temperatures, increased drinking and urination or leaking water troughs. Continual maintenance of the water troughs eliminated this source of wetting. The IO noted that there were a few moist pads in deck locations where air flow was low. Wood shavings were added to these moist pens to reduce the moisture. They dried out after entering the Persian Gulf due to the reduced humidity. The health and welfare of animals was not compromised by the state of the pens.

Health and welfare

The AAV, stockperson and the vessel's crew managed the health and welfare well, including the treatment of animals in hospital pens or humane euthanasia when required.

Despite prolonged observation of sheep movement in pens, it was not possible to validate that all animals were getting their turn at the feed trough. However no pens were identified containing animals in obviously poor condition and primary inanition was not diagnosed as a cause of death on post mortem.

Discharge

The health and welfare of livestock was maintained throughout unloading at all three discharge ports.

Conclusion

The IO determined that the relevant procedures relating to the management of livestock exported by sea were consistent with ASEL.

The IO found that from the timing of loading to discharge, the processes, procedures and attention to the maintenance of pens and facilities was good. The Master, all the vessel's officers and crew were dedicated and diligent in performing their duties to ensure the well-being of the animals. The experienced AAV and stockperson communicated well with the crew in order to maintain the health and welfare of the cattle in line with ASEL requirements.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 4 Cattle in pen—no issues identified



Day 4 Sheep in pen—no issues identified



Day 13 Cattle in pen—no issues identified



Day 11 Sheep in pen—no issues identified



Day 17 Cattle in pen—no issues identified



Day 16 Sheep in pen—no issues identified

