

HEAT STRESS RISK ASSESSMENT.

We accept the move from risk assessment based on mortality to one based on the risk of the animals being affected by heat and animal welfare. However, this Heat Stress Risk assessment is to be based on proper onboard research rather than theoretical deductions based on studies ashore. It is desired that it should also be based on actual facts, opinions and feedbacks received from the Active Australian Accredited Veterinarians who have been sailing with the livestock vessels on numerous voyages and have a vast amount of experience in the field. The AAV's profession dictates that the animal welfare is paramount and their reports and interviews will have immense value. Recommendations are not achieved under duress in a short time but monitoring the sheep response, accumulation of onboard data in a feedback loop, transparent monitoring will achieve a better and practical animal welfare.

The changes imposed will have to be properly studied, researched and gradually implemented. The use of flawed programs may lead to a situation where the stocking densities are such the export of livestock becomes unviable. This is an extremely complex issue and any regulatory outcome will have a direct impact on the revenues of farmers, sheep producers and the whole live sheep transport industry.

The ships are presently loading as per the ASEL + 17.5% destocking density. With this stocking density it is being observed that more than half the animals in the pen are observed lying down at any one time with large amount of ample free space and some of the sheep continuing and opting to stand. Reducing stocking densities any further will have no additional positive effect on animal welfare.

The recommended WBT welfare limit of 28 Deg C for standard Marino Weather sheep of 56 Kg adult will have to be elaborated more in detail for all other categories. It has to be considered if some categories of sheep travel better. Emphasis and regulations should be documented in detail for implementation by calculated adjustments for different classes of sheep based on breed and animal species, body weight, body condition, wool length and acclimatization. A blanket figure of WBT 28 Deg C is not acceptable.

An in-depth studied practical approach will have to be taken towards imposing Heat Stress Risk Assessment which should be based on feedback from the whole livestock transport industry and a hurried response will not achieve the desired results towards animal welfare.