



Australian Government

Independent Observer summary report on *MV Al Messilah*

Sheep exported to Kuwait and United Arab Emirates in September 2023

July 2025

Voyage summary

Livestock: 52,039 sheep

Vessel: *MV Al Messilah*

Loading location and date: Fremantle, from 15 to 16 September 2023

Vessel departure location and date: Fremantle, 16 September 2023

Discharge location and dates:

- Shuwaikh, Kuwait, from 30 September to 3 October 2023
- Jebel Ali, United Arab Emirates, from 5 to 6 October 2023

Voyage length: 22 days

Independent Observer: Boarded at Fremantle and remained onboard until 2 hours prior to completion of discharge.

Voyage mortality rate: 0.34% (175 mortalities). These mortalities are unlikely to be linked to any systemic failure by the exporter.

Notifiable mortality rate: 1% for sheep

Summary of observations

This report summarises key observations of the implementation and effectiveness of exporter arrangements to ensure the health and welfare of livestock. The report has been approved by the observer who accompanied the voyage.

Exporter documentation

Relevant exporter documentation for the voyage was made available to the observer.

Loading

Based on observations made during this voyage, there was no impact on livestock health as a result of pen stocking densities.

The observer noted that:

- 1) The exporter's load plans allocated livestock space on a deck level, however the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL) standards 5.1.2 and 5.5.1 require exporters to provide livestock with minimum stocking densities on a per head per pen level.
- 2) The exporter's stowage plans did not provide all animals with their minimum space required by ASEL standards 5.1.2 and 5.5.1.
 - a) Horned (less than 1 full curl) sheep were not provided with an additional 10% space.
 - i) At the time of this voyage, ASEL standard 5.5.1 required exporters to provide all horned sheep (regardless of horn length) with an additional 10% space above their minimum stocking density.
 - ii) Since this voyage, ASEL has been updated to require an additional 10% space only for sheep with horns more than one full curl.
 - b) The observer calculated the overall pen space available on deck 7 and noted that this was not sufficient to provide all sheep on this deck with their required space.
- 3) On day 9, the observer estimated that one pen of horned (less than 1 full curl) and non-horned sheep had 10 to 15 more head than the space allowed for. The observer noted no adverse animal health effects were observed as a result of the overstocking. The observer alerted the vessel master at the next daily meeting and the sheep were immediately reshuffled to ease spacing. The observer did not identify any further pens that were visibly overstocked during the voyage.
- 4) The exporter produced a revised stowage plan after sheep were reshuffled during the first sailing days of the voyage. The department reviewed the revised stowage plan that demonstrated across the vessel:
 - a) Pens were allocated an average of 63 sheep per pen.
 - b) 41.5% of pens on the stowage plan did not meet ASEL minimum requirements as they were overstocked by 1 animal per pen.
 - c) 11.5% of pens on the stowage plan were overstocked by more than 1 animal and up to 5 animals per pen.

Personnel

Based on observations made during this voyage, the exporter arrangements relating to personnel were appropriate and effective in managing livestock health and welfare.

Daily routine

Based on observations made during this voyage, the exporter arrangements relating to daily routine were appropriate and effective in managing livestock health and welfare.

Feed and water

Based on observations made during this voyage, the exporter arrangements relating to feed and water were appropriate and effective in managing livestock health and welfare.

Ventilation

Based on observations made during this voyage, the exporter arrangements relating to ventilation were appropriate and effective in managing livestock health and welfare.

The observer noted that:

- 1) The observer's measurements of temperatures within livestock pens varied by 1°C to 2°C from those recorded and reported by the shipboard Accredited Veterinarian (AAV).
- 2) Sheep were occasionally observed to be open mouth panting during hotter periods of the voyage. Sheep ate and drank at their normal level and remained alert throughout these periods.
 - a) On day 8 approaching the equator, the first open mouth panting for the voyage was observed in fewer than 1% of sheep when wet bulb temperatures rose to a maximum of 28.3°C for an hour on deck 6.
 - b) On days 15 to 17, around the Strait of Hormuz, wet bulb temperatures remained above 30°C for 1 day and 5 hours, with a 5-hour reprieve in the evening of day 15. The highest wet bulb temperature was measured as 31°C on decks 4 and 11. Wet bulb temperatures dropped to 22.3°C in the afternoon of day 16. Approximately 1% to 2% of sheep across the vessel were observed open mouth panting at any one time.
 - c) On day 20, crossing the Persian Gulf, the voyage's highest wet bulb temperatures were observed with a maximum of 31.9°C measured on decks 4, 5 and 7 for two hours in mid afternoon. The observer noted that 2% to 3% of sheep were open mouth panting during this time.

Pen conditions

The observer noted that:

- 1) On day 3, a pen on deck 6 was observed with a wet pad. The cause of the wet pad was likely from a water spill or leak and was resolved prior to the observation. The pad dried out within a day and no adverse animal health or welfare effects were observed as a result of the wet pad.
- 2) During the voyage, pens were altered by installing temporary wire fencing on deck 2 or reducing a gap in pen railings on deck 6 to prevent sheep from escaping. A previous observer deployed on the MV *Al Messilah* noted that smaller sheep were able to escape on all decks.
- 3) Two sheep were observed outside their pens during the voyage. They had access to food and water and were returned to their pens when feasible. No adverse animal health or welfare effects were observed as a result of the preventative measures or escaped sheep.
- 4) The load plan included empty pens on deck 6 to accommodate for planned engineering work. On this voyage, sheep were moved around deck 6 as work was done on the empty pens. No overstocking was observed and there were no observed negative health or welfare effects.

Health and welfare

No systemic issues observed.

The observer noted that:

- 1) The AAV and stockperson spent a significant portion of their time identifying shy feeders and moving them to hospital pens. This was observed to be effective in providing the sheep with easier access to water and fodder troughs.

The AAV reported that:

- 1) During the voyage, 74 sheep were treated for conditions including lameness, blindness, diarrhoea and a wound. Sheep requiring treatment were moved to hospital pens, with up to 19 animals treated at any one time. The AAV did not report treatments for shy feeders as required by ASEL standard 5.6.7.
- 2) A total of 175 mortalities occurred on this voyage, 36 were euthanised and 139 were found deceased.
- 3) Post mortems were performed on 33 mortalities, with causes attributed to inanition, gastrointestinal issues, a musculoskeletal issue and an infection. The AAV reported that 54 post mortems were unable to be performed due to proximity to shore, 32 due to decomposition, 10 due to time constraints, 1 mortality the AAV was unaware of and 45 were not required due to obvious diagnoses including inanition, infection and wounds.
- 4) Treatments were not reported for day 6 and 7 as required by ASEL standards 1.1.8 and 5.6.7. The AAV reported that this was due to time constraints however treated individuals were visually identified.

Discharge

The observer noted that:

- 1) Discharge at Jebel Ali was delayed by heavy fog conditions so that it took over 2 days. Sheep had ad lib access to fodder and water during the discharge period and higher risk sheep were discharged during the night when the weather was cooler. No adverse health or welfare outcomes were observed as a result of the prolonged discharge.
- 2) The observer, AAV and stockperson disembarked 2 hours prior to completion of discharge under instruction from the vessel master. The master did not report any livestock health or welfare issues, and no mortalities occurred in the final 2 hours of discharge.

Department actions

The department required the exporter to review, amend and vary as required, their processes for reporting treatments and the management of minimum pen space allocation for sheep to ensure ASEL requirements are met on future voyages.

The department required the exporter to provide AAV treatment records for days 6 and 7.

Representative photographs of voyage

Day 2 Horned sheep in pen — no issues identified



Day 5 Horned sheep in pen — no issues identified



Day 8 Sheep in pen — no issues identified



Day 13 Horned sheep in pen — no issues identified



Day 17 Horned sheep in pen — no issues identified



Day 21 Sheep in pen — no issues identified



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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