# Independent Observer summary report on MV *Gloucester Express*

## Cattle exported to China in September 2018

**Report 22, August 2019**

### Voyage summary

The MV *Gloucester Express* has a total of five enclosed decks for the carriage of livestock.

The *Gloucester Express* commenced loading on 28 September 2018 in Fremantle and departed shortly before midnight that day carrying a consignment of 1,952 cattle to China. The livestock were discharged in Huanghua, China on 13 October 2018. The voyage was 14 days in length, with the loading and discharge process taking two days.

The independent observer (observer) joined the vessel in Fremantle on the day of departure.

The overall mortality rate for the voyage was 0.05% for the cattle (one mortality). This does not exceed the reportable mortality rate as stated in the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (Version 2.3) 2011* (ASEL). This mortality was not considered to be linked to any systemic failure of the exporter.

The following comments represent a summary of key observations from loading in Fremantle until discharge at the Port of Huanghua, China. The summary has been approved by the observer who accompanied the voyage.

### Implementation of procedures to ensure health and welfare of livestock

#### Exporter documentation

Exporter voyage instructions, load plan, vessel requirements and shipboard daily reports were made available.

#### Loading

Some but not all nose bowls had water at the time of loading. The observer raised the ASEL requirement to feed and water cattle within 12 hours of loading with the Livecorp Accredited stockperson (stockperson) and this requirement was met within the specified time.

#### Personnel

The Chief Officer (CO) was often seen on the cattle decks.

The stockperson was actively involved in the loading process and it was immediately apparent that he was experienced and competent in cattle movement specific to livestock vessels. The observer was able to verify that the stockperson held a genuine and responsive commitment to good animal husbandry and welfare outcomes.

The crew were well supervised and worked in a collaborative manner. Some crew were more experienced than others however no animal welfare incidents were observed.

## Daily routine

Day to day interactions were predominantly via scheduled daily meetings at 7:00am with the CO, stockperson and the crew.

Once daily from 11:00am, a crew member moved through each deck with a whirling hygrometer to obtain an average daily wet and dry bulb temperature reading for each hold and to determine the relative humidity for each.

## Feed and water

The crew manually distributed fodder to the cattle troughs twice daily at 6:00am and 3:30pm by filling sacks at collection points on each deck and then carrying these along the aisles, filling each trough as they went.

The chaff was fed out between the two fodder feeds on day's 4, 5, 10 and 11. Chaff was made available more often to cattle that were identified as more likely to lose body condition.

Adequacy of feed was evident by the general observable improvement in body condition across all classes of cattle.

The *Gloucester Express* is equipped with two desalination plants with a combined generation capacity of 200 metric ton and multiple fresh water storage tanks to ensure reserve supply. The water is distributed to nose bowl troughs with almost all pens having two nose bowls.

During the voyage a segment of the water supply became non-operational. Feed troughs were temporarily converted to provide water to the affected pens until repairs were undertaken. These corrective measures were observed to be appropriate.

## Ventilation

The *Gloucester Express* has three, four-sided air supply intake towers spaced along the vessel midline. Each tower feeds air into paired supply shafts that distribute into large poly ducts that run along the headroom of the cattle decks. The exhaust air is draw out through screened ducts that feed into exhaust shafts and vent through six paired exhaust turrets lined up either portside or starboard side of the supply towers.

The operation of the ventilation system led to exhaust fumes from the vessel engine being drawn into Hold 3. Temporary measures were taken by the crew to minimise the intake of exhaust fumes and the CO advised the observer that permanent modifications would be undertaken to raise the exhaust funnel using a large diameter length of piping stowed on the upper deck. Modification works to rectify the problem were subsequently undertaken in January 2019.

## Pen conditions

The pad thickness developed over the voyage to a central depth on 5-10 cm with a much thicker piling up effect under the gates, into corners and along the walls. The texture was initially crumbly but progressed to variably tacky to sloppy mud by Day 7.

The stockperson provided instructions on day 9, 10, 11 and 12 for crew to spread sawdust on wet pens. The observer recorded that there were a number of pens where this instruction could apply however the availability of sawdust and capacity of crew to competently evaluate the pens eroded the effectiveness of this direction.

Deck washing was considered however the stockperson was concerned over the mess from washing, physical effort required by the crew, associated cattle stress and the replacement of a cushioning, if variable pad with a denuded wet floor. The pad dried out when the humidity dropped toward the end of the voyage.

### Health and welfare

Within a day of departure from Fremantle, observations were made of three or four cattle with nasal discharge. Over the next few days the observer monitored the affected cattle finding in all cases that there was resolution of the clinical signs without treatment being administered. Several cattle were also observed to have mild eye lesions and these similarly resolved.

The stockperson treated several lame cattle competently and sustained improvement was observed in their condition.

A bull with acute respiratory symptoms was effectively euthanised after administration of a sedative. This was the only mortality recorded on the voyage.

### Discharge

A generous distribution of saw dust was applied by the crew to the internal and external ramps and on the floor of the on-shore transfer deck in preparation for the discharge.

An excess of on-shore personnel with sticks were stationed along the discharge ramp which hampered the movement of the cattle. The observer noted that the frequent interjection from the stockperson prevented the situation from developing into a possible welfare incident. The off load was completed without observed or reported injury to any of the cattle.

### Other

During the voyage there were no observable patterns of morbidity.

## Conclusion

The observer determined that the relevant procedures to ensure the health and welfare of the livestock were consistently applied.

## Representative photographs of the voyage

**Day 3 Cattle in pen—no issues identified**

**Day 5 Engine exhaust intake - Hold 3**

**Day 7 Cattle in pen—no issues identified**


**Day 8 Cattle in pen—no issues identified**


**Day 11 Cattle in pen—no issues identified**


**Day 13 Cattle in pen—no issues identified**