Independent Observer summary report on MV *Ocean Ute*

Cattle exported to China in November 2018

Report 40, May 2019

Voyage summary

The MV *Ocean Ute* was originally a container ship which was converted to carry livestock. The vessel has seven enclosed decks.

The MV *Ocean Ute* commenced loading at Portland, Victoria on 22 November 2018, departing the following day with 5606 breeder cattle loaded destined for Tianjin, China. The vessel completed discharge on 13 December 2018. The voyage was 22 days in length, with the loading and discharge process taking four days.

The Independent Observer (observer) joined the vessel in Portland.

The overall mortality rate for the voyage was 0.84 per cent (47 mortalities). This did not exceed the reportable mortality rate of one per cent for cattle on a voyage of over 10 days.

The following comments represent a summary of key observations from the observer from loading in Portland until discharge in China. The summary has been approved by the observer who accompanied this voyage.

Implementation of procedures to ensure health and welfare of livestock

Exporter documentation

Consignment Specific Export Plans (CSEPs) were available for cattle addressing procedures relating to provision of fodder, water, bedding, medication, humane destruction, voyage instructions from loading through to discharge, and contingency plans.

Loading

One heifer suffered a broken leg during loading and was euthanased as soon as possible thereafter.

Personnel

A total of 37 crew were on-board during the voyage. The Master has four years' experience as a Master, and extensive experience as Chief Officer (CO) previously. The crew had varying degrees of livestock experience. The crew showed concern for the welfare of the livestock and seemed to be hard working and diligent in bringing issues to the stockpersons attention. During the voyage both the Master and CO were engaged on animal welfare issues.

Two LiveCorp Accredited Stockpersons (stockpersons) accompanied the consignment. During the voyage the stockpersons first priority was animal welfare. An Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) was not required to accompany the consignment.

Daily routine

The stockpersons had similar routines, worked together as a team, and both were actively involved in managing adverse conditions and treatments.

Daily meetings were held each morning and were normally attended by the Master, CO, Bosun, stockpersons and independent observer. Items discussed include food and water consumption, feeding requirements, deck washing, mortalities, treatments, emerging issues and environmental conditions.

The livestock crew commenced morning routines at 6.30am feeding and cleaning water and walkways. The second feed commenced after 10.30am. The afternoon feed commenced at 3.30pm and finish approximately 5.30pm. Chaff was fed every second day.

Feed and water

Sufficient pellets and chaff were loaded in accordance with the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (Version 2.3) 2011* (ASEL) to cover feeding of the loaded cattle on the exporter's projected 16 day voyage, along with the required three day contingency. However the voyage went longer than expected at 22 days.

Fodder was stored in silos and in some cattle pens on each deck. The CO could not accurately calculate daily fodder consumption because of fodder wastage and the storage / distribution system.

Even though there were three feeds per day, the cattle consumed the available fodder quickly. A longer than expected voyage and competition for fodder resulted in reduced intake for cattle that were shy feeders or lame. The stockperson isolated ill or shy feeders during to voyage to provide better access to food and additional space.

During the night watch, the crew were in radio contact with the bridge, walking the decks, checking water, and ensuring all was well.

The Ocean Ute has an automatic watering system to all decks, and no issues were observed during the voyage.

Ventilation

The Ocean Ute's ventilation system delivers air to each pen by pipes with strategically located outlet holes. The ventilation seemed effective.

Pen conditions

Over the course of voyage, the pad condition ranged from soft to very sloppy. Early in the voyage, the pad condition appeared to be comfortable but particularly the lower decks became wet and very sloppy from day eight as the temperature and humidity increased. The first deck wash had to be pushed out to day 10 due to proximity to land. The decks appeared to be in an acceptable condition the rest of the voyage. All decks were washed twice during the voyage. The deck washing improved the pad condition and the cattle appeared to be more comfortable.

Bedding was loaded on the vessel in accordance with the ASEL requirements. Some bedding was spread on the ramps and alleys, however was not spread in pens at loading. The bedding was used following the last wash down closer to unloading.

Health and welfare

Over the course of the voyage, the cattle were subject to a wide variation of weather and sea conditions.

The weather during loading at Portland was wet and cold (temperature below 10 degrees Celsius). The temperature and humidity increased as the vessel travelled north. Humidity reached a maximum of 86 per cent (in conjunction with 32 degrees Celsius) on Day 6. The initial pen wash occurred on day 10 and improved the conditions for the cattle. The temperatures and humidity remained similar (without any relief at night) until day 15 of the voyage.

After day 15 of the voyage, the temperature decreased on a daily basis. By day 17, the temperature on the deck was around zero. The heat/humidity and subsequent cold temperatures appeared to adversely affect the health of some of the cattle, particularly those in poorer condition.

The sea conditions were rough for the first two days and nights improving as the vessel travelled north. The conditions were calm through the tropics but were rough between days 12 and 17.

A significant number of cattle became lame during the voyage. The stockperson treated the lame cattle with varying success. Some of the lame cattle were unable to rise or seemed to develop Bovine Respiratory Disease (BRD).

There were 47 mortalities (mortality rate was 0.84 per cent – reportable level is 1.0 per cent). The main causes of the mortalities were mainly lame cattle that were unable to rise and BRD.

Overall the vessel was loaded in accordance with the stocking densities in the ASEL, although some pens were not available for holding cattle because they were used for fodder storage. Throughout the voyage the stockperson amended the number of cattle in pens to optimise space and improve animal welfare as best as possible.

Discharge

The cattle were fed on the morning of arrival. However whilst the vessel was discharging, the cattle appeared not to have been fed. The department has addressed this issue with the exporter.

Conclusion

The cattle were subject to adverse environmental conditions that included cold and wet conditions at loading, rough seas for approximately seven days in total, increased temperature and humidity in the tropics and conversely very cold conditions on arrival in China.

The adverse vessel management factors include the availability of fodder, sloppy pen conditions whilst subject to humid tropical environmental conditions and reduction of availability of some pens because of fodder storage.

Overall the environmental and vessel factors appeared to result in some lameness and subsequent mortalities, poor condition of the pad before the first wash and some loss of condition of shy feeders and lame cattle.

The two stockpersons did all they could to improve the conditions on the voyage and the majority of the cattle at discharge were in good condition.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 4 Cattle in pen - no issues identified

Day 6 Cattle in pen - wet pen conditions

Day 8 Cattle in pen - wet pen conditions

Day 10 Cattle in pen - after pen wash

Day 15 Cattle in pen - no issues identified

Day 18 Cattle in pen - no issues identified