

LIVE SHEEP EXPORTS: VESSEL “AL MESSILAH” RETURN TO PORT

Current Issue

A vessel carrying live sheep to the Middle East has returned to Port Adelaide after a mechanical failure damaged its backup electrical generator. Conditions on the ship remain conducive to providing for the health and welfare of the sheep. At this stage the sheep are remaining on the vessel. Consideration is being given to their transport to an AQIS-approved registered feedlot establishment near Adelaide should it not be possible to quickly repair the vessel.

Talking Points

- The live animal export vessel “Al Messilah” has returned to Port Adelaide after experiencing mechanical failure within 24 hours of its departure.
- The mechanical failure has not compromised the welfare of the 67,000 sheep onboard. Ventilation, feed and water systems are all working and are in good order.
- The mechanical problem is due to the failure of the vessel’s auxiliary generator.
- DAFF is working with the vessel’s master and the exporter to maintain the welfare of the animals. The sheep are under the care of an AQIS approved veterinarian who is onboard.
- The vessel is being assessed to determine if immediate repairs can be conducted, or whether the ship will need to be dry-docked.
- If the vessel can undergo immediate repair, the sheep may remain onboard.
- If the ship cannot be repaired within a reasonable period, the sheep will be unloaded and moved directly to a nearby feedlot that is an AQIS-approved registered facility.
- If unloaded, the sheep will be held under quarantine conditions at the feedlot pending their re-export or slaughter for processing within Australia. This arrangement will ensure appropriate animal health and welfare outcomes are met.
- Animal Health Committee has endorsed a risk assessment concerning the unloading of the sheep from the vessel. This risk assessment has determined that there are negligible animal welfare and biosecurity risks associated with this action, provided certain risk management measures are applied.

Key issues

- A major mechanical failure occurred on the live sheep export vessel “Al Messilah” in the Australian maritime zone on 9th August 2011. The vessel was only 24 hours into its voyage and did not leave the Australian maritime zone. The failure was caused by a crack in a sewage outlet pipe which allowed seawater and sewage to fill an emergency generator room. The vessel has been obliged, for maritime safety reasons, to return to Port Adelaide.
- The vessel departed Port Adelaide on 8th August 2011. The vessel is carrying approximately 67,000 sheep intended for s47 (1)(b) in the Middle East.
- The veterinarian accompanying the sheep reports their continuing good health and maintenance of satisfactory conditions for their welfare.
- Animal Health Committee (AHC) with relevant industry representatives met by teleconference on 10 August 2011 to discuss this incident. AHC requested that a risk assessment concerning the welfare and health of the sheep on the “Al Messilah” be undertaken by DAFF in case the vessel could not be repaired on arrival in Port Adelaide that would necessitate the unloading of the sheep.

- It has been confirmed that all previous shipments by the “Al Messilah” undertaken in the last three months were only Australian animals and only Australian origin fodder and water was taken on board. The Master of the vessel has also advised that no animals were loaded onto the vessel in the past 6 months at any place other than Australia. No animals have been treated with any veterinary therapeutics since the vessel’s departure from Port Adelaide.
- DAFF’s risk assessment identified animal pests and diseases of concern, exposure pathways, and concluded the quarantine risk from the sheep being transported and held at feedlot under quarantine controls to be minimal (should the vessel need to be unloaded).
- The assessment focussed on transfer of the sheep to an AQIS-approved registered feedlot establishment located [REDACTED] s47G(1)(a) [REDACTED]. It is intended that the consignment be re-exported in 3-4 weeks or they will be slaughtered at a nearby abattoir for processing for human consumption. The sheep would not re-enter the Australian flock.
- Risk management measures apply at the vessel, and would apply during transport, and at the feedlot while it is occupied by the returned sheep should they be unloaded. These include, but are not limited to:
 - At the port: exclusion of other ruminant animals; disposal of animal waste; and cleaning and disinfection of the wharf area after the animals have departed;
 - During transport to and from the feedlot: selection of transport routes; monitoring of each transport vehicle;
 - At the feedlot: daily official animal health inspections, disposal of animal waste; and decontamination of the feedlot after the departure of all sheep.
- Animal Health Committee (AHC) with relevant industry representatives met by teleconference on 11 August 2011 and endorsed the risk assessment and risk management plan.
- The vessel returned to Port Adelaide on 11th August and was initially at anchor outside the port.
- An assessment for seaworthiness commenced on 12 August by representatives from the Australian Maritime Safety Authority and Lloyds registry. The assessment is to evaluate the feasibility of repairs that would ensure seaworthiness to recommence the voyage and provide an indication of the timeframe needed. Advice is awaited from AMSA in relation to the conduct of repairs.
- The vessel was moved on 15 August to an outer berth in the Port. This has enabled easier access for engineers and a direct power source to the vessel.
- AQIS veterinary officers are now monitoring the health and welfare of the sheep on a continuous basis with the AQIS approved veterinarian onboard the vessel.
- If repairs cannot be completed to the satisfaction of AMSA, the earliest the sheep can be unloaded and moved to the feedlot would be 17 August. The vessel would need to be moved to an inner berth and enough trucks to transport the sheep would need to be hired. Many of the livestock trucks are being used for local livestock sales on 15 and 16 August and therefore are not available till 17 August.
- There has been a low level media inquiry over the weekend. A response was provided by DAFF media but has not been used by the journalist (from ABC Adelaide) in an article to date.

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