

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 primary 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.

The RSPCA , Animals Australia and the Greens have issued media statements on 16 August. DAFF issued a media statement on 16 August. The South Australian Agriculture Minister spoke to the media on 17 August. Widespread media coverage commenced 17 August.

Indications from the Flinders Port Authority are that the vessel may move to an inner berth. A decision on whether to unload the animals would be made by the owner of the sheep and that unloading would take three days to transport the sheep to the feedlot.

Talking Points

- The live animal export vessel “Al Messilah” returned to Port Adelaide on Friday 12 August, after experiencing failure to the primary power supply for livestock services within 24 hours of its departure.
 - The power failure has not compromised the welfare of the 67,000 sheep onboard. The welfare of the animals carried by the vessel is being given the highest priority.
 - The vessel’s ventilation, feed and water systems are all working and are in good order.
 - The mechanical problem was caused by the flooding of a generator room, which led to failure of the vessel’s primary source of electrical power for livestock services. Power is available from the ship’s backup generator.
 - The vessel returned to Port Adelaide for both maritime safety and animal welfare reasons.
 - 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.
 - Supporting AQIS veterinary officers are in attendance at the port.
 - Repairs have commenced. Progress is being continually assessed to determine if the repairs can be completed in Adelaide or whether the vessel will need to be dry-docked.
 - If the vessel can undergo complete repair in Adelaide, the sheep may remain onboard providing satisfactory animal welfare conditions are maintained.
 - At this time, the best animal welfare and biosecurity outcomes will be achieved by the sheep remaining onboard the vessel. This will minimise stress in the animals, and while onboard they continue to have access to feed, water and veterinary care.
 - If the ship cannot be repaired within a reasonable period, the sheep may be unloaded and moved directly to a nearby feedlot which 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.
- The Animal Health Committee has endorsed a risk assessment on the unloading of

the sheep from the vessel. This risk assessment has determined that there are negligible biosecurity risks associated with this action, provided certain risk management measures are applied.

If asked:

- The sheep will not re-enter the Australian flock. If the sheep are unloaded, they will be either re-exported when another vessel becomes available, or they will be slaughtered for processing.
- If the vessel is repaired, it must obtain certification from the Australian Maritime Safety Authority. This certification covers the vessel's seaworthiness, and confirms that it is fit to carry livestock and maintain their health and welfare needs. DAFF will not re-issue the export license until it also receives the AMSA certification. The odour from the ship is typical of a large number of animals being housed together.
- The sheep would normally have been onboard for 20 days to reach the Middle East markets.
- As of yesterday (17 August) there were 0.35% mortalities. This is within the normal bounds and is not unexpected.
- The Animal Health Committee comprises representatives of the Commonwealth and state and territory governments. The committee is working closely with industry stakeholders on this matter.

Key issues

Location and mechanical status of the ship

- The live animal export vessel "Al Messilah" departed Port Adelaide on 8th August 2011 carrying approximately 67,000 sheep intended for [REDACTED] s47 (1)(b) in the Middle East.
- A mechanical failure occurred 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 the steel boundary or "wall" of a tank which allowed seawater and sewage to enter a generator room.
- The mechanical problem is due to flooding of a generator room, which led to failure of the vessel's primary source of electrical power for livestock services. Power is available from a backup generator on the ship.
- The vessel returned to Port Adelaide, for maritime safety and animal welfare reasons.
- The vessel returned to Port Adelaide on Friday 12th 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. If repairs cannot be completed to the satisfaction of AMSA, the earliest the sheep can be unloaded and moved to the feedlot would be 18 August. Unloading the vessel would take 3 days. 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 18 August.

Health and animal welfare status of the sheep on board

- The “Al Messilah” is carrying approximately 67,000 sheep intended for s47 (1)(b)
s47 (1)(b)
- The voyage was expected to take 20 days.
- AQIS veterinary officers are monitoring the health and welfare of the sheep on a continuous basis with the AQIS approved veterinarian onboard the vessel.
- The veterinarian accompanying the sheep reports their continuing good health and maintenance of satisfactory conditions for their welfare.
- There have been 234 sheep mortalities (as of 17 August) which represents 0.35 per cent.
- This level of mortality lies within normally experienced bounds, and is not unexpected.

DAFF’s Risk Assessment and risk management measures

- Animal Health Committee, 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.
- 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 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 potential concern, exposure pathways, and concluded the risk to be minimal.
- The assessment focussed on transfer of the animals to an AQIS-approved registered feedlot establishment s47G(1)(a) It is intended that the consignment be re-exported in 3-4 weeks or that the sheep be slaughtered at a nearby abattoir for processing for human consumption. The sheep will not re-enter the Australian flock.
- Risk management measures apply at the vessel, during transport, and at the feedlot while it is occupied by the returned sheep. 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 animals.
- Animal Health Committee, with relevant industry representatives, met by teleconference on 11 August 2011 and endorsed the risk assessment and risk management plan.
- There has been widespread media coverage that commenced 17 August.
- DAFF issued a media statement on 16 August.
- The South Australian Agriculture Minister spoke to the media on 17 August.
- DAFF’s Acting Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO), Dr Mark Schipp, has been contacted by the CEO of Animals Australia who said they had been alerted that this vessel had

been loaded but remained in port for a week. The CVO provided assurances that the animals were healthy and well, with both onboard veterinarian and daily AQIS veterinary supervision. We aware that Animals Australia have rung several others in the department and also industry bodies.

- The RSPCA also contacted DAFF regarding the vessel and released a statement on 16 August. Animal Australia and the Greens have also issued statements.
- DAFF is closely monitoring the welfare of the sheep, and if the situation deteriorates the contingency plan to move the sheep to the AQIS approved feedlot will be activated.
- Repair efforts are continuing with the vessel, but none of the commercial parties involved are able to give projected timeframes for completion or predictions on the likely success of repairs.

Background

- The live export industry is an important part of Australia's vibrant and growing livestock industry. In 2009 the live export sector earned \$996.5 million and underpinned the employment of around 10 000 people in rural and regional Australia.
- Australia leads the world in animal welfare practices. The Australian Government does not tolerate cruelty towards animals and will not compromise on animal welfare standards.
- If a notifiable incident occurs at any time, the exporter must provide a report to the department. The Department then undertakes a thorough investigation, taking into account data and reports from the on board veterinarian as well as other relevant information.
- The final investigation reports, which include the actions taken following each incident, are placed on the department's website. A report on the carriage of livestock on any sea voyage to a port outside Australia is tabled in Parliament every six months.

Contacts

Mark Schipp (OCVO s. 47F(1))

Andrew Cupit (Animal Biosecurity Branch s. 47F(1))

Bob Biddle (Animal Health Programs s. 47F(1))

Garry Cullen (Live Animal Exports s. 47F(1))