

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 remained conducive to providing for the health and welfare of the sheep. The exporter advised on 18 August that the sheep will be unloaded and transported to an AQIS-approved registered feedlot establishment near Adelaide. The unloading commenced on 19 August and is expected to take three days. The sheep will be held under quarantine at the feedlot until they are either re-exported or sent direct to slaughter for processing in Australia.

Widespread media coverage commenced 17 August. DAFF issued a media statements on 16 and 18 August. The South Australian Agriculture Minister has spoken to the media. The RSPCA, Animals Australia and the Greens have also issued media statements.

Talking Points

- The live animal export vessel “Al Messilah” cannot be repaired quickly and the owner has now decided to begin unloading approximately 67,000 sheep at Port Adelaide tomorrow (Friday, 19 August 2011).
- The sheep remain in good condition and the welfare of the animals continues to be given the highest priority. The sheep have ongoing access to feed, water and veterinary care.
- AQIS veterinarians are supervising the unloading and movement of the sheep to an approved feedlot nearby.
- The sheep will be held under strict quarantine conditions pending their re-export or processing within Australia.
- At the feedlot, the sheep will receive daily official animal health inspections by South Australian authorities.
- Strict biosecurity measures will be in place during the unloading, transportation and housing of the animals.
- The Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has been working closely with South Australian authorities to ensure sound animal welfare and biosecurity arrangements are in place.
- Strict biosecurity measures will be in place during the unloading, transportation and housing of animals in the feedlot to manage pest and disease risks. These include excluding other animals from quarantine area, disposing of animal waste appropriately, cleaning and disinfecting the wharf area after the animals have departed and monitoring transport vehicles.
- The Animal Health Committee has endorsed a risk assessment on the unloading of the sheep from the vessel. This assessment has identified negligible pest and animal disease risks, provided strict biosecurity measures are used.
- The vessel returned to Port Adelaide on Friday 12 August, after experiencing mechanical failure within 24 hours of its departure. The sheep were intended for markets in s47 (1)(b) in the Middle East.
- 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. Power is available from

the ship's backup generator.

The vessel was obliged to return to Port Adelaide for both maritime safety and animal welfare reasons.

If asked:

- The unloading and transportation of sheep to a nearby feedlot is expected to take three to four days.
- The sheep will not re-enter the Australian flock. They will be either re-exported when another vessel becomes available, or they will be slaughtered for processing.
- If the vessel is used to transport live animals in the future, it must first obtain certification from the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA). This certification covers the vessel's seaworthiness, and confirms that it is fit to carry livestock and maintain their health and welfare needs.

The department will not issue an export license for any vessel until it receives an 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 at 18 August, there were 0.39 per cent sheep 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 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.
- This 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 On Friday 12th August and was initially at anchor outside the port.
- An assessment for seaworthiness was conducted by representatives from the Australian Maritime Safety Authority and Lloyds Registry.
- The vessel was moved on 15 August to an outer berth in the Port where repairs continued. The owner decided on 18 August to unload the sheep and the vessel was moved to an inner berth for this to occur.

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 260 sheep mortalities (as of 18 August) which represents 0.39 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 located [REDACTED] s47G(1)(a) [REDACTED]. 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.

Unloading the sheep

- The health and welfare of the sheep on the vessel continues to be fully satisfactory.
- DAFF issued an import permit to allow the sheep to be unloaded and moved to the feedlot. The South Australian government is issuing a livestock movement restriction order so they are held in quarantine at the feedlot till they are re-exported (or move direct to slaughter for processing in Australia).
- Unloading commenced around 7am on Friday 19 August.
- There are 6 trucks in total moving the sheep (in 12 hour shifts per day). 3 trucks are loading at any one time and moving mainly in groups. The South Australian road

management authority is assisting with traffic control to expedite the movement of the trucks to the feedlot.

- The sheep should move progressively to the feedlot over the next 3 days and it is expected to be completed by noon on Sunday 21 August.
- The department is coordinating the supervision of the unloading and supervision under quarantine at the feedlot with the South Australian government.
- There is one DAFF vet on board the vessel, two on the wharf and one at the feedlot. In addition there are one South Australian government vet and a vet employed by the company.
- DAFF vets have reported the unloading is going to plan.
- RSCPA were granted a court order to observe the unloading at the wharf.
- The sheep will be held under quarantine conditions at the feedlot pending their re-export or slaughter for processing within Australia.

Media Interest

- There is continuing high level of media interest and a small number of observers at the wharf. There is police security at the wharf to prevent general public access.
- 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 has 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.

Contacts

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