

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. The sheep were unloaded and transported to an AQIS-approved registered feedlot establishment near Adelaide on 19-21 August. The sheep are being held under quarantine at the feedlot until they are either re-exported or sent direct to slaughter for processing in Australia. Plans are being prepared to re-export the sheep to the Middle East on two vessels. The livestock vessel the ‘Al Shuwaikh’ is expected in Adelaide this week and may commence loading 50,000 of the sheep on the 2nd or 3rd September. The owners are still hoping the ‘Al Messilah’ can be repaired in Adelaide. It may take the remaining 17,000 sheep however the owners have not indicated to DAFF their intentions.

Widespread media coverage commenced 17 August. DAFF issued a media statements on 16, 18 and 21 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 unloading of 67,000 sheep from the Al Messilah live animal export vessel was conducted between 19-21 August.
- The sheep were moved to a nearby feedlot which is an AQIS-approved registered facility.
- The sheep remain in good condition following their transport to the feedlot.
- The sheep are being held under strict quarantine conditions, pending their re-export or processing within Australia.
- They are receiving daily health and welfare inspections by veterinary officers from the Department of Primary Industries and Resources South Australia.
- Strict biosecurity and quarantine measures are in place at the feedlot. There will be no access given to unauthorised people or groups.

If asked - background

- 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 was available from the ship’s backup generator.
- The vessel was obliged to return to Port Adelaide for both maritime safety and animal welfare reasons.
- The Animal Health Committee endorsed a risk assessment for the unloading and transport of the sheep from the vessel.
- 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.
- The sheep will not re-enter the Australian flock. They will be either re-exported 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 sheep would normally have been onboard for 20 days to reach the Middle East markets.
- Mortalities**
- Unfortunately, in any agriculture, feedlot or transportation situation a number of animal deaths are expected.
 - Conditions on transport vessels are similar to those in feedlots and the level of expected mortalities is similar.
 - All efforts were made to ensure the well-being of the sheep and minimise any losses. The sheep were under veterinary care onboard, during unloading and transport to the feedlot and at the feedlot.
 - If pressed: On 20 August there were 298 deaths out of 67000 sheep. This is 0.44% of the total consignment. This is within the normal bounds and is not unexpected.

Key issues

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. The voyage was expected to take 20 days.
- 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.
- AMSA have advised on 30 August that the vessel is now able to go to sea but is unable to carry livestock until an Australian Certificate of Carriage of Livestock (ACCL) is granted. This requires the owner of the vessel to apply for an ACCL and for an AMSA inspection to take place.
- The livestock vessel the ‘Al Shuwaikh’ is expected in Adelaide this week. DAFF received on 26 August a Notice of Intention (NOI) to export 50,000 sheep on the ‘Al Shuwaikh’. It may commence loading 50,000 of the sheep on the 2nd or 3rd September.
- The owners are still hoping the ‘Al Messilah’ can be repaired. It may take the remaining 17,000 sheep however the owners have not indicated to DAFF their intentions.

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 was 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. 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 or that the sheep be slaughtered at a nearby abattoir for processing. 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.

Status of the sheep

- The health and welfare of the sheep from the vessel continues to be fully satisfactory.
- There were 298 sheep mortalities out of 67,000 sheep (as of 20 August) which represents 0.44 per cent at the time the sheep were unloaded. This level of mortality lies within normally experienced bounds, and is not un-expected.
- DAFF issued an import permit to allow the sheep to be unloaded and moved to the feedlot. The South Australian government issued 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 was conducted between 19 and 21 August.
- The department coordinated the supervision of the unloading and supervision under quarantine at the feedlot with the South Australian government.
- RSCPA were granted a court order to observe the unloading at the wharf.
- The sheep are now being held under quarantine conditions at the feedlot pending their re-export or slaughter for processing within Australia.

Media Interest

- There is a moderate level of media interest (that commenced 17 August).
- DAFF issued media statements on 16, 18 and 21 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. The CVO spoke to a number of media outlets on 19 and 21 August.
- The RSPCA also contacted DAFF regarding the vessel and released a statement on 16 August. Animal Australia and the Greens have also issued statements.
- It is expected there will be renewed media interest and possible protests by animal activists at the wharf when loading of the sheep occurs for re-export.

Contacts

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