

Hatch Counselling and Consultancies

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The Honourable Senators

RE: Submission to The Senate Review of Live Export of Livestock.

Dear Senators,

I was appointed shipboard veterinarian firstly on the MV "Al Kaleez" in March April 2002 and on the MV "Al Kuwait" in December 2003 January 2004.

The "Al Kaleez" Voyage.

The complement of livestock consisted of sheep (approximately 35,000 from memory) and 68 head of male cattle. The voyage was from Fremantle to Al Daman in Saudi Arabia. Sheep on the voyage died from diseases related to transport (actual mortality figures are no longer available) from Pneumonia and Salmonellosis. Other deaths were related to Clostridial disease that in all probability was related to bruising that occurred primarily in transport. However, some bruising especially later in the voyage could have resulted from the aggressive behaviour of some rams. It should be noted that rams have a propensity to seek dominance over other rams resulting in a head-butting and homosexual behaviour causing bruising increasing the risk of Clostridial disease. The 68 bulls exceeded the specified weight range resulting in severe overcrowding, one bull being trampled (but recovered). To reduce the crowding pressure non certified pens were constructed on deck during the voyage.

The "Al Kuwait" Voyage.

The livestock loaded comprise some 106,000 sheep and 78 red deer. The problems on board were with the sheep. The major issues arose in two mobs of sheep, firstly a ewe mob in excess of 600 and secondly in wether mob in excess of 600. The ewe mob was observed to contain lame sheep on the second day of the voyage and on closer examination it was noted that many had chronic foot-rot lesions. It was therefore necessary to pare infected hooves and apply local treatment as these would be rejected at the destination if lame. The

cramped on-board conditions and complete lack of appropriate facilities made this a very arduous task as we crossed the equator.

It was also noted on the second day of the voyage that the wethers were consuming very limited amounts of shipboard pellets and signs of a potential outbreak of Salmonellosis were becoming apparent. Antibiotic treatment was begun and fortunately some chaff was on board for the deer. This chaff was added to the pellets to encourage the wethers to eat. Deaths continued over a number of days until normal food consumption began (from memory over 200 head died from this cause).

The foot rot problem occurred as a result of poor stock selection and the Salmonella in the wethers occurred primarily as a result of poor observation of the stock in the backgrounding feedlot in preparation for the voyage. Whilst loading in Fremantle note was taken of a cursory inspection of the livestock by the individuals responsible. With a number of loading points most of the inspections were conducted by non-veterinarians and by individuals with little or no experience with stock (primarily looking for scabby mouth, broken legs and animals blind with pinkeye). The design of the facilities prevented examination of the feet of the animals as they trotted past. In my opinion examinations were almost non-existent and not conducted with any diligence or competence.

I would also like to place on record I was invited by representative of the exporter to have lunch with him. Over lunch it was drawn to my attention that I would be the on-board veterinarian for the next voyage of the Al Kuwait and that the stock being loaded was some of the highest quality supplied and that there would be no problems encountered. I understood this conversation to mean that I would be employed again as a shipboard veterinarian for the next voyage on the proviso that my final report reflected the statements of the exporter. I believe my final report was an honest appraisal of the problems. I was subsequently to receive a phone call from an AQIS representative and was told as a result of my report an audit would be conducted of the exporter. As a time approached for the return of the Al Kuwait I contacted the exporter to determine the date and was told they had made alternative arrangements for the next voyage. I believe while the exporter appoints and employs shipboard veterinarians coercion to write satisfactory reports will remain. To prevent these occurrences appointment of veterinarians by an independent third party is warranted. The present system of AQIS approval for shipboard veterinarians does not address this problem of the integrity of the veterinarian and I believe still provides an opportunity for reports to be sanitized

Another issue that also prevents any transparency is the confidential nature of final reports. The public release of these reports, even though the result would be public disgust, this is the only way that the live export trade will be perceived to be open and transparent and welfare of Australian livestock protected.

Yours sincerely,

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