

CHAPTER 8

EMBARKATION OF EXPORT SHEEP

8.1 The loading procedure adopted by exporters consists of assembling a shipment of sheep and assessing the weight of the animals. This provides the basis for load numbers and their distribution aboard ship. This is summarised in a loading plan which is in the charge of the chief officer of the ship. The waterside workers are responsible for handling the sheep from the trucks, through the inspection races and along the loading ramp onto the ship. The ship's crew are then responsible for putting them in pens.¹

Dockside Facilities

8.2 Facilities for handling sheep at the dockside may be of temporary or permanent construction and vary in design. The AVA has expressed concern about the design of facilities used in the loading and unloading of livestock.² This applies to the races, pens, yards, ramps, gates and flooring at the dockside and also ancillary features such as lighting and shade.

8.3 The AAHQS has been aware of these criticisms and in 1983 commissioned a consultant on livestock handling, Dr Temple Grandin, to do a survey of the export of Australian livestock. With regard to facilities, she concluded that the handling system used in Fremantle to load the large ships was excellent and that they should be used as a model for other ports.³

8.4 At Fremantle, Fares and Siba used a loading system of a series of trailers with four or six unloading ramps where between two and five trucks could unload at a time. In this system the trailer floors were at the same height as the truck lower deck and unloading ramps were only required for unloading the top deck. It also enabled the inspectors to examine the sheep at eye level enabling them to observe the underside of the sheep for such conditions as pizzle rot. The ship's wide ramps had wheels which rested in guides on the trailer allowing the ramp to move with the tide. The steepness of the ships ramps was reduced by the use of the trailers. However, it had no provision for storing culled sheep on the wharf. The Committee inspected this system in operation at Fremantle during the loading of the 'Al Khaleej' on 15 August 1984.

8.5 On 16 August the Committee received evidence from Mr Anthony Fletcher who, independently, had observed the loading of the 'Al Khaleej'. He commented:

'the pens aboard the "Al Khaleej" were not as compact, not as dense in terms of the number of sheep in those enclosures as on the ships that I visited in January ... Yesterday I actually saw white Australian workers on the ship assisting with the loading, as though they were trying to ensure that sheep were not overloaded.'⁴

He also commented on the loading of the 'Siba Queen'

'I saw sheep coming rapidly off the ramp between the trucks and the ships. The floor of the ship became wet and the sheep were required to make a right angle turn as they entered the ship. Almost all of them were falling to their knees and then sliding, trying to get up and then carrying on. That particular aspect of the loading certainly was not conducive to the welfare of the sheep. Nobody attempted to do anything to alter the situation ... Probably the ship was not designed for loading sheep properly.'⁵

8.6 The provision of non-slip surfaces and the elimination of wet areas is an important aspect of loading facilities and is incorporated in Marine Orders Part 43 Section 26. An inspection of a relatively new SLTT carrier, the 'Mawashi Al Gaseem', revealed that effective non-slip surfaces had been applied to the decking.

8.7 Apart from being well-designed, facilities need to be properly maintained, cleaned and arranged at the dockside. The AAHQs reported that there is often a failure to clean facilities on a regular basis:

'This can only result in contamination of sheep prior to loading. The loading management plan must include arrangements for yard cleaning which will result in the loading of clean sheep.'⁶

8.8 There appears to be considerable scope for improvement in the tally system. Dr Peter Arnold indicated that tally disputes of between two and three per cent are common.⁷ The ALEA responded that the sheep are counted five times, at the farm gate, into the feedlot, out of the feedlot, onto the wharf, and onto the ship. At Portland, the port authority does the count which is accepted by both the exporter and livestock agents.⁸ Dr Temple Grandin reported that, at Fremantle, sheep were counted manually by people with hand counters as the sheep passed through the single file races. She suggested that an automatic counting system be installed, which would use a meat works conveyor fitted with an electric eye or feeler switch.⁹ The technology and its application is already in use in some shearing sheds.

8.9 The Committee notes that an accurate count is essential for research into sheep mortalities.

Weather Conditions

8.10 There was disagreement among witnesses as to when loading should be stopped during extreme weather conditions. In March 1984, the RSPCA criticised the loading of sheep on the 'Al Qurain' in adverse conditions.

8.11 The Committee received a similar report of that incident of 26 March from Miss Chris Larter, a British animal welfare worker on a visit to Australia sponsored by the Brooke Hospital for Animals, Cairo.¹⁰

8.12 The AVA informed the Committee that, in November 1982 at Portland, 50 000 sheep were loaded during very high temperatures, which were exacerbated by a hot northerly wind and dust. About 120 sheep collapsed from heat exhaustion. It was agreed between exporters and departmental officers that in future, under similar conditions, loading would stop.

8.13 The Committee **RECOMMENDS** that the AAHQs draw the attention of quarantine veterinary officers to the need to halt loading under unsuitable weather conditions.

Embarkation Management - Practices and Malpractices

8.14 A principal consideration in the embarkation of sheep is the minimisation of stress. The ALEA believes that stress is minimised on the newer ships because they have an efficient loading ramp system and there is no reason for the sheep to baulk, turn around or change direction. Little crew handling is necessary and sheep have been loaded at a rate of up to 6000 an hour. Sheep spend little time between the feedlot and the shipboard pen, thereby avoiding much stress. Some of the older ships, however, do not have modern loading ramps and passageways and, as a result, loading takes longer and is not as efficient, with more stress put on the sheep.

8.15 The ALEA told the Committee that every attempt is made to have feed and water available in the pens when the sheep are loaded¹¹ but, if this is not possible because of the design of the ship, to provide feed within the first 24 hours.¹² The Victorian Government has tried to ensure that, wherever the design of the ship will allow, the export company will place food and water in all troughs prior to loading so that sheep have access to feed and water immediately upon loading.

8.16 Stress can be minimised if the waterside workers, stockmen and ship's crew are properly trained or experienced in the handling of sheep. Mr Anthony Fletcher observed at Fremantle that one of the wharf workers was standing in front of the animals that were being loaded, 'which tended to make them stop in their tracks. The people at the other end then got angry and started hitting certain animals. It seems to me that the problem is human in origin, a lack of knowledge rather than the animals' fault'.¹³ Dr Temple Grandin observed at Adelaide that:

'The wharfies need to be educated in sheep handling methods. There was no brutality or rough treatment of the sheep by the wharfies.'¹⁴

8.17 The South Australian Government has proposed a training programme for waterside workers but this has not been endorsed by the industry.¹⁵

8.18 The use of prods may increase stress in sheep. The unreleased draft Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals : Sea Transport of Livestock restricts the use of electric prods and continues:

'"flappers" ... or "metallic rattles" are effective in that they encourage movement in response to sound. The use of sticks, lengths of heavy plastic, metal piping or heavy leather belts should not be permitted as methods of encouraging stock to move.'¹⁶

8.19 The Committee observed that the loading of sheep on to trucks at the Aberdeen feedlot in Tasmania for the 'Mawashi Al Gaseem' was achieved by forcing the sheep up the ramps by shaking rattles made from aluminium cans and pebbles, accessories which, if not euphonic, were effective and readily available.

8.20 The Committee also observed the loading of sheep aboard the 'Al Khaleej' and noticed no prodding or abuse of the sheep. Mr Anthony Fletcher told the Committee that at the adjoining berth the day before:

'I spoke to one of the wharf workers who was, in my view, prodding animals excessively when blockages developed in the loading, irrespective of the fact that sheep at the back of the crowd cannot very well push the others on. Certain animals were getting prodded to the extent that the animal I was concerned about was physically shaking but was continuing to be prodded. I spoke to the wharf worker, who explained his point of view that he was trying to assist in the operations, and the situation was solved amiably. The interesting thing about yesterday (i.e. the day of inspection of 'Al Khaleej') was that when I returned to the wharf and somebody saw me as a stranger down there, not somebody who had seen me the previous day, he went round to all the people with prods and discreetly - to my way of thinking - advised them not to prod the animals. They all just stopped dead when I was on the wharf. That is not normally the case when I am on the wharf but I feel that the visit of the senators was obviously known yesterday.'¹⁷

8.21 The Committee RECOMMENDS that the AAHQs, in consultation with State Departments of Agriculture, arrange training programmes for waterside workers who load animals on to carriers.

8.22 Another consideration in the minimisation of stress is the use of 'Judas' sheep which would make it easier to induce sheep, which have baulked, to walk up the loading ramp.¹⁸ Grandin recommended the use of Judas sheep but recognised that there may be quarantine problems.

8.23 There is evidence that overcrowding of trucks from the feedlot to the wharf occurs.¹⁹ The AAHQ standards state that where internal gates are provided in vehicles to maintain an even load, 'the exporter or his agent should ensure their use'.²⁰ This is in addition to the requirement that the transport should be clean, maintained in a satisfactory state of repair and not overstocked. Sheep's legs have been observed to project through the stock crate.²¹ There is a need for better design of stock crates. This problem will be examined by the Committee later in the inquiry when it examines road and rail transport of livestock.

8.24 There is evidence that 'shandying' of sheep occurs; that is, the mixing of lines of sheep of different ages, breeds and district types. This practice has been developed in the industry in order to use experienced sheep to introduce inexperienced sheep to hand feeding and watering in yards. This practice is detrimental to the younger sheep.²²

Stocking Densities

8.25 Stocking densities aboard livestock carriers are inextricably linked to economic considerations. It has been argued that, since shipping costs are about half the total cost of landing export sheep in the Middle East, a ten per cent increase in floor space would increase the cost of export sheep by five per cent.²³ The important welfare consideration is that five extra sheep placed in a pen of 60 head adversely affect 65 sheep, not just the extra five. The Marine Orders Part

43 Section 23.11, and the draft Model Code of Practice on Sea Transport of Livestock, contain the following specifications for pen stocking density.

Table 8.1: Specifications for Pen Stocking Density

Average Mass of Sheep determined in accordance with Section 23.1.3 (kilograms)	Minimum permissible floor area per sheep having an average wool length of not more than 25 millimetres (square metres)
20 or less	0.24
40	0.29
60	0.34
80	0.44
100	0.54
120 or more	0.64

Source: Marine Orders, Part 43, Section 23.11.

8.26 Animal Liberation NSW provided evidence of their inspection of MV 'Procyon' in July 1982, which was loading at Port Adelaide:

'When asked how many sheep were loaded per pen a wharfie explained to us that when a pen "looked full" that was considered satisfactory.'²⁴

8.27 Mr Anthony Fletcher gave evidence to the Committee that pens on the 'Al Yasrah' and 'Siba Queen' were 'stocked so tightly that the animals were not able to lie down'.²⁵ The evidence of Mr Fletcher is supported in part by Dr Temple Grandin who observed that:

'the crews made a genuine effort to load the correct number of sheep into each pen, but sometimes they could not shut the flat gate

until five or six extra sheep ran into the pen. Some of the pens appeared to be overstocked.'²⁶

8.28 Lt Colonel Harries of the South Australian RSPCA, on his voyage on the 'Al Qurain' in March-April 1981 found that only four to six sheep of 20 head could lie down if the gates were closed.²⁷

8.29 The Committee, on its inspection of the 'Al Khaleej', noticed stocking limits stencilled on all the pens. At the public hearing the ALEA was asked whether they were strictly adhered to. Dr Franklin replied:

'As strictly as possible, yes. In the ship we saw this morning it is easy to get a fairly accurate count, as you can imagine. That figure is put on probably two days out of port or the first day in port prior to loading, after the master has been advised that the weight of the ship will be such and such. He then has a master plan of his ship, showing that the pen on deck 2 or whatever it is can take so many sheep at 53 kilos, and at 54 kilos it can take one less or whatever the figure is.'²⁸

8.30 It has been argued that the accurate measurement of sheep weights is necessary if stocking density regulations are to be complied with.²⁹ The ALEA stated that the sheep are weighed out of the feedlot:

'An estimate is made prior to loading commencing and, towards the end of the loading when you possibly have 5000 sheep to go, you would say that the average weight out so far is 52 instead of 54 so we can continue or it is 54 instead of 52 and it would be cut back. These figures are available to the Department of Agriculture and Department of Transport so that the correct calculation can be made.'³⁰

8.31 Brennan has reported that overloading of vessels has occurred and should be prevented by checking the weight of the sheep before embarkation.³¹

8.32 Inspection procedures need to be able to meet these contraventions. The Victorian Government, acting as an agent of the Commonwealth, attempts to monitor stocking densities:

'While loading is actually taking place on a particular deck or a row of pens, it is best not to interfere at that point. But once, for instance, a deck has been loaded, we would certainly have a look through that deck to see whether overcrowding occurs and, if it does, we would bring it to the attention of the ship's officers or the exporters. This would be a continuing thing during the loading and certainly on final inspection.'³²

8.33 The Committee RECOMMENDS that quarantine veterinary officers inspect carriers before departure to ensure that stocking densities are complied with.

8.34 The adherence to the regulations is flexible but there has been criticism of the regulation itself. Dr Temple Grandin interviewed ships' officers and veterinarians who indicated that the present stocking rates may be too high for the 55 kg plus sheep.³³

8.35 The Marine Orders regulate pen stocking densities but these are circumvented to a varying extent. The pen stocking density regulations may be too tight for the larger sheep. Dr Temple Grandin interviewed several ships officers who reported that they opened the gates between pens after they left port to give the sheep more room. One Captain did this only during hot weather. Grandin reported that a DOT official doubted that it would present a hazard to ships stability.³⁴ It does present a

hazard for movement around the deck for crew and may be injurious to the sheep themselves. It also may contribute to the problem of shy feeders and allow a few sheep to establish dominance over a larger number.

8.36 Brennan reports that stocking density regulations may be incorrect especially with regard to lighter weight sheep.³⁵ The current stocking density regulations in the Marine Orders Part 43 were formulated by the LAC in 1952 using the Newmarket Victoria stockyards and basic techniques.³⁶ It appears that new research into stocking densities is required.

8.37 The Committee RECOMMENDS that the Livestock Advisory Committee review stocking densities onboard live sheep carriers and, if necessary, the Department of Transport amend the Marine Orders Part 43 accordingly.

Mortality Rates During Embarkation

8.38 The mortality rates for embarkation are available in the Masters Reports of the DOT but their reliability has not been demonstrated. They report losses of under two per cent, yet there is evidence of discrepancies in the tallies of the order of one per cent. This reinforces consideration of Grandin's suggestion of an automated tally system administered by a neutral authority. Dr Brennan recommended further research to discover the extent and causes of mortalities for this phase.