

Mr Ross Carter,

Inspector General of Live Animal Exports

Having worked as an AAV for twenty years and close to 130 voyages I have seen a variety of ships. My voyages have been between six and 43 days in length and covered a variety of livestock including sheep, cattle, goats, buffalo and even deer. One factor does stand out. What you get loaded on the ship does influence the outcome. Although not specifically mentioned in the terms of reference; the control exercised by the department in the preloading inspections can have a decisive effect on the outcome of the voyage. In some cases this outweighs the influence of the on board staff on the outcome of an individual voyage. For example the recent controversy over the Awassi Express. I have personally experienced cases where the supervision by the departmental staff relies too heavily on the information provided by the exporter and not their own observations (eg declared weights).

The role of the Independent Observers I see as providing the Government with a solid base line of on board conditions. Their input into the welfare of the cargo, in my experience, is minimal. One example is when I asked the IO if he could hold the head rope of a breeding cow who was giving birth, he (a veterinarian) obliged as I needed someone with an understanding of what was required if the animal went down during the procedure. He then got censored by Canberra for putting himself in danger even though there was a solid, secured gate between him and the dairy heifer. Another situation that arises with the IO boarding the ship is crew numbers. All ships have a legal maximum crew number, this is dictated by cabin space and evacuation numbers (ie how many spaces there are in the life boats). The IO often takes the place of a stockman, resulting in a reduction in the number of people available to actually manage the stock. In the above example with the calving I would have asked a stockman but there was none available due to the crew number limit.

The Observers should include those who are responsible for the supervision of the programme. In my experience there is anecdotal evidence of the department looking to recruit Observers from groups such as Quarantine Inspectors at airports. The staff from Canberra, who in my opinion should undertake at least three voyages including a long haul, seem not to be involved in this exercise.

The reporting protocol that has been developed over the years gives a basic understanding of on board conditions on a day by day basis. In the vast majority of the cases there is little to report as there is little happening that is not routine. If any clarification is required from the Department or the exporter, with modern communications this can be easily undertaken. In some instances the chief officer fills out the daily report. This invariably has reflected the data presented by me but can lead to errors and I would prefer to incorporate the data myself, as the AAV, in the interests of accuracy.

There is a push in some quarters, mostly by people with no or very limited on board experience, to provide a much more detailed reporting system. This included very detailed environment records over several points on each deck. To undertake this by an AAV takes up to four hours a day. That is four hours they are not examining the cargo, assisting the stockmen, liaising with the crew etc. which, unless there are extreme conditions, are a much more important role for the AAV. This extreme micromanagement of the reports benefits no one except those with an agenda to discredit the industry. It is unfortunately true that the general population has little interest in the mundane voyages where nothing of significance occurs. No amount of detail will have any effect on their opinion or interest. It can even have the opposite effect of information overload even with those who have a personal interest in the industry. A bit like countries like Russia where there is an incredible amount of detail recorded on the citizens. The end result being that people just fill in the

forms with anything, often with little relationship to actuality. Nobody checks anything because they are overwhelmed by the bulk of information.

There are unfortunately a small minority of cases where the voyage does not proceed smoothly and these should indeed be investigated from the farm to the destination. There is a history of some exporters being over represented in these cases and their voyage history should be analysed by the Department and the Departments efforts should be focused on the results of their analysis. However it should be emphasised that the outcomes of voyages from Australia are so much better than from other exporting countries where there are anecdotal reports of five percent mortality or more being the norm on ships that are registered for cargoes from Australia.

There have been two instances where I have been given my “ end of voyage” report by the ships captain for my signature. This was obviously at the direction of the exporter or ship owner as in one instance it was even on his letterhead. I refused, much to the consternation of the captain. The department should question any EOV reports provided directly from the ship or the exporter.

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