



SEMAPHORE

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Livestock Lost Through Red Sea Voyage Interruption

A total of four cattle and 64 sheep died onboard the livestock carrier Bahijah, with a further seven cattle and six sheep dying when back on land – “below reportable mortality levels” – following a month-long onboard ordeal associated to the Red Sea conflict.

On 5 January, the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry advised it had granted an export permit and health certificates to the exporter for about 2000 cattle and 14,000 sheep. The initial consignment was loaded and departed from Fremantle onboard the 136-metre and 13,016-GT vessel intending to travel directly to Israel through the Red Sea.

However, seven days later, the exporter informed the Department that the Bahijah would be diverted from entering and travelling through the Red Sea due to the region’s deteriorating security situation, stated Department acting first assistant secretary Andrew McDonald.

“The exporter’s preferred option was to reroute the vessel around the Cape of Good Hope,” he said.

“However, this was dependent on obtaining approval to load foreign fodder, safety considerations and obtaining new import permits. Alternatively, the exporter would need to consider other potential contingency markets.”

Ultimately, given issues over finding approved fodder, animal welfare concerns and other matters, the Department issued a direction to the exporter on 19 January to return the consignment to Australia.

A few days later the exporter sought permission to promptly re-export the consignment, via the longer Cape of Good Hope route, after the vessel’s return to Australia and the loading of fodder, chaff, bedding and additional veterinary medication.

Much discussion and exchange of information between the parties and others ensured, but Mr McDonald decided to refuse a new Notice of Intention (NOI) to export on 5 February. By 14 February all livestock had been discharged from the vessel and taken by truck from Fremantle Port to “appropriate” premises in Western Australia.

“I considered each of the relevant considerations and all of the evidence put before me individually and cumulatively,” stated Mr McDonald in conclusion.

“I gave weight to the Israeli competent authority’s earlier indication that it would grant the import permits and its query as to whether the Department could provide further information assuring animal welfare.

“However, I gave more weight to the concerns it expressed about the passage of time and its preference for the livestock to be offloaded and spelled before re-export. I found that there remained a risk that animal welfare incidents might appear when the livestock were moved to quarantine upon arrival in Israel, despite having been deemed fit for extended transportation.

“While I thought that this risk could be managed by the approved extended long-haul management plan, on balance and weighing everything before me, I considered that the risk that the Israeli competent authority may not be able to grant the import permits or otherwise accept the livestock upon arrival, outweighed the mitigation strategies that had been identified.

“I found that this updated information, coupled with the uncertainty of the injunction proceedings in Israel, meant that I was unable to be satisfied that import permits were likely to be issued before the livestock reached Israel.”

On 1 March a new statement appeared on the Department’s website announcing it had “approved a notice of intention to export a consignment of livestock to Israel on the MV Bahijah”.

“The exporter intends to transport the livestock to Israel without passing through the Red Sea,” added the statement.

The full record of Department notices relating to the matter can be viewed [here](#).

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