

LORD HOWE ISLAND BOARD

Business Paper

OPEN SESSION

ITEM

Cattle importation post Rodent Eradication Project (REP).

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board note this paper.

BACKGROUND

Prior to the Lord Howe Island Rodent Eradication Project (REP), the majority of cattle on-island were destroyed to increase areas aerially or hand baited and decrease the area baited via bait station and give the project the best chance of success. The LHIB resolved to pay cattle owners for their stock to be dispatched. As part of this agreement, the LHIB also resolved to assist cattle owners in reintroducing replacement cattle after the cessation of the REP.

Following the cessation of the active baiting period, the LHIB is now actively arranging the transport of cattle back to Lord Howe Island. There have been several unexpected hurdles in arranging this process, namely significant changes in legislation and policy regarding live animal transport by sea that have caused significant delays in the importation of cattle that were not known or anticipated during the consultation phase of the REP.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS AND DATA

1) Summary of order to date

Cattle required:

Summary of cattle required				
OWNER	Bulls	Cows	Breed	Specifications
Owner 1	1	8	Angus	Pregnant cows
Owner 2	1	10	Dexter	Pregnant cows
Owner 3	1	5	TBC	Yearlings
TOTAL		26		

2) Summary of process to date

Currently the plan is to transport the cattle in three or four shipments due to the capacity limits on the Island Trader.

All stock imported to Lord Howe Island needs to comply with the Lord Howe Island Stock Importation Policy:

<https://www.lhib.nsw.gov.au/sites/lordhowe/files/public/images/documents/lhib/Publications/Policies/Stock%20Importation%20Policy.pdf>

To accommodate biosecurity requirements, through liaison with Ian Poe (North Coast Local Land Services Veterinary Officer) and Hank Bower (LHIB World Heritage Manager), a quarantine period of **7 days** has been deemed adequate to clear stock of weed seeds. Stock will be purchased through Wauchope Stock and Estate Agent John O'Brien. Mr O'Brien has agreed to hold stock in quarantine at a local Wauchope stock yard, feeding stock biosecure feed for seven days prior to importation, and will engage a local vet to confirm stock health/ compliance with transport specifications prior to quarantine. If weather prevents the transport of livestock on the scheduled ship, this stockyard will also be available as a contingency holding yard. Costs for this have been quoted and are within budget estimates.

A second vet check (to ensure health of the animals) will be completed by the vet employed to accompany the animals aboard the Island Trader from Port Macquarie to Lord Howe Island. Cattle will then be transported to the ship yard, where they will be transferred to Portable Livestock Units (PLU) by John O'Brien and accompanying vet, and loaded to the ship via a crane. The vet will be responsible for arranging the loading of all food and livestock bedding and associated stock equipment through liaison with Birdon staff. Cattle will be loaded on the open deck, in front of the wheelhouse for stability.

During the voyage the Vet will be responsible for the welfare of the animals on board. They will be responsible for all husbandry during the voyage including watering, checking welfare, changing bedding and clearing waste in line with Marine Pollution (Marpol) regulations. As transport will be under 48 hours, feeding is not required.

Upon arrival to LHI the cattle crates will be craned on to a heavy-duty trailer (limit 4.5 t), and towed using the LHIB tractor to their destination paddocks. The trailer will then be backed up to a hill and crates will be unloaded, with the cattle exiting the trailer by stepping off (height of trailer is 40cm, which is an acceptable height as per vet advice).

Crates will then be cleaned and all bedding removed and disposed of at the Waste Management Facility (WMF). Crates will then be transported back to the ship using the heavy duty trailer and tractor. They will then be crane loaded back on to the ship, to be returned and reused on the next voyage.

Cattle will be checked by Vet after unloading, and once more the morning following their release.

Contingency plans have been developed. Additional plans to be developed in partnership with Birdon and the nominated vet include:

- Risk assessment/consignment risk management plan
- Loading plan
- Contingency plan
- Animal Husbandry plan
- Discharge plan
- Marine Pollution plan

3) Estimated costs

Costs have been taken from the highest quote and include 4 voyages to give the maximum estimate of costs. Additional costs are expected to arise as the process proceeds.

Cost Item	Amount per voyage	Total
Vet on voyage	\$6,600	\$26,400
Sundry Vet (flight back to Port Macquarie, accommodation while on LHI, berth on voyage)	\$1,580	\$6,320
Quarantine costs, inc. cartage to ship, 7 days feeding and stabling, vet check prior to loading	\$2,625	\$10,500
Design of cattle crates	\$10,070 (one-off)	\$10,070
Fabrication of cattle crates, with marine survey certification	TBC	TBC
Ship transport costs (estimated). Require full crate design before an accurate quote can be drawn up	\$16,521.60	\$49,564.80
Feed/ water/ bedding	No food cost as off food permitted for 48 hrs travelling. Water – cost minimal. Bedding TBC.	TBC
Total	\$37,397	\$102,855

4) Legislative issues encountered to date

Domestic transport of livestock including cattle by sea must adhere to several pieces of legislation, including:

- Marine Order 43 (Cargo and cargo handling – livestock) 2018:
<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/F2018L00875>

This legislation primarily outlines the Portable Livestock Unit (PLU) required dimensions. These are closely related to ship stability and design, with smaller ships having more restrictive limits for PLU size. All PLUs must also be surveyed by an approved marine surveyor.

- NSW animal cruelty legislation:
<https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/regulations/2013-281.pdf>

A brief outline, referring mainly to the federal guidelines.

- Australian Federal animal cruelty guidelines:
<http://www.animalwelfarestandards.net.au/files/2011/02/Land-transport-of-livestock-Standards-and-Guidelines-Version-1.-1-21-September-2012.pdf>

These guidelines dictate restrictions for transport of animals (including by sea) – these reference the transport of pregnant cattle, where limits are restrictive – i.e. cannot be transported in last trimester. This is problematic as wo of the owners have requested pregnant cows to be transported.

5) Physical issues encountered to date

- Size of the Island Trader

There is limited space for livestock to be carried onboard the Island Trader. Any livestock must be carried on the deck, in front of the wheelhouse for stability and ventilation reasons. Livestock cannot be carried in the hold, or anywhere else on deck. Due to this, the size of PLUs must be restricted to fit in these areas, while not obstructing hatches or pathways.

As cattle must be housed on deck, crates must also be weatherproof and impermeable to seawater (as per animal cruelty guidelines), whilst also having ample ventilation.

- Safe working limits for weight

Birdon's approved safe working limit per item is 4 ton gross. Most cattle transport crates used elsewhere are in the order of 18+ ton gross. Altering a ready-made item therefore is not an option.

- Crane points

The PLU must have adequate crane points to be lifted without tipping/spinning when loading and unloading the vessel. Most ready-made trailers do not have these lift points.

- Transport options on-island

Unless the PLU is equipped with wheels and tow ball, the only method of transport on-island is the 4.5 t heavy-load trailer owned by the LHIB. Internal dimensions of this trailer is 4050mm x 1820mm. Any PLU must be within these size limits to be able to be transported from the ship to their destination paddock.

6) Other issues:

While cattle have been transported to LHI on the ship previously, this legislation has only come into effect since 2018, where major reforms in relation to transport of livestock by sea were required to address issues surrounding live-export.

No livestock have been transported on the ship since Gower imported two jersey calves in 2013, and so this legislation has not been applied to the livestock transport on the Trader before.

Understanding how these regulations apply to the Island Trader is a complex process. We have liaised with Birdon engineers to assist in interpreting these requirements and how they apply to this specific ship.

As changes in legislative requirements are only a recent development, it is unlikely that REP community liaisons would have been aware of these new restrictions while dealing with livestock matters. These unexpected issues have significantly delayed the transport of cattle to LHI and could not have reasonably been expected when many agreements were reached prior to the implementation of new laws.

All previous livestock transfers were undertaken when the Island Trader was owned by Seafreight. Staff here may have had a working understanding of the requirements to transport stock by sea. With the transfer of ownership to Birdon, we have also lost the specialist staff who may have been involved in this process. Developing transport policies for livestock is a lengthy process involving considerable liabilities which Birdon is currently becoming familiar with.

7) Other options explored:

Many other options have been explored:

1. Engagement of a livestock transport specialist to assist with this process.
Many transport specialists have been approached, both nationally and internationally. No specialists have been able to assist or recommend any solutions.
2. Approached governmental departments for assistance, including Local Land Services and DPI Senior Vet Policy Officers. Both were unable to offer advice.
3. Inquiry to large-scale international animal export consultants yielded no responses.
4. Transport by air. Through liaison with Stockair (specialists in stock transport by aeroplane), they have determined the airstrip on Lord Howe is too short to accommodate a freight plane large enough to carry full-size cattle. While the Hercules does land here, trips are conducted with minimal freight to make landing on the 888m airstrip possible. With freight included, the plane would not be able to land safely. While Dash-8 planes are able to land here fully loaded, the only place where Dash-8 planes have been converted to freight planes is currently in west-Africa. In these locations, the total freight limit for the converted planes is 4.5 ton. Stockair was interested in helping, but once they were made aware of the restrictions they were unable to help.
5. Contact with livestock transport experts on Norfolk Island – all stock transport is conducted on their 737 aeroplane that regularly services the Island. No transport by sea has been conducted for a long time.
6. Contacted livestock transport providers that service Tasmania and islands in Bass Strait (King Island/Flinders Island) – Page Transport and Hodge Transport.
Both companies use converted containers to carry livestock aboard roll-on roll-off (ro-ro) barges. Each container weighs approximately 18 ton gross and cannot be modified to suit the requirements of the Island Trader.
Initially both companies were interested in helping, but once they were made aware of the restrictions they were unable to help,

7. Ready-made wooden livestock crates from CMTP/other similar companies.
When contacting these companies to clarify if they could meet Marine Order 43, they were unable to determine this. We liaised with their consultant engineer and they were unable to establish whether these crates could be used. Upon liaison with Stockair, they advised these crates would likely contravene animal cruelty legislation as they are not weatherproof, and they advised against the use of these crates to transport animals on the Island Trader.
8. Ready-made metal livestock transport trailers.
After inquiring with eight different providers, we were unable to determine whether these trailers would be able to meet restrictions of Marine Order 43. Advice was sought from Birdon engineers. They deemed these transport crates unable to meet legislative restrictions.
9. Bennett Steel were approached to make and design custom crates. They advised they were unable to design the crates due to the extensive technical knowledge required to develop a design.
10. Ro-Ro ferries – liaison with Stradbroke ferries stated it was unlikely they had a vessel suitable for transporting livestock while also being able to enter and traverse the lagoon. Due to the large cost of chartering a ferry (\$400,000), this option was set aside until all other options were exhausted. Has not been reinvestigated.
11. Jetpets – recommended by Taronga Zoo as they handle exotic animal transport for the Zoo. As of mid-March 2020, they have ceased services barring domestic dog and cat transport by air due to the impact of COVID19. They have expressed that they are unable to help in this situation.

8) Current direction:

Taylor Bros are a marine engineering company, who have been tasked with designing the PLUs in line with legislative requirements of Marine Order 43 and physical limitations of the Island Trader. We have engaged them to produce a compliant design that will be able to be used for transporting livestock to and from the island in the future.

Other options still under consideration are:

1. Transport of calves on Eastern Air, with the Board paying supplementary fees until calves are mature.
2. Reimbursement plus additional fees if cattle are unable to be transported across.

SUMMARY

Significant challenges have been encountered in arranging transportation of cattle to Lord Howe Island.

The main issue faced currently is finding suitable Portable Livestock Units (PLUs) to carry livestock aboard the Island Trader. Legislative requirements for the design of PLUs are restrictive and for a small vessel like the Trader, difficult to meet. The Board have contracted Taylor Bros to draft a compliant PLU design that suits the Island Trader to enable importation of livestock to LHI.

When liaising with other providers that transport cattle within Australia, it has quickly become apparent that domestic shipping of livestock is rarely undertaken. For example, Norfolk Island transports stock by air. This is not an option for LHI due to the length of the runway.

Other islands that transport livestock by sea (King Island, Flinders Island, Tasmania) use large roll-on roll-off (ro-ro) barges that are able to fit 18+ ton cattle trucks in their entirety. Neither option applies to Lord Howe – we are effectively breaking new ground in relation to this new legislation.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board note this paper.

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