



Transport of cattle – what would you do?

Transporting cattle can be a tough call when there's the possibility of existing injury. VCNZ's **Wayne Ricketts** shares three case studies and offers some advice.

AS FORESHADOWED IN my last article, I am sharing some real-life examples of transport situations this month. Sorry, non-production animal veterinarians, this is not an issue that you are likely to come across.

CASE 1: POSSIBLE UPWARD FIXATION OF THE PATELLA

Mature cow presenting with abnormal gait and lame on one leg. Able to bear weight evenly on all four legs when standing. Possible diagnosis: arthritis, or an injury resulting in entrapment of the patella ligament. Veterinarian confident that cow could withstand the journey to the slaughter premises, but nevertheless contacted the local MPI VS veterinarian to discuss and seek advice. Agreed that the cow could be transported with a veterinary certificate. Feedback from the MPI VS veterinarian confirming the abnormal gait, but cow was still fit to be transported.

CASE 2: POSSIBLE DISLOCATED HIP

Cow with dislocated hip. Cow was sedated, and the veterinarian reduced the dislocation. Still lame several weeks after the dislocation reduction. Farmer wished to dispose of the cow as still not sound. Able to bear weight evenly on all four legs when standing, but was clearly lame on the affected leg. Veterinarian concerned at this stage that the dislocation had not been reduced, and concerned about transporting cows with dislocated hips to slaughter premises. Veterinarian contacted the local MPI VS veterinarian, who advised that, while cows with dislocated hips were occasionally received, they believed that

they should not be transported. However, it was agreed to receive the cow with a veterinary certificate. Feedback indicated that the hip had been successfully reduced, but there was significant arthritis of the hip joint. Unclear if the arthritis was present before the dislocation or developed as a result of it.

CASE 3: POSSIBLE CRUCIATE LIGAMENT RUPTURE

On the initial visit, veterinarian determined that the cow had possibly suffered a ruptured cruciate ligament, as the leg was making an audible 'clunk' during walking. It was not quite a lameness score of 3. Veterinarian recommended drying off to reduce further wear and tear on the joint. Veterinarian was called back to the farm one month later to certify the cow for slaughter. Examination indicated that lameness had improved somewhat. It could bear full weight on the limb at rest, but had trouble bringing the leg forwards, and the 'clunk' was still present. Veterinarian was confident that the cow could be transported, but unsure if it would be acceptable for slaughter. Sought MPI VS veterinarian advice. Agreed that cow could be transported to slaughter with a veterinary certificate. Feedback confirmed that cow unloaded without any problems and walked satisfactorily. Post-mortem indicated that the cruciate was ruptured.

I am very grateful to veterinary colleague Guy Oakley for providing these examples. (He advises that most of the animals he's asked to certify are for lameness reasons.)

Guy says that despite the difficulty sometimes in deciding if an animal is fit to be transported, the NZVA guidelines aid his decision-making, as does discussing cases with other practice veterinarians and the local MPI VS veterinarians. Guy really appreciates the advice from MPI veterinarians and that they take the time to provide feedback.

I really like Guy's advice that in most cases you don't have to make a decision immediately. These are generally not life-or-death situations, so if you are unsure, take some time to think about it, discuss it with a colleague or a senior veterinarian, or contact the local MPI VS veterinarian (you can send a video clip to them on your phone) and read the NZVA guidelines (of course!). If you can't reach a decision, you can contact the NZVA or VCNZ. It's not your responsibility to salvage an economic return for an animal that has to suffer unnecessary or unreasonable pain or suffering. It's also a good idea to record the reasons for your decision.

While veterinarians are most likely to be asked to sign certificates for transport for slaughter, the same 'rules' apply to transport for any reason. Fractured humeri are not an uncommon injury in heifers on run-offs, and are often caused by bulling. These animals are not fit to transport and euthanasia is required. It can be a tough call telling a farmer this news.

The NZVA guidelines will be reviewed in light of the forthcoming animal welfare regulations (1 October 2018), which include the transport of livestock, and to clarify some issues. My thanks to Guy for providing the content for this article. ⁽⁹⁸⁾