

Thursday 16th September 2021

Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee

OUR SUBMISSION

In providing this submission we considered the Regional Telecommunication Review Issues Paper July 2021. We contributed to the virtual Regional Telecommunications Review – Central & West QLD Public Consultation on the 27th of July and our contribution during the meeting is summarised below.

About OBE Organic

OBE Organic® produces the world's best organic beef. We began in the 1990s as Australia's first and only premium meat exporter 100% dedicated to the production of organic beef. Our mission is to help people lead better, healthier lives.

Formed by a group of far-sighted pastoral families in Thargomindah, QLD, our company was founded on century old traditions – raising cattle exactly the way nature intended. No chemicals, no pollutants, no hormones, nothing, except a whole-hearted commitment to letting the most enriching natural forces and environment produce the very best grass-fed organic beef.

OBE Organic produces fresh, chilled and frozen organic beef at a modern processing facility on the east coast of Australia. Our certified organic beef is available to grocery retailers, butcheries, restaurants and food service customers in the USA, Middle East, Asia and Australia.

Our Production Region

Our cattle are sourced from the pure & remote heart of Australia. It's a place where connectivity is challenging, given the remoteness of the area and vast distance to reach regional hubs. Outback towns like Birdsville & Boulia & Quilpie are small but vital staging posts into our production region.

Our free-range production operation is staggering, together, our family farmers own over 8 million hectares of grazing land. That's almost 20 million acres - about the area of Tasmania, or 2 times the area of Taiwan, or the area of Nebraska.

Our Business Considerations

Whether you are responsible for moving cattle or people or goods or resources about the remote Outback, businesses have common needs.

Traceability: The ability to trace livestock from property of birth to slaughter is critical for businesses like ours, which are compliant to the Export Control Act. We use technology like RFID tags to identify our animals.

Transparency: Internationally agreed upon frameworks like the Global Round Table for Sustainable Beef and the UN Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs), recognise transparency as key to meeting our social license to operate in years to come.



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■ The Channel Country.
Our production region.

Compliance: We need to comply with State & Federal Government Legislation like Chain of Responsibility (COR) as outlined within the Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL), Work Health & Safety Regulations (WHS Regulation) and relevant codes of practise. Paper-based National Vendor Declarations (NVDs) are used to declare necessary information about the food safety status of the livestock we purchase.

Our ability to upgrade to Electronic NVDs (eNVDs) is not possible whilst access to the mobile phone network is limited for most of our producers.

It's not all about beef

Towns like Quilpie & Thargomindah & Windorah are not just gateways to the vast cattle production region of the Channel Country, they are tourist hubs as well.

The Big Red Bash, Simpson Desert Ultra Marathon, Birdsville Races, Boulia Camel Races, Channel Country Ladies Day, Bedouries Races & Rodeo, Windorah Yabby Races & the Outback Masters are just a handful of the events which bring people instead of cattle into and out of our production region. There is a surge of people moving about and spending money in the tourist season, bringing benefit to regional communities.

Lack of Access to Real-Time Information

There are eleven million head of livestock in Queensland & five million people, give or take. Hundreds of thousands of animals and people move around our state on a monthly basis. Agricultural supply chains like ours contribute millions of dollars to the nation's economy each year.

Unfortunately, we have more real-time information coming to us from temperature trackers sitting in our boxed beef in a warehouse in Los Angeles or Jakarta, than we do from our supply chain in Australia.

When you don't have the connectivity you need, like many people & businesses in regional Queensland, you tend to hoard data, because you fear that using it or sharing it, will give away something useful, that you can't get back.

We recommend the Committee consider what data and information is currently being hoarded either be accident or design. Could this information be useful for compliance, traceability, biosecurity or disaster risk management purposes & if so, what value would it bring to our communities, if some of it, were to be willingly shared. Operational decision-making is likely to be improved with access to more immediate information.

An opportunity to reframe our perspective on regional connectivity

Whether you are in the business of beef or tourism, resources, disaster management or Local Government, the concept of regional connectivity should be broadened to consider the perspective of, or impact on, products and animals, as well as people.

We recommend the Committee consider examining connectivity in the context of its impact on **products, animals and people**. A broader perspective will allow consideration of new or novel solutions.

Furthermore, we recommend the Committee consider regional connectivity from the perspective of the **movement** of products, animals & people. It is a different way to think about connectivity. In this way, we focus less on 'universal access to high-speed internet and mobile phone coverage', to a more holistic approach to regional telecommunications investments, which considers, why we need it, when we need it and where we need it.

Off-Shore Solutions



OBE Organic beef is consumed by families around the world, so we often look over the horizon to explore new markets and develop new sales opportunities for our business. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, opportunities presented in places as diverse as Mexico and Manila & international business travel allowed us to experience other countries & cultures.

We are not the only country with regional connectivity issues. Mongolia for example, is 1.566 Million square kilometres, just a bit smaller than Queensland, yet some of its most isolated populations, the rural herders, have access to a mobile phone connection¹ and many rural Queenslanders do not.

We recommend the Committee consider if we are looking hard enough off-shore for innovative solutions.

The COVID-19 Pandemic & Data Insights



The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many businesses to necessarily look just weeks & months into the future, instead of years and decades. So much change is occurring over such a short time period, at unprecedented scale and from multiple fronts, it has tested our international supply chains like never before.

Improving supply chain resilience, growing and diversifying export markets, mitigating risk and harnessing opportunity will be key to our recovery from the business impacts of the pandemic. Digital technology & regional connectivity will play a critical role in our recovery, including adopting better systems for information flow. Whilst some of our peers will focus more on some work areas, our successful recovery from the pandemic will require a collaborative approach & communication between all participants, as most actions will be complementary.

But active, intelligence-led monitoring takes work.

Data provides both a picture of current practice & enables us to demonstrate our commitment to improving practice. It shows us where we are now and where we need to be in the future.

¹ [Education during the pandemic: Dimensions of the digital divide in Mongolia](#)

The OBE Organic team are leveraging data & insights to promote change in our business. In the interest of transparency, public reporting of actions against targets, aims to communicate improvement over time to our stakeholders.

Case Study: Emerging Data Solutions

OBE Organic has invested time, dollars and effort into exploring emerging solutions to streamline data flow through our export supply chain. This case study² illustrates the journey we have gone on, to explore how emerging blockchain offerings, might complement existing supply chain integrity solutions.

Like many beef businesses in Australia, OBE Organic sells branded, boxed beef in domestic and export markets. We outsource the operational aspects of our supply chain to third parties, including livestock transport, processing, and freight shipments to market.



Having a relatively small team, OBE Organic is continuously working to optimise the transfer of complex operational and verification data along its supply chain for both customers, supply chain partners and to comply with government reporting.

Future Opportunities with Better Regional Connectivity

- Better performance reporting at a business, Local Government, State and Federal Government level.
- Better root cause analysis.
- More & better use of CCTV for compliance and safety purposes.
- Better monitoring and compliance to manage biosecurity risks.
- More timely updates to hardware and software, minimising cybersecurity risks and optimising equipment performance.
- Ability to selectively activate 'surge' capacity across digital infrastructure for major events or major disasters
- The ability to move animals, products or people from one place to another with more and better compliance, safety & transparency.



Ends

² Case Study: <https://www.buysellmove.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/BSM-Customer-Story-OBE-Organic.pdf>