



Position Statement on the protection of the Lake Eyre Basin rivers and floodplains in Queensland.

Introduction

OBE Organic is aware that the Queensland Government is currently undertaking consultation in relation to its commitment to work with Traditional Owners and other stakeholders to ensure adequate protection for the rivers and floodplains of the “Channel Country” and Lake Eyre Basin in Queensland. The principal rivers are the Georgina River, Cooper Creek System and Diamantina River. When there is sufficient rainfall in their catchment area these rivers flow into Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre, in South Australia.

The Lake Eyre Basin is unique. It is an arid zone river system. It is a low gradient river system. It originates and terminates inland. It's unregulated in that it does not have infrastructure which interferes or has altered the natural flow. It is one of the last remaining river systems in the world that is still in its natural pristine state.

OBE Organic is a farmer-owned, Queensland-based company with the privilege of supplying consumers in Australia, as well as customers in export markets in Asia, the Middle East, and the North America. OBE Organic is Australia's first and oldest global exporter of organic beef. OBE Organic sources its certified organic livestock from family farmers across the Lake Eyre Basin's Channel Country. Certified organic cattle production covers more than 8 million hectares of the Lake Eyre Basin. It's larger than the area of Tasmania.

At OBE Organic, our story and our global reputation has been built on supplying some of the world's best clean and green organic beef, sourced from a pristine environment - the naturally irrigated floodplains of the Lake Eyre Basin's free-flowing rivers.

Position

- It is OBE Organic's position that the Lake Eyre Basin's rivers and floodplains are of significant environmental, social, cultural, and economic value and its pristine condition, along with the integrity of the natural seasonal water flows, must be protected.
- OBE Organic supports the current restrictions under the *Regional Planning Interest Act 2014 (Qld)* on broadacre cropping and open cut mining within the rivers and floodplain areas of the Lake Eyre Basin. It is OBE Organic's position that these exclusion zones are maintained.
- It is OBE Organic's position that the unique characteristics of the Lake Eyre Basin require a unique set of regulation for future oil and gas projects. This regulation may require exclusion of activities to particularly sensitive parts of the Lake Eyre Basin River system.
- Tourism is critically important to our region's economy. Tourists witnessing the landscape during and immediately following a flood is a treasured opportunity to experience one of the world's great natural wonders.
- OBE Organic believes that regulation should eliminate, so far as reasonably practical, adverse cross-border impact on river flows into Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre, in South Australia. It is important that the Queensland Government manage their portion of the Lake Eyre Basin with a whole of basin perspective. Everyone needs to be conscious of our obligations downstream.

- Current regulations which guide the activities of the oil and gas industry are largely self-enforced. Too often there is no consequence for non-compliance. Any new regulation needs to account for the cumulative impact of oil and gas extraction in the Lake Eyre Basin.
- OBE Organic has been formally managing sustainability through our FLOURISH sustainability program since 2015 to help us live our mission and to help us run a better business. We recently released a report showing how we take our commitment to people, animals, the environment and our product seriously.

Background

The Lake Eyre Basin is globally recognised for its significant and unique environment. The free-flowing rivers that create this unique environment also support a highly productive sustainable beef industry. Floodwaters naturally irrigate vast areas of the Channel Country and cattle feed on over 250 species of native grasses and forbs. This is arguably the world's largest, and most valuable region for organic beef production with livestock free to roam in an environment free from harsh chemicals or pollutants. Pastoralism continues to be the backbone of the local community and central to our way of life. Compromised water quality and/or the disruption of natural flows has the potential to have devastating and widespread economic and social consequences in addition to the environmental impact.

Tourism is also critically important to the region's economy, a major direct employer following agriculture and services, and contributing millions of dollars to the economy. The unique and spectacular environment of the Channel Country attracts thousands of domestic and international visitors each year- witnessing the landscape during and immediately following a flood is a treasured opportunity to experience one of the world's great natural wonders. Proposed new developments, particularly industrial activities, must consider the value of this natural environment to what is arguably the region's greatest economic growth opportunity in tourism.

Recent research (Kingsford & Walburn 2022) has confirmed that the footprint of the oil and gas industry within the Lake Eyre Basin is increasingly leading to greater risk of contamination incidents as well as increased cumulative impact of associated infrastructure on disrupting overland flows. The low gradient topography and unique hydrology of the Channel Country landscape leaves it vulnerable to significant alterations from infrastructure such as roads and pipelines. Loss of pasture productivity due to water diverted away by roads is unfortunately an impact experienced by some of OBE Organic's family farmers. It is of great concern that the cumulative impact of increased oil and gas infrastructure on the Channel Country floodplains is not adequately monitored or regulated.

Protecting our rivers and floodplains has been a matter of national importance for all Australians and has attracted international attention for all the right and all the wrong reasons.

In 2014 the Lake Eyre Basin partnership won the National River Prize and then in 2015 went on to win the International River Prize, the world's most prestigious water conservation award, for helping protect the Lake Eyre Basin. The Lake Eyre Basin was up against the Jordan River in the Middle East and the River Mur in Austria as one of three finalists for the annual international award. The award was the culmination of 20 years' worth of collaboration, towards protecting our unique desert river systems.¹

But there have been some regrettable incidences too, particularly where mining activities have been allowed to occur within river and floodplain areas. These include the Lady Annie copper mine

¹ [Lake Eyre Basin partnership wins \\$500,000 International River Prize | UNSW Newsroom](#)

release of highly toxic wastewater into the waterways in 2009 and the Santos Zeus oil spill in 2013 on a floodplain which was fortunately not in flood at the time. Both events attracted international media attention emphasising not only the direct on-ground impacts but the significant reputational risk to the organic beef and tourism industries.

Oil & gas extraction has largely coexisted in a satisfactory way with the region's major industries for many years. OBE Organic producers have seen the positive and negative of the oil and gas industry. It is clear to OBE Organic that the proposed expansion of exploration and potential production, with large numbers of wells and associated infrastructure, is likely to have a much greater negative impact on this sensitive environment. Exploration is often associated with single use infrastructure that serves no purpose after the exploration.

There is a need to ensure that necessary safeguards are in place to protect the Lake Eyre Basin rivers and floodplains.

On this basis, OBE Organic calls on the Queensland Government to act to protect this special part of our state. It is OBE Organic's position that the unique characteristics of the Lake Eyre Basin require a unique set of regulation for future oil and gas projects. This regulation may require exclusion of activities to particularly sensitive parts of the Lake Eyre Basin River system.

The oil and gas industry are not dependent on a healthy environment, but all other stakeholders are. Really, the environment should be the top priority.

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