



# **Exposed: The Inaccurate and Inappropriate Campaign by Zoos Victoria**

**Zoos Victoria's abuse of taxpayer's dollars  
on an anti-palm oil political campaign**

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## Executive Summary

Zoos Victoria is constituted by the State of Victoria under the *Zoological Parks and Gardens Act 1995* and is responsible to Environment Minister, Gavin Jennings. Last year, Zoos Victoria received \$14.6 million of taxpayer funds.

One of the functions of Zoos Victoria is “to carry out and promote zoological research, the conservation of wildlife and its natural habitats and the maintenance of biodiversity”. It is on these grounds that Zoos Victoria has transformed into a “Zoo-based Conservation Organisation”, engaging in public advocacy campaigns – including the *Don’t Palm Us Off* campaign.

However, Zoos Victoria is in danger of overstepping the mark. The *Don’t Palm Us Off* campaign is a political campaign aimed at pressuring politicians to regulate for the mandatory labelling of palm oil in products sold in Australia.

There is no evidence that the *Don’t Palm Us Off* campaign is aimed at conservation of the Orang-utan or their habitat. Nor is there evidence that targeting the use of palm oil in Australia will have any benefit for Oran-utan populations. Out of the twelve ‘facts’ promoted by Zoos Victoria to support its *Don’t Palm Us Off* campaign, only two are actual facts, eight are false and the remainder cannot be substantiated.

By running a campaign which is based on substantially false claims, Zoos Victoria is running a political advocacy campaign – not a conservation campaign.

This means that Zoos Victoria is treading a fine line between the use and misuse of public funds.

Instead of running its *Don’t Palm Us Off* political campaign, Zoos Victoria should refocus its resources on delivering evidence-based zoological services to Victorians.

Zoos Victoria’s ‘Facts’	‘Facts’ status
Over 85% of the world’s palm oil comes from Malaysia and Indonesia	TRUE
Today, the most common cause of deforestation and fragmentation in Indonesia is related to palm oil development	FALSE
An estimated 40% of food on our supermarket shelves contains palm oil	UNKNOWN
In SE Asia alone, the equivalent of 300 football fields are deforested every hour for palm oil production	FALSE
Palm oil typically costs the lives of up to 50 Orang-utans each week	UNKNOWN
Australians unknowingly consume on average 10 kilograms of palm oil each year because we do not currently have the ability to exercise consumer choice	FALSE
Sustainable Palm Oil Plantations are a possibility however you need you to tell FSANZ you want palm oil labelling if they are to become a reality	FALSE
Once palm oil is labelled, consumers can actually drive a market for proper certified sustainable palm oil because they can demand it of manufacturers (as we’ve seen with Fair Trade and Rainforest Alliance products)	FALSE
Palm oil from certified sustainable RSPO sources only accounts for 8 percent of the global supply of palm oil	FALSE
90% of Orang-utan habitat has been lost already. If all of it is lost then so are the livelihoods of many people	UNKNOWN / FALSE
The industry needs to increase yields on land that has already been cleared but right now there is very little incentive for them to do this	FALSE
We share 97% of our DNA with Orang-utans. You could say they are our wild cousins	TRUE

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## 1.0 Introduction

Zoos are typically non-controversial and benign institutions dedicated to preserving and educating the public on animal species.

But as Australia's oldest zoo, and one of the oldest in the world, Melbourne Zoo, as part of Victoria Zoos, has recently begun engaging in political activity by running campaigns in favour of environmental causes.

The most glaring example of this is the *Don't Palm Us Off* campaign which draws public attention to palm oil and its alleged contribution to deforestation and the loss of orang-utan populations in Indonesia and Malaysia.

But the campaign is more than just drawing the public's attention to Melbourne Zoo's concerns. The campaign is now encouraging Australians to engage in political activity to support its view through promotional activities and petitions.

As part of the campaign, Zoos Victoria is now advocating for Australians to lobby Parliamentarians for legislative reform.

This occasional paper will look at the activities of Zoos Victoria and assess the legitimacy and merit of their recent emergence as a political campaign entity and consider the impact of its current direction.

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## 2.0 About Zoos Victoria

Zoos Victoria is a statutory authority operating under the Victorian Parliament's *Zoological Parks and Gardens Act 1995*. Zoos Victoria is currently responsible for the operation and management of three Zoos – the Melbourne Zoo, Healesville Sanctuary and Werribee Open Range Zoo.

Under *The Act*, Zoos Victoria's governance is provided by its Board, and is responsible to the relevant Minister currently identified as the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Gavin Jennings.

Under *The Act* the Board functions:

- (a) to conserve, protect, manage and improve the zoological parks and managed land and the zoological collections.
- (b) to promote and increase public enjoyment of the zoological collections and the zoological parks and managed land.
- (c) to increase public knowledge and awareness of the zoological collections and zoological parks through exhibition of the zoological collections, publications, educational programs, advisory services and other activities.
- (d) to carry out and promote zoological research, the conservation of wildlife and its natural habitats and the maintenance of biodiversity.
- (e) to advise the Minister on matters relating to the Board's functions or powers or on any other matter referred to it by the Minister.
- (f) to provide consultancy and advice services to the public on zoological matters.
- (g) to provide for services and facilities for visitors to the zoological parks and managed land.
- (h) to carry out any other functions conferred on it by this or any other Act.<sup>1</sup>

As a consequence, the clear intention of *The Act* is for the Zoos Victoria Board to be responsible for the management of Victoria's zoological attractions, to promote these to Victorians, to appropriately engage in research that supports zoological efforts, and to provide advice to the public on matters related to the zoo.

Zoos Victoria operates on a number of different income sources. The majority of funding is provided through private sources, notably ticket sales and retail income. A modest return is also delivered as a result of the income derived from assets. The other major source of income is the taxpayers of Victoria. According to the Financial Statements of its 2008/09 Annual Report, Zoos Victoria receives government grants amounting to \$14.6 million.<sup>2</sup> Of that \$14.6 million, \$13.4 million is recurrent contributions and \$1.2 million is non-recurrent.

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<sup>1</sup> Parliament of Victoria, 1995, "Zoological Parks and Gardens Act", Victoria, Australia, at [http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol\\_act/zpaga1995263.txt/cgi-bin/download.cgi/download/au/legis/vic/consol\\_act/zpaga1995263.txt](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/zpaga1995263.txt/cgi-bin/download.cgi/download/au/legis/vic/consol_act/zpaga1995263.txt)

<sup>2</sup> Zoos Victoria, 2009, "Zoos Victoria Financial Report", at [http://www.zoo.org.au/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=385,19347,315,33,290,Documents&MediaID=21252&Filename=ZVAR08-09\\_5\\_FINS.pdf](http://www.zoo.org.au/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=385,19347,315,33,290,Documents&MediaID=21252&Filename=ZVAR08-09_5_FINS.pdf)

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### 3.0 Zoo Victoria's transformation

Zoos Victoria is the custodian of Australia's oldest, and one of the world's oldest zoos – Melbourne Zoo. In addition to Melbourne Zoo, the state government entity is also responsible for the Werribee Open Range Zoo and Healesville Sanctuary and managing the operations of these zoos remains its primary role.

But recently Zoos Victoria has sought to redefine its role. In July 2009, Zoos Victoria launched its 2009 – 2029 Zoos Victoria Strategic Plan.<sup>3</sup> A key platform of its Strategic Plan was to transition Zoos Victoria's activities from fulfil its transition from a "Traditional Zoo" to a "Zoo-based Conservation Organisation". Table 1 outlines the differences between a "traditional zoo", a "21<sup>st</sup> Century Zoo" and a "Zoo-based Conservation Organisation".

As a Zoo-based conservation organisation Zoos Victoria is seeking to transform itself as a public institution designed to provide zoological services to the public, notably the exhibiting of animals, and broadening its mandate to engage in campaigning, and inspiring Victorians to engage in campaigning, on conservation issues.

According to Zoos Victoria, being a zoo-based conservation organisation involves:

- Opening the door by providing exceptional wildlife encounters that reach beyond the boundaries of our campuses.
- Leading the way by communicating and demonstrating the role of conservation and research in all we (Zoos Victoria) do
- Catalysing action through inspiring experiences that motivate participation leading to conservation and sustainability outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

As well as:

- Influencing key decision makers
- Associations with like organisations, and
- Advocacy on behalf of conservation.<sup>5</sup>

And while Zoos Victoria outlines a number of performance indicators, one of the most relevant for its broadened role is to measure the "presence of Zoos Victoria's voice in conservation issues – through the number of stories in the media and the number of contributions to industry publications and conferences."<sup>6</sup> And in delivering its revised mandate, Zoos Victoria is also seeking the support of its staff to implement these programs. Zoos Victoria wants "to run successful call-to-action environmental campaigns and programs that are linked to our priority conservation programs and/or those of our partners" and "to ensure staff ... are knowledgeable, supportive, actively engaged and advocates."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Zoos Victoria, 2009, "2009 – 2029 Zoos Victoria Strategic Plan", Parkville, Australia, at [http://www.zoo.org.au/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=19348,19347,315,33,290,Documents&MediaID=19071&Filename=ZVStratPlan09\\_FA1.pdf](http://www.zoo.org.au/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=19348,19347,315,33,290,Documents&MediaID=19071&Filename=ZVStratPlan09_FA1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Zoos Victoria, 2009, "Vision and Mission", Parkville, Australia, at [http://www.zoo.org.au/About\\_ZV/Vision\\_and\\_Mission](http://www.zoo.org.au/About_ZV/Vision_and_Mission)

<sup>5</sup> Zoos Victoria, 2009, "2009 – 2029 Zoos Victoria Strategic Plan", Parkville, Australia, at [http://www.zoo.org.au/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=19348,19347,315,33,290,Documents&MediaID=19071&Filename=ZVStratPlan09\\_FA1.pdf](http://www.zoo.org.au/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=19348,19347,315,33,290,Documents&MediaID=19071&Filename=ZVStratPlan09_FA1.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Zoos Victoria, 2009, "2009 – 2029 Zoos Victoria Strategic Plan", Parkville, Australia, at [http://www.zoo.org.au/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=19348,19347,315,33,290,Documents&MediaID=19071&Filename=ZVStratPlan09\\_FA1.pdf](http://www.zoo.org.au/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=19348,19347,315,33,290,Documents&MediaID=19071&Filename=ZVStratPlan09_FA1.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Zoos Victoria, 2009, "Action area – conservation", at [http://www.zoos.org.au/About\\_ZV/Vision/Conservation](http://www.zoos.org.au/About_ZV/Vision/Conservation)

**Table 1 | Zoos Victoria’s activities transition**

Role	Primary activity	Animal collection	Funding
<b>Traditional Zoo</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerned with the delivery of animal-based recreation</li> <li>Social service that delivers family-based recreation at a reasonable price</li> <li>Educational programs for schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Availability</li> <li>Public appeal</li> <li>Director’s preference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government-supported</li> <li>Commercially-orientated</li> <li>Public attendance</li> </ul>
<b>21<sup>st</sup> Century Zoo</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Animal-based, recreation destination with conservation as its main focus</li> <li>Educational programs, involvement in conservation projects and involvement in research projects support operations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consideration of the collection to conservation outcomes</li> <li>Sustainable collection</li> <li>Capturing animals from the wild is undesirable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government-supported</li> <li>Public attendance</li> <li>Philanthropic support</li> <li>Commercially-orientated</li> </ul>
<b>Zoo-based Conservation Organisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conserve threatened species</li> <li>Direct conservation activities that have tangible conservation benefits</li> <li>Advocating for wild places and wildlife</li> <li>Supporting habitat conservation and environmental sustainability by engaging with and influencing the behaviour and actions of visitors, communities and stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Species as part of recovery programs</li> <li>Endangered species</li> <li>Species that promote conservation messages</li> <li>Species that enable visitors to connect with animals</li> <li>Species related to research priorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government-supported</li> <li>Public attendance</li> <li>Philanthropic support</li> <li>Consulting</li> <li>Partnerships</li> <li>Leveraging assets</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from Zoos Victoria, 2009, “2009 – 2029 Zoos Victoria Strategic Plan”, Parkville, Australia, at [http://www.zoo.org.au/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=19348,19347,315,33,290,Documents&MediaID=19071&Filename=ZVStratPlan09\\_FA1.pdf](http://www.zoo.org.au/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=19348,19347,315,33,290,Documents&MediaID=19071&Filename=ZVStratPlan09_FA1.pdf)

## 4.0 Becoming a Zoo-based Conservation Organisation

In becoming a “Zoo-based Conservation Organisation”, Zoos Victoria will continue managing zoos. But in addition, they have taken on a number of Australian and international conservation programs, in part, designed to assist in the preservation of species through “sophisticated recovery programs” for endangered or rare species.<sup>8</sup> Programs are outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2 | Zoos Victoria’s Australian and international conservation programs**

Conserving Australia’s wildlife	International conservation
Tasmanian Devil	Melako Community Conservancy
Southern Corroboree Frog	Tenkile Conservation Program
Eastern Barred Bandicoot	Sumatran Conservation Program
Helmeted Honeyeater	Cardamom Mountains – Cambodia
Mountain Pygmy-possum	Philippine Crocodile Recovery Program
Orange-bellied parrot	Conserving Asian Freshwater Turtles
Spotted Tree Frog	
Sunshine Diuris Orchid	

**Source:** Zoos Victoria, 2009, “Australian Conservation Programs”, Parkville, Australia, at <http://www.zoos.org.au/Conservation/Programs/Australian> and Zoos Victoria, 2009, “International Conservation Programs”, Parkville, Australia, at <http://www.zoos.org.au/Conservation/Programs/International>

The role of Zoos Victoria in Australian conservation programs is unlikely to be controversial. While it likely overlaps with other State and Federal government agency roles, Australian zoos reasonably have a responsibility for the conservation of Australian species.

**Table 3 | Zoos Victoria’s sponsored campaigns**

Campaign	Detail
<b>Act4Nature</b>	Zoos Victoria is supporting the Act4Nature campaign which encourages individuals to take action to address environmental degradation. Each month the campaign focuses on an individual species that may be threatened by environmental degradation. <sup>9</sup>
<b>Don’t Palm Us Off</b>	A political campaign lobbying Food Standards Australia and New Zealand to label palm oil separately from other oils currently labelled “vegetable oils”. Zoos Victoria will cease collecting signatures for its petition to support separate food labelling from the 1 <sup>st</sup> of July 2010.
<b>Beads for Wildlife</b>	The sale of beads from Kenya to provide a livelihood for the Rendille people who are working to support the preservation of zebras and elephants.
<b>Seal the Loop</b>	Seal the Loop is designed to improve recycling to limit the environmental and wildlife harm caused from waste, particularly plastics, in the ocean by placing bins from recycled plastics in known fishing locations.
<b>They’re Calling on You</b>	A campaign to encourage consumers to recycle their mobile phones to reduce the demand for coltan mining in Africa that is claimed to result in the destruction of habitats for gorillas and contribute to local unrest.

**Source:** Zoos Victoria, 2009, “Zoos Victoria’s Campaigns”, Parkville, Australia, at <http://www.zoos.org.au/Conservation/Campaigns>

<sup>8</sup> Zoos Victoria, 2009, “Australian Conservation Programs”, Parkville, Australia, at <http://www.zoos.org.au/Conservation/Programs/Australian>

<sup>9</sup> ACT4Nature, 2010, “About Act4Nature”, at <http://www.act4nature.org.au/About-Act4Nature.html>

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International conservation projects are more controversial, especially on the basis that State-based taxpayer dollars are now being used in foreign projects that should ordinarily be left to the Federal government. Similarly, there are grounds to argue that the conservation of foreign species outside of Australia reasonably belongs with the governments of those countries. But in light of the development stages of those countries, Australia has a part to play in conservation in the short to medium period.

In addition to Zoos Victoria's conservation programs, they are also engaging in a number of sponsored campaigns to promote their Zoos-based conservation agenda. The zoo-based conservation agenda is a new and radical direction for zoos, which focuses on the organisation and their staff engaging in campaigning and political activity. Table 3 outlines the main sponsored campaigns. The campaigns vary in their activity, but primarily involve encouraging greater awareness about potential environmental threats that may harm wildlife species, and provide recommendations about how these potential environmental threats can be addressed.

But one of the campaigns does not take the form of promoting awareness – *Don't Palm Us Off* – and instead encourages political campaigning on public policy issues.

## 5.0 The *Don't Palm Us Off* political campaign

The *Don't Palm Us Off* campaign was launched in mid-August 2009 at Melbourne Zoo to promote awareness of concerns that the Malaysian and Indonesian palm oil industries are contributing to the loss of habitat for orang-utans.

As part of the *Don't Palm Us Off* campaign, Zoos Victoria has attracted celebrity ambassadors and is encouraging Australians to sign petitions against palm oil.

The *Don't Palm Us Off* campaign includes a number of different avenues to raise awareness, including a schools campaign that encourages students to turn information they learned at the zoo into action by auditing their canteen of products that may contain palm oil and completing a postcard signature drive to raise awareness of the objectives of the *Don't Palm Us Off* campaign.<sup>10</sup>

### 5.1 The political response

The cause of the *Don't Palm Us Off* campaign has been taken up by Independent South Australian Senator, Nick Xenophon, who introduced the *Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling - Palm Oil) Bill 2009*. The Bill is currently being considered by an Inquiry of the Senate Community Affairs Committee which has attracted at least 327 submissions.<sup>11</sup> However, the vast majority of these submissions are from individuals who are repeating the core messages of the *Don't Palm Us Off* campaign.<sup>12</sup>

The proposed Bill would require the separate labelling of palm oil and privately certified sustainable palm oil (CS palm oil) on food product labels. It is argued by its proponents that because the production of palm oil may lead to some environmental degradation, consumers may wish to

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<sup>10</sup> Zoos Victoria, 2009, "Don't Palm Us Off – Get Your School Involved", Parkville, Australia, at <http://www.zoos.org.au/palmoil/schools>

<sup>11</sup> As listed on the Senate Community Affairs Committee's website on 21<sup>st</sup> of June 2010

<sup>12</sup> Community Affairs Committee, 2010, "Inquiry into Foods Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling – Palm Oil) Bill 2009, Parliament of Australia, Canberra, Australia, at [http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac\\_ctte/food\\_standards\\_truth\\_in\\_labelling\\_palm\\_oil\\_09/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/food_standards_truth_in_labelling_palm_oil_09/index.htm)



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reserve the right to not consume products which include palm oil or non-certified sustainable palm oil, and that without separate labelling they will be denied that choice.

The purpose of the Bill is “to ensure that consumers have clear, accurate information about the inclusion of palm oil in foods; and ... to encourage the use of certified sustainable palm oil in order to promote the protection of wildlife habitat”.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, The Council of Australian Governments has commissioned a review into Australia’s food labelling policy and laws chaired by Dr Neal Blewett AC. In its issues consultation paper, the committee raised a series of questions addressing possible justifications and proposals for reform of Australia’s food labelling regulations. These included the mandatory labelling of palm oil ingredients.<sup>14</sup>

## 5.2 Incorrect ‘Facts’ of the *Don’t Palm Us Off* political campaign

But the campaign against palm oil by Zoos Victoria, Senators Xenophon, Brown and Joyce, and its inclusion in the COAG food labelling review is founded on false information. Included as part of the *Don’t Palm Us Off* campaign is a fact sheet which makes a number of claims. As Table 5 outlines, out of the twelve ‘facts’ put forward by Zoos Victoria, only 2 are true, with the remaining 10 either being false or unable to be substantiated.

In fact the broad campaign against palm oil is based on a misinterpretation that deforestation is responsible for reduced orang-utans habitats. Palm oil is not responsible for deforestation. Poverty is.

Deforestation occurs around the world as poor farmers seek to lift themselves out of poverty through the production of commodities that are in demand in domestic and international markets.

As the world’s largest traded oil, palm oil is in heavy demand throughout the developing and developed world because it is a high-yield, trans-fat free, Vitamin A-rich, low-cost oil.<sup>15</sup> Without palm oil deforestation would still occur in the developing world. But instead of palm oil, growers would simply produce different crops, such as replacement oil seeds. Such a scenario would lead to expanded environmental degradation and deforestation because of the relatively low-yield of alternatives.

Based on data from Oil World<sup>16</sup> palm oil remains the most efficient oil seed. Even one of palm oil’s critics and sponsors of the Bill, Senator Bob Brown, acknowledges that “oil palm is the most productive oil seed”.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Community Affairs Committee, 2010, “Inquiry into Foods Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling – Palm Oil) Bill 2009, Parliament of Australia, Canberra, Australia, at [http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac\\_ctte/food\\_standards\\_truth\\_in\\_labelling\\_palm\\_oil\\_09/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/food_standards_truth_in_labelling_palm_oil_09/index.htm)

<sup>14</sup> Council of Australian Governments, 2010, “Issues Consultation Paper: Food Labelling Law and Policy Review”, Canberra, Australia, at [http://www.foodlabellingreview.gov.au/internet/foodlabelling/publishing.nsf/Content/BFB4ACD9B215DEBFC\\_A2576AF000E7C34/\\$File/Food%20Labelling%20Policy%20and%20Law%20Review%20-%20Issues%20Consultaton%20Paper.pdf](http://www.foodlabellingreview.gov.au/internet/foodlabelling/publishing.nsf/Content/BFB4ACD9B215DEBFC_A2576AF000E7C34/$File/Food%20Labelling%20Policy%20and%20Law%20Review%20-%20Issues%20Consultaton%20Paper.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF, 2004, “Vitamin and mineral deficiency: A global damage assessment report”, United Nations, New York, at [http://www.wsahs.nsw.gov.au/folate/documents/VMD\\_global\\_damage\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.wsahs.nsw.gov.au/folate/documents/VMD_global_damage_assessment.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Oil World, 2010, “Oil World Annual 2020”, Hamburg, Germany

<sup>17</sup> Brown, B., 2009, “Second reading speech: Food Standards Amendment (Truth in labelling – Palm oil) Bill 2009”, Australian Senate, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, Australia

**Table 4 | Zoo Victoria’s ‘facts’ versus the facts**

Zoo Victoria’s ‘Facts’ <sup>1</sup>	‘Facts’ status	The Facts
Over 85% of the world's palm oil comes from Malaysia and Indonesia	<b>TRUE</b>	Based on United States Department of Agriculture Data approximately 86 per cent of the world’s palm oil is sourced from Malaysian and Indonesian major and small holder palm oil plantations. <sup>2</sup>
Today, the most common cause of deforestation and fragmentation in Indonesia is related to palm oil development	<b>FALSE</b>	The Stern Review on the economics of climate change found less a fifth of cleared forest in Indonesia was to support the palm oil industry, and less than a third in Malaysia. <sup>3</sup>
An estimated 40% of food on our supermarket shelves contains palm oil	<b>UNKNOWN</b>	The percentage of products including palm oil vary, but it is accepted that a large percentage of consumer products do contain palm oil as an ingredient.
In SE Asia alone, the equivalent of 300 football fields are deforested every hour for palm oil production	<b>FALSE</b>	The claim that 300 football fields are deforested first appeared in a Greenpeace short paper – INDONESIA, a great country? <sup>4</sup> But as the title suggests the paper wasn’t about South East Asia, it was only about Indonesia. And the data sourced from an FAO report didn’t discuss palm oil and deforestation; it was about illegal logging in general. And since the release of the paper the FAO has downgraded the volume of logging by a quarter. <sup>5</sup>
Palm oil typically costs the lives of up to 50 Orang-utans each week	<b>UNKNOWN</b>	There is no supportable evidence for this claim. The potential loss of orang-utan populations varies from campaign to campaign. For example Perth Zoo claims that up to 6,000 orang-utans are dying each year, or around 116 a week, and allude that the palm oil industry is responsible. <sup>6</sup>
Australians unknowingly consume on average 10 kilograms of palm oil each year because we do not currently have the ability to exercise consumer choice	<b>FALSE</b>	It is impossible to know whether Australians unknowingly consume a product. Consumers can exercise consumer choice by buying products that carry the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil logo.
Sustainable Palm Oil Plantations are a possibility however you need to tell FSANZ you want palm oil labelling if they are to become a reality	<b>FALSE</b>	Sustainable Palm Oil Plantations are already a reality and are certified by the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil. <sup>7</sup>
Once palm oil is labelled, consumers can actually drive a market for proper certified sustainable palm oil because they can demand it of manufacturers (as we’ve seen with Fair Trade and Rainforest Alliance products)	<b>FALSE</b>	Both Fair Trade and Rain Forest Alliance products are not legally required to be labelled. Their markets are driven by voluntary labelling. Legally requiring certified sustainable palm oil will create a non-voluntary artificial market operating nothing like Fair Trade and Rainforest Alliance products. <sup>8</sup>
Palm oil from certified sustainable RSPO sources only accounts for 8 percent of the global supply of palm oil	<b>FALSE</b>	According to the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm oil its membership represents 35 per cent of the world’s palm oil production. <sup>9</sup>
90% of Orang-utan habitats have been lost already. If all of it is lost then so are the livelihoods of many people	<b>UNKNOWN / FALSE</b>	The reality is that data on the world’s orang-utans is unknown and at best there are only estimations available. But it is false to suggest that people will lose their livelihoods from the loss of orang-utan populations.
The industry needs to increase yields on land that has already been cleared but right now there is very little incentive for them to do this	<b>FALSE</b>	The primary incentive for producers to increase yields is to make profits using fewer resources to produce more palm oil. The United States Department of Agriculture considers yield growth one of the more important contributing factors to the growth of global production over recent years. <sup>10</sup>
We share 97% of our DNA with Orang-utans. You could say they are our wild cousins	<b>TRUE</b>	A recent paper published in the Journal of Biogeography supports the conclusion that humans share a percentage of DNA with different types of orang-utan. <sup>11</sup>

**Table 4 Sources:**

<sup>1</sup> Zoos Victoria, 2010, "Don't Palm Us Off Facts", at <http://www.zoo.org.au/PalmOil/facts>

<sup>2</sup> Calculated from data found at Foreign Agriculture Service, 2010, "Table 16 Copra, Palm Kernel and Palm Oil Production", United States Department of Agriculture, at

<http://www.fas.usda.gov/psdonline/psdreport.aspx?hidReportRetrievalName=BVS&hidReportRetrievalID=454&hidReportRetrievalTemplateID=9>

<sup>3</sup> Greig-Gran, M., 2008, "The cost of avoiding deforestation: Update of the report prepared for the Stern Review of the Economics of Climate Change", International Institute for Environment and Development, London, United Kingdom, at <http://www.iied.org/pubs/pdfs/G02489.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Greenpeace, 2005, "INDONESIA, a great country?", at <http://www.greenpeace.org/raw/content/seasia/en/press/reports/indonesian-deforestation-facts.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> World Growth, 2009, "Caught red handed: The Myths, Exaggerations and Distortions of Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and Rainforest Action Network", Green Papers, i4, at [http://worldgrowth.org/assets/files/WG\\_Green\\_Paper\\_Caught\\_Red\\_Handed\\_5\\_10.pdf](http://worldgrowth.org/assets/files/WG_Green_Paper_Caught_Red_Handed_5_10.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Perth Zoo, 2009, "Orangutan breeding success", at <http://www.perthzoo.wa.gov.au/Your-Zoo/Media-Releases/2009/Orangutan-Breeding-Success/>

<sup>7</sup> Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, 2009, "Overview of RSPO", at <http://www.rspo.org/files/pdf/Factsheet-RSPO-Overview.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Wilson, T., "Fair trade and voluntarism", in Macdonald, K. & Marshall, S. (Eds), 2010, "Fair trade, corporate accountability and beyond: Experiments in global justice", Ashgate Publishing, Surrey, United Kingdom

<sup>9</sup> Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, 2009, "Overview of RSPO", at <http://www.rspo.org/files/pdf/Factsheet-RSPO-Overview.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Foreign Agriculture Service, 2005, "Malaysia: Palm oil yields surprisingly high", Production estimates and crop assessment division, United States Department of Agriculture, at [http://www.fas.usda.gov/pecad2/highlights/2005/06/palm\\_23June05/index.htm](http://www.fas.usda.gov/pecad2/highlights/2005/06/palm_23June05/index.htm)

<sup>11</sup> Grehan, J.R. & Schwartz, J. H., 2009, "Evolution of the second orangutan: phylogeny and biogeography of hominid origins" Journal of Biogeography, v36

Table 5 outlines the yield potential of four major competing oils and clearly identifies the high-yield potential of palm oil. Should alternative oils be grown more land would be needed to produce an equivalent volume of oil to replace palm oil likely resulting in further deforestation.

### Table 5 | Comparison of oil yield (tonne / hectare)

Oil	Tonnage per hectare
Soybean oil	0.37
Sunflower oil	0.5
Rapeseed oil	0.75
Oil palm	4.09

Source: Oil World, 2010, "Oil World Annual 2020", Hamburg, Germany

While this may appear to be a contestable claim, Zoos Victoria actually supports this conclusion in an alternative campaign they are running. The *Beads for Wildlife* campaign is designed to encourage visitors to Werribee Open Range Zoo to buy beads produced in Kenya. The objective is to provide a livelihood for the Rendille people of Melako, Kenya through the purchasing of products they produce. According to Zoos Victoria "it is easier saving wildlife when you have a steady income and food in your stomach".<sup>18</sup>

Political campaigns against palm oil have a cost – economic instability for the roughly one million Indonesians and Malaysian workers who depend on the industry for their livelihoods and the millions of people dependent on it as a dietary staple.

Being an agriculture crop principally grown in developing countries, small holder palm oil farmers include some of the world's poorest producers. And they are not insignificant contributors to the industry.

In Malaysia small holders account for up to 40 per cent of the total area of planted oil palm and in

<sup>18</sup> Zoos Victoria, 2009, "Beads for Wildlife", at <http://www.zoos.org.au/beads>

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Indonesia it is 45 per cent.<sup>19</sup> And the industries in both countries support hundreds of thousands of workers. That is one of the reasons why the Asian Development Bank finances palm oil projects, whose success ensures that it delivers strong repayment rates on loans from funded projects.<sup>20</sup>

### 5.3 The problem with the *Don't Palm Us Off* political campaign

Zoos Victoria is a public entity who is clearly charged with responsibility of delivering zoological services. While its responsibilities under *The Act* are broad, the intention of the focus of the organisation is clear.

Zoos Victoria is clearly and rightly given some latitude by the government and the people of Victoria to deliver zoological services. And while the role of Zoos Victoria to participate in international conservation programs may be a questionable use of the public resources provided to it to deliver Victorian zoological services, it is not an outright misuse of taxpayer's funds. Similarly, its sponsored campaigns are a broad interpretation of Zoos Victoria's role.

The same standard does not apply to the *Don't Palm Us Off* political campaign. By encouraging Australians to petition their government and regulators to take political action in favour or against a particular product is a misuse of taxpayer's dollars.

The *Don't Palm Us Off* campaign also raises a number of serious issues about the role of government agencies using public funds to campaign for changes to the rules and regulations of other government agencies.

Similarly, the irresponsible publication of incorrect facts brings into question the credibility and responsibility of Zoos Victoria to act in the best interests of Victorian taxpayers and fulfil its mandate to engage in evidence-based research with which to educate Victorians on zoological matters.

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<sup>19</sup> Vermeulen, S. & Goad, N., 2006, "Towards better practice in smallholder palm oil production", International Institute for Environment and Development, p4

<sup>20</sup> Asian Development Bank, 1999, "Project performance audit report on the West New Britain small holder development project", at <http://www.adb.org/Documents/PERs/pe526.pdf>

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## 7.0 Conclusions

Zoos Victoria has an obligation to provide zoological services to Victorians, and while the latitude provided to deliver those services is broad the vast majority of services provided fulfil those guidelines.

But Zoos Victoria's *Don't Palm Us Off* campaign does not.

Instead of being a conservation campaign the *Don't Palm Us Off* campaign is a political campaign to encourage Australians to petition Food Standards Australia and New Zealand to regulate for food labelling regulations to require the disclosure of the use of palm oil and its production method.

Zoos Victoria is currently using Victorian taxpayer dollars to run its political campaign and raises serious issues about the role of government agencies campaigning for other government agencies to change their practices.

Zoos Victoria's campaign is also based on a series of largely false claims about the cause of deforestation in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Out of the twelve 'facts' put forward by Zoos Victoria, only 2 are true, with the remaining 10 either being false or unable to be substantiated.

In the short term the consequence is that Zoos Victoria is misleading Victorians and Australians, and in the long-term is likely to result in greater environmental damage and harm because of the ill-considered consequences of denying Indonesians and Malays in rural areas of their livelihood.

Instead of running its *Don't Palm Us Off* political campaign, Zoos Victoria should refocus its energy on delivering evidence-based zoological services to Victorians.

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## 9.0 About the Institute of Public Affairs

The Institute of Public Affairs, founded in 1943, is the world's oldest free market think tank. The IPA is a not-for-profit research institute based in Melbourne, Australia with staff and associates based around Australia.

Think tanks act as public policy incubators and develop public policy solutions. The objective of the IPA is to promote evidence-based public policy solutions rooted in a liberal tradition of free markets and a free society. The IPA achieves these objectives by:

- undertaking and disseminating research.
- participating in national and international policy debate through the media.
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The IPA has a demonstrated track record of contributing to, and changing the terms of the public policy debate in Australia and internationally. In particular, in recent years the IPA has been at the centre of public discussion in Australia and in appropriate international fora on:

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- Water
- Energy
- Housing
- Industrial relations
- Taxation
- Investment

## 10.0 About the Author | Tim Wilson

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Tim is one of Australia's foremost commentators and debaters on public policy and regularly appears on Australian and international television and radio as well as contributing chapters to books and being published in newspapers such as *The Australian* and the *Wall Street Journal*. *The Australian* newspaper has recognised him as one of the ten emerging leaders of Australian society and has also received an Australian Leadership Award from the Australian Davos Connection.

He is also a member of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's IP industry Consultative Group. Prior to working at the IPA he delivered aid and development projects across South East Asia, was a trade, IP and communication consultant and advised State and Federal Members of Parliament.

Tim was twice-elected President of the Monash University Student Union and was elected to the Council of Monash University. He also serves on the steering committee of the Sydney Opera House's Festival of Dangerous Ideas.

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