



Government of Western Australia  
Zoological Parks Authority



**SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE ECONOMICS COMMITTEE**

**Inquiry into the Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labeling Laws) Bill 2009**

**ON BEHALF OF  
ZOOLOGICAL PARKS AUTHORITY (PERTH ZOO)**

**OCTOBER 2009**

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### **Inquiry into the Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labeling Laws) Bill 2009**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Western Australian Zoological Parks Authority (Perth Zoo), working in a partnership with Zoos Victoria, is running a community campaign requesting Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) to legislate for mandatory labeling of palm oil on all food products.

Perth Zoo seeks consideration to incorporate the mandatory labeling of palm oil on food products on the grounds of consumer choice and the public's right to know if palm oil is in the food they purchase.

#### **SOME FACTS ABOUT PALM OIL**

Palm oil is found in a wide variety of processed food products and its ongoing cultivation is destroying Orangutans' habitat at an alarming rate. Originally from Western Africa, the oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) has become the plantation crop of the 21st century. Where heat and regular rainfall combine, it can flourish. Southeast Asia has become its home with ever-increasing areas being given over to this high-yielding crop. Each decade since 1980, palm oil production has doubled, mostly in Malaysia and Indonesia. Plantation owners have been rapidly clearing rainforest by chopping or setting fire to the vegetation. As forests are cleared, orangutans, facing starvation, desperately seek food in the developing plantations, and are considered an agricultural pest. It is estimated that approximately 5,000 orangutans are killed every year as a result of this situation.

Orangutans' population has declined 90%, along with the decline of hundreds of other animal species that live in rainforests. The United Nations has warned that Orangutans could be extinct within a generation if action on palm oil production is not taken soon. The consumers of palm oil cannot tell whether they are contributing to this crisis because palm oil is not labeled on most food products.

Most palm oil that ends up in the food that appears on Australian supermarket shelves is unsustainably harvested and is a part of the destruction of orangutan and virgin jungle habitat. It is reported that only one to four percent of the palm oil used comes from reportedly sustainable sources. Without proper labeling consumers cannot choose palm oil that is certified sustainable in food products.

#### **PERTH ZOO'S INVOLVEMENT IN ORANG-UTAN CONSERVATION**

Perth Zoo has been involved in Sumatran Orangutan conservation for 39 years. Perth Zoo has one of the World's largest breeding colonies of Sumatran orangutan and in partnership with the Indonesian Government has ongoing projects on habitat protection and species conservation in Java and Sumatra. The Zoo is the most visited zoo per capita in Australia with over 630 000 visitors per year.

The drivers for this submission are our firsthand knowledge of the situation in Indonesia through our in-situ projects; our ongoing work with the unique Sumatran orangutan which is so seriously threatened by extinction; and our close links with the community's concern on this matter. It is an issue of growing community concern.

THE CURRENT LEGISLATION DOES NOT ADEQUATELY INFORM CONSUMERS ABOUT THE NATURE OF INGREDIENTS IN THE FOOD THEY CONSUME  
Section 2A of the current *Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act 1991* (FSANZ Act) provides:

*"The object of this Act is to ensure a high standard of public health protection throughout Australia and New Zealand by means of the establishment and operation of a joint body to be known as Food Standards Australia New Zealand to achieve the following goals:*

- (a) a high degree of consumer confidence in the quality and safety of food produced, processed, sold or exported from Australia and New Zealand;*
- (b) an effective, transparent and accountable regulatory framework within which the food industry can work efficiently;*
- (c) the provision of adequate information relating to food to enable consumers to make informed choices"*

The provision of adequate information relating to food sources enables consumers to make informed choices. With heightened awareness amongst the general community of environmental issues and particularly when it relates to loss of biodiversity and species' habitat loss, information on the sustainability of food production is equally as important as the source, quality and safety of food.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Perth Zoo hereby requests:

1. Amendment to the FSANZ Act should mandate that FSANZ develop a standard that ensures the use of the words "Palm Oil" in the ingredients list of all packaged foods, which contain any quantity of palm oil and palm oil derivatives regardless of whether or not the palm oil has been certified by a credible certifying body.
2. The necessary amendments to the FSANZ Act should ensure that FSANZ develop and approve labeling standards that ensure food manufacturers and producers distinguish between those manufacturers that source palm oil from credible certified sources and those that do not.
3. A system must be designed whereby after the words "Palm Oil" it is clear that the ingredient has been sourced from a sustainable source and certified by a credible organization.

**Zoological Parks Authority Western Australia  
(Perth Zoo)**

**October 2009**