

To whom it concerns,

I wish to make a submission on the Food Standards Amendment Bill (Truth in Labelling - Palm Oil) Bill 2009.

I fully support mandatory labelling of palm oil on food packaging in Australia and New Zealand so that consumers can identify and (in many cases) chose to avoid palm oil. This would allow consumers the choice to not unwittingly contribute to further tropical rainforest loss, human rights abuses, large scale pollution, endangered species extinction and global warming, through their everyday food purchases.

It is my belief that consumer power will then force large corporations to take action to reduce the rate of destruction of tropical rainforest that is currently occurring all over Indonesia (and now starting to spread into African nations).

Palm Oil can be produced in a far less destrcutive way but the current flaws and lack of accountability in governance of this industry mean there is easy money to be made in logging of timber and costs saved by not setting in place environmental protection policies.

One of the long term side effects of this unchecked industry (of which there are many) is the demise of species such as the orangutan which shares 97% of it's DNA with humans. We have much to learn from these sentient creatures yet we allow them to be battered, killed and traumatized for entering plantations in search of food, a plantation on land that was once natural forest, their home. Many babies, after seeing their mothers killed, are sold into the pet trade where their futures are pitiful, to say the least. The lucky ones will end up in a rehabilitation center, most of which are well over capacity. Unless we can save the forests, where will they go?

It is estimated we have less than five years to save the orangutan from extinction in the wild. Palm oil is the greatest threat to their survival. I have worked with orangutans for several years and can say with my hand on my heart that they suffer and feel emotion just as intense as you and I do. They have personality. They have relationships. They have dignity. They have intelligence. They deserve a future.

Indonesia is the 3rd largest emitter of greenhouse gases due solely to rapid deforestation and draining of peat swamps. Peat swamps are carbon sinks and very often when a new plantation is established these peat swamps are disturbed and massive amounts of carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere. This activity is illegal however the Indonesian Government do not have the resources and/or support to adequately deal with the offenders. This is impacting on the whole world.

Although these activities are occurring (predominantly) in Indonesia, everyone in the world needs to take responsibility for creating demand for destructively produced palm oil. Mandatory labelling on food products is a very significant step in the direction that must be taken if we are to reduce demand for palm oil and send a clear message to those in the industry to clean up their act.

All creatures should have the right not to suffer and all humans the right to not unwittingly cause suffering to others.

Thank you very much for your time in reading my submission,
Warm regards,

Asha Rodger,