

To the Committee,

I'm writing to provide my endorsement of the Don't Palm us Off campaign, which aims to have the Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling – Palm Oil) Bill passed by the Senate, and to implore the committee to recommend its passing.

As an environmentally aware person, I'm quite concerned with the way current palm oil farming practices are impacting on the environment and in particular, the habitat of the orangutan. The ongoing deforestation to provide land with which to farm palm oil is not only severely detrimental to the orangutan population across South East Asia, and in particular Borneo and Sumatra, it is also adding a heavy carbon load on the atmosphere as the forests are burned to clear land for new palm plantations. To compound the problem, the people relying on the income provided by palm oil would be living in complete poverty if that income were to be removed.

Due to the long term impact that the Don't Palm us Off campaign might have on communities in South East Asia, where palm oil is produced, I initially had reservations about supporting the campaign. I come from a farming background myself and nothing makes farmers in Australia more angry than people from other countries telling them what they can and can't do on their farms. Taking the moral high ground on one single issue (i.e. abolition of mulesing or similarly, protecting the orangutan by forcing through market manipulation, a reduction of palm oil farming) is very hard to take for the community whose practices are being questioned. Often the farmers themselves are against what they practice themselves, but with little other option they pursue those practices.

I can say with confidence that there isn't a single farmer in Australia who enjoys mulesing his sheep. It is a gruesome and brutal task that is hard to witness and hard to carry out. I should know, I did it myself for about ten years when I was growing up. But, given there are currently no other functional alternatives, farmers must continue to mule lambs in order for them to grow up to be productive adult sheep. Similarly I'm sure there's not many farmers in South East Asia who enjoy wiping out the orangutan.

Often the communities where palm oil is produced have one single industry that prevents them from living in absolute destitution, palm oil. Even with the income palm oil provides, the communities where palm oil is grown often live very simple lives without the conveniences that city-dwelling Australians consider essential to life (electricity and clean water for example). Which brings me to my point. If we are going to attempt to help save the forest habitat of the orangutan, we should not do it at the expense of the people who also live in those regions. The only way we can achieve both of these goals is to promote sustainable farming practices. This will reduce the impact of farming on the forest, but still allow the palm oil industry to continue provide income to those communities who desperately need it.

By advocating mandatory labelling of palm oil in products, we can influence the palm oil industry in South East Asia to move towards more sustainable farming practices. To do this we can give incentives to farmers that promote the utilisation of land that has already been cleared (of which there is ample). This will reduce, and hopefully negate, the need to clear more virgin forest, and therefore allow the rapid decline of orangutan populations to stabilise and eventually perhaps, rise again.

Promoting the use "Certified Sustainable Palm Oil" whilst condoning the use of non-sustainably produced palm oil is just one incentive that will produce positive results for the survival of the orangutan. At the same time will not impact upon the livelihood of the communities producing the sustainable oil. However, this may negatively impact upon communities not willing to grow palms

sustainably, by making their oil less saleable. But that would be the incentive they need to move towards more sustainable farming practices.

My initial reservation in supporting the Don't Palm us Off campaign and the Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling – Palm Oil) Bill, was that I was fearful that it might be another ill thought out attempt by an organisation to curtail harmful farming practices for the good of the orangutan, without considering the impact on the communities reliant on palm oil for survival. But after discussing the campaign with organisers, it's clear that the campaign has been well thought out, not only in terms of the environmental issue at hand, but also the social and economical issues as well.

For something to change to become truly sustainable (as opposed to becoming simply green), it should not negatively impact the society or economy in which the change is to occur. Assessing a solution in terms of its impact to the economy, society and environment in this way is known as triple bottom line analysis, and this is fundamental to applying the concept of sustainability to a problem. If the Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling – Palm Oil) Bill is passed, it will be a move towards a genuinely sustainable solution to a very complex environmental and socio-economic problem.

Kind Regards,

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