

19 April 2010

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
PO BOX 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA, ACT 2600

By Email: Community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling – Palm Oil) Bill 2009 (**the Bill**).

Coles Supermarkets makes available around 26,000 food and grocery products in our 750 supermarkets across Australia, many of which may contain palm oil or palm oil derivatives.

Coles acknowledges and shares the concerns of many of our customers and community members about the impact of palm oil production on the environment and on the welfare of animals and we are committed to providing clear, accurate and truthful information relating to food sources so that our customers can make informed choices when shopping in our stores. We are also committed to encouraging our suppliers to work towards more sustainable palm oil production.

To achieve this, Coles has committed to the following;

Palm oil labelling

We clearly label palm oil when it is used in Coles Housebrand food products. Our policy ensures that we identify palm oil in these products instead of using the term 'blended vegetable oils' which makes it easier for our customers to make an informed purchasing decision.

Housebrand product development

When developing new Housebrand products, we seek to avoid the use of palm oil wherever possible. We also seek to remove palm oil from Coles Housebrand products wherever possible. For example, we have removed palm oil in some of our Bakery products including Ginger Kisses and Lamingtons. We have also removed palm oil from Coles Choc Top, Coles Sultanas and Coles 2 Minute Instant Noodles.

Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil

To further demonstrate our commitment to this issue, Coles intends to become a member of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil in the next financial year. By becoming a member, we hope to gain better access to Certified Sustainable Palm Oil and work closely with our suppliers to move towards sustainable palm oil in all Coles Housebrand products.

Specific comments on the Bill

It is our understanding that the Bill seeks to prescribe that producers, manufacturers and distributors of food containing palm oil include palm oil on the ingredient list and, where the palm oil used has been certified sustainable (in accordance with the regulations), list this ingredient as “CS palm oil” to indicate its sustainable origins.

Coles has no objection to using the proposed words “CS palm oil”, but we are concerned that this terminology may not be well understood by customers. To this end, we believe a comprehensive community education and awareness program should be undertaken by Food Standards Australia New Zealand/State Food Authorities to communicate the meaning of “CS palm oil”.

If the Bill becomes law, Coles requests that the food industry be given adequate time to change food labels and for stock in trade. Coles believes a minimum three year commencement date is a reasonable time period.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Robert Hadler
General Manager Corporate Affairs, Coles