

Dear Sir/Madam

Firstly, I would like to commend Senators Xenophon, Brown and Joyce for introducing into the Parliament a private members Bill – the *Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling – Palm Oil) Bill 2009*. My interest is personal, not material.

I wholeheartedly support this Bill for the following reasons:

- Palm oil is not a healthy edible oil, as it contains over 50% saturated fats
- Most people (including me) are/were not aware of the saturated fat content, assuming that “all vegetable oil is better than animal fat”, which is patently untrue. I do not buy products labelled ‘vegetable oil’ now, and have not for many years, as I don’t know what they contain.
- Producers and retailers trade on its inexpensiveness relative to other vegetable oils, whilst hiding under the guise of “vegetable oil”. This is misleading advertising and labelling
- Health programs aimed at reducing overweight/obesity and lowering cholesterol are being undermined by this misleading labelling (as well as by many other factors)
- Because it is primarily grown in third world countries, it is cheaper to grow and process, but at what cost to the local people – I recently saw in *Sydney Morning Herald*, photographs of sago palm plantations (a staple food crop for local people as well as export) being bulldozed to plant palm oil for export, in West Irian. What impact is this having on indigenous peoples? The misleading labelling and lower cost is encouraging purchase of products that may be excessively impacting on food resources for indigenous people
- In addition, the expansion of the industry, leading to the clearfelling of forests in Indonesia, including West Irian, is removing food and fibre resources for indigenous people, as well as habitat for charismatic wildlife such as orang-utan. This destruction is unnecessary, given the (healthier) alternatives to palm oil for edible uses. There is a historical and current market for palm oil in non-edible goods (eg soaps), so the Bill is not denying export income to developing countries, merely moving to inform Australians of the health and environmental issues associated with palm oil, and hopefully help to cap the industry at a sustainable level.

I support labelling which identifies palm oil by name in products. I also support certifying the products, provided that indigenous peoples’ welfare, as well as wildlife, is properly assessed and addressed in the certification process.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely

Estelle Blair