

James and Kylie Brice

17th April 2010

Dear Senators,

Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling – Palm Oil) Bill 2009

I am pleased to present this submission in relation to the above bill. The submission speaks to issues 1 through 6 of the terms of reference and I respectfully request that it be considered by the committee.

We recently returned from a trip to Borneo where we experienced first hand the utter devastation the palm oil industry is reaping on the rainforest of interior Borneo. We had the opportunity to drive across the interior of Malaysian Borneo to Sandikan, and within an hour of leaving Kota Kinabalu we were at the edge of the palm oil plantations. Imagine our amazement that instead the thick, impenetrable rain forest we had expected, all we could see for mile after mile, hour after hour was palm oil trees. There were no birds, no wild animals and in fact no other forms of life except oil palms. The reason we later discovered is that, after rainforest is cleared and all the animals have either fled or been killed, the plantation owners and managers actively deter wildlife from entering the plantations. Female Orangutans are killed and their babies are sold or left to die of starvation.

Visual evidence appears to clearly indicate that the palm oil industry doesn't consider the needs of the native wildlife they are affecting, nor do they plant with forethought. For example, there are no corridors of native plant species to allow native animals access to their land and traditional migratory paths, thus contributing to the increasing number of animals starving through inability to access their native food. This is also a major contributing factor to the decrease in genetic diversity thus expediting the extinction of many species. Their habitat isn't just fragmented but destroyed. Palm oil plantations are also not sustainably planted and maintained. Current plantation practice is to remove oil palms once they are around 20 years old and move on to pure rainforest rather than replant and regenerate used land. This is a management strategy of pure destruction which systematically rapes the ecosystem and leaves desolate swathes in the earth.

Through Australia supporting palm oil we are effectively condoning the mass destruction of both rainforest and the endangered native species of Malaysia, Indonesia and New Guinea. Through this support of palm oil and its manufacturers we are condoning the flow on effects from the palm oil industry which contribute to the ever increasing quantity of pollution generated by human industries which ultimately contribute to the ever increasing crisis of global climate change.

Positive action on this issue is long overdue. Australia must follow in the footsteps of the European Union and ensure that all products which contain palm oil are clearly labelled, thus ensuring consumers have the right to choose not to use a product which is actively causing the destruction of rainforests. Many consider these areas to be worthy of world heritage listing and the protection this listing so rightly deserves. The mandatory labelling of palm oil in products is an essential step in the preservation of these fragile and irreplaceable environments. Consumers have the ability to influence supermarkets, producers and ultimately global markets if given the opportunity and the passing of this bill gives Australian consumers exactly that opportunity.

Thus we feel if the Food Standards Amendment bill (Truth in Labelling – Palm Oil) 2009 is passed and Australian manufacturers are forced to clearly label the palm oil content in all its forms (as there are many names for palm oil) consumers will be able to make an informed decision and let their feet and money do the talking.

However, if we are truly committed to stopping the continued destruction of endangered species and the habitats which they depend upon, this will be the first step in the ultimate goal of Australian consumers, industry and governments working together to ban the use of palm oil and support the use of environmentally friendly products such as sesame, canola and olive oil.

The sheer horror that we witnessed first-hand in Borneo will not quickly fade from our minds. While our intention was to capture the extent of the palm oil expansion and the almost inconceivable amount of rainforest destruction on camera, we quickly realized that photographs could not possibly hope to illustrate the full extent of the carnage. Only an aerial or satellite photograph could truly give scale to the enormity of the problem and the urgent need to address it constructively.

We strongly urge all Members and Senators to pass the Food Standards Amendment bill (Truth in Labelling – Palm Oil) 2009 and begin the process of saving ecosystems and species that once gone, are gone forever.

Should you require any further information, we can be contacted on 0408 868 741 and would be happy to discuss this issue further with the Senate Committee if required.

Yours faithfully,

James and Kylie Brice