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Wednesday, 21 April 2010

Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs

PO Box 6100

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600 Australia

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to convey Australia Zoo Wildlife Warriors support for the Inquiry into Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling – Palm Oil) Bill 2009.

There are many important reasons this bill is so important, both environmentally and socially. As you would be aware, the production of palm oil is having a dramatic negative effect on both the environment and the local communities that must co-exist alongside the plantations.

As it states in the bill, it is the right of the consumer to be provided with accurate and truthful information on the ingredients in their foods. Every consumer should have the opportunity to make informed decisions on the food products they are buying and eating.

At present it is estimated that over 50 orang-utans a week are dying as a direct consequence of the palm oil industry. The Orang-utan is just one example of many species being pushed to extinction; in part, due to the devastating and unsustainable land clearing practices for Palm oil plantations. This rich biodiversity being destroyed is vital for the entire planet and all living things, including humans!

The development of new "unsustainable" oil palm plantations is commonly associated with social conflict and human rights abuses. Most of the area developed in Borneo and Sumatra is the customary land of indigenous peoples and local communities. Some communities are being forced to give up their land against their will and without adequate compensation. On many plantations there is heavy use of pesticides and chemicals with no or very little regulations, rivers and surrounding environments are becoming heavily polluted, denying local communities fresh water for drinking and bathing. The pollution is also killing fish, a vital food source.

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The Roundtable of Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) say that an amazing 44% of people in Indonesia still rely on the natural forest for their livelihoods, these are the same forests being cleared at an alarming rate. They also say that local people suffer a 50% reduction in wages when palm oil replaces forests.

Consumers have the right to know that their foods contain palm oil as they do with any other ingredient, and they have the right to have the opportunity to make decisions that they deem to be more ethical. It is for the reasons I have outlined above that Australia Zoo Wildlife Warriors endorses the Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling – Palm Oil) Bill 2009.

The mandatory labelling of palm oil would allow the creation of consumer driven demand for sustainable palm oil which in turn would allow sustainable palm oil to become more accessible and affordable. Having a label 'Certified Sustainable Palm Oil' may also be of benefit to food manufacturers, as this may drive ethically motivated people toward their products.

Yours faithfully,

Murray Munro

Appeals Manager

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