

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 express my 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 undoubtedly be aware, and the production of palm oil is having a dramatic negative effect on the environment and the communities existing in plantation areas. 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. As an organisation we fully support the Amendment and believe every consumer should have the right to make decisions based on actual accurate information before purchasing products that contribute to this environmental and social devastation.

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 unsustainable land clearing practices for these plantations. The biodiversity that is being destroyed is vital for the entire planet and all living things – humans included!

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 regulation, rivers and surrounding environments are becoming heavily polluted, denying local communities fresh water for drinking or bathing. The pollution is also killing fish, an important food source.

The Roundtable of Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) say that 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 they deem more ethical.

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,

Rove McManus
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