



## **AUCKLAND ZOO SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY AFFAIRS**

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

**23 April 2010**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this submission is to achieve compulsory transparent labelling of palm oil on all product packaging sold in New Zealand, by asking the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs to support the Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling Laws – Palm Oil) Bill 2009.

This paper outlines the changes Auckland Zoo would like to see implemented. Our intended result is to enact legislation requiring Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) to make it compulsory for manufacturers to transparently label palm oil as “palm oil” in the ingredients list on all packaged foods that contain any quantity of palm oil and/or palm oil derivatives.

This submission is also on behalf of the approximately 12,000 people (to date) who have signed the Auckland Zoo petition directly asking Food Standards Australia New Zealand to require the transparent labelling of palm oil on all packaged foods that contain this ingredient.

### **Background**

One of the objectives of the current FSANZ Act is the provision of adequate information relating to food to enable consumers to make informed choices<sup>1</sup>. Auckland Zoo believes that by mandating the labelling of palm oil on food packaging, consumers will be able to a truly informed choice when purchasing food products that contain palm oil.

The definition of informed choice is not limited in any way by the FSANZ Act and we believe it can extend to international environmental issues and any other issues about which the consumer may wish to be informed.

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<sup>1</sup> Part 1, 2A Object of Act (c), *Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act 1991*.

Auckland Zoo appreciates that public health and safety is the highest priority of FSANZ in developing food standards, and that this issue must be considered in determining whether to make or vary a food standard. However, this is not the only matter relevant to the making of a food standard as demonstrated by the groundswell of public opinion and concern in New Zealand (and Australia) about the misleading labelling of product ingredients.

## **Why Auckland Zoo supports mandatory labelling of palm oil**

Auckland Zoo's Mission:

*'To focus the zoo's resources to benefit conservation and provide exciting visitor experiences which inspire and empower people to take positive action for wildlife'.*

As a conservation organisation, advocating for and actively conserving wildlife and wild places, is at the heart of what Auckland Zoo is about – hence our palm oil awareness campaign and our direct support to conservation projects in the wild (see paragraph below). It's no secret that what we do as humans, be it as individuals or organisations, has an impact on the environment. The production and consumption of palm oil, and the corresponding loss of mature rainforest habitat and unique wildlife species, is sadly, a striking example of this.

Along with supporting field conservation projects within New Zealand, Auckland Zoo provides financial and practical support to international conservation projects, including to a number of projects in South East Asia. Species benefiting include the orangutan, Sumatran tiger, Asian elephant, Asian rhino, and of course, the habitats of these animals. It has been through our direct relationships with these conservation organisations and people on the ground in these areas, that we have become acutely aware of the specific threats to species in the region.

It is our view, endorsed by our conservation partners, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Tiger, Asian Rhino Project and the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Project, that, deforestation (for the expansion of oil palm plantations) is currently the greatest single threat to the future of many species including Sumatran tiger, orangutan and rhino. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) also believes palm oil is the major driver of deforestation in Borneo and Sumatra, and the biggest threat to the survival of the orangutan. They have called this situation a 'conservation emergency'<sup>2</sup>.

This is why Auckland Zoo seeks the support of the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs to legislate to change manufacturer behaviour (in labelling ingredients in a transparent manner), so consumers know what they are consuming and understand the broader environmental impacts of their consumption choices.

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<sup>2</sup> *Last Stand of the Orangutan*, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2007

## **Palm oil production – a conservation emergency**

Palm oil is derived from the fruit of the oil palm. It is one of the world's leading agricultural commodities and is widely used as an ingredient in food products, cosmetics and other household items.

Over 85% of the world's palm oil comes from Malaysia and Indonesia – the last remaining habitat of the Sumatran orangutan, Sumatran tiger, Sumatran rhino, and many other animals and plants (Sumatra is classified as a biodiversity hotspot - home to 59 mammal species, 192 bird species, 98 fish species, and over 650 plant species).

Approximately 90% of the supply of palm oil goes into food products<sup>3</sup> and about 40% of the packaged food products in Australia and New Zealand's supermarkets contain palm oil.<sup>4</sup> The remaining 10% of palm oil supply goes into a range of other products including cosmetics, cleaning and hygiene products, bio-fuel and stock feed (derivatives from palm kernel).

Every year, Australians and New Zealanders consume an average of 10 kilograms of palm oil each<sup>5</sup>.

- From 2000 – 2009 mature palm areas in Indonesia have grown at an average annual rate of 10% (or 250,000 hectares) and the rate of palm oil production has increased by 17.4% (or 1.25 million metric tonnes) per annum<sup>6</sup>. For manufacturers, palm oil is a low-cost ingredient. As such, it is manufacturers, and not consumers, who are driving up the demand and subsequent growth of palm oil production;
- The outcome of manufacturers working to keep up with production levels is deforestation on a grand scale. Mature rainforests are being destroyed at the rate of 300 football fields per hour;
- Each week, 50 orangutans alone are dying to make way for oil palm plantations<sup>7</sup>;
- Conservation organisations working on the ground in Borneo and Sumatra estimate the world is losing up to 5,000 orangutans every year;
- At the current rate of deforestation, the International Fund for Animal Welfare believes the orangutan could be extinct in the wild within the next 10 years<sup>8</sup>;

Because labelling of palm oil is not required:

- Consumers do not know their products contain palm oil, so are uninformed they are consuming it; and
- Therefore, consumers are unaware of the impact of their purchasing and/or consumption choices.

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<sup>3</sup> Malaysian Palm Oil Council, see <http://www.mpoc.org.in/palmoil-uses.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Hickman, The guilty secrets of palm oil: Are you unwittingly contributing to the devastation of the rain forests? *Independent.co.uk*. 2 May 2009. <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/the-guilty-secrets-of-palm-oil-are-you-unwittingly-contributing-to-the-devastation-of-the-rain-forests-1676218.html>

<sup>5</sup> Palm Oil Action Group. See [www.palmoilaction.org.au/images/palm-oil-action-brochure.pdf](http://www.palmoilaction.org.au/images/palm-oil-action-brochure.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.pecad.fas.usda.gov/highlights/2009/03/Indonesia/>

<sup>7</sup> Palm Oil Action Group, [www.palmoilaction.org.au](http://www.palmoilaction.org.au)

<sup>8</sup> International Fund for Animal Welfare in Lean, 10 years left to live: Orang-utans face extinction in the wild. *Independent.co.uk*. 17 December 2006. <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/10-years-to-live-orangutan-faces-extinction-in-the-wild-428850.html>

## **Public demand for transparent labelling**

It has been in Auckland Zoo's role as animal advocates that we have been communicating information on this issue to our 650,000 annual visitors and the wider community. Without accurate labelling, New Zealand consumers are left uninformed about what is in their food. They are also being denied the ability to decide whether they want to contribute to the destruction of rainforest habitat and wildlife.

One of the objectives of the current FSANZ Act is the provision of adequate information relating to food to enable consumers to make informed choices<sup>9</sup>. Through Auckland Zoo consumers have started (and are continuing), to demand this information as a right, in order to know what is in their food. This is of particular significance when some products or ingredients have a negative environmental impact.

However, under the current FSANZ Act, it is not compulsory to label palm oil in food products. Instead, palm oil and its derivatives are often labelled as 'vegetable oil' or disguised as some other chemical names or numbers (eg cetearyl alcohol, or emulsifier 422). Auckland Zoo believes this to be a misleading form of labelling that deprives consumers of the ability to make an informed choice about the packaged food products they buy.

### **Palm oil is commonly listed in the following ways:**

#### **PALM OIL CAN BE LISTED AS:**

Vegetable oil  
Cetyl and Octyl Palmitate  
*Elaeis Guineensis* (Latin/ taxonomic name for palm oil)  
Hexadecylic or Palmitic Acid  
Hydrated Palm Glycerides  
Palm Oil Kernel  
Palmate  
Palmitate  
Anything with Palmitate at the end

#### **LIKELY TO BE PALM OIL DERIVATIVES:**

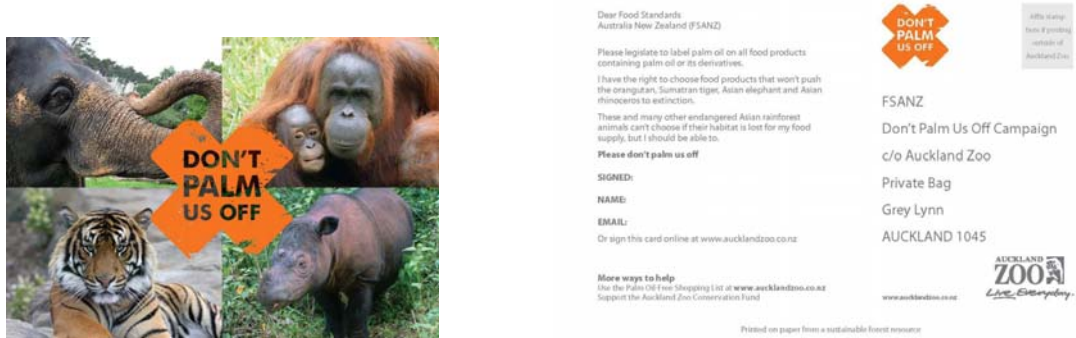
Cetearyl Alcohol  
Emulsifier 422, 430-36, 470-8, 481-483, 493-5  
Glyceryl Stearate  
Sodium Dodecyl Sulphate (SDS or NaDS)  
Sodium Isostearoyl Lactylate  
Sodium Laureth Sulphate  
Sodium Lauryl Sulphates  
Steareth – 2 & Steareth – 20

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<sup>9</sup> Part 1, 2A Object of Act (c), *Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act 1991*.

Since Auckland Zoo began its palm oil awareness campaign (including the *Don't Palm Us Off* petition) in November 2009:

- Over 12,000 New Zealanders have signed our petition, online or via postcard, stating they support the mandatory labelling of palm oil and its derivatives on all relevant food products;



Online campaign information available at [www.aucklandzoo.co.nz](http://www.aucklandzoo.co.nz)

- 4,988 (to date) have joined our *Don't Palm Us Off* supporters' group on Face book <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=99560141028>

## Recommendations

In light of this public support, Auckland Zoo recommends that the Committee support the Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling Laws – Palm Oil) Bill 2009.

## Contact

Auckland Zoo would be happy to appear to give evidence before a Senate Committee hearing in Canberra in relation to this submission. Please contact:

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Yours sincerely,

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Auckland Zoo