



**Submission from the Dietitians Association of Australia on the  
Inquiry into Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling – Palm Oil) Bill 2009**

**April 2010**

The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) is pleased to provide the Community Affairs Legislation Committee with advice on this Inquiry.

DAA notes the issues from Senate webpage

[http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/clac\\_ctte/food\\_standards\\_truth\\_in\\_labelling\\_palm\\_oil\\_09/tor.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/clac_ctte/food_standards_truth_in_labelling_palm_oil_09/tor.htm)

1. The rights of consumers to be provided with accurate and truthful information to enable them to make an informed choice about the food products they are eating and purchasing;
2. That allowing palm oil to be listed as "vegetable oil" on food packaging is misleading to consumers;
3. That palm oil is considered high in saturated fats and consumers should be made aware if it is used in foods they are eating for health reasons;
4. That the impact of palm oil production on wildlife, specifically Orang-utans in South East Asia is significant unless it is done sustainably;
5. That sustainable palm oil can be produced with low impact on the environment and wildlife and with better labour laws on plantations; and
6. That manufacturers should be encouraged to use sustainable palm oil in their production process and can subsequently use the status of "Certified Sustainable Palm Oil" as a business benefit.

With reference to the above points,

Point 1: DAA agrees that Australian consumers should have access to accurate and truthful information to enable them to make informed choices about the food products they purchase and eat. Dietitians often teach consumers how to read and interpret food labels. Clear, accurate labels are needed to aid consumer understanding.

Point 2: Palm oil is a vegetable oil. It is used widely in food manufacture in Australia and is present in numerous imported foods. DAA recognises that palm oil is not always listed on food labels as there is no legal requirement to do so. When used, palm oil may be listed on the label as 'vegetable oil'. Availability of vegetable oils can be variable and the current labelling requirement provides the food industry with some flexibility with oil ingredients for

this reason. Whilst DAA notes there is no legal requirement to list exact ingredients, DAA believes that this does not enable consumers to make informed choices.

Point 3: Palm oil and its fractions (palm olein and palm stearin) are high in saturated fat content (45-60%). The Nutrient Reference Values for Australia and New Zealand (2006)<sup>1</sup> recommend that saturated and trans fats together should be limited to no more than 10% of individual's energy intake in order to reduce chronic disease risk, in particular coronary heart disease. In order to meet this recommendation, foods containing high amounts of saturated fats, such as palm oil, should be limited. Replacing palm oil with mono and polyunsaturated fats is recommended to reduce chronic disease risk and is consistent with NHMRC's Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults<sup>2</sup> and the Heart Foundation's Lipid Position Statement<sup>3</sup>. DAA believes consumers need accurate labels to enable informed choices, including nutrition information to make health based choices.

Point 4: DAA does not have expertise in how to assess whether a palm oil is grown sustainably but agrees in principle with sustainable agricultural practices.

Point 5: DAA feels that there is some risk that if sustainable palm oil is labelled as such that this may confuse consumers into thinking the product is a healthy food.

Point 6: DAA is aware that food labelling law and policy is currently under review by an independent panel overseen by the Department of Health and Ageing. The review's scope includes all of food labelling law and policy including health claims. It would be appropriate to address the Senate Inquiry issues through this review. DAA is participating in the review consultation as an interested stakeholder.

## **References**

1. Department of Health and Ageing, NHMRC, NZ Ministry of Health. 2006. Nutrient Reference Values for Australia and New Zealand. Commonwealth of Australia
2. NHMRC. 2003. Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults. Commonwealth of Australia.
3. National Heart Foundation of Australia. 2009 Position statement: Dietary fats and dietary sterols for cardiovascular health.

## **About DAA**

The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) is the national association of the dietetic profession with over 4100 members, and branches in each state and territory. DAA is a leader in nutrition and advocates for better food, better health, and better living for all.