

## **SUBMISSION: The Truth in Labelling – Palm Oil Bill 2009.**

I support, and my submission supports, the Truth in Labelling - Palm Oil Bill 2009. You have my permission for my submission to be made public.

### **Why Label products that contain Palm Oil?**

Palm Oil is being produced at an unprecedented rate. The ecological impacts of this production extend from the destruction of rainforests and their ecosystems to the unknown consequences of the introduction of the species outside its native locality in such vast quantities. These environmental impacts are the result of consumer demand for products that contain Palm Oil. Currently the majority of consumers are unaware of the environmental impacts of palm oil, let alone whether it is contained in the products that they purchase. The two primary benefits of labelling products that contain palm oil is that it will educate consumers and provided them with a choice. Australia can not prevent the production of palm oil but it can influence the demand for these products. Labelling is the first step that Australia can take to reduce the environmental impacts of palm oil internationally.

### **What is Palm Oil used in?**

The majority of palm kernel oils are used in other products like soaps, detergents, shampoos, surfactants, cosmetics, plastics, herbicides and other industrial and agricultural products.<sup>1</sup> There is also research being done into the possibility of Palm oil as a biofuels.<sup>2</sup> If it is found viable this will have significant environmental impacts that consumers are entitled to be informed about. Palm Oil is economically the cheapest oil product Palm Oil is a cheap element of production because it has the largest and fastest yield of any oil plant. Furthermore the countries that are growing palm oil plants are economically disadvantaged thus reducing production costs and regulation of palm oil industry. It may be suggested that these countries are willing to accept the environmental impacts of palm oil because of the short term economic benefits. As consumers of these products we have a responsibility to curb demand for these products to reduce the environmental impacts. Labelling is the first step to reducing demand for palm oil.

### **Why label Palm Oil in products available on OUR shelves in OUR supermarkets and grocery stores in Australia?**

If we can accurately label products with palm oil it gives consumers a choice. Currently the degradation happening in some of the beautiful and unique parts of the world goes unknown. Consumers like myself WILL choose not to buy products containing oil palm. I would like to see labelling that says “rainforest safe” or “palm oil free” so that I can know that what I have purchased does not impact on the rainforests which are so important to our world. Labelling is a mechanism for education. By labelling products that contain palm oil, consumers like myself are given the chance to take action against the products that do contain palm oil. Further it will allow concerned individuals like myself to inform others of the harms of palm oil and provide them with a simple and identifiable way to take action in pursuit of global environmental preservation. Often I have had friends say – “so which products can I buy that do not contain palm oil”, with the labelling I can educate them and we will be able to easily identify the products which suit our needs. At the moment I find myself spending endless hours roaming the shops trying to work out which shampoo, dish liquids, clothes washing detergents, toothpastes and foods contains palm oil or palm oil derivatives. It is impossible. As a consumer I am entitled to know what I am purchasing so that I can make informed decisions.

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1. *The Impacts and Opportunities of Oil Palm in South East Asia’ paper – CIFOR Centre for International Forestry Research*

2. Prateepchaikul G., and Teerawat Apichato, Associate Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Songkla 90112, Thailand. [http://journeytoforever.org/biodiesel\\_SVO-palm.html](http://journeytoforever.org/biodiesel_SVO-palm.html)

### **Environmental Impacts of Palm Oil**

The Oil Palm Tree is native to Central and West Africa. In 2006 43 countries were involved in palm oil cultivation. Of those 43 countries Indonesia and Malaysia are the 2 top producers of palm oil. The economic benefits of palm oil are creating an incentive for the nations of the South East Asia and the Pacific to introduce the plant on a vast scale which is resulting in deforestation and its associated carbon emissions, the destruction of ecosystems and unpredictable future impacts on these nations. In Indonesia 16.4 million tonnes of oil palm fruit was grown over 6.2 million hectares of former lowland rainforest in 2006 (Indonesian Ministry of Agriculture). An average of 350,000

hectares was used to plant oil palms between 2000–2006. This makes Indonesia the leader in palm oil production. In Malaysia 15.8 million tonnes of oil palm fruit was grown over 4.3 million hectares of former rainforest in 2007, making Malaysia the 2nd biggest producer in palm oil. Combined, Indonesia and Malaysia account for 90% of 36 million tonnes of crude palm oil produced globally per annum.

The Oil Palm tree grows up to an average of 20m (65ft) by 25 years, is fast growing and is ready for 1<sup>st</sup> harvest in 3 years. It produces the best yields between 9-15 years and is too tall for yielding from 25-30 years so is cut down and replaced. There is insufficient data on how many replacements the soil can sustain, and how long the land can viably produce palm oil. After the virgin rainforest is cleared for oil palm plantation and the nutrients from the soil are exhausted by palm oil production the rainforests are gone and the land will lay fallow. Not only will the land not be available for other forms of production but the environment will not be provided with the ecosystem services and their economic benefits. The production of palm oil will have long term environmental and economic impacts that can not be justified by the short term economic gains. Previously the slash and burn method was used to clear otherwise thriving rainforests in a bid to make land clearing cheaper. In some of these cases fires would deliberately or accidentally get out of control. Since 1995 this method has been officially made illegal, with high penalties in place. But nobody takes any notice. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has investigated the cases of 176 plantation and forestry enterprises - 133 of them were oil plantation companies, because of fire related issues, of which 5 have been convicted.

When felling rainforests palm oil companies get the additional benefits selling the timber on to gain further profits. This happens despite the fact that there are millions of hectares of degraded land available that could be used for oil plantations. Deforestation is rife in Indonesia with 1.87million hectares being cleared annually. Cleared rainforest land is susceptible to long, slow burns releasing huge amounts of carbon into the air. 15% of all global carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels come from this rainforest destruction. The problem does not stop there. When the ground has been cleared and the seeds are sown the earth emits a dangerous combination of greenhouse gases. The rainforests have been harbouring swampy soils rich in methane gases, which are ideal living conditions for the forests macro and micro environments. Rainforests in Indonesia are unique in this way and so are home to numerous flora and fauna that are completely unique and highly specialised to this way of life. We must curb these short term economic incentives that in the long term will be economically and environmentally damaging.

## **Conclusion**

Palm Oil is unsustainable environmentally and economically. The only way consumers can have their concerns heard about production is by choosing not to purchase these products. Consumers can not take this action if they are not aware of the content of the products they purchase. Australia should be labelling products that contain palm oil to curb demand for palm oil products as a responsible member of the Asia Pacific and Global community.

## **Tara Davies**

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*3 'The Impacts and Opportunities of Oil Palm in South East Asia' paper – CIFOR Centre for International Forestry Research*

*4 "Thinkers of the Jungle-The Orangutan Report" by Gerd Schuster, Willie Smits and Jay Ullal*

*5 extracts from [www.palmoilaction.org.au](http://www.palmoilaction.org.au)*

*Please, let's label palm oil – so we can choose to help our neighbours.*