

I wish to make a submission on the Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling – Palm Oil) Bill 2009.

I am an Australian citizen and I have a personal interest in this amendment.

I wish to make it known that I support this amendment to make the labelling of palm oil products mandatory. I believe that this amendment will be of benefit to Australia in a number of ways.

(1) It will protect the rights of consumers and allow them to make informed choices about the products they buy, by forcing food manufacturers to end the misleading practice of labelling palm oil as "vegetable oil". In my opinion this practice is a deliberate attempt to pass off a product which is high in saturated fats as healthier than it actually is. The motives of the food manufacturers is irrelevant, whether it is deliberately deceptive or merely accidentally so, I ask you to bring the practice to a stop. As a consumer, I feel very strongly that my ability to make informed choices is important, and that this amendment will help me do so.

I do not demonize palm oil -- in its natural state, it is extremely rich in beta-carotene and other nutrients, although after processing most of the benefits of palm oil are lost. Nevertheless, consumers expect "vegetable oils" to be such things as safflower or olive oil, not a product which is extremely high in saturated oil and chemically closer to animal fats than they expect.

(2) If the labelling of palm oil leads to consumers rejecting palm oil products in favour of those with healthier oils, then this will be good for Australia by increasing the overall health of the population. Over 3.5 million Australians are affected by heart disease, with millions more at risk, and the practice of labelling palm oil as vegetable oil makes it more difficult for Australians to manage their diet. As a personal anecdote, I am an educated consumer, I am very aware that palm oil is high in saturated fats, and yet I still find myself fooled by food products that disguise the use of palm oil. Food manufacturers wouldn't do this if it didn't work.

(3) Amending the Truth in Labelling Bill will open new opportunities for Australian business to educate the consumer in the horrific environmental damage done by unsustainable palm oil production in South East Asia. The unsustainable clearing of forest and peat bogs to grow palms is not only catastrophic for the general health of the SE Asian ecology, but it risks leading to an accelerated greenhouse effect by releasing carbon currently locked up in peat bogs. Once consumers become more aware of the environmental damage done by palm oil, this will drive demand for sustainable palm oil, which leads to a win-win situation: less environmental damage, and benefit to

business as companies can certify their product to win consumer confidence and loyalty. Handled properly, this will open new opportunities for Australian businesses here in Australia and overseas.

(4) Finally, but certainly not least, I wish to make a personal plea to the Senate to please think of the orangutans in South East Asia. These magnificent animals are our genetic cousins, sharing 97% of our DNA.

They are the third closest living relative to humanity, behind the chimpanzee and bonobo. The world would be a darker, sadder place without orangutans, and the unsustainable production of palm oil increases the pressure on their survival.

One cannot help but look into the eyes of a living orangutan without seeing that they are sentient. I do not mean that they are intelligent as human beings are, but they are self-aware and are at least as intelligent as dogs, and probably more so. Orangutans are one of the elite group of tool-using animals in the wild. For instance:

Orangutans have learned to use leaves to change the tone of their calls:

<http://discovermagazine.com/2010/jan-feb/058>

Using a spear to catch fish:

<http://primatology.net/2008/04/29/orangutan-photographed-using-tool-as-spear-to-fish/>

This is hardly the invention of the space shuttle, but it is the earliest beginnings of tool use and culture. Some millions of years ago, our ancestors were like them, and we can gain insight into our human origins by studying the orangutans. Not only can we learn more about our origins, but giving the orangutans a better chance of survival is the ethical thing to do.

Thank you for the opportunity to give my support to this amendment.

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Steven D'Aprano