

Submission for - Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling – Palm Oil) Bill 2009

I am a conscientious consumer. I try to buy Australian made, I try to support local produce and sustainable practices. I consider myself a conservationist but not an extremist, I try to be an informed consumer. I also happen to be a zookeeper and take matters of animal welfare and preservation very seriously.

I support the above Bill for a number of reasons. As an informed consumer I have made myself aware of the myriad of different names palm oil is branded as, over 30 different names. Some names are obviously palm oil or palm oil derivatives, however a lot more are less identifiable unless you know what you are looking for, such as cocoa butter equivalent (CBE), *Elaeis guineensis*, Sodium Laureth Sulphate, even Vegetable Oil sounds innocent to the average person. An average consumer would not know that the above mentioned names are palm oil. Most consumers would not know that Vegetable Oil is often palm oil.

Because of a recent focus and educational program on the use and production of palm oil a lot more people are becoming concerned about the prevalent use of palm oil in our food products. More people are becoming concerned about the preservation of the world's orangutan population and their imminent extinction if something drastic is not done to protect them. People want to help, they want to protect these amazing animals, however they can't be expected to learn more than 30 different names of palm oil and palm oil derivatives to be able to make a personal choice.

Each day more and more forests are being destroyed for palm oil plantations. In South East Asia alone, the equivalent of 300 football fields are deforested every hour for palm oil production. In some areas there is no regulation, no incentives to do it the right way. It is not generally the fault of locals in Malaysia and Indonesia, these are third world countries and these people are just trying to make a living and survive. Willie Smits, author of 'Thinkers of the jungle' and founder of the Masarang Foundation, which raises money and awareness to restore habitat forests and to empower local people, is a visionary in the way local people and orangutans can live together. He has created a system where locals are given sections of palm oil forest which surrounds natural orangutan habitat, these locals are entrusted with looking after the natural forest and protecting the orangutans that live there, otherwise they run the risk of losing their palm oil plantations and therefore their livelihood. This way locals are able to sell their produce and they have a vested interest in protecting the orangutan and its habitat.

Unregulated palm oil plantations are created in such a destructive manner. Bull dozers are sent in to just indiscriminately tear down the forest. Once this is done, the debris is burnt, this burning can go on for weeks, creating an environmental nightmare. Once the fires are out the palm oil is planted. During this process, orangutans are often killed or injured in the most horrific ways. Imagine being in your home and without warning having a bull dozer tear it down. If they survive the bull dozing, they then have to contend with the fires, many are burnt alive. Some orangutans survive the massacre, but their battle is not over, they now have nowhere to live, no food and are confused and disoriented. Many die of starvation, but others are killed by the makers of the plantations, who wants a pesky orangutan hanging around when there's money to be made. The adults are usually killed with machetes or shot and the babies are usually sold into the pet trade, or left alone scared and traumatised to starve to death.

I realise this account sounds dramatic, but the truth is this is how it's done. Orangutans share 97% of our DNA, they are just like us. They have the intelligence

of a five or six year old child and their babies are reliant on their mothers until they are about seven years old, they feel fear, pain and anxiety. How can we as a civilised country support what is happening to these animals.

If palm oil was labelled as such consumers would be able to make an informed choice when buying goods. I believe with this knowledge, more people will start looking for alternatives to palm oil or buying products that use sustainable palm oil. This will inevitably result in less illegal palm oil production, because the demand is less. Which will in turn take some pressure off the diminishing orangutan population.

I know Australia is just one country, but I personally would like to live in a country that takes a stand on these issues. We are already strides above many others with our animal welfare laws and labelling laws and I think this is just another step in the right direction. I want my children to grow up in a country where they are able to make a difference with the choices they make and I want them to grow up in a world that still has orangutans in the wild. There is a long way to go for this to happen, but these standards would go a long way to achieving this.

Thank you for your time, I look forward to a positive result through the passing of this bill.

Emma Martin