

Jo Shepherd

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Re: Inquiry into Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labeling – Palm Oil) Bill 2009

I am writing in support of the proposed Bill, Truth in Labeling – Palm Oil, which calls for the accurate labeling of palm oil in food. As a vegan I am very interested in the welfare and rights of all animals. Since I became aware of the deforestation caused by palm oil production in South East Asia I have scanned the labels of all products to avoid supporting companies who use palm oil. Finding that the majority of labels do not list specific ingredients but use the blanket term “vegetable oils” made this process very frustrating. I then had to avoid purchasing any product which did not disclose the type of vegetable oils used.

Even though I believe that the general public are aware of and empathise with the plight of Orang-utans (and countless other animals) who have already lost 90% of their habitat to the palm oil industry (<http://www.zoo.org.au/PalmOil/facts>), currently it is too difficult to avoid purchasing products which contain palm oil. If product information standards are amended to disclose all ingredients, in this case palm oil, consumers can make a choice to boycott that product on ethical grounds. This will put pressure on manufacturers to use sustainable palm oil in their production process and can subsequently use the status of "Certified Sustainable Palm Oil" as a business benefit.

Truthful and accurate labeling of food also equips consumers with the information they need to make informed choices for health reasons. I take medication to lower my cholesterol and avoid saturated fats in my diet. As palm oil is high in saturated fats I believe I have the right to know if it is included in the ingredients of food products so I can avoid it.

For whatever reasons, whether they are ethical or related to health, consumers deserve the right to accurate and truthful information on all food products. In the case of palm oil its continued use from unsustainable sources in South East Asia will be an environmental disaster. Armed with accurate food labeling consumer pressure will encourage manufacturers to use sustainably produced palm oil.