

Dear Mr Thomson

I have previously made submissions regarding this Bill and wish to reiterate my strong support for it via the following points:

1. It is without question that the conversion of tropical forests, particularly lowland forests in south-east Asia, to palm oil plantations is the single greatest threat to the survival of the Orang-utan in the wild. Many other species are also threatened of course, but the Orang-utan is being pushed to the edge of extinction in the wild by the loss of these forests for palm oil.
2. The statements by the Malaysian Palm Oil Council that something approaching 50% of Malaysia is covered by forest, and protected as such (including by the large oil palm companies), is grossly and dangerously misleading. Their definition of "a forest" would appear to include any patch of trees, regardless of their type, origin or purpose. The extent of native forest, by globally accepted definitions, is far less than their suggestion of 50%. The Council's statements on this point appear not to have been seriously challenged, which is also very disturbing.
3. The recent statements by the Malaysian Forestry Minister regarding loss of livelihoods by small farmers if manufacturing companies are required to list palm oil on those products containing this ingredient, are similarly highly misleading. Repeated independent assessments and reports show that small farmers in Malaysia and Indonesia, including those growing oil palms, are regularly forced off their land by the large multi-national companies producing palm oil. Moreover, very little long-term benefits accrue to small land-holders from conversion to oil palms. Such actions appear to be often linked to allegations of corruption involving government officials in those countries, suggesting that the real cost of producing palm oil is neither captured nor openly reported.
4. The statements by some of the larger companies importing and distributing products containing palm oil in Australia, that making palm oil labelling mandatory will impact their financial bottom line, need also to be thoroughly challenged. If a company such as Woolworths can make the product change to either palm oil-free, or sustainably produced palm oil, which is a key goal of this Bill, then why cannot other companies not make the same progressive move?

I urge the Committee most strongly to recommend the tabling and passing of this Bill in the House of Representatives.

Yours sincerely

Mr Chris Banks