



Statement

by

The Australian Institute of Horticulture Inc (AIH)

**INQUIRY INTO THE FOOD STANDARDS AMENDMENT
(TRUTH IN LABELLING – PALM OIL) BILL 2011**

by

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AIH Background

The Australian Institute of Horticulture Inc has been representing and developing the interests of professional horticulturists in Australia and more recently in Singapore since its inception in 1960.

The Institute membership has represented over 1000 individual practitioners from the production and amenity horticulture sectors.

The AIH Mission Statement specifically notes the ‘promotion of excellence and environmental responsibility in horticulture practice through quality professional development, services and advocacy’

The AIH does not have any members producing Palm Oil and does not cover the interests of vegetable oil producers in Australia as an agricultural crop.

AIH Environmental View of Palm Oil Production

We agree with the comment that large tracts of land (rainforest specifically) are being cleared to grow crops of *Elaeis guineensis* with the result of unsustainable practices which are at some stage destined to become failures for a number of reasons, specifically the role of rainforests to generate and influence weather patterns over a large area –ie., rainfall.

Further, we understand the sentiment of the loss of natural habitat of Orangutangs in the process of clearing large tracts of land for Oil Palm cropping in Asia.

In addition, little is mentioned in relation to other species (birds, reptiles, etc), vegetation types and ecology and the disintegration of the soil quality which at best is poor and mostly as we understand has very little depth or profile above clay pans or growing on peat soils.

AIH View as to Truth In Labelling Food and Other Products with Palm Oil Content

We believe that unrefined Palm Oil is its most beneficial state. We note also the virtues of Palm Oil for its number of culinary uses (its odourlessness and stability) and its growing use as a bio-fuel.

We suggest that it is unrealistic to expect these qualities to translate in the same form after processing which then contain high levels of fatty acids which are seldom known by purchasers of food products. The identification of the existence of Palm Oil listed as vegetable oil is a mystery as to its origins, but clearly, is used to present a wholesome existence of an edible oil.

The existence of Palm Oil listed as vegetable oil is a case of semantics in some cases, and in others can be seen as a 'cover up' to disguise what most consumers would believe to be a beneficial edible oil content, that had the many virtues of low or unsaturated fatty acids. This is partially true and partially false it would seem.

We understand that the saturated fatty acids of unprocessed palm oil are in balance with the unsaturated fatty acids in a pre-processing condition and have beneficial characteristics that provide high levels of some Vitamins.

The Horticulture of Palm Oil Growing

We believe that growing *Elaeis guineensis* palm for oil recovery is more productive than that of sunflower, canola and soybean over similar production areas. This accounts for the adaptability of Palm Oil as an excellent and abundant food ingredient, bio fuel and as a cosmetic component.

Vegetable oils such as canola and sunflower are considered intensive cropping and in many cases require valuable quantities of irrigation water, regular chemical and in some cases organic fertilisers which percolates to aquifers and run off to waterways. These vegetable oil plants also require regular work with machinery that devalues the soil profile and its composition, whereas Oil Palm plantations have negligible inter row disturbance apart from basic vegetation clearing and harvest activities.

It could also be said that large tracts of land have been cleared at some time to allow for the production of sunflower, canola and other seeds for oil recovery.

Palm Oil production does not usually require artificial irrigation and depends on rainfall for growth and water needs. Further, the use of chemicals and their costs as fertilisers in the countries of their production precludes and avoids other issues to do with major run off and other environmental problems.

In Summary

The AIH

- Suggests that labelling of food items that contain Palm oil be identified as Palm Oil not Vegetable oil.
- That the Palm Oil composition and nutrition facts are included on the label.
- That we support the discussion to grow sustainable crops of *Elaeis guineensis* and consider the large areas of abandoned land around the world that could grow viable and sustainable Palm Oil.
- Suggests the investigation and viability of revisiting sustainable palm oil production in the Australian tropics on previously cleared land and to be seen as an import replacement crop for some of the 130,000 tonnes of imported Palm oil at present.
- That urgent dialogue be establish if not already between appropriate parties to accommodate the diminishing orangutang, other flora, fauna and environment in the destruction of rainforests for the growing of Oil Palms.



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