

The Hon Nicola Roxon  
Minister for Health and Ageing  
Suite MG 50  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Roxon,

I am writing to express my concern about the use of palm oil because of the serious environmental consequences associated with new palm oil plantations in Indonesia and Malaysia. Primary rainforest is being cleared in these countries, destroying the habitat of highly endangered species, especially orangutans.

Orangutans are losing their habitat to make room for oil palm plantations, and these highly intelligent creatures, which share 97% of their DNA with humans, are now expected to be extinct by 2015. I do not want to be part of the cause of the demise of this species, and so choose not to consume products that I know to contain palm oil.

Additionally, much of the forest grows on peat swamps, which when burnt release large amounts carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Indonesia is the world's third largest carbon emitter because of these fires. Papua New Guinea ecosystems and communities are also threatened by oil palm plantation development.

I would also draw your attention to the Heart Foundation's concerns about the health consequences of palm oil which is high in saturated fat.

My biggest concern, however, is that often I do not know if I am consuming palm oil because it may be labelled only as vegetable oil. Regulatory Objectives of the Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) state that regulations must provide for

(a) the protection of public health and safety; and

(b) the provision of adequate information relating to food to enable consumers to make informed choices;

and that, in developing food regulatory measures and variations of food regulatory measures, FSANZ must also have regard to the following:

- The promotion of fair trading in food

Currently, with regard to palm oil, I feel these objectives are not being met. I believe palm oil should be labelled as such because, in direct relation to the above points:

- It is high in saturated fat, therefore I want to know if I am consuming it, thereby protecting my own health and safety.
- I am not able to make an informed choice about consuming a product containing palm oil if it is only labelled as vegetable oil - therefore the information on the label is inadequate
- Social advocacy groups in Indonesia report that human rights abuses are being perpetrated by oil palm plantation developers, and palm oil processing mills are highly polluting, damaging ecosystems and the wellbeing of people who live in the area. The fair trading of this commodity starts with landowners; therefore, by not requiring palm oil labelling FSANZ robs consumers of the choice to avoid a substance which is not 'fair trade', and fails to meet its own objectives.

Please urgently address the issue of palm oil labelling. I would appreciate an explanation as to why FSANZ is not meeting its own objectives in the above cases.

Yours sincerely,