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All You Need to Know: More Info About Palm Oil



What is palm oil?

Palm oil is a derivative of the Oil Palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) that originates in the tropics of western Africa. The oil is extracted from the fruit and kernel, and has been used for medicine and as a source of food for 5000 years.

Throughout the 18th century traders introduced the plant to the tropical regions of South-east Asia, where the plantations supplied the burgeoning demand for oil resulting from the industrial revolution, when it was used as a lubricant in steam engines and in soap production.

The Oil Palm produces two distinct oils from its fruit. The oil used in the production of foodstuffs is derived from the flesh of the fruit. This is used in cooking oils; shortening; margarines; as a milk fat replacement and in cocoa butter substitutes. The other oil, derived from the kernel, is mainly used to make soaps, detergents, toiletries and cosmetics.



Palm oil can be found in one in four food products in Australia, from margarine to chocolate biscuits, and chips to crackers.

What is the difference between 'sustainable' and 'unsustainable' palm oil?

Unsustainable palm oil production:

- ✗ Clears tropical rainforest displacing animal species and traditional land users
- ✗ Results in mono-culture plantations that significantly reduce biodiversity
- ✗ Takes advantage of workers, small-scale suppliers and local communities.

Sustainable palm oil production:

- ✔ Provides for and conserves natural resources
- ✔ Develops new plantations on existing cleared land
- ✔ Fairly deals with workers, small-scale suppliers and local communities

Palm oil is much cheaper than other comparable oils and it's naturally occurring, so what's the problem with using it?

There is no doubt that palm oil is a "good" oil in many respects. The main problem lies with farming practices.

Within the last two decades palm oil production has increased enormously with most of the oil exported into international markets. This has provided income and sustenance for developing communities in Indonesia and Malaysia. But it has also resulted in loss of habitat for many threatened species including the Sumatran Tiger, Orang-utan, Asian Elephant and Asian rhinoceros species as well as displacement of some indigenous peoples.

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Palm oil is one of the least expensive oils to produce. It is a high yielding crop - palms crop for several years and both the kernel and the seed of the plant produce oil. Unfortunately its cost effectiveness is paid for by many, many species of animal – some critically endangered.

Planting Oil Palms to harvest palm oil is a way of staving off starvation for some people in Asia - why are you against it?

We want industry to move towards sustainability. It is best for human communities and best for animals and their habitats.

We do not advocate the banning of palm oil. We just want to get palm oil labelled on food products, as a first step, then gradually consumer pressure will demand sustainable sources – just as the Rainforest Alliance had delivered fair trade coffee and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certifies sustainably-sourced timber for paper, furniture and building.

Why is the Zoo involving itself in this debate?

The Zoos are committed to wildlife conservation. Nearly one quarter of the world's mammals, nearly one third of amphibians and more than 1 in 8 of all bird species are at risk of extinction. At our Zoos we see 1.5 million people every year and we aim to inspire them to care for wildlife and take whatever action they can to protect wild habitats.

So what will be the result of the Don't Palm Us Off campaign?

We hope that Food Standards Australia New Zealand will make labelling mandatory for palm oil.

Who are the other stakeholders in this issue?

- The peoples of South-east Asia
- Many multinational food and cosmetic producers
- The Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil
- Palm Oil Action Group Australia
- 21st Century Tiger
- Australian Orang-utan Project

Related links:

> [The Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil](#)

> [Palm Oil Action Group Australia](#)

> [21st Century Tiger](#)

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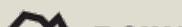
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"Our name comes from an Aboriginal language word Tarong, long thought to mean 'sea view', but it is also a local word for 'shoulder'. We have strong links to our history and both zoos have Aboriginal stories to tell."

> **Taronga Indigenous Heritage.**

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