



WORLD GROWTH

Collateral Damage: How The Bogus Campaign against Palm Oil Harms the Poor

Annex: Rating the Strength of NGO Claims
December 2009

ANNEX: RATING THE STRENGTH OF NGO CLAIMS

Table 4: Percentages and areas of reserved and protected land for Malaysia and Indonesia

NGO	CLAIM	RATING	REALITY
Greenpeace	20% of global greenhouse gas emissions are caused by deforestation ⁶²	Overstatement	<p>Current estimates of rates of deforestation are based on very weak science. In fact, a leading scientist has recently stated that these estimates are over-stated and based on out-of-date data. The calculations of the carbon sinks and sources were based on two types of data: rates of land-use change and per hectare changes in carbon storage that result from changes in land use and land management. The estimates of land clearing rates are based on satellite data which takes broad-level area samples as representative of country-wide land clearing rates.</p> <p>For tropical countries the estimates of deforestation rates have a 50 per cent error margin. Analyses of tropical deforestation find rates that are between 23 per cent and 54 per cent lower than the rates that have been reported from the satellite images.⁶³</p>
Greenpeace	A UNEP Report recognized that palm oil plantations are the leading cause of rainforest destruction in Malaysia and Indonesia. ⁶⁴	Misleading	<p>The report <i>The Last Stand of the Orang-utan</i> was written by as a 'Rapid Response Assessment' which appears to have very little, if any, scientific backing for the claim. In actual fact, the statement referred to was '<i>the rapid increase in plantation acreage is one of the greatest threats to Orang-utans and the forests on which they depend. In Malaysia and Indonesia, it is now the primary cause of permanent rainforest loss</i>'. Whether this statement refers to oil palm plantation or the total expansion of agriculture is unclear. There are certainly no statistics given to back this claim. This is throwaway line in a report which was researched out of Norway – not a scientific study.</p> <p>Actual data has been given in research for the Stern Review which found that only 20–30 per cent of forest clearing occurs because of oil palm plantations. Similarly, the FAO has found that while forest cover fell by 13.1 million hectares between 2000 and 2005, land used for building and infrastructure increased by 9.4 million hectares in the same period.</p>
Friends of the Earth	Palm oil plantations are responsible for decimating the Orang-utan population ⁶⁵	Overstatement	<p>There are a number of threats to Orang-utan populations which are causing a greater impact than palm oil plantations. These threats differ between areas or provinces. These impacts include hunting and poaching, mining and poor government regulation. Given that oil palm is not even a primary driver of land conversion, it is an overstatement to claim that palm oil is decimating Orang-utan populations and that ceasing to purchase palm oil will save the Orang-utan.</p>

62. Greenpeace, Indonesia's Rainforests and the Climate Crisis, October 2009

63. Achard, F, Eva, HD, Stibig, H-J, Mayaux, P, Gallego, J, Richards, T, and Malingreau, J-P, (2002); and DeFries, RS, Houghton, RA, Hansen, MC, Field, CB, Skole, D, and Townshend, J, (2002).

64. Greenpeace, Cooking the Climate, November 2007

65. Friends of the Earth, The Oil for Ape Scandal, 2005

Table 4: Percentages and areas of reserved and protected land for Malaysia and Indonesia (con't)

NGO	CLAIM	RATING	REALITY
Nature Alert	The Palm Oil industry is 'arguably the most environmentally destructive industry in the world'. ⁶⁶	Dogmatism	Statements such as these are a good indication of the weakness of the case made against palm oil. To contend "arguably" it is one of the most environmentally destructive industries in the world reflects a dogmatic assessment. No evidence is presented to support this sweeping conclusion. The evidence suggests the reverse. Palm oil biodiesel has been proven to be significantly more efficient at reducing GHG emissions than other biofuels, has an extremely high yield and is a renewable source of energy.
Friends of the Earth	Indigenous tribes are being forced off their ancestral land to make way for oil palm plantations. ⁶⁷	Overstatement	The issue of indigenous rights and benefits is a fraught one. As countries develop there is inevitable friction between competing interests. This is particularly the case in developing countries where property rights are generally poorly defined. This is a fairly rare occurrence in relation to palm oil however. The reason is that oil palm is such a productive plantation and has the capacity to return enough income to provide a living for small land owners who want to plant oil palm. Conflicts with traditional forest people such as the Penan have been used to cast the palm oil industry in a light that is not accurate or representative.
Nature Alert	Some 20 years from now, oil palm plantations mean that there could be little or no forest cover left in Malaysia and Indonesia. ⁶⁸	Contrary to Established Facts	Malaysia has over 55 per cent of its land under forest. It pledged at the Rio Earth Summit to retain at least 50 per cent of its land as permanent forest. It has set an upper limit on agricultural land of 23 per cent, which has now been reached. This means that no more primary forest will be cleared for agriculture. Indonesia has 60 per cent of the total land area designated as forest – although some of that is production forest, not permanent forest. Both nations have recognized the need to retain forest cover and have made commitments to that end.
Friends of the Earth	Rapid plantation development is leaving indigenous communities impoverished and indebted. ⁶⁹	Overstatement	The impact on indigenous communities is exaggerated and disregards the contribution to local economic development of introduction of plantations. The Indonesian Government and Palm Oil Commission (IPOC) that help develop and support smallholders in growing oil palm plantations. Under a Plasma Scheme, the developer is committed to purchase fresh fruit bunches (FFB) from the local small landholders at formula prices set by the government less the costs incurred by the developer in processing and selling the FFB. IPOC also collaborates with local banks to facilitate cheap loans for smallholders to replant oil palm plantations and ease the debt burden.

66. Sean Whyte, Nature Alert, 11 November, 2009

67. Friends of the Earth, Malaysian palm oil – green gold or green wash? A commentary on the sustainability claims of Malaysia's palm oil lobby, with a special focus on the state of Sarawak, October 2008.

68. Sean Whyte, Nature Alert, 11 November 2009.

69. Friends of the Earth, Losing Ground, February 2008.

NGO	CLAIM	RATING	REALITY
Friends of the Earth	Oil palm plantations lead to methane emissions from peat fires	Unsubstantiated	The level of current research on the impacts and cause of peat fires do not warrant sweeping assertions such as this. Estimates of carbon equivalent emissions from peat show huge variations and margins of error. It is impossible to generalize about methane emissions from peat fires. Similarly, it is virtually impossible to isolate the source of peat fires to one cause. Fire events such as the 1997 Indonesian fires were caused by a combination of political upheaval, an abnormal El Niño weather period and population pressure. Scientists who have attempted to quantify the emissions from peat fires state that the causes are largely unknown.
Friends of the Earth (Australia)	When palm oil is used in food, it has such a high saturated fat content that even the Australian Heart Foundation recommends it should be avoided. ⁷⁰	Unwarranted Health Alarmism	While palm oil is high in saturated fats, it has no trans fat and is high in vitamin E. The American Heart Association has consistently cited trans fat as more harmful to the health than saturated fats. ⁷¹ The negative health effects of trans fat has lead to many national and sub-national governments imposing bans or restrictions on the use and sale of goods containing trans fat. ⁷² As the CEO of the Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation has been quoted as stating 'trans fats are not a choice. They are a killer.' ⁷³

70. <http://www.foe.org.au/campaigns/corporates/activities-and-projects/project-1>

71. <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4582>

72. These include New York City's Health Board, Denmark, Switzerland and some Canadian provinces.

73. <http://www.cbc.ca/health/story/2008/07/21/f-transfats.html>