Palm Oil in Food
Policy Position Statement

Key messages: Australian, New Zealand, and work health and nutrition bodies recommend limiting our intakes of saturated fat. Palm oil contains a high proportion of such fat.

One of the key impacts in countries and regions where palm oil is produced is deforestation. The impacts of deforestation include greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming and biodiversity loss.

Recommendation 12 of the Australian Government’s 2011 Review of Food Labelling Law and Policy called for the naming of individual sources of oils added to foods so that consumers are able to make informed food purchase decisions specifically relating to palm oil.

Key policy positions: 1. All individual oil sources on food labels should be declared, including the country of origin, to assist consumers in making food choices in keeping with the Dietary Guidelines.

2. Transparent labelling of palm oil will provide further impetus to develop the sustainable palm oil industry as consumers demand, and will have benefits for reducing the negative environmental, social and economic impacts of palm oil production, which is essential for population health.

Audience: Federal, State and Territory Governments, policymakers and program managers, PHAA members, media.

Responsibility: PHAA Food and Nutrition Special Interest Group

Date adopted: 18 September 2019

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PHAA affirms the following principles:

1. Recommendation 12 of the Labelling Logic Review of Food Labelling Law and Policy advocates the naming of individual sources of oils added to foods so that consumers are able to make informed food purchase decisions.¹

2. The use of palm oil has negative consequences – both health and environmental.

PHAA notes the following evidence:

3. Palm oil is produced predominately in Malaysia and Indonesia.²

4. Worldwide palm oil production has almost doubled over the past 10 years³ and demand is expected to continue to rise.⁴

5. Palm oil is used in a number of food products, since it has a number of favourable properties including:⁵
   a. Low price compared to other vegetable oils
   b. No trans-fat content
   c. Resistance to oxidation improving shelf life

6. However, palm oil contains a high proportion of saturated fat.⁶

7. The Dietary Guidelines for Australians recommend that we limit our intakes of saturated fat.⁷ This echoes advice provided in the New Zealand Eating and Activity Guidelines for Adults,⁸ Dietary Guidelines for Americans,⁹ World Health Organization¹⁰ and the Heart Foundation.¹¹

8. These recommendations are based on reviews that find good evidence of an association between fat intake and an increased risk of cardiovascular disease.

9. There have been a number of studies specifically investigating the role of palm oil in cardiovascular disease risk but few have been of a high quality and many have been conducted or funded by the palm oil industry.¹²

10. The most recently published, independent study relating to palm oil effects had equivocal results showing both unfavourable and favourable changes in terms of coronary heart disease or cardiovascular disease biomarkers.¹³ The authors concluded that further research was needed to provide policy guidance and in the meantime, dietary advice to limit saturated fats is still appropriate. This requires that consumers are well informed of the source of vegetable oils in foods.

11. Deforestation is one of the key impacts in palm oil producing countries and regions, the effects of which include greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming and biodiversity loss.
including the decline of the orangutan population.\textsuperscript{2} Global warming and its many ecological consequences threaten population health.\textsuperscript{14}

12. There is also a range of economic and social benefits and harms that accompany palm oil production and much effort has been devoted to encouraging a sustainable palm oil industry.\textsuperscript{3, 15} Considerable work is being conducted to ensure sustainable production of palm oil\textsuperscript{16} with a view to protecting the health of diverse local, regional and global ecosystems, as well as that of individuals and communities dependent upon those ecosystems.

13. Implementing this policy would contribute towards the achievement of \textit{UN Sustainable Development Goals 3 – Good Health and Wellbeing} and \textit{15 – Life in Land}.

PHAA seeks the following actions:

14. All individual oil sources on food labels should be declared, including the country of origin, to assist consumers in making food choices in keeping with the Dietary Guidelines.

15. Transparent labelling of palm oil products will provide further impetus to develop the sustainable palm oil industry as consumers demand, and will have benefits for reducing the negative environmental, social and economic impacts of palm oil production, which in turn is essential for population health.

PHAA resolves to:

16. Advocate for the above steps to be taken based on the principles in this position statement.

\textit{ADOPTED September 2019}

\textit{(First adopted 2016)}
References


