



DISCUSSION MEETING

BIODIVERSITY AND OIL PALM: INTEGRATING SCIENCE AND POLICY

Tuesday, 8 April 2008

The Meeting Rooms, The Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RY

Chair: Tony Whitten, Senior Biodiversity Specialist at the World Bank

How does oil palm affect biodiversity?

Ben Phalan, Conservation Science Group, Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge

Palm oil production is increasing by around 9% every year globally. Most oil palm is grown in Indonesia and Malaysia, although it is also found across the humid tropics, in the same climatic zone as tropical rainforests. These forests are the most biodiverse terrestrial habitats, but they are being cleared at an alarming rate. I will briefly review the evidence that oil palm is a major cause of deforestation, and assess its potential to cause future forest loss. I will summarise what is known about the biodiversity impacts of converting forest to oil palm plantations, and of pollution from palm oil production. Only if future oil palm expansion is managed so as to avoid deforestation will substantial impacts on biodiversity be avoided, so I will end with some suggestions for the way forward.

Further reading:

Buchanan, G.M., Butchart, S.H., Dutson, G., Pilgrim, J.D., Steininger, M.K., Bishop, D.K. & Mayaux, P. (2008) Using remote sensing to inform conservation status assessment: estimates of recent deforestation rates on New Britain and the impacts upon endemic birds. *Biological Conservation* **141**: 56-66.

Fargione, J., Hill, J., Tilman, D., Polasky, S. & Hawthorne, P. (2008) Land Clearing and the Biofuel Carbon Debt. *Science* **319**: 1235-1238.

Venter, O. Meijaard, E. & Wilson, K. (2008) Strategies and alliances needed to protect forest from palm-oil industry. *Nature* **451**: 16.

Oil Palm: prodigious potential, but many challenges

Bryan Dyer, Managing Director Operations, London Sumatra Indonesia

Biodiversity conservation and oil palm – room for compatibility?

Dr Tom Maddox, Zoological Society of London

In previous presentations we have learned of the importance of biodiversity and its role in ecosystem functionality, and we have learned of the importance of palm oil in feeding a rising global demand for nutrition and fuel and forming an important component of developing economies. But we have also learned of the conflict between the two, with oil palm growing best in the world's top biodiversity regions using methods generally incompatible with biodiversity maintenance whilst biodiversity concerns often inhibit production despite clear information on impacts and solutions. Oil palm is here to stay, despite the wishes of some conservationists, whilst environmental issues cannot be ignored, despite the wishes of some industrialists. Solving the conflicts therefore requires collaboration and compromise. In this presentation we outline our vision of the way forward, focussing on a facts-driven approach to minimise environmental damage caused by palm oil cultivation through new plantings and existing holdings within the framework of the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) together with practical examples from South East Asia. However, we also highlight the difference between minimising and eradicating environmental impacts and introduce biodiversity offsets as possibly the only viable option for achieving the latter.