

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS
Green Party

for the South East of England

Commissioner Dimas
DG Environment
The European Commission
B1049 Brussels
Belgium

January 19th 2006

Dear Commissioner,

You may be aware of the being expressed in relation to the impact of palm oil plantations on habitats across the world. At particular risk are rainforests in countries that include Indonesia and Malaysia and which are home to species threatened with extinction, including the orang-utan and the Sumatran tiger. A recent report by the British NGO Friends of the Earth shows that palm oil imports to the EU have increased by 92% since 1995. Palm oil is used extensively in foods (approx 1 in 10 supermarket products contain the oil), cosmetic products and increasingly as a biofuel.

Given the huge EU market for palm oil, and the enormous environmental damage being caused by the growth of the industry, I am hoping that some measures can be put in place at EU level to tackle what is a rapidly growing problem. In particular, I would like to ask that vegetable oils be incorporated into the Commission's work around greening public procurement and the Integrated Product Policy Initiative. Ultimately, of course, I would like to see the Commission developing binding legislation that makes corporations responsible for the environmental and social damage they cause, and for the EU to only sell products that have been produced responsibly.

It has also come to my attention that normal EU import tariffs are not applied to palm oil from some countries because of the Generalised System of Preferences. Given that the impacts of some large-scale palm oil plantations are contrary to the Commission's strategy on Sustainable Development, I would like to request that DG Environment work with DG Trade to look into whether or not these exemptions are still appropriate. To be entirely clear, I am not advocating a move that would damage any genuine development work in these countries, and would recommend that EU policy distinguishes between small scale, locally owned and managed palm oil production and that happening on an altogether more worrying and unsustainable scale.

I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.

Cc Commissioner Peter Mandelson