

Adviser Report
National Council of Women Queensland Inc.
Consumer Affairs
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Clearing land for palm oil plantations has resulted in mass de-afforestation, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia, where more than 80% of the world's palm oil is produced. This has destroyed habitat of animals (orang-utans, tigers, rhinos and elephants) pushing them in some cases to the brink of extinction. Indigenous people are being displaced, depriving them of their livelihood, culture and way of life. It has also resulted in large volumes of greenhouse gas emissions.

Favoured by the food industry because of its relative low cost, versatility and function, palm oil is in about half of all packaged items in the supermarkets and according to W.W.F. accounting for 65% of all vegetable oil traded internationally. Palm oil is popular with food manufacturers because it maintains its properties under high temperatures – it is stable over long periods of time extending the self-life of foods. Its smooth creamy texture and neutral taste and smell make it a great ingredient for many recipes from margarine and chocolate spreads to baked goods such as biscuits. It is relatively cheap being the highest yielding vegetable oil crop and requiring less land than other crops to produce the same amount of oil. It is also used in personal care items such as lipstick and shampoo.

Choice is calling for mandatory labelling of palm oil. This would help consumers make informed decisions and give companies incentives to source sustainable palm oil and those who already using sustainable to promote this. FRANZ is reviewing the Blewett Review's recommendation for palm oil labelling. If this issue is important to you take action at: www.choice.good.do/palmoil

The Australian Dietary Guidelines identifies palm oil as one of the saturated heavy fats we should replace with predominantly polyunsaturated and mono-saturated fats.

Health professionals have flagged concerns about the effects of "fasting" on medication management as fasting diets become popular for losing weight, "detoxing" and for other perceived health benefits. Concerns cover altered absorption and increased gastrointestinal problems from taking medication on empty stomachs.

Choice has called for the financial regulator to be given more resources to monitor industries proven to be dangerous to consumers e.g. the financial planning industry.

Palcohol, a solid alcohol product that contains more than one and a half standard drinks per packet is due to reach Australian shores by June or July this year. Federal authorities are unable to ban the powdered alcohol with loopholes in the law blocking both the Australian government and the Therapeutic Goods Administration from acting, but the states have the power to regulate it. The Victorian government hopes, other states will join with them in preventing its introduction.

Comparing clothing sizes between different brands could be a thing of the past should retailers and consumers embrace a new sizing tool – the world's first fully automated 3D mapping tool. This was launched in April throughout seven Westfield Centres. It is envisaged every Westfield will have access to the 3D body imaging within twelve months. The 'm Pods' use non-invasive safe infrared technology to track more than 200,000 points in the body to determine a correct sizing of the individual. The company

behind mPort wants to reduce the rate of online returns and frustration over size variations between retail stores.

A World Health Organisation (WHO) report has linked a chemical in household weed killer, Roundup with Cancer. WHO's report concluded that glyphosate, a chemical found in a range of common herbicides is "probably carcinogenic to humans". Glyphosate has been detected in blood and urine of agricultural workers. Monsanto, the company behind Roundup has disputed the evidence.

Consumers are being warned against giving personal information to people claiming to represent the National Broadband Network (NBN).

The Governor of the Reserve Bank, Glenn Stevens has announced that the next generation of Australian banknotes will include a "tactile" feature to assist people with vision impairment.

Glue, gel pads and even a fat-free ingredient for baking are being tested to make the most of the increased blue jelly fish plague. The bladders are being trialled by researchers as an adhesive to paint and as fertiliser, fisherman are harvesting them for export to Asia.

An ABC program – 4 Corners – uncovered a disturbing trend of "slave labour" and exploitation of workers on 417 working holiday visas. Properties in Queensland and South Australia were at the centre of the investigation. Migrants were used and paid below legal wage and working extremely long hours – 22 hours shifts, processing chickens, packaging tomatoes and salad vegetables. These were supplied to Woolworths, Coles, IGA, Aldi, Costco and fast food chains FKC, Red Rooster and Subway.

Food Standards Australia figures show an average of 59 products are recalled each year and two-thirds of them are produced within Australia. Meats and poultry posed the biggest risk of listeria – particularly dangerous for pregnant women and elderly people. Raw egg-based dishes caused salmonella at several catering functions. Frozen berries were linked to this year's highest outbreak when people contracted hepatitis A. These berries were partly processed overseas. The real source of origin of imported frozen foods is not always clear, with many travelling between countries for processing – this was dealt with in more detail in my February report.

ACCC advises that food grown or sourced in Australia bear the "grown in" or "product of Australia". Products with "Made in Australia" may contain ingredients from other countries.

The ACCC has published a message to consumers about "Door-to-Door Energy Sales". The Australian Consumer Law protects your rights as a consumer when Door-to-Door salesperson come to your home. Origin Energy Electricity Ltd and Sales Force Australia Pty Ltd. have been ordered to publish an article listing what a salesperson must disclose and what they must not do, following court action by ACCC. For more information visit: www.accc.gov.au

Named by Time Magazine as one the world's 25 best Inventions for 2014, research by Distinguished Professor James Dale showing bio-fortification of bananas to improve the health of East Africans. Each year some 700,000 children worldwide die from pro-vitamin A deficiency.

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