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**ACTIVITY PLANNER**

## Palm oil agreement could lead to logging moratorium

By Ian Wood  
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The view that the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) is merely a way of making companies appear politically correct without making difference to de-forestation could be about to change if agreement on an important new resolution is reached.

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Until now the RSPO have been unable to implement a monitoring system to enforce the criteria that high value protected forests are not converted to palm oil. One of the reasons for this was a lack of maps showing where these areas of forest actually are.

However there are now comprehensive digital maps for Malaysia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

Under the terms of the new proposal these maps would form the basis for an immediate implementation of a logging moratorium in these regions.

Members of the RSPO include major purchasers of palm oil such as Unilever, Nestle and Cadburys along with a number of NGO's including Greenpeace, WWF and Oxfam. There are also several palm oil producers in active dialogue with the RSPO.

Unilever announced on May 1st that it pledged to switch to fully traceable palm oil by 2015. This was rightly applauded by many parties but will be too late to save some key areas of critical biodiversity.

Palm oil is found in about 1 in 10 products in British supermarkets along with an increasing demand for use as an ingredient in bio-diesel. It is projected that Indonesian palm oil plantations will triple in size by 2020 to 16.5m hectares, an area the size of England and Wales.

advertisement Each year the burning and degradation of Indonesian peat swamp forests releases a staggering 2 billion tons of CO2 into the atmosphere. This accounts for nearly 4 per cent of global emissions from less than 0.1 per cent of the world's land surface.

At the same time as the global need for oil palm rises, there is evidence that the industry is neglecting to invest in yield improvement. The average yield in Malaysia in 2007 was 3.5 tons per hectare and in Indonesia the figure is just 2.8 tons/ha.

However some estates manage to produce up to 7 tons/ha which shows the kind of improvement that is possible.

There is also concern about replanting rates. Palm oil trees have a productive life of about 25 years and in Malaysia the replanting rate has dropped to an alarming 2 per cent. The RSPO are also considering a programme to help the sector achieve both better yields and increase replanting of existing estates.

There are vast areas of deforested land in Indonesia and Malaysia that could in theory be used for the ambitious expansion plans of the palm oil sector.



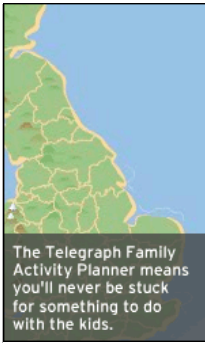
Rainforest logging: Land being cleared between Gua Musang and Limau Kasturi in Kelantan, Malaysia

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Developing these lands does not create huge emissions of greenhouse gases and would relieve the pressure on remaining areas of forest. Sometimes these areas are occupied by farmers so the RSPO is keen to develop a programme to support development whilst meeting the needs of local people as well as central government.

Where companies have a legitimate claim on a concession previously granted by central government they should be granted compensation if they are now forced to give up or move their concession.

There is a possibility that they could be awarded funds through carbon credits under the Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) scheme that is currently under discussion.

Under the terms of this new resolution the RSPO will also start a programme to support the responsible development of suitable land. These would include land swaps where forest concessions could be exchanged for waste land concessions and the establishment of soft loan funds.

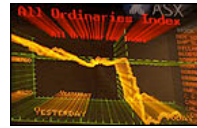
The RSPO will meet in Bali on 18th November to study and then vote on this new resolution. A yes vote would at last give the RSPO some real credibility and be an important tool to help conserve rain forests.

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