

Greenpeace, FOE and the Profitable Business of Environmental & Palm Oil Scaremongering

Contributed by Frank Tate
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Scare-mongering must be a profitable business. How else can we explain the plethora of apocalyptic environmental news that spews forth in the shape of news releases, “reports” and “scientific” papers all calling for “urgent action” before the world meets an impending calamitous end!

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But, global warming preachers have had a shocking 2008 as so many of their predictions this year have gone cold like the early winter storms that have hit the eastern seaboard in the United States.

Here's their problem: they've been scaring us for so long that it's now possible to check if things are turning out as hot as they warned. Unfortunately for the scaremongers, many of their predictions have gone splat!

In April this year, the papers were full of warnings the Arctic ice could all melt.

"We're actually projecting this year that the North Pole may be free of ice for the first time," claimed Dr David Barber, of Manitoba University, ignoring the many earlier times the Pole has been ice free.

"It's hard to see how the system may bounce back (this year)," fretted Dr Ignatius Rigor, of Washington University's polar science centre.

Tim Flannery also warned "this may be the Arctic's first ice-free year", and the ABC and Age got reporter Marian Wilkinson to go stare at the ice and wail: "Here you can see climate change happening before your eyes."

In fact, the Arctic's ice cover this year was almost 10 per cent above last year's great low, and has refrozen rapidly since. Meanwhile, sea ice in the Southern Hemisphere has been increasing. Been told either cool fact?

Yet Barber is again in the news this month, predicting an ice-free Arctic now in six years. Did anyone ask him how he got his last prediction wrong?

And so it is with environmental organizations like the oddly named Friends of the Earth with the most eminently appropriate acronym (FOE) and the equally inappropriately named Greenpeace.

Never one to shrink from shooting themselves in the foot, the FOE issued a “report” called “Malaysian Palm Oil: Green Gold or Green Wash?” (i) in which the FOE makes the tenuous and tortured claim that palm oil is causing massive deforestation and consequently, global warming. Just why the FOE should single out palm oil for these outrageously dishonest attacks is intriguing and baffling, to say the least.

The trouble with the “report” is that palm oil happens to be one of the most productive oilseeds around, yielding more than 4.5 metric tons of edible oil per hectare planted. This incredible yield does not sound remarkable until it is juxtaposed against the typical yield of its competitors, such as soy, sunflower and canola, which typically yields less than 0.5 metric tons per hectare. Logic dictates that such high productivity should mean that palm oil requires far less acreage (close to 10 times LESS land) to produce the same unit of edible oil as its competitors.

This probably explains why Malaysia, despite being the world's largest producer of palm oil for more than a century can still boast forest cover of more than 65%. Read that again. One hundred years of palm oil cultivation by the world's largest producer still leaves 65% forest cover. This might not sound like much, until we compare it against the typical 20% forest cover in the countries of the industrial west from which the “paragons of environmental virtue” such as the FOE hails!

Not to be outdone, Greenpeace quickly joined the parade of the absurd! Donning monkey suits and screeching like the juvenile delinquents that they really are, monkey suited Greenpeacers scaled the walls of Unilever factories throughout Europe, on the grounds that Unilever was a major consumer of palm oil, despite Unilever having helped initiate the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil.

However, what really takes the cake is when FOE issued another “report” called "The Oil for Ape Scandal” (ii) which made the tortured link of the demand for palm oil to the impending extinction of the orang-utan. The report even states that without urgent intervention, the palm oil trade will probably cause the extinction of the orang-

utan within 12 years. They allege that the palm oil industry is the primary cause of the orang-utans' decline, wiping out its rainforest home. FOE encouraged its members to dress in funky orange colored orang utan suits to picket supermarkets such as Tesco that had the temerity to stock cookies, confectionaries and other products containing palm oil. The report acknowledged though that "as a campaign this is obviously an emotive one."

The problem with the "report" is that it fails to contend with the fact that the current orangutan population in the wild in Borneo alone is estimated at between 45,000 and 69,000. Even a casual observer would have deduced that it is just not even remotely possible for the orang utan, by any leap of logic or stretch of imagination, to go extinct within 12 years.

This does not even take into account the many conservation programs and orang utan enclaves established by Malaysia and Indonesia. Orang utan conservation centres had been established in Indonesia including those at Tanjung Puting National Park in Central Kalimantan, Kutai in East Kalimantan, Gunung Palung National Park in West Kalimantan, and Bukit Lawang in the Gunung Leuser National Park on the border of Aceh and North Sumatra. In Malaysia, conservation areas have been set up and they include the Semenggoh Wildlife Centre in Sarawak and Matang Wildlife Centre also in Sarawak, and the Sepilok Orang Utan Sanctuary near Sandakan in Sabah.

Such scaremongering based as they were on faulty premises and leaky notions, instead of cold hard facts, can only eventually result in the destruction of the credibility of Greenpeace and the FOE! In the view of the Palm Oil Truth Foundation, the reasons for Greenpeace and FOE's intransigence towards palm oil is becoming more and more transparent with each ill-conceived campaign. Perhaps this Freudian slip which can be evinced from their statements is most illuminating: "Palm oil is the world's most important category of vegetable oil. In 2007, palm plantations yielded more than 38 million tonnes of oil, making it one of the world's biggest commodity products. In Europe, palm oil is now used as an ingredient in a large variety of consumer products, including margarine, ice cream, chocolate, detergents, soap and biscuits." THE END.

References

- (i) www.foeeurope.org/publications/2008/malaysian-palm-oil-report.pdf
- (ii) http://www.ekfoe.org.uk/Docs_foe/EK%20FoE%201.pdf