



Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil

RSPO Secretariat Sdn Bhd
Company No.: 787510-K
Unit 7-03, Level 7 Menara Amcorp
Persiaran Barat
46000 Petaling Jaya
Selangor, Malaysia

Telephone : +6016-2132052
Fax : +6016-2132053
Email : rspo@rspo.org

RSPO Indonesia Liaison Office (RILO)
Suite 225, Wisma Metropolitan II, 6th Floor
Jalan Jendral Sudirman Kav. 29
Jakarta 12920
Indonesia

Telephone : +62 21 3004 8080
Fax : +62 21 3004 8081
Email : desi@rspo.org

RSPO in an Uproar.....??

We refer to the article in Starbiz, *Rush for GHG Emission Plan Creates Uproar in RSPO (20 Oct 2009)*. While we consider the article long on story and short on facts, we nevertheless welcome the attention it has drawn to the issue of GHG emissions and the resulting climate change.

We are all too familiar with this: – serious floodings, dry spells and even durians all year round. We may not be thinking about it, but the reality is that climate change is here. The palm oil industry, like any other sector, will also have to adapt to this reality and is indeed doing so, with numerous recent projects on GHG, e.g. methane capture from effluent ponds.

The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) is taking this environment-threatening matter on board. This adds to, rather than questions, RSPO's integrity: there has been no proposal for a blanket ban on planting oil palm on peat and no uproar at the meetings.

Free, democratic discussions of issues of concerning stakeholders, a hallmark RSPO process, would naturally elicit heated debate and passionate expression. But should we expect, or indeed want it any other way when it comes to issues of such importance and scale?

RSPO came about because of the demand for palm oil to be sustainably produced. It was set up by a multi-stakeholder group including growers, traders, processors and social and environmental NGOs, both local and international. It is called "Roundtable" because its *raison d'être* was to find the middle ground through the various interest groups for palm oil to be produced responsibly. All are to be able to present their views in discussions and all are to be equal.

In view of the urgency to begin producing sustainable palm oil to mitigate against grievous environment damage, the first act of RSPO was to draft its Principles and Criteria (P&C) for sustainable palm oil. This was produced over 4 years in consultation with all the interest groups including social and environmental NGOs. To apply the P&C locally an all-Malaysian team was formed to produce a National Interpretation for Malaysia in 2008.

The P&C were "completed" in 2007 and the first production units certified in 2008. However, there is no set, scientific definition for "sustainability" and jury still out on many issues, especially on levels and figures (methane, CO2 emissions, pollution, etc). In short, it is over these uncharted waters that RSPO is trying to make progress.

Accordingly, RSPO set up the GHG working group in Bali 2008 at the 5th General Assembly (GA5) to deliberate on the subject and come up with recommendations for incorporation into the P&C.

The recently reported meetings in Jakarta and Sibu, were stakeholder consultations by the RSPO GHG working group. Naturally, in the discussions, there were disagreements/agreements, as is par for any meeting. It was no more than the normal process of getting feedback for the next stage forward. Obviously, it was not smooth sailing, but to expect such from so complicated and contentious an issue would be simply delusional.

After all, are the world trade talks not often mired for decades yet still considered a normal process? Why then, on an equally complicated issue, nothing but smooth sailing is expected of the RSPO.

All members of RSPO, producers or users, will also be asked of their GHG policies and commitments. Some may view the issue as "eastern producers vs western NGOs", "North vs South", but as far as the RSPO is concerned, the world is round and climate change knows no borders. It may be necessary for us make a living, but it is also necessary to ensure the survival of coming generations. At RSPO, we can only do this by looking at the GHG footprint of the entire palm oil world which happens to be both producers and users, rather than picking sides.