

HCV Toolkit for Smallholders: Relevance in a Rapidly Changing Landscape, Tripa, Aceh, Indonesia

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At the RSPO GA3 in 2006 a resolution was adopted endorsing the PanEco Foundation's initiative to: *establish a palm oil estate according to RSPO Principles and Criteria on semi-degraded, unproductive land in Aceh Province, Indonesia*. This programme is on-going and has been supported by various institutions including the BACP, Yves Rocher, Cordaid, and ourselves. A total of 89 ha of oil palm and mixed plantations have been developed by 60 smallholders, at 2 sites on degraded mineral soils near the Tripa peat swamps on the west coast of Aceh. These smallholder plantations have not only followed RSPO P&C, but also organic principles. First harvests are expected next year. During initial planning at the main site, after several surveys and meetings, the smallholders agreed to maintain a small patch of remnant secondary forest (2.4 ha) as a "conservation forest". An initial baseline environmental survey at the end of 2008, and 2 subsequent studies have been conducted, and we report briefly here on the results.

At the RSPO GA5 in 2008 a second PanEco resolution was adopted that requested the RSPO take action to stop the destruction of the Tripa peat swamps, and their population of critically-endangered Sumatran orangutans, by a number of oil palm plantations. Here we present a timeline of deforestation in the swamps from 1990 to October 2012, and evidence of the repeated use of fire and the systematic clearing of deep peatlands (>3m) in contravention of current Indonesian legislation. This on-going destruction of HCV 1 forests in Tripa and the resulting huge GHG emissions, have become the focus of an international environmental campaign that has already led to the cancellation of an illegally-issued plantation permit, and on-going criminal and civil investigations by the Ministry of the Environment and National Police. By contrast the oil palm industry, including the RSPO, and the Indonesian Ministry of Agriculture (the government agency responsible for regulating the industry) have so far been completely silent. We believe that this only reinforces the industry's overall poor current public image, i.e. that the oil

palm industry has only one voice, while its largest producer, Indonesia, consistently fails to implement its own environmental laws and plantation regulations. We believe that a much more active role by the RSPO in condemning such obviously detrimental bad practices, as well documented in the Tripa peat swamps, would greatly enhance the relevance of RSPO certification.

On the other hand, failure to acknowledge and publicly condemn such practices within Indonesia seriously erodes consumer confidence in any certification schemes pertaining to palm oil products originating there. HCV assessments are carried out as a tool towards certification, but if public trust in the certification process itself is weak, HCV assessments themselves can become meaningless. Likewise, whilst we applaud the initiative to incorporate environmental considerations (i.e. HCV assessments) into RSPO smallholder policies we regrettably also have to consider the undeniable fact that the massive scale of environmental destruction by larger companies within the industry effectively renders any attempt to protect forest fragments at the smallholder scale, both irrelevant and inconsequential.

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