

Sustainable certified palm oil scheme failing to achieve goals

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Credit: University of Queensland

There is little evidence that a certification scheme for palm oil plantations is improving protection of critically endangered orangutans in Borneo, researchers say.

A study by The University of Queensland, the ARC Centre of Excellence for Environmental Decisions (CEED) and Borneo Futures found vague targets, concepts and terminology left too much to interpretation.

UQ PhD candidate Courtney Morgans said the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) [certification](#) aimed to protect orangutans and improve living standards for people in the region.

"We found [palm plantations](#) with certification did not excel compared to their non-certified equivalents when it came to protecting the orangutans," Ms Morgans said.

"There also wasn't a clear sign that RSPO was improving levels of wealth or improving access to health infrastructure for villagers neighbouring the plantations.

"The only small benefits were to certified companies which were associated with marginally higher yields".

Ms Morgans said it was difficult to detect the impact of certification.

"Our study was the first study of its kind, creating the most comprehensive map and dataset yet of RSPO certified sites in Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo.



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A recent study showed 100,000 orangutans have been killed this century, although not all were lost because of forest clearing for oil palm development.

The team of researchers say certification is still a valuable opportunity to prevent species loss and increase equity.

"Certification is good in theory and RSPO is the best vehicle currently available to improve the sustainability of the [palm oil](#) industry, but there is significant room for improvement," Ms Morgans said.

"Even between stakeholders there are different interpretations of what 'sustainable' means.

"The RSPO is currently being revised, and it is possible new standards could be in place before the end of the year.

"We need to make sure we use this valuable opportunity to adopt the critical changes needed to improve the sustainability scheme."

The research is published in *Environmental Research Letters*.

More information: Courtney L Morgans et al. Evaluating the effectiveness of palm oil certification in delivering multiple sustainability objectives, *Environmental Research Letters* (2018). [DOI: 10.1088/1748-9326/aac6f4](https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/aac6f4)

Provided by University of Queensland

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