

Ministers: Cabinet approves move to ban products with 'no palm oil', 'palm oil-free' labels

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BY RADZI RAZAK



Primary Industries Minister Teresa Kok speaks during a press conference at Parliament in Kuala Lumpur October 31, 2019. Picture by Firdaus Latif

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 31 — The Cabinet has approved a proposal by the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry to ban products with “no palm oil” or “palm oil free” labels.

The Cabinet decided on the matter on October 18, with Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail saying that the regulation can be in the form of an Act or a ruling and that the plan is to get it done as soon as possible following engagement with stakeholders.

“This proposal was brought to the Cabinet on October 18 and agreed upon by the members.

“This move is also in line with the government’s objective of supporting the palm oil industry via the Sayangi Sawitku (Love My Palm Oil) campaign,” he told reporters during a joint press conference in Parliament today.

Saifuddin said his ministry had conducted checks on 2,609 premises nationwide and found 12 products with labels such as “palm oil free” or “does not contain palm oil”.

He said the enforcement officers had "advised" that the products be taken off the shelf which the vendors complied with.



Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail speaks during a press conference in Parliament October 31, 2019. — Picture by Firdaus Latif

Meanwhile, Primary Industries Minister Teresa Kok said most of the labels were used as a marketing gimmick by European manufacturers to paint a negative picture about palm oil.

She gave an example of a peanut butter brand that carried the label "palm oil free" although palm oil is not a necessary ingredient in peanut butter.

She said such negative and untrue allegations need to stop as it does not benefit Malaysia.

"Why do you need to specify there's no palm oil here?"

"The negative perception and claims are untrue and gives a bad impression of palm oil-based products without being supported by scientific evidence," said Kok.

She also said that Indonesia, the largest palm oil manufacturer in the world, had a similar law in place to protect its palm oil industry, which sees food labelled as "palm oil-free" being banned.