

# Apparel Insider



## Danger Ahead

Storm clouds gather for *GREENWASHING* brands



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# PHYSICAL & DIGITAL

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Brett Mathews

# Editorial

Around a decade ago, brands and retailers began introducing in-store clothing take-back schemes. These allow customers to return old clothing into stores, depositing them in branded containers. In return, customers sometimes receive gift vouchers.

One of the biggest names in the collection space for such schemes is I:CO, short for I:Collect, and the branding they use is 'circular economy in the textile industry'.

I:Collect now works with retailers in more than 60 countries globally. It used to be very loud on public relations but has gone noticeably quiet in the past couple of years.

I think I may have worked out why. In this issue (page 29) we report on a survey of brands which found the majority (52 per cent) of brands do not know what happens to clothing collected as part of these in-store 'take-back' schemes. In fact, just 11 per cent of brands surveyed had decent visibility of the destination of clothing collected as part of the schemes.

It was not supposed to be like this given these schemes were launched as part of a recycling 'closing the loop' drive.

A few years ago, I visited one of the plants of I:Collect which is run by its parent company, Soex, in Lower Saxony, Germany. This huge plant was where much of the clothing being collected via these schemes ended up. I asked a few of the people running the plant about recycling and they said the clothing arriving was almost all being downcycled.

They were looking at new recycling technologies but said a huge problem was that the quality of clothing arriving was of such poor quality and that sorting costs made shifts to full recycling prohibitive.

Soex invited a few journalists on this trip but they aren't keen to talk to the press anymore (last time I reached out to them they told me "management board has ... decided not to give interviews until further notice").

I did some more digging in the wake of the above survey findings. Talking to middlemen in the collection and downcycling industry, it seems that

**” The low-quality stuff sent to India and Pakistan is mainly downcycled, and they use all of it over there (“every scrap,” one agent told me). None of it is landfilled or incinerated ”**

around 40 per cent of clothing gathered via take-back schemes is sent to India (specifically Panipat's huge recycling market) or Pakistan. This is because the cost of sorting is prohibitive in Europe, especially for low grade clothing; the declining quality of clothing is making this issue worse.

The low-quality stuff sent to India and Pakistan is mainly downcycled, and they use all of it over there (“every scrap,” one agent told me). None of it is landfilled or incinerated.

In a strange twist and a relatively new development, some of this clothing is shredded and ends up being sold back to agents and used in the 'recycled' collections increasingly popping up in the stores of leading fashion brands.

This gives rise to the scenario of fast fashion clothing originally being made in India, shipped to stores in Europe, worn a few times, returned to stores, shipped back to India, shredded, and returned to Europe for recycled collections.

You won't read much about this story on the websites of leading fast fashion brands as it doesn't really fit the 'closing the loop' narrative. But then again, none of this should come as a surprise in an industry where things are never quite as brand marketing teams would have us believe.

Brett Mathews

Editor

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## BCI'S LEADERSHIP VACUUM

**L**ONDON - Members of the BCI Council, which includes representatives from Levi's, H&M and Adidas, have continued to stonewall questions from this and other publications about BCI's decision to remove a statement from its website condemning the human rights situation in Xinjiang. BCI published a press note on its website on 21 October 2020 in which it stated that sustained allegations of forced labour and other human rights abuses in Xinjiang had contributed to an untenable operating environment. However, that statement was swiftly removed

following a huge backlash by Chinese consumers about Western brands and their decision to ditch Xinjiang cotton.

The decision to remove the Xinjiang statement has never been explained by the BCI's leadership, which appears to have completely gone to ground since the backlash by Chinese consumers began.

*Apparel Insider* recently contacted individual members of the BCI Council whose role it is to ensure BCI has a "clear strategic direction and adequate policy to successfully fulfil its mission."

We asked the likes of H&M, Levi's and Adidas whether they had a say in the decision to re-

move the Xinjiang statement and whether they, individually, supported the decision.

All have stonewalled our contact.

BCI has never publicly apologised for exposing consumers globally to the risk of purchasing garments which have a high risk of containing cotton picked via state-sponsored forced and prison labour schemes.

Rather than face the music on this issue – which refuses to go away as more and more revelations emerge about Xinjiang – BCI and its leadership have now completely gone to ground.

If these people cannot lead when the going gets tough, what are they doing in leadership roles?

## WHY RPET IS NO SILVER BULLET

**L**ONDON – Garments made with recycled polyester released 2.3 times more microfibres than those made with virgin polyester in a study using controlled washes. Knitted fabrics made with recycled polyester and virgin polyester were washed three times under the same conditions. Researchers suggest the higher release of fibres produced with recycled polyester may be due to their shorter fibre length, which would seem logical.

The research was published in the *Journal of the Textile Institute*. Knitted fabrics were washed three times under the same washing conditions according to the TS EN ISO 105-C06 standard. It was found that R-PET knitted fabrics released almost 2.3 times more fibres than virgin PES fabrics.

However, the study also found that the amount of the released fibres showed a significant reduction with an increase in the number of washing cycles for both R-PET and virgin PES samples.

The study is the first to our knowledge to compare the release of microfibres from virgin polyester alongside recycled polyester. Its findings raise a potential dilemma for brands which are increasingly promoting their use of recycled polyester. Textile Exchange categorises recycled polyester as a 'preferred fibre' alongside organic cotton, BCI cotton and other allegedly more sustainable fibres. However, like the Sustainable Apparel Coalition, TE completely ignores the issue of microfibre shedding.

It is also encouraging brands to increase their uptake of recycled polyester via its 2025 Recycled Polyester Challenge.



Indeed, Textile Exchange and the Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action, convened by UN Climate Change, recently launched a joint initiative to "spur further a shift in the market towards the uptake of recycled polyester and the associated reduction in greenhouse gases (GHGs)."

The rPET Challenge petitions the apparel industry to commit to increasing the global percentage of recycled polyester from 14 per cent to 45 per cent at 17.1 million metric tons by 2025.

None of those involved in this initiative

seem concerned about all those extra microfibres being released.

There is another issue here. Conversations we have had with industry insiders suggest there is already not enough recycled polyester to meet the collective commitments of brands. Some we have spoken to are adamant rPET must be being mixed with virgin polyester in some cases.

We are still trying to verify this claim but, if there is truth in it, the commitments being made by the challenge above would surely raise some eyebrows.



## TIME TO CLAMP DOWN ON AMAZON'S ANTICS

**H**AMBURG – Greenpeace recently announced it had obtained covert film recordings showing employees at an Amazon warehouse in Germany sorting out unsold goods, including clothing, for destruction. Recordings by an undercover reporter clearly show T-Shirts being removed from their packaging before being placed in bins marked 'destroy'.

A Greenpeace researcher worked for several weeks as an employee in the Amazon logistics centre in Winsen to document the processes. The researcher found that products in their original packaging were being pre-sorted for destruction at eight workstations that Amazon calls 'Destroy Stations'. In this way, Amazon disposes of at least one truckload of unsold goods every week at one location alone, from T-shirts to books to brand-new electrical goods, claims Greenpeace.

Last year, the German government launched draft laws aimed at improving waste avoidance and increasing recycling.

With the new 'duty of care' laws, stock may only be destroyed if items are unusable, and manufacturers and dealers must clearly document how they handle unsold goods.

Greenpeace claims that so far the duty of care has neither been implemented nor monitored by the authorities. "Amazon relies solely on quick sales and therefore considers the



space on the shelf to be more important than the product in it - a climate-damaging waste of resources," Viola Wohlgemuth, consumer expert from Greenpeace, told Apparel Insider.

The German government brought in the new duty of care guidelines for retailers as part of a reform of the Recycling Management Act. According to the text of the law, the duty of care stipulates that "when selling products, also in connection with their taking back or return, that the usability of the products is maintained and they do not become waste."

Greenpeace claims Amazon is taking advantage of the fact that so far there is no legal ordinance on duty of care, which is why no penalties are imposed.

Given Amazon is now the most shopped online retailer for clothing in the US and many other countries, this is a huge concern.

Amazon already manages to shift its profits to tax havens like Luxembourg to avoid paying its fair share of tax, with the authorities seemingly powerless to do anything about this as it is all – somehow – deemed legal and above board.

A similar dereliction of its duties where the environment is concerned would surely be a step too far.

## UNIQLO'S EXPERIENCE SHOULD CONCERN ALL BRANDS

**T**OKYO: Japanese retailer Uniqlo, which is owned by Fast Retailing, recently had a shipment of its shirts blocked by US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) on suspicion they had been made with forced labour in the Xinjiang region of China.

Customs said the shirts flouted a Withhold Release Order (WRO) on goods produced by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), the state-owned quasi-paramilitary organisation which controls much of Xinjiang's cotton industry.

Uniqlo has since protested, arguing it had "no direct deal" with any company in China's Xinjiang region suspected of using forced labour and that the products should not have been intercepted.

"We confirm that certain cotton shirt products, which were manufactured in China using raw cotton from outside China, were blocked from being imported into the US," said Uniqlo in a statement.

"We demonstrated that there is no evidence of forced labour in our supply chain, and that there should be no problem with importing these products into the US," the business argued, adding that it has provided information on the country of origin of raw materials used in its products and production processes.

Who is in the right here, it is hard to know. What the story does tell us, however, is that even clothing manufactured in China now appears to be under the scrutiny of the US



authorities, regardless of Xinjiang links. This could be due to ongoing hostilities between the two global superpowers.

If this is indeed the case, it represents a whole new ball game for brands.

# HIGG 'PRODUCT PROFILES' – FIVE UNRESOLVED ISSUES

**SAN FRANCISCO** – On pages 24-25 we report on a major study which concluded the fashion industry should not be relying on out-of-date LCA studies to draw sustainability conclusions.

These are significant findings for those who care to join the dots. On the one hand, the findings tie in with our cover story, which focuses on greenwashing. The findings also tie in with the recent announcement that Amazon and H&M will publicly share data on a product's environmental impact as part of a new programme with the Sustainable Apparel Coalition and its spin-off outfit, Higg Co. This move towards consumer-facing hang-tags using Higg data has always been a major end-goal of the SAC, and this is a potentially huge step for the industry, although not necessarily a positive one, for the reasons we will outline below.

The first phase of the programme will focus on evaluating material environmental impacts of products using data from the Higg Materials Sustainability Index (MSI).

Further phases will expand to incorporate additional data, including manufacturing and corporate responsibility.

Just like the SAC, we welcome a world where consumers are given better information about clothing to help them make better

choices for the planet.

But we have serious reservations about this particular programme and – more crucially – the data underpinning it.

Here are five reasons why:

## **1. LCAs should not be used to make comparative assertions – no ifs or buts**

The Higg MSI makes comparative assertions between different types of cotton production and polyester production. This data is underpinning the Higg product scores.

The UNFCCC Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action report, covered later in the magazine, states: "The existing LCA research conducted on cotton fibre production more often reports results as global averages and lacks regionality... LCA data cannot be used to determine the environmental performance of one cotton type over another."

As an example, the Higg MSI draws on a 2014 LCA for organic cotton to give it a far better environmental profile than conventional cotton. This is a comparative assertion and this is precisely what the UNFCCC report suggests we should not be doing.

As an aside, the Higg MSI LCA for conventional cotton simply fails to factor in the huge strides made by conventional cotton farmers in recent years. Australian 'conventional' cotton, for instance, is arguably the most sustainable cotton in the world at the present time due to its highly progressive farming practices.

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**" THE EXISTING LCA RESEARCH CONDUCTED ON COTTON FIBRE PRODUCTION MORE OFTEN REPORTS RESULTS AS GLOBAL AVERAGES AND LACKS REGIONALITY... LCA DATA CANNOT BE USED TO DETERMINE THE ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE OF ONE COTTON TYPE OVER ANOTHER "**

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## 2. Consumers need to know the issues with polyester

There are two issues here. The first refers back to the UNFCCC study mentioned above. The researchers found existing LCAs are “not capturing the geographic variability of polyester feedstock production” and we cannot rely upon them to accurately measure and compare polyester’s environmental impact.

Once again, the data underpinning the Higg profiles does precisely that. Moreover, the Higg LCA data for polyester is based on European polyester production. Is this truly representative in any case given the majority of polyester production takes place in Asia (particularly China - and often in areas with huge water-stress issues)?

The second factor is microfibre shedding, again a huge concern for consumers. Research studies have consistently found that a majority of microplastic particles in our waterways are from synthetic fibres. Note: research has shown this issue is even worse with recycled polyester as such fibres tend to be shorter (see p6).

None of this is reflected in the Higg MSI scores and therefore none of this is reflected on the Higg product profiles.

The SAC says it is waiting for an appropriate

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## “ ENCOURAGING CONSUMERS TO BUY BETTER GARMENTS AND MAKE THEM LAST LONGER (AS LEVIS’ MARKETING CAMPAIGN RECENTLY DID) IS SURELY A BETTER WAY TO ENCOURAGE MORE RESPONSIBLE PURCHASING THAN PLACING HANGTAGS (UNDERPINNED BY QUESTIONABLE DATA) ON POLYESTER CLOTHING BEING RETAILED BY FAST FASHION BRANDS ”

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measurement technique for microfibre release. The problem is, it has been saying this for several years. Two questions. Firstly, why can’t the cash-rich SAC fund such research given it is they who require this information to be able to offer accurate environmental insight? And secondly, should these product profiles be given to the public given they are missing this critical piece of information?

### 3. What about complaints from natural fibres?

Three industry sectors – leather, alpaca and silk – have already complained directly to the SAC about how their scores are represented on Higg MSI. We also know the wool sector has for years had reservations about wool’s representation on the Higg MSI.

It is one thing for the SAC to turn a blind eye to the reservations of four major fibre sectors in regard to the Higg MSI (the complaints of all four above sectors have, to our knowledge, been met with obfuscation and defensiveness from the SAC).

It is quite another to then produce consumer-facing scores based on the Higg MSI when such scores are – in the eyes of some – unfairly penalising natural fibres. Remember, there are livelihoods at stake here in natural fibres sectors if these product profiles impact consumer purchasing practices.

To our mind, these issues should have been properly resolved before Higg product profiles were shared on garments.

Natural fibres sectors are being treated unfairly and not being given a proper hearing.

### 4. Who is liable?

Greenwashing has risen up the agenda within the European Union as well as at national level in countries such as the UK and Holland. Both countries have recently issued guidelines to businesses on product marketing claims – see cover story - and it is clear that regulators are losing patience with business on this issue. Fashion, where brands and retailers have always sailed close to the wind

where sustainability marketing claims are concerned, is under the microscope.

The use of Higg product profiles raises an interesting question: if a consumer or other entity attempts to challenge a company for greenwashing with its use of Higg Profiles, who is liable – the brand or Higg?

This is one for the legal teams (and we will be addressing this issue with a group of lawyers in our next magazine!).

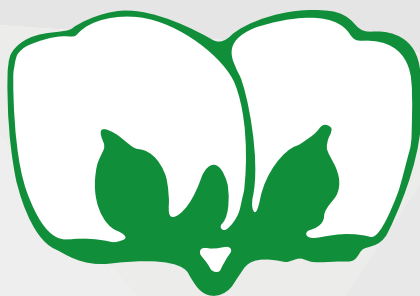
### 5. Product profiles are missing the point

We have felt for a long-time that the focus on fibres is misplaced and, in many ways, a red herring. Such as the Higg MSI are making the issue of sustainable fashion far more complicated than it need be (I quickly gave up trying to make sense of the methodology behind Higg product profiles).

Encouraging consumers to buy better garments and make them last longer (as Levis’ marketing campaign recently did) is surely a better way to encourage more responsible purchasing than placing hangtags (underpinned by questionable data) on polyester clothing being retailed by fast fashion brands.

It was also unfortunate timing that in the same week Amazon was announced as a participant in the Higg profiles, the business was also exposed as destroying clothing items which had been returned to its German warehouse. Is this really the kind of business which we should be holding up as leading the charge in sustainable fashion?

Swedish researchers at Mistra carried out a study a couple of years ago. They found that if each garment is used twice as many times before disposal, almost half the impact is mitigated. Solar-powered electricity in production and manufacturing reduces another 18 per cent and walking or taking a bicycle to the store saves another 11 per cent. Sustainable fashion need not be complicated. Why we continue to make it so with tools such as Higg product profiles is a question only the SAC can answer.



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## PLASTIC MASK WASTE WILL BE COVID'S LEGACY

**BEIJING** – Data from commodity consultants, Jernigan Global, suggests the US is being flooded with below-cost personal protective equipment (PPE) from Asia, primarily China. In the first quarter of 2021, the US imported US\$6.4bn of PPE, a 431 per cent increase from a year ago. China remains the dominant source, with Malaysia, Mexico, Vietnam, and Thailand the other largest suppliers. Ed Jernigan notes that with the pandemic slowing in the US and Europe, Chinese exporters are reportedly dumping PPE far below the cost of the production across the US market as China seeks to find a home for its expanded production capacity.

He says: "China made PPE part of its 5-year plan way before the pandemic and is now the world's dominant producer and exporter. It has built huge capacity it must utilise."

"It installed the fabric capacity to produce the specialised protective fabric, which is dominated by man-made fibres, and requires record polyester capacity to produce it. It has to dump product to keep these plants open, but even then some closure of plants is likely. "The result of this and lack of enforcement and protection from the US government are allowing Chinese imports to undercut all US manufacturers."

The US has enforced anti-dumping measures on, for instance, elastane imports in recent years but, as Jernigan points out, such ac-

tions take months or years, which mean US producers could be out of business by the time any duty is applied.

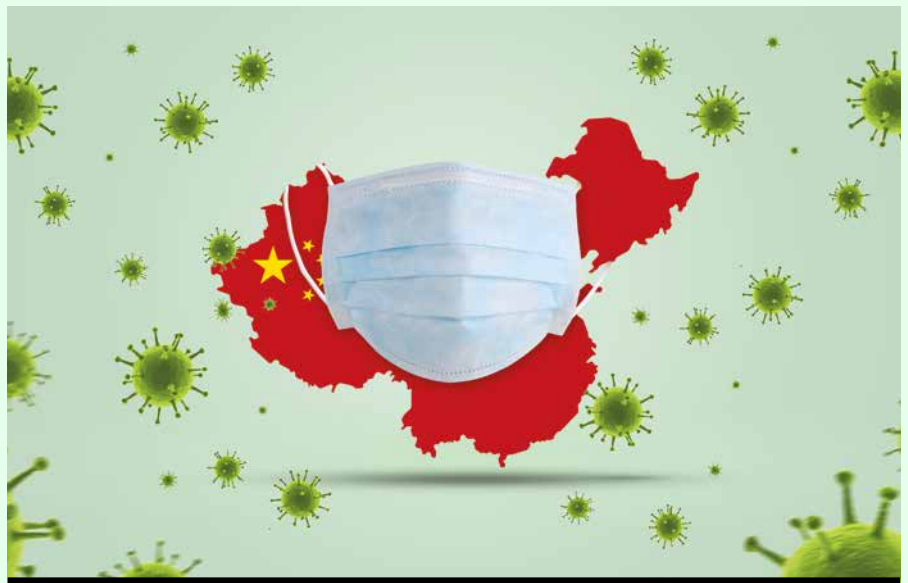
He adds: "The entire PPE market is dominated by man-made fibre thanks to cotton essentially abandoning this market. This resulted in very limited research into making cotton fabric work in many of the PPE products."

"The domination of man-made fibre in PPE and the lack of any real effort to change that are creating an environmental disaster

when these in many cases single-use products are disposed of."

Indeed. One suspects that long after this pandemic is over, plastic masks will still be scattering our landscape, so ubiquitous have they become this past 18 months. Equally galling is that the most recent research from Sweden found masks made of cotton are about a third more effective at slowing the spread of Covid-19 than those made of polyester.

But, obviously, cotton masks are more expensive. Must cost always trump all else, even on matters of public health?



## NO WINNERS IN CHINA-US TIT-FOR-TAT

**BEIJING** – China has ramped up its war on Western brands by accusing clothing giants Nike, H&M and Zara of selling goods that could be harmful to children. The country's customs administration website listed a warning notice on 81 items im-

ported by companies including Nike, H&M and Zara.

The announcement included items like children's clothing as well as shoes, toys, toothbrushes and baby bottles, with the warnings covering items from June 2020 to May 2021. Batches of H&M girls' cotton dresses were said to contain "dyes or harmful substances [that] may be absorbed by the body through the skin, mouth, etc. and endanger health."



The same issues were flagged for children's clothes imported by Zara, Nike boys' t-shirts and batches of Gap boys' cotton pyjamas.

Notably, all three brands and retailers are prominent members of the ZDHC, the industry body working with textile, apparel, and footwear industries to implement sustainable chemical management best practices. Indeed, all three are contributors to the work of the ZDHC.

The US government has placed Withhold Release Orders on the import of garments containing cotton from Xinjiang over concerns around forced labour. It would seem the Chinese government has now turned this into a tit-for-tat by flagging up products from Western brands for what we suspect may well be spurious reasons.

China seems to be backing itself into a corner here. It's hard to see this ending well for any party concerned.





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SOON**



# Storm clouds gather for greenwashing brands

By **BRETT MATHEWS**

UK regulators recently published new guidelines around greenwashing, with fashion one of the sectors in the spotlight. We caught up with several lawyers to find out what this might mean for green marketing claims by brands



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**” As always, it is much cheaper for a seller to pull the wool over the purchasers' eyes with clever marketing or sleight of hand in the use of meaningless terminology ”**

**LONDON** – Fashion brands using vague marketing claims such as “greener” or “more sustainable” cotton could face legal action for flouting proposed new guidelines around environmental claims in the UK. The Competition and Market’s Authority (CMA) has set out the guidelines to give businesses an idea of the types of misleading green claims which would likely fall foul of the law. It also wants to create a more level playing field around environmental marketing claims. This would help smaller brands which are genuinely doing the right thing but which are losing competitive advantage to larger rivals which use greenwashing as part of their marketing strategy.

There is nothing new regarding the legal basis for the CMA’s draft guidance. In the UK, brands and retailers will still need to comply with the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations, which focus on the use of misleading

marketing either by expressly stating something or by omission.

The significance of the move by the CMA, however, is two-fold. Firstly, it is part of a broader clamping down by regulators internationally on the issue of sustainability marketing – a huge growth area. For instance, the CMA has been collaborating closely with its equivalent body in Holland, the Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM). The ACM began investigating the use of sustainability claims by companies last year and this research led to the publication of a set of similar guidelines which Dutch companies are now expected to adhere to in their marketing around sustainability.

The Dutch government wrote to more than 70 Dutch fashion retailers requesting they present their sustainability claims in a “clear, specific, accurate, and unambiguous manner” to avoid

misleading consumers. And it warned the businesses that if they continue to break marketing guidelines on these issues beyond mid-June, they may face fines and other penalties.

In the UK, as indicated, while there is nothing new in the legal basis for the CMA’s draft guidance, the development here – as in Holland – is that authorities are now starting to look at clarification around and enforcement of the rules.

To this end, Cecilia Parker Aranha, director of consumer with the CMA, told *Apparel Insider* that after the green guidelines are finalised in September 2021, a ‘compliance review’ will be carried out early in 2022. This will look at compliance to the guidelines in consumer facing sectors, with fashion again likely in the spotlight. This review will likely last around three months, after which enforcement procedures will be introduced, with potential fines

## GREENWASHING

for greenwashing brands.

So what would constitute greenwashing? As well as the need to be accurate, clear and unambiguous, the guidelines call for businesses to make “fair and meaningful” comparisons, to not “hide or omit information,” for claims “to be substantiated,” and to consider the full lifecycle of a product.

Talking to *Apparel Insider*, the CMA confirmed that vague statements such as “more sustainable cotton” would “absolutely be something we would look at” – with potentially major ramifications for the marketing of Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) members. Other cotton standards which market themselves as “more sustainable” will also fall under the spotlight.

Thus the CMA’s proposals open a potentially huge hornet’s nest for fashion brands and retailers. Fast fashion brands have been sailing close to the wind for years on green marketing claims. For instance, should they be compelled to publish information on microplastic shedding from synthetic clothing under the premise of not hiding or omitting information?

There is also the issue of brands increasingly promoting their use of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition’s Higg MSI, which does not cover the full lifecycle of a product but, rather, is a cradle to gate tool.

The CMA’s own analysis of websites

**” The latest research suggests that green labelling has a significant impact on consumer sentiment and purchasing decisions ”**



last year found that 40 per cent of green claims could be misleading.

Andrea Coscelli, chief executive of the CMA, told us: “We’re concerned that people are paying extra for so-called ‘eco-friendly’ products and those businesses which are genuinely investing in going green aren’t getting the recognition they deserve. People must be able to trust the claims they see and businesses must be able to back them up.”

Another issue for us is that of recycled polyester. This is now classed as a ‘preferred fibre’ by Textile Exchange – a vague and ambiguous phrase if ever there was one – and dozens of brands have now signed up to that organisation’s rPET Challenge which is calling on the apparel industry to commit to increasing the global percentage of recycled polyester from 14 per cent to 45 per cent by 2025.

With the backing of TE’s ‘preferred fibre’ status, many brands are now bracketing recycled polyester in the bracket of ‘more sustainable’. This is despite the fact that the vast majority of recycled polyester comes from plastic bottles. Once these are melted down, the resultant polyester used in clothing becomes unrecyclable. Can that process really be classed as more sustainable?

To get further insight, we reached out to several lawyers in the UK on this issue.

Sailesh Mehta of Red Lion Chambers is a barrister who specialises in regulatory law. He prosecutes and defends large corporations and their directors and advises institutions at a national level. He also lectures lawyers and judges on aspects of regulatory law internationally.

Mehta notes the huge shift in consumer spending on ethical products and services, which in 2019 was estimated at around four times as much as two decades ago.

“The ethical market is now big business,” he tells *Apparel Insider*.

“Unfortunately, increasing consumer willingness to buy products that reduce their pollution footprint is matched by some producers’ willingness to confuse, cloud and mislead their customers on the issue.

“As always, it is much cheaper for a seller to pull the wool over the purchasers’ eyes with clever marketing or sleight of hand in the use of meaningless terminology, which gives the public a mistaken impression that they are buying ethically.”

Mehta makes the telling point that because of the complexity of the problem, “no consumer has the time or expertise to check every green claim made by a seller.”

Such sentiments ring loud alarm bells in a fashion industry where brands permanently seem to be pushing at the boundaries of what is and is not acceptable around green marketing.

“Most sellers ‘sail close to the wind’ in that they are fully aware of the law, but are also aware of its





## WHAT THE GUIDELINES SAY ABOUT GREEN CLAIMS:

- **Must be truthful and accurate:** Businesses must live up to the claims they make about their products, services, brands and activities
- **Must be clear and unambiguous:** The meaning that a consumer is likely to take from a product's messaging and the credentials of that product should match
- **Must not omit or hide important information:** Claims must not prevent someone from making an informed choice because of the information they leave out
- **Must only make fair and meaningful comparisons:** Any products compared should meet the same needs or be intended for the same purpose
- **Must consider the full life cycle of the product:** When making claims, businesses must consider the total impact of a product or service. Claims can be misleading where they don't reflect the overall impact or where they focus on one aspect of it but not another
- **Must be substantiated:** Businesses should be able to back up their claims with robust, credible and up to date evidence



limitations and fully exploit those limitations," he says.

So what about the law? Mehta suggests that while many brands may push the limits of marketing in a way that could break – for instance – CMA guidelines, they may manage to remain within the letter of the law.

Offering examples of claims

**” Enforcement orders and undertakings can also include ‘enhanced consumer measures’, which require businesses to take additional steps to protect consumers ”**

which would likely mislead – but be unlikely to breach the law - are phrases such as ‘now greener’, ‘now more ethically sourced’ or ‘more sustainable material.’

“[This] may be factually true even if the change is miniscule,” Mehta says. “Again, this is contrary to the guidelines from the CMA but not contrary to letter of the law.”

Summarising, he tells us: “The difficulty is that the Guidelines are not binding. Experience of Guidelines in various industries shows that because of the huge financial gains that can be made, a sizeable minority of producers and sellers will continue to breach the CMA's guidelines while staying just on the right side of the law.

“The public will continue to be duped by carefully designed, ambiguous and half-true advertising until the law adopts the guidelines and some high-profile prosecutions are pursued. This is unlikely to occur in the near future. In the meantime, pressure groups should do their best to ‘name

and shame’ in the most obvious cases in the hope that MPs can be embarrassed into taking action against powerful industries.”

Duncan Reed is a regulatory partner at UK law firm TLT. Asked about the implications for brands of this flexing of muscles by regulators, he told *Apparel Insider*: “What this means for brands is, the more noise they make about their green credentials and the harder they fight for that eco-minded consumer, the greater the risk of being called out if they fall foul of the regulations. For example, if your product is as green as they come, but your packaging couldn't be less environmentally friendly, you need to be careful what you say.

“The test is: how would the average person on the street behave? The latest research suggests that green labelling has a significant impact on consumer sentiment and purchasing decisions. If the average consumer would be misled by the claims, then there will be a case to answer. We've seen

this with palm oil – as awareness grows, consumers are more likely to attach certain connotations to certain sustainability claims, and marketing those products becomes riskier.”

Asked about penalties, Reed said: “While a breach of the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations could result in prosecution and an unlimited fine, a CMA investigation itself can be costly and risks damaging the brand's reputation. The CMA could require the brand to change its behaviours and processes, and get them to publicly agree to a list of undertakings that will hold them to account for future actions.

“It will be interesting to see if there is any divergence between the UK and EU approaches post-Brexit. While the CMA will allow time for this to bed in, the announcement suggests that it will start investigating brands that do not comply, and is prepared to take them to court and fine them.”

Katharine Mason is a senior

## GREENWASHING

associate, Regulatory, Compliance and Investigations at DWF, a global provider of legal and business services.

Asked generally about marketing claims around sustainability, she told us: “Claims must be factually accurate, and companies will need to hold evidence to prove any claim made. The stronger the claim the more robust the evidence needs to be.

“A top tip is to keep the R&D or technical teams in the discussion when it comes to developing the marketing claims. This way, businesses can ensure claims accurately reflect reality, aren't cherry-picked or risk being potentially misleading. Debate robustly in-house now, so you don't have to defend to the regulator later!”

Asked how a claim against a retailer might play out, Mason said: “If the CMA identifies a consumer protection issue relating to advertising, it could refer this to the Advertising Standards Authority to consider, as an alternative to taking law enforcement action of its own. The ASA welcomed the guidance as a means to help consumers make better informed decisions about products, so it's likely we'll see references to the guidance in ASA rulings in the future. Such rulings stay published for five years and are widely reported so can have long term reputational impact.

“However, this guidance goes beyond advertising, so businesses should be prepared for the CMA to have its eye on areas not covered by the ASA such as packaging and hangtag claims.”

She added: “If a business does not comply with consumer protection law, the CMA or another enforcement body may seek an enforcement order from a court against businesses who breach the rules governing consumer protection. The CMA can also accept an undertaking from a trader to stop breaches of consumer protection law.

“Enforcement orders and



undertakings can also include ‘enhanced consumer measures’, which require businesses to take additional steps to protect consumers. This can include requirements to pay redress to those who have been harmed by the failure to comply with consumer protection law and measures to ensure that similar breaches do not occur in future. Businesses may also face legal action from consumers, who can bring legal proceedings in response to a business's conduct or seek redress in the courts for certain breaches of consumer protection law.”

We also asked Mason to talk us through a few specific examples of where brands might – in theory – be making misleading claims at the present times.

On the guideline of ‘must be clear and unambiguous’ we pointed to the example of “more sustainable cotton.”

Mason said: “‘More sustainable cotton’ is a comparative claim, so in isolation it's an absolute claim against all other cotton/methods of producing. One way to approach it might be to state: ‘X standard, which champions more sustainable cotton production, find out more at...’ It might be necessary to explain in a summary what's specifically different about the standard.”

Under the guideline of “must not omit or hide important information,” we pointed to the example of recycled polyester where, in most cases, we are actually talking about the downcycling of plastic bottles.

Mason told us: “Companies should consider how they are presenting the

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**” Claims should not mislead consumers about the total environmental impact. In this example, a brand would need to be clear what the Higg MSI relates to, and then, if it wanted to make a claim beyond the factory gate, have its own data ”**

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information. Again, the comparison should be clear on what's being compared against, is polyester from plastic bottles more sustainable than traditionally produced polyester? If there's going to be polyester, is recycled not a better option?”

Finally, we asked about brand's promoting their use of the Higg MSI of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition as part of their sustainability marketing and the fact Higg specify it is cradle to factory gate tool, not a full product lifecycle tool.

On this, Mason said: “The guidance is clear that claims may be based on a specific part of an advertised product's life cycle, or part of a business's activities as long as it's clear which aspect is being referred to. Claims should not mislead consumers about the total environmental impact. In this example, a brand would need to be clear what the Higg MSI relates to, and then, if it wanted to make a claim beyond the factory gate, have its own data.”



# Without honesty, we'll never solve fashion's problems

By **BRETT MATHEWS**

Global Fashion Agenda's annual 'CEO Agenda' somehow manages to completely avoid the two foremost problems facing the fashion industry.



**C** ” The language and phraseology is so similar at every event that one could be viewing the same event from five years ago ”

**OPENHAGEN** – Where were the suppliers? That was the first question that came to mind when watching the launch of the ‘Fashion CEO Agenda’ by Global Fashion Agenda earlier this week. For those of you unfamiliar with the CEO Agenda, this is an annual event where industry leaders from the fashion sector come together, discuss the huge social and environmental problems facing our industry, then go away for another 12 months to continue business as usual.

The language and phraseology is so similar at every event that one could be viewing the same event from five years ago and it would

be difficult to tell otherwise (and that's no exaggeration). So, there is talk of collaboration, of industry transformation of enhancing prosperity (who for?) and reversing the impact of climate change.

How one can reverse climate change impacts using a business model which is based on producing ever larger amounts of poorly made clothing that have a decreasing lifespan using finite resources is a question the organisers of this event have never quite got to grips with. Slow fashion is not a phrase one is likely to hear at this conference any time soon.

This year's 'Agenda' contained five main themes, two of which focus

on respectful and secure work environments and better wage systems. Laudable goals, one might argue, but then look at some of the organisations which are strategic partners (funders) of GFA. These include Bestseller, the SAC, and Fung Group, to name three.

Last year, research by the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) among Bestseller's suppliers found the company was cancelling up to 20 per cent of orders already completed or in process – without compensation. The company was also found to be imposing price cuts of up to 25 per cent on the orders it is accepting.

Fung Group is listed on the Covid-19

**” Natural animal fibres, such as wool, leather, down and silk offer unique qualities, but their production can entail force feeding, live plucking and unethical slaughtering practices, while the rising number of vegetarian and vegan consumers strengthens the business case to protect animal welfare ”**

tracker of the WRC of businesses which during the pandemic have refused to pay in full for orders completed and in production.

Half a dozen members of the SAC also sit in this category, including SAC co-founder Walmart. Walmart subsidiary, Asda, was found last year to be demanding 40 to 70 per cent price reductions on orders completed but not yet shipped and on in-process orders via its UK-based brand, George.

So tell us, GFA, where does all of this sit with regards better wage systems? Put another way, how would a supplier facing these kinds of appalling purchasing practices possibly be in a position to look at implementing better wage systems? Somebody really isn't connecting the dots here are they?

If we are serious about improving and bringing about genuine change, why not talk to a supplier about these issues given that suppliers are the ones being impacted by poor purchasing practices. If we want suppliers to implement better wage systems and secure working environments for garment workers, we must look at poor purchasing practices. And yet, I did not hear 'purchasing practices' mentioned once at this year's event.

The truth is, when developing its CEO Agenda, GFA doesn't seem interested in talking to suppliers. Instead, the discussions involved senior representation from the world's leading fashion brands. They took part in a series of debates which included the same soundbites we have been hearing for the past ten years, re-hashed and repackaged for a new (or old in this case!) audience.

All speakers seemed at pains to justify the existence of the CEO Agenda, perhaps conscious that many of us have now twigged this annual event as the greenwashing façade that it is.

There was Patrik Silén, chief strategy officer at Asos: "We know that no individual company or brand can transform a whole industry, which is why organisations like Global Fashion Agenda and tools like the *Fashion CEO Agenda* are so important."

Or Dorte Rye Olesen, head of sustainability at Bestseller: "As a strategic partner, Bestseller supports the GFA and the *Fashion CEO Agenda* in our collaborative work towards a more holistic, sustainable and prosperous future for all."

Patrick Ho, group managing director, Fung Group, said: "The *Fashion CEO Agenda* provides a blueprint for shared prosperity in a sustainable world."

And Helena Helmersson, CEO, H&M Group said: "I am convinced that the key to our success is to help the people and communities around us to grow and be empowered. Only this way we can grow in a way that is truly meaningful and create prosperity far beyond our company."

In fairness to H&M, I have rarely heard a bad word said about the company from a CSR standpoint over the years (certainly not directly from suppliers). I am also reliably informed they have been paying bills to their suppliers in Bangladesh in less than seven days this past 12 months.

Perhaps Helmersson can have a word or two with Bestseller and co as part of this 'collaboration' process.

We also heard from Amina Razvi, executive director of the SAC. She said: "The *Fashion CEO Agenda* helps set key priorities for the industry to work together in unison, ultimately aligning our efforts so we can achieve our common goals. That strategic framework is necessary to unite the industry in addressing systemic issues that will lead to true industry transformation."

The SAC is a strategic partner of Global Fashion Agenda and both have now formed the Policy Hub, together with the European Sporting Goods Industry (FESI).

Among other things, this trio – for reasons we have never quite understood – are attempting to influence upcoming environmental laws around textiles and apparel in the European Union, including the proposed Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) rules. Pushing the tools of SAC spin-off organisation, the Higg Index, is obviously a large part of this process.

It was no surprise therefore that the CEO Agenda chose to stick the knife into natural fibres. "Natural animal fibres, such as wool, leather, down and silk offer unique qualities, but their production can entail force feeding, live plucking and unethical slaughtering practices, while the rising number of vegetarian and vegan consumers strengthens the business case to protect animal welfare," the agenda says.

Why not mention the amazing strides which have been made in wool

production in recent years, including the ending of the practice of Mulesing outside of Australia (and even there, promising new methods are being trialled to tackle flystrike)? Why not reflect on the fact that the silk industry has made an official complaint which is being reviewed by the Federal Trade Commission over how silk is scored by the Higg MSI of the SAC?

One could also mention that last year the global leather industry itself called for the SAC to suspend the leather score on the Higg MSI. Leather, let us not forget, is a by-product of the meat industry and the leather sector itself would argue, with some justification, that if it were not used in fashion it would be incinerated or landfilled.

On what sane planet is that better for the environment?

Instead, the CEO Agenda opines: "Animal farming can have a large environmental impact because of its land use and climate effects. For leather production, the heavy use of chemicals for tanning is particularly hazardous."

Meanwhile, at the start of this week's conference, there was an interlude where the show organisers talked of "lab grown leather."

There are plenty of these new 'vegan' leathers on the market. The problem is, they are almost always held together by plastic, which is derived from petroleum. Have GFA ever stopped to consider the devastating impact the petroleum sector has on animals and wildlife?

The CEO Agenda goes on: "So, what about synthetic alternatives? Some man-made fibres look promising: fibres such as polyester typically require less water than natural fibres, are often highly durable and can be recycled more easily."

Recycled more easily? "Than what?" is the obvious question. Most recycled polyester on the market currently comes from plastic bottles in a process which offers an extra life to a bottle which would ... probably be recycled into



issues in the fashion industry is to produce less clothing which is better made and lasts for longer. This focus on impact by fibre type by the Higg MSI and the industry's absurd obsession with 'circularity' are both complete red herrings when placed against the monster that is fast fashion. In fact, a cynic might argue these twin focuses are diversionary tactics, no more.

Consider that annual clothing production has more than tripled in the past two decades and that there are several credible claims which

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**” In reality, there are huge impact differences between factory fibres depending where they're manufactured ”**

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something else. That's one extra life, as clothing, which will likely end in landfill or incineration afterwards. That's not recycling, its downcycling. Language is important, GFA. So is research, for that matter.

Also consider this: as Veronica Bates Kassatly recently pointed out in our magazine, despite the fact that 93 per cent of all polyester is Asian, where production is at the high end of the environmental impact range (for water use etc), the Higg MSI for polyester is based solely on self-evaluated, best practice European Union PET manufacturing - the low end of the range.

Why not use Asian polyester production not European as the benchmark? And remember, real-world sourcing decisions are now being made based on this data. We would all agree it has to be truly reflective of impacts, wouldn't we?

“In reality, there are huge impact differences between factory fibres depending where they're manufactured,” Kassatly said.

Of course, we all know that, including the SAC and GFA. So why not discuss? Why keep brushing these issues aside? Why continue with this demonisation of natural fibres?

None of these are easy conversations but then again, whoever said change was easy?

It all comes back to honesty and transparency, issues SAC and GFA talk about in spades but singularly fail to demonstrate.

Change does not come about when huge, gaping issues such as poor purchasing practices are swept under the carpet. It does happen when the people who produce our clothing – the people who really know what is going on in supply

chains – are not even invited to the discussion table at events such as this. It does not happen when, in place of meaningful, practical actions, we get empty, vacuous soundbites about 'transformation' and a 'vision' for the industry we have been talking about for a decade, but which seems to get further away with each passing year.

Change can be confrontational, it can make people feel uncomfortable, it can lead to heated debate and cause division.

But we would all agree that these things are a necessarily evil if the chronic issues which continue to hamstring our industry are to be tackled. Virtually all CSR problems have their roots in poor purchasing practices, even the brands speaking at this event would acknowledge that in private (so why not here?). Meanwhile, the biggest thing we could do to tackle environmental

say that more than a quarter of clothing produced is never actually sold, and you begin to see the real problems facing our industry.

The good news is they are not half as complicated as the SAC and co make out. The bad news is brands don't want to know about solutions – ie less volume – that would hit profits.

Also consider that prices paid to suppliers have continued to fall in real and sometimes even nominal terms in recent years and it becomes abundantly clear why garment workers continue to be denied the living wage they deserve.

Again, the solutions are far easier than we are being led to believe but they would require having the kind of awkward, uncomfortable conversations GFA and co simply are not ready to have with brands. It's hard to believe they ever will be.



# Brands not safeguarding workers, study finds

By **MARK LANE**

The world's top fashion brands are failing to safeguard workers in their supply chains, a new benchmarking report has revealed.

**ONDON** - The world's top fashion brands are failing to safeguard workers in their supply chains, a new benchmarking report has revealed. KnowTheChain ranked 37 of the world's biggest apparel and footwear companies on their efforts to tackle forced labor. On average, companies did not score even 50 per cent in their efforts to address some of the worst forms of exploitation in their supply chains. This includes the world's two largest luxury goods companies, Kering (Alexander McQueen and Gucci) and LVMH (Christian Dior and Louis Vuitton), and retail giants Amazon and Walmart. Of serious concern were the low scores on the most worker-centric indicators. KnowTheChain is a partnership

between Humanity United, the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, Sustainalytics, and Verite. Key findings include:

- Supply chains are rife with allegations of abuse, worsened by the treatment of workers in the pandemic, and companies largely do not demonstrate how they work to ensure abuses against workers are remedied.
- There is a substantial gap between policy and practice, suggesting company efforts to end forced labor are ineffective, and this allows companies to take credit while disregarding the plight of workers.
- Luxury brands are among the poorest performers, indicating a

higher price tag doesn't translate into stronger transparency and respect for workers' rights.

Felicitas Weber, project director of KnowTheChain at the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, said: "In this third KnowTheChain apparel and footwear benchmark companies have recorded better scores, but the findings also indicate that advances in company policies, alone, are not effective. Companies continue to create an environment in which abuse can thrive, revealing disregard for the workers upon whom their profits rely. Companies are unwilling to address root causes of exploitation and retain purchasing practices that often prevent decent work and living wages to be paid.

"To achieve a just recovery from the pandemic the immense power and wealth imbalances between workers and companies must be addressed, and, crucially, companies need to adopt a worker-centric approach to prevent abuse. Disappointingly, our findings indicate the apparel sector is far from achieving this.

KnowTheChain's third apparel and footwear sector ranking found luxury apparel companies score particularly poorly, averaging 31/100. Italian luxury fashion house Prada's score has worsened over time, at just 5/100, while peers such as the French luxury goods company Kering (41/100) and the German upper premium brand Hugo Boss (49/100) have improved significantly since the first benchmark in 2016. Also among the bottom five companies is US-based Tapestry (16/100), the owner of Coach and Kate Spade.

The poor performance suggests a lack of will rather than a lack of resources: Prada offered US\$100m in dividends to its shareholders in early 2021 and Tapestry's gross profits for the last quarter of 2020 alone equalled US\$1.17bn.

Notably, the largest investors in the lowest-scoring five companies were all ESG investors. While this might be expected against the backdrop of a rise in ESG investing (investing that includes considerations for environmental,

**" They disclose robust efforts across benchmark themes, such as the steps they take across different sourcing contexts to safeguard the rights of migrant workers "**

social, and governance factors) that has reached mainstream investing, it indicates that ESG investors are failing to use their leverage on supply chain matters. For example, US asset managers Invesco and Vanguard are the largest investors in Prada (5/100) and Foot Locker (13/100), respectively, two companies that have continuously underperformed across different human rights benchmarks. "Both investors have publicly cited the importance of tackling inequality - yet they failed to take proactive steps and use their leverage to address inequality in supply chains and ensure decent working and living conditions for the supply chain workers who make the clothes we wear every day," claims the report.

The benchmark also suggests more robust practices are both possible and profitable. Lululemon (89/100) and Adidas (86/100) again topped the benchmark, because, the report says, "they disclose robust efforts across benchmark themes, such as the steps they take across different sourcing contexts to safeguard the rights of migrant workers.

Among other things, the report also calls on brands to adopt responsible purchasing practices that enable living wages and decent work and disclose key data points such as length of payment terms; and to adopt supplier ratings received from independent parties, such as Better Buying company reports, highlighting forecasting, costing, and payment practices.



# How workers became 'weakest link' in pandemic

By **BRETT MATHEWS**

A new report has documented how hardball brands tactics used by fashion brands have stretched suppliers and garment workers in Bangladesh to breaking point during the global pandemic.

**TOCKHOLM** – New research, supported by the Swedish government, found that well-meaning CSR programmes have been rendered redundant during the pandemic with not one brand making a direct financial contribution to either their suppliers (beyond their contractual obligations) or garment workers. Only one brand – H&M – comes out of the report with any credit, while the authors conclude that “the actions of many brands were extremely detrimental to their suppliers and ultimately for the workers at the bottom of the chain.” The report was produced by the Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) and the Subir and Malini Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies at the University of California Berkeley, with the support of UNDP Bangladesh and the Government of Sweden.

The authors interviewed a number of brands – which chose to remain nameless – along with suppliers in the Bangladeshi ready-made garment (RMG) industry, chronicling the impact of lockdowns and the pandemic. They found that while the industry suffered from closure of markets, suspended shipments, delayed payments, and a liquidity crisis, Bangladeshi workers suffered what was in effect a 35 per cent pay cut during the lockdown month of April last year.


“Many workers in other surveys

too said they earned less, or their salaries were delayed,” says the report. “Many Bangladeshi factories supplying to international brands consolidated their business and some went under. Many thousands of workers lost jobs and depleted their savings without having a safety net to fall back on.”

On the role of brands, the researchers said that while international brands sent health and safety guidance on responding to the pandemic to their suppliers, drawing on standards developed by international agencies, “many brands either delayed payments, suspended orders, or, in a few instances, invoked force majeure, a legal provision by which they could cancel the contract.”

It adds: “Some brands intervened with international financial institutions or banks to advocate for greater liquidity for their suppliers. Campaigns by international civil society groups partly influenced some brands to honour their original contractual obligations. However, none of the brands interviewed for this report made direct financial contributions to either the suppliers (beyond their contractual obligations) or to the suppliers’ employees.”

The researchers interviewed labour leaders who said some suppliers paid their workers late, less, or not at all. They add: “Many workers had no safety net to fall back upon. While suppliers complied



” Many workers in other surveys too said they earned less, or their salaries were delayed ”

with new regulations about social distancing, labour leaders said that some suppliers subsequently relaxed those rules to meet contractual commitments, which exposed workers to greater vulnerability.”

They suggest that while transnational labour organising groups were effective in making brands aware of the reputational risks they were exposed to, “their ability to act depended on consumer pressure and willingness to participate in campaigns.”

Moving forwards, the researchers recommend that the Bangladesh government should strengthen social protection mechanisms, including health benefits and social security net, and provide resources through well-designed furlough regulations so that workers’ wages are not reduced during a crisis.

They add: “It should not reduce the minimum of what are already low wages and ensure that workers

receive a living wage. It should also enable trade unions to function without restrictions.”

The researchers also call on brands to ensure their actions do not squeeze their suppliers [good luck with that]. “They should use their resources and leverage to ensure liquidity for the suppliers,” the report says. “They should oversee or supervise the factories so that international standards are met. They should also avoid cancelling contracts, and where they must, they should pay for raw materials already acquired and work already undertaken. Suppliers, who bear direct responsibility for the well-being of the workers, should provide for the necessary infrastructure to ensure safe working conditions, and adhere to the disbursement wages as required by local laws.”

 **Further Reading:**  
[bit.ly/3u7Qflo](https://bit.ly/3u7Qflo)

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# Chemical pollutants discovered in facemasks

By **BRETT MATHEWS**

Researchers at Swansea University discovered high levels of pollutants, including lead, antimony, and copper, within the silicon-based and plastic fibres of common disposable face masks.

**WANSEA** – It was only a matter of time before scientists began looking into what is contained in the facemasks billions of us are now obligated to wear on a daily basis. The latest research saw tests carried out by a research team from Swansea University in Wales, using a variety of masks – from standard plain face masks to novelty and festive masks for children. Many are currently being sold in UK retail outlets.

The findings revealed significant levels of pollutants in all the masks tested – with micro/nano particles and heavy metals released into the water during all tests.

Researchers conclude this will have a substantial environmental

**” It is, therefore, imperative that stricter regulations need to be enforced during manufacturing and disposal/recycling of DPFs to minimise the environmental impact ”**



impact and, in addition, raises the question of the potential damage to public health – warning that repeated exposure could be hazardous as the substances found have known links to cell death, genotoxicity and cancer formation.

In the UK, where the tests were carried out, schoolchildren have been obliged to wear facemasks all day while in school since schools returned in March.

The production of disposable plastic face masks (DPFs) in China alone has reached approximately 200 million a day, in a global effort to tackle the spread of the new SARS-CoV-2 virus. However, improper, and unregulated disposal of these DPFs is a mounting plastic pollution problem.

Project lead Dr Sarper Sarp of Swansea University College of Engineering said: “All of us need to keep wearing masks as they are essential in ending the pandemic. But we also urgently need more research and regulation on mask production, so we can reduce any risks to the environment and human health.”

The rise in single-use masks, and the associated waste, due to the COVID-19 pandemic has been documented as a new cause of pollution. The study aimed to explore this direct link – with investigations to identify the level of toxic substances present.

To combat this, the team advise further research and subsequent regulations be put in place in the manufacturing and testing process.

Dr Sarper Sarp continued: “There is a concerning amount of evidence that suggests DPFs waste can potentially have a substantial environmental impact

by releasing pollutants simply by exposing them to water. Many of the toxic pollutants found in our research have bio-accumulative properties when released into the environment and our findings show that DPFs could be one of the main sources of these environmental contaminants during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

“It is, therefore, imperative that stricter regulations need to be enforced during manufacturing and disposal/recycling of DPFs to minimise the environmental impact.”


The study team suggests there is also a need to understand the impact of such particle leaching on public health. One of the main concerns with these particles is that they were easily detached from face masks and leached into the water with no agitation, which suggests that these particles are mechanically unstable and readily available to be detached.

The study team claim a full investigation is necessary to determine the quantities and potential impacts of these particles leaching into the environment, and the levels being inhaled by users during normal breathing. “This is a significant concern, especially for health care professionals, key workers, and children who are required to wear masks for large proportions of the working or school day,” said Dr Sarp.

The research team included professor Trystan Watson, Dr Javier Delgado Gallardo and Dr Geraint Sullivan.

The work is supported by the Institute for Innovative Materials, Processing and Numerical Technologies (IMPACT) and the SPECIFIC Innovation & Knowledge Centre.

The IMPACT operation is part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund through the Welsh Government and Swansea University.

 **Further Reading:**  
[bit.ly/3yffu8R](https://bit.ly/3yffu8R)

# SAC silent on ground-breaking LCA report

By **BRETT MATHEWS**

A major study has concluded that the fashion industry should not be relying on out-of-date LCA studies to draw sustainability conclusions.

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” As conditions change from season to season, variations in climate, soil, farming practices, etc., it may not be appropriate to extrapolate results calculated over a decade ago to inform current policies ”

**ENEVA** – A new report by the UNFCCC Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action has raised huge question marks about the fashion industry’s dependence on out of date and unrepresentative LCA data for cotton, polyester and other textile fibres. The researchers crunched data from 35 LCA cotton studies and found there is a lack of transparency regarding the background life cycle inventory (LCI) data used to model LCAs while in many cases, “there is also a lack of transparency regarding the methodological assumptions applied while undertaking the LCA.”

“The existing LCA research conducted on cotton fibre production more often reports results as global averages and lacks regionality. For example, databases such as Higg MSI, provide scores for global averages of cotton production,” states the report.

The report adds: “LCA data cannot be used to determine the environmental performance of one cotton type over another and it is inappropriate to compare LCA results across [various cotton types].”

The report argues that existing LCAs are modelled with foreground data which is predominantly over ten years old. “LCAs only present a snapshot in time of a specific location and farm site,” it states. “As conditions change from season to season, variations in climate, soil, farming practices, etc., it may not be appropriate to extrapolate results calculated over a decade ago to inform current policies.”

Researchers carried out a meta-analysis of cotton studies and found that LCAs in use today are, in general, not effectively capturing the variability of impacts; are modelled with farming data which is predominantly over 10 years old; and not directly comparable due to differences for a variety of reasons.

They also looked at polyester LCAs, carrying out a meta-analysis of over 21 LCA studies.

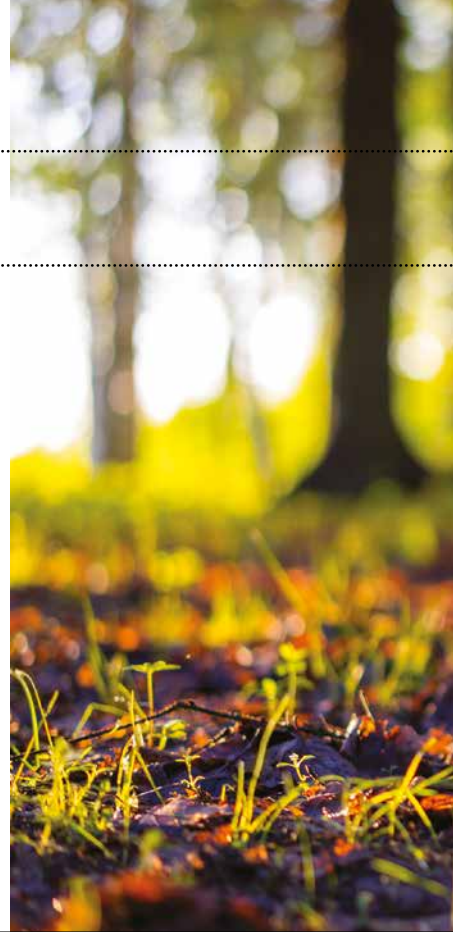
They found PET LCA datasets in use today are, in general, not directly comparable due to inconsistencies in the functional unit of PET which varies from chips, fibre to different grades of filament yarn. They also found the majority of reported polyester LCA datasets are aggregated

from cradle-to-finished product gate (e.g., chip/fibre/filament) and lack transparency on a process level, which makes it difficult to identify the key GHG drivers for the product.

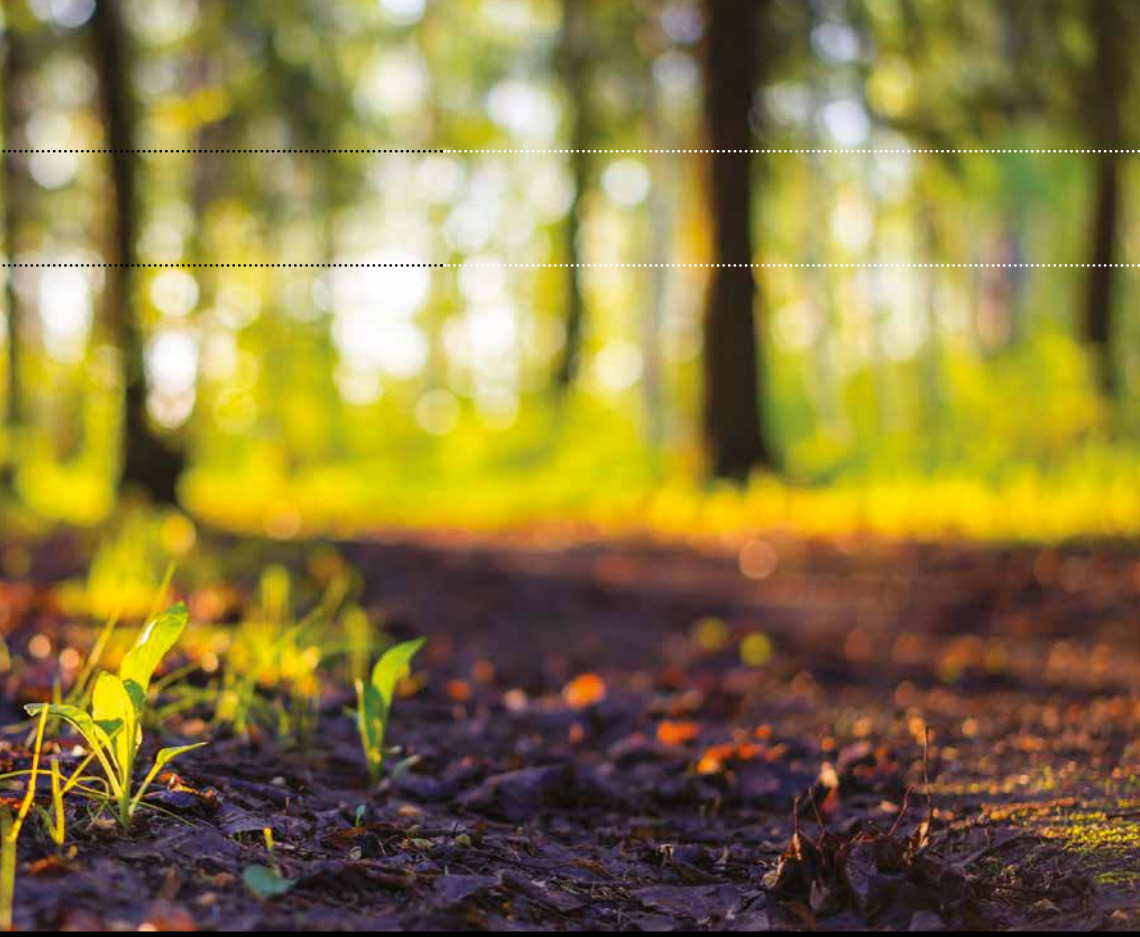
The UNFCCC researchers said polyester LCAs are not effectively capturing the geographic variability of feedstock production. “For example, petrochemical feedstocks and intermediate chemicals are produced and transported across diverse geographies, which can have a significant influence on the results,” state the researchers.

The report ‘Identifying Low Carbon Sources of Cotton and Polyester Fibres’ was developed by a group of experts brought together by the UN Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action.

The findings of the report support much of what we have been saying in this magazine for the past two years. Veronica Bates Kassatly has repeatedly warned the industry about how tools such as the Higg MSI of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition should not be relied upon to guide sourcing decisions as they are underpinned by out of date, unrepresentative LCA data.







In her analysis on cotton data in 2019, she pointed out that the main fibre scoring systems at present – including the SAC’s Higg MSI – base their values for organic cotton on just one industry-funded LCA from 2014, despite the fact that the study itself says it can’t be used to make comparative assertions, or to attribute differences to the respective production systems. The LCA concerned also has notable errors and omissions, according to Kassatly’s analysis.

Her paper concluded: “At the present time there is no data to substantiate claims that at a global level, one type of cotton is more sustainable than another.”

The Higg MSI does precisely this.

Likewise with polyester, the concern raised by the UNFCCC paper is that like is not being compared with like. For example, the Higg MSI of the SAC tells us polyester is the world’s most sustainable fibre. And yet, the issue of geography – as raised by the UNFCCC paper – is a major factor here. Higg bases its score for polyester production on European polyester manufacture.

Writing for *Apparel Insider* in July

2020, Bates Kassatly pointed out that SAC uses 2011 data, from European production facilities, to estimate global polyester impact. Higg states: “Data are based on the average unit process from the eco-profiles of the European plastics industry and extrapolated to represent a global average production scenario.”

But as Kassatly rightly points out, since 94 per cent of global polyester production comes from Asia, how representative can European production data really be?

We believe all of this raises questions for the Higg MSI and brands which are using it to guide sourcing decisions. With this in mind, we contacted the SAC to ask it some questions.

We were confident the SAC would be willing to engage given that it has recently announced that transparency is one of the four pillars of its new strategic plan.

So what did we ask the SAC? Firstly, the UNFCCC report states unequivocally that LCA data should not be used to determine the environmental performance of one cotton type over another and that it is inappropriate to compare LCA results across different cotton

types. The Higg MSI is drawing on cotton LCA data that does precisely this and, by doing so, gives organic cotton – for instance – significantly lower environmental impact than conventional cotton.

We asked whether SAC will be updating the Higg MSI to reflect these findings.

The SAC did not respond.

The UNFCCC report suggests most LCAs mistakenly allow manure to be burden-free, which is of major significance for organic cotton production and environmental impacts. Again, this means the Higg MSI is giving organic cotton a deceptively low environmental impact.

We asked whether SAC will be updating the Higg MSI to reflect this issue.

The SAC did not respond.

The researchers say that existing LCAs are not effectively capturing the geographic variability of feedstock production and that we cannot rely upon them to accurately measure and compare polyester’s environmental impact. The Higg MSI is doing exactly this. We asked whether SAC will re-evaluate polyester’s score on the Higg MSI given that, if the recommendations of this report are to be believed, it is clearly unsafe?

The SAC did not respond.

The UNFCCC report states that LCAs capture a point in time, don’t account for variations in geography and climate and should not be used for comparison purposes (as the Higg MSI does).

In fact, the Higg MSI is underpinned by LCA data which compares different fibre types. With the above in mind, we asked where does it go from here? We asked the SAC whether there will be a complete overhaul of the Higg MSI or will the findings of this ground-breaking UNFCCC report be ignored?

The SAC did not respond.

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**” At the present time there is no data to substantiate claims that at a global level, one type of cotton is more sustainable than another ”**

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# IWTO: 'Sustainability is everything'

By **BRETT MATHEWS**

The global pandemic meant the recent IWTO Congress took place online for the second year running. But this did not detract from the core message – sustainability is now everything and there is a huge PR battle ahead to win hearts and minds among consumers.

**B**

**"It is really important that wool is able to get out and sell its sustainability credentials much harder. The battle is now"**

**RUSSELS** - Sustainability is now everything – this was the overriding theme of this year's IWTO Congress which took place 17-21 May with a fully digital series of presentations and discussions held over the course of five days and spanning several global time zones.

Of all the conferences and events in the annual textile industry calendar, the IWTO's is the one where the physical event is most missed. These are always lively, passionate affairs – and they always seem to choose some fantastic locations (Cape Town or Venice anybody?)

That said, the digital event did its best to get the message across that as companies and consumers worldwide strive to become healthier and more sustainable, wool fibre has a huge role to play.

Scott Williams, who facilitated Australia's Wool 2030 Strategy, opened the Congress on 17 May with insights into this new vision. He was joined by the Campaign for Wool's Peter Ackroyd, who has guided the Campaign into key international markets over the course of its 10-year span.

In fact, the Campaign for Wool celebrated its 10-year anniversary in 2020 with a host of initiatives across the UK. At the same time, the Campaign for Wool in Canada, along with its parent body the Canadian Wool Council, took some bold steps toward transforming the Canadian wool landscape.

One of the effects of the ongoing pandemic is that research suggests people care more about the clothes they buy and how they are made.

They want to buy less and wear what they have for longer. How sustainability became "everything", and how wool delivers to that requirement, was the focus of a retail forum on 20 May with Veronica Bates Kassatly, Simon Cotton and Olivier Segard, group managing director of Segard along with host Peter Ackroyd.

Simon Cotton is chief executive at Johnstons of Elgin in Scotland and a key protagonist in the PR battle which is currently being waged between proponents of plastic-based fibres on the one hand and natural fibres on the other.

In his own address, he said: "There is this battle over carbon footprint between wool and plastics and unfortunately the reality is that the SAC and Higg Index are winning the argument against wool and other natural fibres like silk and alpaca.

"It is really important that wool is able to get out and sell its sustainability credentials much harder. The battle is now."

Cotton also suggested that we are seeing more and more brands conflating a product being vegan as short-hand for it being sustainable. Stella McCartney seemed to start this trend but it has now spread into mainstream and fast fashion brands, with worrying implications for sustainable, natural fibres like wool given vegan fashion is in most cases simply plastic through the back door.

Yet Cotton suggested it should not be all doom and gloom and that the, "concrete has not yet set on the sustainability argument. Although vegan advocacy as an argument is doing extremely well there is still an opportunity to turn that tide."

He added: "But it is really up to entire wool industry to get behind this because it is the biggest challenge we face today. There is a massive PR challenge ahead of us if we want wool to be seen as a sustainable product in the mass market. We really need to make that case – and make it strongly."

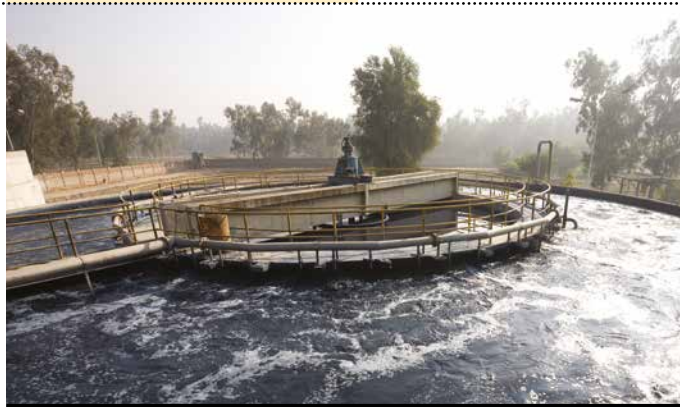




# Scientists track supply chain microfibres

By **MARK LANE**

A new study has estimated that for every 500 shirts manufactured, one t-shirt's worth of microfibres pollute oceans.



**ALIFORNIA** - Scientists with The Nature Conservancy in California and Bain & Company examined a significant source of microplastic emissions from clothing that has hitherto flown under the radar – namely pre-production microfibre emissions.

In their report they found that an estimated 0.12 million metric tons (MT) of synthetic microfibers are released into the environment annually at the pre-consumer stage. The new study examines the sources of microfibre emissions from textile manufacturing and materials processing, such as fragmentation of yarn and fabric in the industry and ineffective filtration of fibres that leak into waterways. While attention on microfibres emissions has been largely focused on the shedding, washing and disposal of synthetic textiles by consumers, this report claims pre-consumer emissions have now reached the same order of magnitude as the consumer use stage.

“Previously most of the focus and research on microfibre emission has been on the consumer use and loss during laundering, but now we are starting to see that the magnitude of the problem is similar at the pre-consumer stage,” said Tom Dempsey, oceans programs director at The Nature Conservancy in California.

“The good news is that with a few powerful steps - ranging from

development of fibre control technology and establishing best practices for suppliers to the continued work in materials innovation - collectively we can make a massive impact in reducing pre-consumer microplastic emissions into the ocean.”

Left unaddressed, these pre-consumer emissions are projected to increase by 54 per cent by 2030 according to the researchers. The report outlines consumer and supplier recommendations, along with regulatory steps, which it claims could address 90 per cent of pre-consumer emissions.

Proposed changes include better understanding the relative emissions of microfibres at each manufacturing step (from fibre to yarn to fabric to garment) as well as developing microfibre control technologies and codifying best practices; and scaling these solutions to Tier 1, 2 and 3 suppliers via a combination of regulatory and

brand or retailer-led action.

The researchers point out that tech solutions for “fibre control” in supply chains already been developed. For example, the researchers claim Nike and Adidas are both “testing technology to address fibre emissions [Ed’s note: yet more pilots?]”

For water, the study rightly points out that conventional wastewater treatment practices such as reverse osmosis are already effective at removing most fibres but the “removal of fibres from air and sludge is less well-understood.”

They add: “In all these cases, further work needs to be done to improve the efficacy of the technology and codify the knowledge on how to operate the technology consistently. A consistent standard to test for microfibers (currently under development) will support this.”

The researcher also claim brands, retailers and regulatory bodies

can play a role in driving adoption of microfibre control practices. “Establishing policy on microfibre limits (e.g., via the ZDHC guidelines or through local government regulations) that requires suppliers to regularly measure and report microfibre concentrations in effluent will drive uptake of best practices and technology,” says the study. “Brands and retailers should ask their suppliers to conform to these relevant microfibre regulations, proactively engage them on discussions regarding microfibres, and offer to share industry best practices on control. Finally, where cost of upgrading technology is a barrier, they suggest there is “the opportunity to educate suppliers on the benefits of water sustainability best practices to both control microfibres and save water, chemicals and energy costs.

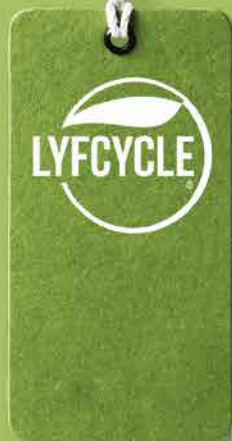
They claim there is an ROI of 26 months for textile mills adopting water sustainability best practices, including nanofiltration and reverse osmosis, which can remove microfibres.

As we keep saying, it is time to stop the talk in this issue. Every other research report we read on this seems to call for the “need for more research;” readers, make of that what you will...

The report also fails to answer one glaring question: once they’ve stopped all these tiny microfibres leaving wastewater treatment plants in supply chains, what should they do with them?

**“ Previously most of the focus and research on microfibre emission has been on the consumer use and loss during laundering, but now we are starting to see that the magnitude of the problem is similar at the pre-consumer stage ”**

 **Further Reading:**  
[bit.ly/3cusePH](https://bit.ly/3cusePH)



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# Brands in dark over unsold goods

By **BRETT MATHEWS**

New research from Textile Exchange found there is a lack of insight among brands around the destination of clothing collected via in-store 'take-back' schemes.

**EXAS** - Almost a quarter of fashion brands and retailers did not know the destination of their unsold finished goods, according to a new survey by Textile Exchange. The not-for-profit polled brands and other textile industry stakeholders on a variety of issues, including a range of questions relating specifically to recycling.

The research also found that the majority (52 per cent) of companies using in-store clothing take-back schemes do not know what happens to their collected materials or "have little visibility." Such schemes have been in operation for the best part of a decade and see consumers depositing used clothing in-stores, sometimes in exchange for vouchers. Textile Exchange surveyed 83 companies - totalling 145 when including subsidiaries - as part of their research for a report entitled 'Material Change Impacts Report 2020'.

The report looks at a range of issues, particularly the use of 'preferred fibres' - essentially organic cotton, recycled polyester and other fibres Textile Exchange has deemed better for the environment.

The real interest, however, comes in the report's section on recycling and collection services.

The past decade has seen a large growth in clothing take-back schemes. Ostensibly, they are sold as brands doing their bit for the

environment by encouraging recycling. In reality, most of the clothing returned is downcycled to be used, for instance, in the building trade as insulation or as dust cloths.

Industry insiders who did not wish to be named told *Apparel Insider* the situation is getting worse as collectors are bombarded with poor quality clothing. Around 40 per cent of clothing collected via such schemes now ends up in Pakistan and India according to our sources.

In their survey on this issue, Textile Exchange found 43 per cent of brands and retailers are offering in-house collection services while just over a quarter (27 per cent) are contracting a third-party service provider to collect and manage their recycling for them.

23 per cent are providing customers with feedback on what happens to their returned clothing/textiles.

The majority of companies (63 per cent) surveyed could not report on volumes of textiles collected, but a further 16 per cent said they were starting to make progress through "estimates."

In terms of destinations of collected post-consumer textile products, a third said they have visibility and "most products are resold in original form."

Adds the report: "The majority (52 per cent) of companies (with collection schemes in place) do not know what happens to their collected materials or have little visibility. The remainder (48 per cent) said they had some visibility, within that group (11 per cent) had good to full visibility. Most companies reported that post-consumer goods are resold or donated in their original form, followed by recycled and downcycled."

61 per cent of companies reported having a policy in place for managing unsold goods, although not all of these "were able or willing to provide the actual policy." 22 per cent of companies said they did not have a policy (or were still working on developing one) and a further 17 per cent said a policy was not applicable since all their goods were eventually sold. Some mentioned that while they did not have a policy, they did have procedures or

**"In reality, most of the clothing returned is downcycled to be used, for instance, in the building trade as insulation or as dust cloths"**



programmes in place. Repair, resale, or donate were priority options, unless health and safety was an issue and goods needed to be destroyed. If this was the case, policy stipulated incineration to energy.

Two thirds of respondents were unwilling or unable to disclose volumes of unsold finished goods. 16 per cent said they are not tracking this issue at all and 47 per cent are choosing not to disclose details. For the companies that could report, 14 per cent selected to do so confidentially (and did not include this data in their survey submission).

"Perhaps not surprisingly, there were no companies reporting actuals in the public domain, although a small number of companies publicly reported having no unsold goods and associated waste problems," said the report. "All in all, there was no volumetric data provided on unsold finished goods."

 **Further Reading:**  
[bit.ly/3vzHuIH](https://bit.ly/3vzHuIH)

# ISKO, the leading denim ingredient brand, continues to set new industry benchmarks around sustainability, innovation and social responsibility

T

here are an infinite number of ways the sustainability credentials of a product can be impacted: the right raw materials, the right process flows, the right ingredients and the right partner.

Keep such thoughts in mind when considering the merits of denim giant, ISKO. The commitment to sustainable living, coupled with creativity and innovation drive ISKO, a business which is creating fabrics that perform exceptionally, last longer and use fewer resources. ISKO calls this Responsible Innovation™.

ISKO's sustainability strategy is focused on developing products that are made well, do good by the people who make them, and minimize the impact on the environment. It has built its business around this premise, to track, monitor and report on



environmental performance at every stage of production and in real time.

For ISKO to meet sustainability targets, the business recognises it must look towards the environmental impact at every stage of its business. From raw material to final product, science and data must inform all decisions, and best practice must sit at the centre of this.

## State of the art

Central to ISKO's ability to meet its goals are state of the art facilities. Committed to an approach of continuous improvement, the business works closely towards external stakeholder engagement, striving for third-party certifications and partnerships. This has led to many achievements, including becoming a bluesign® SYSTEM PARTNER, STeP by OEKO-TEX®, Textile Exchange, SAC, ZDHC, and EU Ecolabel.

ISKO's work to become a bluesign® SYSTEM partner last year, followed more recently by achieving bluesign® APPROVED fabrics, is part of its ambition to lead the industry on the journey towards sustainable living. Bluesign aims to unite the entire textile supply chain to jointly reduce its impact on people and the environment. The system applies importance regarding consumer protection, workplace safety, waste-water management and emissions and is widely recognised as the world's highest industry standard in this area.

ISKO believes that as an industry and as consumers, we become preoccupied with looking at circularity only in terms of end-of-life. This is hugely

important, but we must look to close the loop as soon as possible.

There are a huge number of ways that need to be considered before the end-of-life stage. We must look first at the way a product is designed and the raw materials chosen, to the processes that are used to create that product, the packaging and even how companies communicate to ensure better product care, reuse and recycling at end of life. Each part of the process has an important role, impacting the final sustainability credentials of a product.

## Integrating Circularity

The industry must actively integrate circularity principles into everything it does. This means looking to circular solutions, not just from a finite raw material perspective or water scarcity principles, but in terms of carbon and water impact reduction from the start.

For ISKO, this focus on circularity begins at the raw materials stage. The business looks to full systems integration: from reusing water in its main processes and strict waste management controls to integrating renewable practices into its production, every decision has a consequence.

ISKO is proud to have pioneered

**” The commitment to sustainable living, coupled with creativity and innovation drive ISKO, a business which is creating fabrics that perform exceptionally, last longer and use fewer resources ”**



the industry's first Product Category Rules for Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs) for the textile sector. The impact of its choices can be seen in these declarations in plain black and white. Available at [enrivodec.com](http://enrivodec.com) for anyone to access freely, ISKO's EPDs are verified Lifecycle Assessments (LCAs), audited and confirmed by the Control Union. They present a powerful tool for the industry: a unified declaration of product impact and a framework for evaluating the exact impact of water, carbon and other metrics for products. Through these tools, one can understand the impact of 1m<sup>2</sup> of ISKO fabric, from field to final product. This is why ISKO has set its intentions and targets so fully towards implementing circularity at all stages of its business.

It is also the reason ISKO pioneered R-TWO™ – a clean and efficient product switch which integrates reused and recycled materials to reduce overall consumption of carbon, water and raw materials. R-TWO™ is about integrating circular systems thinking into products at the earliest stage possible. This is an out-of-the-box solution that can be scaled up for industry's needs with the same look and feel, but with materials that reduce industry dependency on finite raw materials.

#### Recycling

R-TWO™ begins at the spinning stage, collecting the cotton loss, and keeping it in the system or recycling post-consumer PET/Cotton. To create R-TWO™, ISKO blends reused and virgin cotton with certified recycled polyester, made from PET bottles and other certified material. Producing recycled polyester uses less energy than virgin polyester and lessens dependence on petroleum as a raw material. Both the reused cotton and recycled polyester reduce the carbon footprint of ISKO's products compared to virgin materials. Depending on the percentage of recycled polyester,



**” ISKO believes that as an industry and as consumers, we become preoccupied with looking at circularity only in terms of end-of-life. This is hugely important, but we must look to close the loop as soon as possible ”**



R-TWO™ fabrics can be either Global Recycled Standard (GRS) or Recycled Claim Standard (RCS) certified. These Textile Exchange recognised standards reassure buyers and demonstrate the environmental credentials of R-TWO™ fabrics.

Ahead of COP26, there is a renewed urgency to ISKO's efforts to reduce its impact at every stage. It's belief is that it's clear we must all wake up to address the major challenges in the industry and double down on ambition towards #NetZero and net positive business outcomes.

With R-TWO technology applied to ISKO fabrics there is a raw material saving potential for both water and CO<sub>2</sub> eq., which – in some cases – could be of +40 per cent water and 30 per cent carbon per m<sup>2</sup> of raw materials. This is the solution ISKO believes we must look to in order to face the climate emergency and challenges set in front of us.

#### Empowered

But this cannot be the sole solution. ISKO believes the best work is done when its teams are valued and empowered to make changes and suggestions. None of this would happen without ISKO's employees and this figure is not computed on an Environmental Footprint Declaration (EFD) or a Lifecycle Assessment.

ISKO is proud to pay employees a fair living wage and the starting wages at the company's facility are 33 per cent above the minimum salary in Turkey. With many people devoting a large part of their career to ISKO, the business believes it is succeeding.

Details about ISKO's responsible approach to products, processes and people are detailed in the company's Sustainability Impact report.



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# Study backs case for real leather

By MARK LANE

A new study, which found virtually no link between hide prices and US cattle production, raises questions about the environmental benefits of switching to 'vegan' leather.

**EXAS** – Switching away from real to vegan leather will have barely any impact on global cattle production, new analysis suggests. The Leather and Hide Council of America commissioned a study which examined the relationship between US hide prices and US cattle production. The researchers found there is no direct relationship between hide prices and cattle production and only a fractional indirect relationship.

The research was commissioned in response to claims from proponents of vegan leather that a switch away from real leather would lead to a reduction in cattle production.

Proponents of leather have always

argued that this is wrong, and that leather is simply a by-product of the meat industry. The latest research appears to support such claims.

The research was authored by Dr. Gary W. Brester and Kole Swanser, Ph.D.

Professor emeritus at Montana State University, Dr Gary Brester, told the Leather and Hide Council of America: "Cattle are not produced for their hides. The cattle industry invests huge resources to improve beef quality and production, but they don't invest in improving hide production. This is because hides are simply a by-product of cattle production. However, while we do not find statistical evidence

of a direct effect of hide values on cattle production, economic theory and quantitative evidence suggest hide values likely have an indirect effect on cattle production. While people don't raise cattle for the purpose of producing hides, cattle hides have value and input into many products including clothing, furniture, automobile interiors, and sporting goods. As a result, the value of cattle is somewhat influenced by the value of hides."

In terms of the extent of this influence, the study found that a 10 per cent increase in hide prices would be expected to cause a 0.31 per cent (i.e., less than one-third of 1 per cent) increase in the production of fed cattle. Because this small increase in fed cattle production would necessitate an increase in breeding cattle numbers, the total *indirect* effect of a 10 per cent increase in cattle hide prices would represent about a 0.17 per cent increase in US cattle inventories.

"Given that steer hides are more valuable than most other hide types, the 0.17 per cent increase is likely an upper bound on the effect of hide values on cattle production," states the study.

Brester added that, given the global nature of beef and leather production, it would be likely that similar results would be found in other cattle producing countries in which markets determine cattle and

hide prices."

Asked about the impacts of a switch away from leather products, Brester said: "The value of hides would decline. This would have a minor impact on reducing cattle prices which would, in turn, reduce cattle production by a small amount.

"The biggest impact would involve the costs and environmental challenges related to the disposal of hides through landfill dumping or incineration.

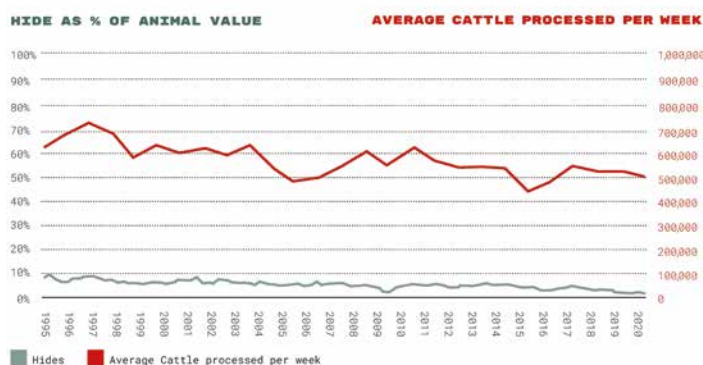
"There is a cost to processing, transporting, and using hides. If processing plants cannot profitably sell hides, then they would be disposed of in some manner. Even now, many smaller cattle processing plants dispose of hides in landfills or incinerate them because the value of the hides does not cover the costs of processing them."

In recent years, several brands have begun to look at 'vegan' leather, including Stella McCartney and Hugo Boss. However, of the plant-based alternatives on the market, none are anywhere near scaling, while nearly all rely on plastics to hold them together, and all will require chemicals for finishing.

The leather industry has also in recent months criticised the Higg MSI datasets for leather, claiming they were developed in 2013 – since which time, significant strides have been made in leather production.

The secretary of the International Council of Tanners, Dr Kerry Senior, recently told Apparel Insider: "The [Higg score for leather] has led to a negative perception of leather that does not reflect its sustainable, circular nature. On the basis of current Higg score, manufacturers are deselecting leather in favour of fossil fuel-derived, unsustainable synthetic products. We believe that the reputation and viability of leather and leather manufacturers are being unfairly damaged by an assessment that does not reflect the true nature of leather or, indeed, the alternatives."

DECLINE IN VALUE OF HIDE MEANS INCREASING QUANTITIES GOING TO LANDFILL.



Source: US Department of Agriculture [USDA] 2021

**"The biggest impact would involve the costs and environmental challenges related to the disposal of hides through landfill dumping or incineration"**

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## A&E LAUNCHES TRACEABLE SEWING THREAD

**NEW YORK** – The world's leading thread manufacturer has partnered with a US molecular tagging business to bring fully traceable textile supply chains a step closer. Thread manufacturer American & Efird (A&E) will use the traceability solutions of Applied DNA Sciences in its Eco100 sewing lines.

A&E will use Applied DNA's CertainT molecular-based technology in its sewing thread to provide a way for brands to authenticate and validate their products anywhere within the supply chain by way of a common component – sewing thread.

A&E's Integrity Eco100 identification thread line is produced with recycled fibre and will now combine the technology of Applied DNA Sciences' proprietary CertainT with Beacon platform. This can authenticate a brand's products and components by using the Beacon technology for in-the-field optical verification and, when needed, by using a portable qPCR test for a forensic analysis of the molecular tag.

"Our customers are hyper-aware of the detrimental effects of counterfeit prod-



ucts, from lost sales to the potential loss of brand equity. It's a real and global threat," said Chris Alt, executive vice president, A&E. "Our expansion of Integrity secure thread technology developed with Applied DNA Sciences is a natural progression for us to address our customers' needs and extend our brand protection solutions."

"Integrity thread protects the brand, as well as supply chains, at a time when security and sustainability are extremely important. We are helping to ensure that customers can meet their supply chain traceability and sustainability goals," said Wayne Buchen, vice president, strategic sales, Applied DNA Sciences.

## UK GOVERNMENT TARGETS SWEATSHOPS WITH NEW BODY

**LONDON** – The UK government will launch a single enforcement body to protect workers' rights and clamp down on unscrupulous employment practices. The new watchdog, yet to be named, will be responsible for tackling modern slavery, enforcing the payment of the national minimum wage and protecting agency workers rights.

In the sightlines of the new body, which is yet to be named, will be garment sweatshops in the UK. Last year, online fashion giant Boohoo was criticised after concerns were raised that workers at its Leicester suppliers were being underpaid and not being protected against Covid-19.

It was alleged that some factories in the UK working for the firm were paying staff as little as £3.50 an hour, less than half the national minimum wage.

After an internal review, Boohoo cut its sup-



plier network from around 500 firms to under 100 following the allegations.

Currently, modern slavery and related issues are tackled by three separate bodies: the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate and HM Revenue & Customs' national minimum wage enforcement team.

The government said it was looking into either creating a Garment Trade Adjudicator to investigate companies' supply chains, or it could extend an agricultural licensing scheme.

Business minister Paul Scully said: "This government has been absolutely clear that we will do whatever we can to protect and en-

hance workers' rights.

"The vast majority of businesses want to do right by their staff, but there are a minority who seem to think the law doesn't apply to them. Exploitative practices like modern slavery have no place in society."

He added that the new watchdog would enable the government to "take action against companies that turn a blind eye to abuses in their supply chains".

The government also says the new watchdog will make it possible for vulnerable workers to get the holiday pay and statutory sick pay they are entitled to, without having to go through a lengthy employment tribunal process.

## BGMEA URGES SUPPORT FOR MMF PRODUCTION

**HAKA** – Bangladesh garment exporters should be financially incentivised to shift to the production of clothing from man-made fibres (MMF), according to the industry's main trade body.

Faruque Hassan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) told government that with global demand for MMFs "very high," policy makers should bring in a 10 per cent

incentive on export receipts from MMF garments "to encourage investment in non-cotton garment production and exports."

At present, garment production in Bangladesh is predominantly cotton garments. An incentive to shift to MMFs would likely be via tax-breaks.

The BGMEA is currently lobbying in regard to Bangladesh's national budget for the 2021-22 period.

Hassan said the RMG industry is going through a difficult time due to the Covid-19 pandemic. "Bangladesh's exports declined by 18 per cent in the last fiscal year and decreased by 10 per cent in the first 11 months

of the current fiscal year compared to the same period of the last year," he said.

Hassan said garment factories are still struggling to recover from the losses caused by the pandemic and, in many cases, to stay in business. Declining unit prices are also making life increasingly difficult for factory owners.

The president urged the government to extend policy support in the proposed budget so that the RMG industry could "address the extraordinary challenges and turn around." He also asked government for continuation of the existing 0.5 per cent source tax for RMG sector for the next five years.

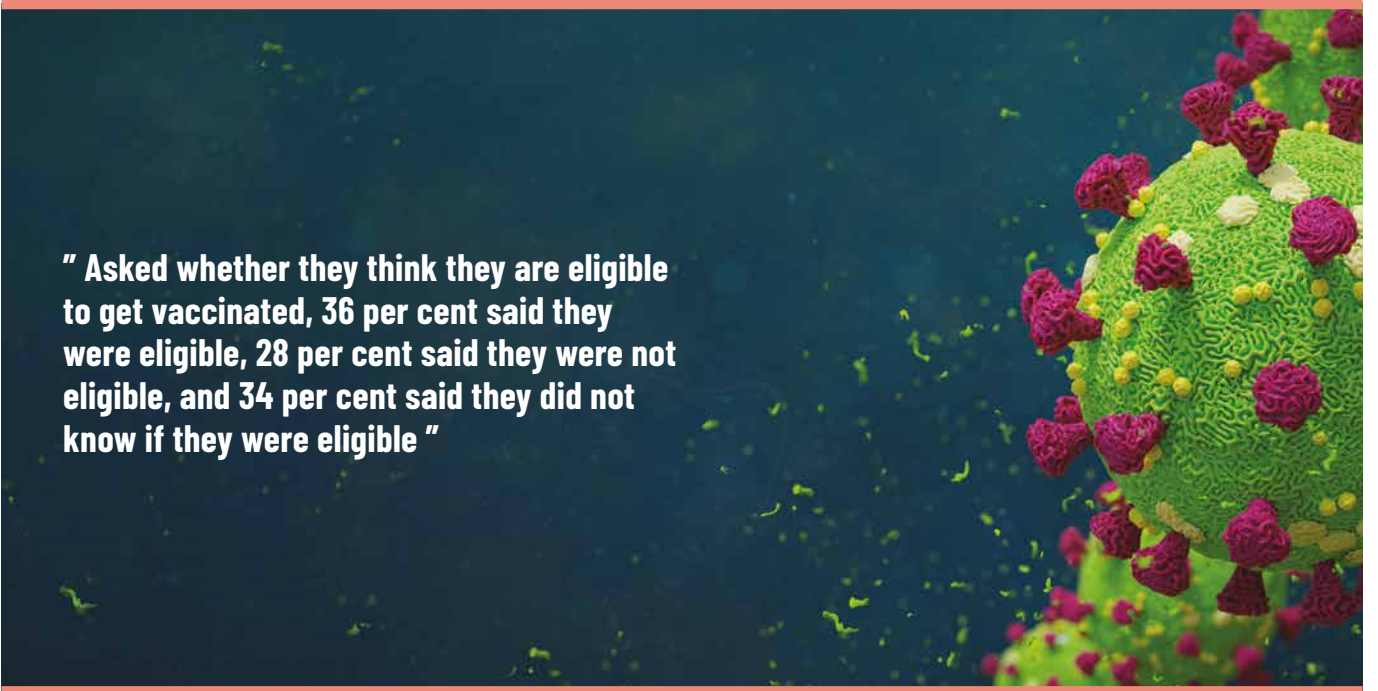
## JUST 2% OF GARMENT WORKERS VACCINATED IN BANGLADESH

**HAKA** – Just two per cent of garment workers had received the Covid-19 vaccine in Bangladesh until April this year, according to by South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM) and Microfinance Opportunities (MFO). The study was carried out as part

Dhaka city, Chattogram, Gazipur, Narayanganj, and Savar.

Just over three-quarters of the working respondents were women, roughly representative of workers in the sector as a whole. They look at COVID-19 lockdown conditions

the survey. Asked whether they think they are eligible to get vaccinated, 36 per cent said they were eligible, 28 per cent said they were not eligible, and 34 per cent said they did not know if they were eligible. 69 per cent of respondents said they were



" Asked whether they think they are eligible to get vaccinated, 36 per cent said they were eligible, 28 per cent said they were not eligible, and 34 per cent said they did not know if they were eligible "

of a joint project titled "Garment Worker Diaries" in which SANEM and MFO have been collecting monthly data since April 2020. The researchers spoke to 1,285 workers in

as garment workers' awareness of and opinions about COVID-19 vaccinations. Only 2 per cent of the surveyed workers had received the Covid-19 vaccine before

willing to get vaccinated if they were eligible. The data also indicated that workers do not have access to adequate information related to Covid-19 immunization.

## BRANDS LINKED WITH EXPLOITATION IN TAMIL NADU

**AMSTERDAM** – A new report claims there is a serious risk that workers are trapped in forced labour conditions in the Indian spinning mills that produce yarn and fabrics for the international clothing and textile industry. Large-scale research was undertaken by SOMO and Arisa, of 29 spinning mills in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

Yarns and fabrics from Tamil Nadu mills are processed into garments and household textiles for European and North American markets. But because of the complexity of the supply chain, and a lack of transparency about trade flows and the precise buying relations of brands and retailers, it is difficult to confidently map all links from spinning mill to consumer.

Through painstaking research, SOMO and Arisa uncovered direct and indirect links between the 29 spinning mills under investigation and ten companies operating internationally: Carrefour, GAP, IKEA, Marc O'Pollo, NEXT, Sainsbury's, Tesco, The Cookie Company Group, WE Fashion, and Zeeman. In some cases, SOMO and Arisa found links between

the investigated mills and these international companies; in other cases, there are links between the mother company that encompasses the mill, and the international companies. The report claims labour conditions in Tamil Nadu spinning mills are "appalling." It states: "Under pressure and threats, workers are made to work excessive overtime. Many workers come from other states in India, do not speak Tamil and belong to the lower castes. Employers take advantage of the vulnerable position of these labour migrants, who are often recruited with false promises and end up living miserably in hostels that are by and large isolated from the outside world. Since the Corona crisis this situation has only worsened: more forced overtime, less salary and mass dismissals.

Pauline Overeem, Researcher at SOMO: "Based on our research, we conclude that the living and working conditions in the textile industry in Tamil Nadu are deplorable. In the worst case, this amounts to forced labour. Buying companies must take measures to prevent forced labour from occurring in their supply chains, and take account of the risk of forced labour in their purchasing practices."

Tamil Nadu has, for years, been infamous for the poor working conditions in the garment and textile industry based there. Since 2011, SOMO and Arisa have been conducting research into working conditions in this industry.

## LOCKDOWN LEADS TO PERMANENT ONLINE SHIFT

**LONDON** – The length and severity of lockdown in the UK has led to a permanent shift to consumers shopping online, new data reveals.

Recent data by Dressipi revealed shoppers are continuing to make purchases online instead of in-store, with research finding retailers who would previously make 70 per cent of their sales in-store now likely to be closer to 50 per cent.

In terms of what customers are buying online, jeans and tops are extremely popular, while dress purchases are only slowly increasing to 2019 levels.

The increase in online shopping means many retailers now have access to more customer data than ever before, according to the survey. Thus the digital imprint of customers means businesses know who each visitor is and what their intent is – increasing opportunity for retailers to gain a deeper understanding to nudge customers towards purchases. The study also suggests online sales are predicted to grow post-pandemic, with brands expected to integrate the digital and physical shopping experience via services such as buy online, pick up in-store, curbside pick-up, digital checkout, virtual concierge.

## PUMA BANS MULESED WOOL

**HERZOGENAURACH** – German sportswear brand Puma has committed to a ban on mulesed wool by 2025. Mulesing is a breech modification technique through which strips of wool-bearing skin are cut from sheep to prevent parasitic infection. It has been banned in wool exporting countries with the

exception of Australia.

Puma joins Calvin Klein and Marks and Spencer in its commitment, with NGO Four Paws calling on its competitors Nike and Adidas to follow and ban the practice from their wool products. Rebecca Picallo Gil, Four Paws wool campaigner, said in a statement: "We are very pleased that Calvin Klein, Marks and Spencer and now also Puma have decided, with our support, to ban this cruel and long-outdated method in the next years."





## LCA SHOWS CONSUMERS HAVE BIGGEST IMPACT ON SUSTAINABILITY

**LONDON** – The environmental impact of clothing can be cut by 75 per cent if we choose natural fibres, wash them less and wear them for longer, according to a new study, published in The International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment. The study, which focused on wool, found that while production, processing, and garment care can reduce impacts, the number of times a garment is worn and length of garment lifetime was found to be the most influential factor in determining overall impact. “This indicated that consumers have the largest capacity to influence the sustainabil-

ity of their woollen garments by maximising the active garment lifespan which will reduce overall impacts,” say the authors. A cradle-to-grave life cycle assessment (LCA) was used to compare six plausible best and worst-case practice scenarios for use and care of a wool sweater, relative to current practices. These focussed on options available to consumers to reduce impacts, including reduced washing frequency, use of more efficient washing machines, reduced use of machine clothing dryers, garment reuse by multiple users, and increasing number of garment wears before disposal. A sixth scenario combined all options. Worst practices took the worst plausible alternative for each option investigated, with impacts reported per wear in Western Europe for climate change, fossil energy demand, water stress and freshwater consumption.

Washing less frequently reduced impacts by between 4 and 20 per cent, while using more efficient washing machines at capacity reduced impacts by 1 to 6 per cent, depending on the impact category. Reduced use of machine dryer reduced impacts by <5 per cent across all indicators. Reusing garments by multiple users increased life span and reduced impacts by 25–28 per cent across all indicators. Increasing wears from 109 to 400 per garment lifespan had the largest effect, decreasing impacts by 60 to 68 per cent depending on the impact category. Best practice care, where garment use was maximised and care practices focussed on the minimum practical requirements, resulted in a 75 per cent reduction in impacts across all indicators. Unsurprisingly, worst-case scenarios increased impacts dramatically: using the garment once before disposal increased GHG impacts over 100 times.

## SÖDRA AND LENZING COLLABORATE ON RECYCLING

**LENZING** – Austrian fibre-maker Lenzing and wood pulp supplier Södra have signed an agreement to dramatically boost the production of pulp from post-consumer textile waste to make Tencel Refibra fibres.

The pair say they aim to process 25,000 tons of textile waste per year by 2025 – equating to 50,000 tons of pulp containing 50 per cent wood and 50 per cent post-consumer waste.

OnceMore pulp by Södra is a process for the industrial-scale recycling of textile waste of blended fibres. The process combines wood cellulose with textile waste to create a dissolving pulp which can be used to produce new clothing and other textile products.

During 2022, a new investment will ten-fold the production capacity of OnceMore pulp and the aim is to reach a higher level of recycled textile content.

“The cooperation with Södra is a major milestone towards achieving our ambitious climate and sustainability goals. We are proud to be able to go this way with a competent partner. One company alone cannot solve the pressing issue of textile waste. It is proactive partnerships like this that enable us to move forward and bring about real systemic change,” said Christian Skilich, member of the managing board of Lenzing. “With OnceMore pulp, Södra has created a globally unique solution to base textile on a recycled source. By joining forces with Lenzing, we now taking the next step on our journey and will bring world-class recycling to the textile value chain. Through a new investment, we will also ten-fold our production capacity of OnceMore pulp during 2022 and have a higher level of recycled textile content. These are important steps towards our long-term target to create a circular textile industry,” added Lotta Lyrå, president and CEO of Södra.



## H&M, PRIMARK, BESTSELLER RESUME MYANMAR ORDERS

**LONDON** - Fashion retailer Primark has joined H&M and Bestseller by resuming sourcing in Myanmar. The three had previously placed a halt on the placing of new orders following the military coup.

A Primark spokesperson said: "We took the decision to pause the placing of new orders in Myanmar some weeks ago. We hoped then that this would be temporary as we are committed to supporting our suppliers and their factories, and in turn, protecting the livelihoods of the workers in those factories.

"We are committed to honouring all existing orders with our suppliers in Myanmar, however long they take to fulfil, and have recommenced placing some orders with our key strategic suppliers in the country."

Swedish fashion retailer H&M said it was



gradually beginning to place new orders again with its suppliers in Myanmar after a temporary pause following the military coup in the country in February.

"With our decision we want to avoid the imminent risk of our suppliers having to close their factories which would inevitably result in unemployment for tens of thousands of garment workers," it said in a statement.

H&M said that after due diligence, it had concluded the company had no direct links with the military in Myanmar. "We are now looking for legal guidance on how to handle any potential indirect links international companies may have," the company said.

An independent report commissioned by Danish clothing brand Bestseller concluded the company should resume sourcing from Myanmar as the withdrawal of international companies could cause poverty and famine. Bestseller's report by lawyer Jonas Christoffersen, former head of Danish Institute for Human Rights, concluded the company should resume business in the country "as quickly as possible."

## ARTISTIC MILLINERS PARTNERS ON PAKISTAN TRACEABLE COTTON

**MÜNCHEN** - Retraced GmbH, a supply chain management platform for fashion, has announced a new partnership with Artistic Milliners, one of the world's largest vertically integrated denim and apparel manufacturers, headquartered in Karachi. The project will aid the digitalization of more than 500 cotton farmers, via a traceability solution that enables the tracing and real-time tracking of cotton moving along each value chain step until it is transformed into final apparel.

All the value chain partners will be digitally connected, allowing them to exchange data on one platform, and "work collaboratively towards a more transparent and sustainable value chain."

The project will enable brands and consumers to trace Milliner Cotton products back to the source getting a full overview of the value chain and its production standards.

As part of the project, the retraced application will be distributed to all key stakeholders in the value chain, starting on farm level. 500 cotton farmers in the Rahim Yar Khan region of Pakistan will be equipped with a mobile application for managing their cotton sowing, picking and shipment to track the lifecycle of cotton to the ginner.

The ginner – also equipped with the retraced application – will be able to digitally discern between the different cotton shipments and assess the quality. The tagged cotton

will then be sent to the Artistic Milliners' in-house spinning, dyeing, weaving, and cut-make-trim facility in Karachi, where it will continue to be traced via a retraced system integration. The cotton thread will then be manufactured into denim fabric and apparel for clothing brands around the world. These brands can, in turn, use the data to evaluate the apparel's production standards and communicate the source of the clothing to their consumers.

Lukas Pünder, co-founder and CEO of Retraced, said: "Transparency in cotton supply chains is long overdue and necessary basis for ethical supply chain management, environmental sustainability or circularity. Often, cotton from up to 1,000 farmers from different continents are mixed in one single pair of jeans. And little is known about who, where, and what happens. Traceability is an industry-wide challenge, and only with a platform that connects everyone, we can address that. The retraced application is being built on Oracle's Blockchain Cloud platform and Autonomous infrastructure, ensuring greater data security, immutability, and reliability for Artistic Milliners' cotton value chain.





## CALLS FOR EU TO MAKE CLIMATE TARGETS LEGALLY BINDING

**RUSSELS** – Activities or investments in supply chains which are disproportionately contributing to climate change should be outlawed under new EU diligence laws, a briefing from a group of global NGOs has argued. The briefing, endorsed by WWF and International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) among others, has called for environmental protection to be integrated into companies' due diligence requirements alongside respect for human rights. "New EU legislation should enforce obligations on companies to reduce and account for their climate change impacts, including but not limited to their own emissions and their indirect greenhouse gas emissions through their global value chains," states the briefing. "EU legislation should specify criteria for corporate climate targets and ensure that companies set concrete goals and targets to bring them in line with the 1.5-degree target scenario of the Paris Agreement. This may include, where appropriate, the cessation of activities or investments that are disproportionately contributing to climate change."



If such legislation was imposed, it would have significant ramifications for fashion brands given that so much production takes place in South East Asia where environmental laws around pollution - including wastewater treatment - are often poorly enforced. The new briefing has been endorsed by ActionAid, Amnesty International, Anti-Slavery International, the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, CIDSE, ClientEarth, the European Coalition for Corporate Justice (ECCJ), the Fair Trade Advocacy Office, Fern, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Forest Peoples Programme, Global Witness and WWF. It suggests the scope of upcoming EU due diligence laws must include the environment in order to effectively contribute to the sustainability objectives enshrined in the EU Treaties and the Green Deal, as well as to meet the EU's climate-related commitments.

"Establishing mandatory environmental due diligence requirements at the EU level is crucial for ensuring that companies respect the environment," it states. "This will contribute to sustainable development and help promote a high level of environmental protection, EU objectives outlined in Article 3(3) and (5) and Article 21(2)(d) and (f) of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU)."

It adds: "Deep connections between the environment and human rights have increasingly been recognised by governments, courts, international organisations and societies. This is clear in the case of Shell in Nigeria, for instance, where devastating oil spills have caused large-scale, continued contamination of the groundwater and soil, harming the vegetation and fauna in the area and causing a multitude of human rights impacts including harm to health and the livelihoods of local communities."

## BRANDS URGED TO BACK VACCINE WAIVER

**AMSTERDAM** - Garment worker unions and rights groups have called on global fashion brands which rely on sourcing from low income countries in Asia to publicly back calls to waive IP protections for Covid-19 vaccines. The Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) waiver was

first proposed by India and South Africa as a temporary waiver of global intellectual property and trade rules until widespread vaccination is in place globally. Since then, over 100 governments, including most recently, the US and New Zealand, have supported the waiver proposal. However, a handful of governments, including the EU, the UK, Canada, and Japan have blocked the waiver. In a statement, Clean Clothes called on major global brands to put their weight behind

calls for the waiver.

It said: "Global brands with business models reliant on outsourcing labour to low-income countries have a human rights responsibility and moral duty to take action and use their leverage to ensure that garment workers, and garment producing countries, have equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines. In addition, workers' health is key to economic recovery in the garment industry. Brands have a vested financial interest to ensure that workers, and their communities, are protected from Covid-19."

It called on brands to publicly support the TRIPS Waiver proposal and support global equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines, treatments, testing kits, and personal protective equipment.

It also called on brands to lobby governments to support the TRIPS Waiver and expand capacity to manufacture Covid-19 vaccines, testing and treatments, and personal protective equipment, to keep workers safe and help garment supply chains recover.





## INVESTORS WRITE TO LAGGARDS OVER HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

**NEW YORK** – A group of 208 global investors organised by the Investor Alliance for Human Rights and representing US\$5.8 trillion in assets under management have written to 106 companies that scored zero on all human rights due diligence indicators in the 2020 Corporate Human Rights Benchmark (CHRB) report. Among those being urged by

investors to be more transparent about their work in protecting human rights in supply chains are Prada, Ralph Lauren, Kohls, Macys, and Target Corp.

The CHRB assesses companies on a set of human rights indicators established by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct.

Based on the latest 2020 CHRB ranking, 106 companies – nearly half of the 230 largest publicly traded companies in high-risk sectors measured against five human rights due diligence indicators – scored zero on all five indicators.

"Only a minority of companies demonstrate the willingness and commitment to take human rights seriously," said Camille Le Pors of the CHRB. "If we are to achieve the SDGs by 2030, we need all companies to participate in this effort and to place people and planet above the pursuit of profit at all cost."

"A company's public communication on these factors will impact its score on the CHRB ranking, so while some companies may well be doing more, their failure to disclose will count against them," added Anita Dorett, director of the Alliance. "Disclosure is critical to transparency and accountability of companies in addressing human rights risks, and will provide investors with needed insights into how a company is meaningfully working to fulfil its responsibility to respect human rights."

"We have been calling on companies to act on CHRB results since 2017," said Anna Pot of APG Asset Management. "While we do see that some scores have improved, only a minority of companies are demonstrating their commitment to human rights. As a responsible investor, APG wants to see companies perform human rights due diligence and report on outcomes. Period. We have clearly communicated our expectations in the joint investor letter. Companies need to take it seriously. It is time to act."

In March 2020, 176 international investors sent a letter to the 95 companies that failed to score any points on the human rights due diligence indicators, calling for urgent improvement. Of those 95 companies, 79 continue to score 0 on human rights due diligence.



## EWM AND BGMEA AT LOGGERHEADS OVER UNPAID BILLS

**DHAKA** – The Bangladesh and Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) has written to British retailer Edinburgh Woollen Mill (EWM) requesting it pay outstanding monies owed to Bangladesh apparel makers. *Apparel Insider* understands the Bangladesh trade body is considering legal action if its requests are not met.

The BGMEA claims its members have goods shipped and released but not paid for by EWM as well as goods lying at UK ports which were shipped under the instruction of

EWM – again which EWM has yet to pay for. However, EWM has been telling Western media that it has offered to take the goods off suppliers, although it is unclear what discount would be involved.

In April, collapsed fashion retailer Peacocks, previously owned by EWM, was brought out of administration by EWM chief operating officer Steve Simpson who led a consortium of investors.

A similar deal was done for the EWM brand Bonmarche, while Jaeger was sold to Marks & Spencer. The deal saw all the former EWM brands – excluding Jaeger – reform under the old management led by Simpson.

However, unsecured creditors – including garment suppliers – lost out in the deal, hence the potential action from the BGMEA.

The letter from BGMEA has been copied to

the Ministry of Commerce in Bangladesh, Bangladesh Bank, Bangladesh Investment Development Authority, the European Union and The British High Commission.

It is timely given that purchasing practices – and their devastating impact on garment supply chains – are under the microscope right now.

The letter states: "We do not have any record that our members received any payment for the goods released by you last year and lying in port. We strongly urge you to immediately settle the dues of the aforementioned goods in compliance with the Central Bank law. Also, we would like to know how and when you will take the goods that are lying in the factories of our members and how you will be paying for those goods."

## AAFA ISSUES WARNING OVER 'DUPE' INFLUENCERS

**WASHINGTON** – A small but fast-growing group of 'dupe' social media influencers are playing an increasing role in the market for counterfeit fashion, claims new research from the American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA). The US trade body has now issued guidelines aimed at educating online platforms and brands on the rising trend of "dupe influencers."

The AAFA describes a dupe influencer as an individual with a social media following who shares links to, and reviews, counterfeit goods. AAFA has documented the growth of the dupe influencer market which, it claims, has generated millions of views, likes, and shares of content directly related to the advertisement and sale of counterfeit goods online. The report also looks at dupe influencer tactics and explains how dupe influencers "put their followers in harm's way by exposing them to potentially unsafe products and to cybercriminals."

The AAFA has now called on online platformers to clean up their sites while blocking hashtags such as #designerdupes and related hashtags.

It also argues that platforms must terminate the accounts of dupe influencers who repeatedly promote counterfeits, while suggesting consumers also need more information about the reach of counterfeits.

## ADIDAS CHINA SALES SURGE IN FIRST QUARTER

**LONDON** – German sportswear giant Adidas saw sales grow in China by 156 per cent over the first three months of 2021, despite a supposed boycott by domestic consumers of western fashion brands. The company also said it does not think there will be a major shift in its supply chains amid ongoing political tension between China and the West. Earlier this year, it was reported that Chinese consumers would begin boycotting Western brands which had taken a stand against human rights atrocities in Xinjiang by no longer using cotton from the region in their products. However, as we reported at the time, agents working for the Chinese Government use technology to troll popular

Chinese platforms such as Sina Weibo, WeChat Friend Circles, Baidu Tieba and are likely to have had a huge influence on sentiment around Xinjiang cotton turning sharply against Western brands (and may not reflect real life purchasing decisions).

Kasper Rorsted, CEO of Adidas, told CNBC he still expects "very strong growth" from China for the year overall.

"So, we are still very confident we will continue to build our position in China, which is the single biggest market for us," he told CNBC.

"This is of course a sensitive topic and we are doing whatever we can to make sure human rights are protected."



## INDIAN GARMENT FACTORIES BATTLE HUGE ORDER LOSSES

**DELHI** – More than three quarters of small and medium sized garment makers in India expect to cut staffing levels by 25 per cent according to a new survey. The concerning findings suggest clothing makers are being hit by further lockdowns in the West, having initially managed to ride out the storm caused by the global pandemic during 2020.

The Clothing Manufacturers Association of India (CMAI) surveyed micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) manufacturers in the Indian garment industry. They found

that by the start of 2021, sales had recovered to almost 80 per cent of pre-pandemic sales. However, survey findings from the beginning of May indicate that 55 per cent of manufacturers are achieving less than 25 per cent of their sales during April 2021.

"Uncertainty is looming large for these manufacturers, as 72 per cent of the respondents have seen more than 50 per cent of their orders on hand being cancelled by their buyers. This will lead to a huge problem of dead inventory in the coming months," the CMAI said.

It added: "The situation is equally grim on the cash flow front, with 72 per cent of the respondents receiving less than 25 per cent of their due payments in April, and another 12 per cent receiving less than 50 per cent of their dues."

As a result of regional lockdowns increasing across the country, 90 per cent of members believe May to be far worse than April, and 45 per cent are not expecting markets to revive before the Diwali festival. More than 20 per cent do not see the revival starting before 2022, according to the survey.



## LENZING MOVES TO COAL-FREE PRODUCTION IN CHINA

**LENZING** – Austrian fibre producer Lenzing has announced that its facility in Nanjing will become the first wood-based fibre plant in China to eliminate coal as an energy source. The company said the plant will switch to natural gas, to reduce CO2 emissions by more than 200,000 tons per year.

Lenzing says it is investing €200m (US\$240m) in reducing carbon emissions from two key production sites in China and Indonesia.

At the same time, a line of standard viscose will be converted to a Tencel branded modal fibres line making Lenzing (Nanjing) Fibers Co., Ltd a 100 per cent wood-based specialty fibre site by the end of 2022.

In Purwakarta (Indonesia), Lenzing says it will reduce its CO2 emissions by increasingly using biogenic fuels. Additional investments to reduce emissions to air and water will



make this facility fully compliant with the EU Ecolabel by the end of 2022, according to the company. "That, in turn, will allow converting standard viscose capacity into Lenzing Ecovero branded fibres for textile applications as well as Lenzing Viscose Eco fibres for personal care and hygiene applica-

tions," Lenzing said in a statement.

As a result, the site in Indonesia will also become a pure specialty viscose supplier as of 2023.

Both investments are in line with Lenzing's target to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions per ton of product by 50 per cent by 2030.

## DUTCH GOVERNMENT WARNS OVER SUSTAINABLE FASHION CLAIMS

**MSTDERDAM** – The Dutch government has launched investigations into three sectors - including clothing - to check for misleading sustainability claims. It has written to more than 70 Dutch fashion retailers requesting they present their sustainability claims in a "clear, specific, accurate, and unambiguous manner" to avoid misleading consumers. And it has warned the businesses that if they continue to break marketing guidelines on these issues beyond mid-June, they may face fines and other penalties.



The Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM) began investigating the use of sustainability claims by companies last year and this research led to the publication of a set of guidelines which Dutch companies are now expected to adhere to in their marketing around sustainability.

Edwin van Houten, director of ACM's Consumer Department, said: "We are taking this action in order to stimulate businesses to take a critical look at their sustainability claims, and to check their claims' accuracy, clarity, and substantiation. Consumers must be able to have confidence in sustainability claims. And businesses with honest claims should not have to face unfair competition from businesses that mislead consumers using misleading claims."

In the clothing sector, over 70 clothing companies have been contacted and asked to take a critical look at sustainability claims which ACM says it encountered when it probed the sector last year. False claims uncovered in the Dutch fashion sector include a clothing company using the claim 'T-shirt made of organic cotton', when

only 50 per cent of the T-shirt was made of organic cotton; and an online store offering the option of filtering its clothing range by 'sustainability'. "Consumers using that filter get to see a selection where all displayed items get the term "sustainable choice" next to them, yet the online store does not explain what is sustainable about the displayed items," said the ACM,

In the letter sent to fashion retailers, the ACM says: "ACM requests that you review your company's commercial sustainability claims in all your communication channels and, where necessary, align these with unfair commercial practices legislation. This applies to products sold in stores as well as those sold online. You must present your sustainability claims in a clear, specific, accurate, and unambiguous manner to ensure that consumers are not misled about the sustainability of your products or services. ACM will continue the investigation from 14 June 2021. From that date onwards, traders making sustainability claims that do not comply with the legislation run the risk of enforcement by ACM.

## LEVI'S LAUNCHES SLOW FASHION CAMPAIGN

**SAN FRANCISCO** – US denim brand Levi Strauss has launched a new slow fashion campaign to encourage customers to buy better quality clothing and wear it for longer. The campaign has been developed in response to what the company says is an "over-consumption crisis." It will see Levi's team up with six global activists including Jaden Smith, Xiye Bastida, Melati Wijsen, Xiuhtezcatl, Emma Chamberlain and Marcus Rashford MBE.

"Fashion production and consumption has reached unsustainable levels: between 2000 and 2020, global clothing consumption doubled," said the company as it launched the campaign. "While we have more items in our wardrobes, we're wearing what we have less often and throwing out our clothes too quickly, keeping clothing for almost half as long as we did 15 years ago."

The campaign, says Levi's, "leans into our history of high-quality products that are made more responsibly and made to last



longer, all to offer one simple suggestion: Buy better. Wear longer. It's a proposition and a promise. We'll keep making products that stand the test of time, and you keep wearing them as long as possible."

'Buy Better, Wear Longer' also encapsulates Levi's efforts to drive more sustainable production practices. This includes driving climate and water actions and investing in materials and technologies such as Cottonized Hemp and scaling its patented Water<Less

manufacturing techniques.

"You experience the difference when you have jeans that have been through it all with you, or when you go thrifting for second-hand jeans. A pair of Levi's holds up better and holds its value longer," said Paul Dillinger, vice president of product innovation. "It's both a physical and an emotional durability that we strive to offer consumers by investing in quality and designing for lasting value."

## ASOS CALLS FOR MANDATORY UK HUMAN RIGHTS LAWS

**LONDON** – ASOS, the leading UK online fashion retailer, has called for the implementation of mandatory human rights due diligence legislation in the UK in order to strengthen the 2015 Modern Slavery Act, as part of the publication of its fifth Modern Slavery Statement. Such legislation, currently being developed by the EU, would legally oblige UK companies to take steps to prevent and mitigate risks and protect vulnerable people within supply chains in line with their responsibilities under the UN Guiding Principles. It would require businesses to disclose these actions and be held to account for taking them.

ASOS CEO Nick Beighton also said ASOS would support such legislation to drive up standards, alongside targeted interventions such as a UK garment manufacturer licensing scheme.

ASOS has also included an independent NGO commentary in its Modern Slavery Statement, provided by Anti-Slavery International. The commentary focuses on Anti-Slavery International's views on the chal-

lenges faced by the fashion industry and garment manufacturers during the COVID-19 pandemic and the steps brands and retailers must take to address modern slavery risks throughout global supply chains. ASOS' fifth Modern Slavery Statement covers the modern slavery risks identified and actions taken by ASOS from February 2020 to January 2021. It details the measures implemented by ASOS to ensure people in its global supply chain have been protected



during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the steps taken to ensure UK brand partners sign up to the Transparency Pledge and the Fast Forward auditing programme, co-founded by ASOS in 2014 to tackle problems with UK garment manufacturing supply chains.

ASOS CEO Nick Beighton said: "There is absolutely no place for modern slavery in today's world, and after an incredibly challenging year for the fashion industry and for garment workers worldwide, all companies and brands must now share the risks they have identified and the actions they have taken to ensure we can work together to deliver effective change."

Anti-Slavery International CEO Jasmine O'Connor OBE said: "We're proud to be working with ASOS to encourage the company to make sure its customers can be sure their clothes aren't tainted by human rights abuses. We welcome ASOS' call for a new UK law to hold companies to account when they fail to prevent human rights abuses. We hope other UK companies across all sectors follow ASOS' leadership, and that the UK Government responds to the growing calls from civil society, trade unions and business to go beyond the Modern Slavery Act and introduce stronger laws."



## NGOS FILE XINJIANG COMPLAINT AGAINST BRANDS

**ARIS** – A group of NGOs have filed a complaint with the French authorities alleging that fashion retailers such as Zara owners Inditex, Uniqlo, SMCP and footwear brand Skechers are complicit in crimes against humanity due to their links with cotton supply chains in Xinjiang.

The case, backed by the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, claims the retailers are among many that "continue to subcontract part of their production or to market goods using cotton produced in the region, thus knowingly taking advantage in their value chain of the workforce in a region

where crime against humanity are being perpetrated."

NGOs Sherpa, the Collectif Ethique sur l'éthique and the Uyghur Institute of Europe as well as an Uyghur survivor have filed the complaint with the Public Prosecutor's Office in Paris.

The case is also supported by Members of European Parliament Raphaël Glucksmann and Reinhart Butickhofer, as well as by the World Uyghur Congress. In a statement, they said, "our organisations are submitting this complaint to shed light on the role played by multinational companies in the crimes

committed against the Uyghur people and to enable French courts to rule on their possible criminal liability."

Most notably, the NGOs aim to take advantage of French legislation which makes companies legally responsible for human rights transgressions in their supply chains and potentially set a precedent.

"Europe is often quick to criticize China for human rights violations. But European companies finally have to admit – and end – their own involvement in these international crimes," said Miriam Saage-Maaß, head of ECCHR's Business and Human Rights program. This complaint is the first of a series of filings organized by ECCHR against European companies for alleged complicity in crimes against humanity. ECCHR said in a statement.

**" Our organisations are submitting this complaint to shed light on the role played by multinational companies in the crimes committed against the Uyghur people and to enable French courts to rule on their possible criminal liability "**



## CHINA TO ESTABLISH BCI ALTERNATIVE

**BEIJING** – China has announced plans to set up a domestic version of the Better Cotton Initiative, while claiming the current technical requirements of the Swiss-based BCI are "pretty low" and do not focus heavily on cotton quality. Beijing-based cotton vertical service provider Zhongnong Guoji established the Weilai Cotton - "future cotton"- project two years ago. Its progress has been limited to date, however, BCI's exit from the Xinjiang region has accelerated the work.

The proposed programme would aim to build China's own industrial standards in a bid to foster high-quality development and promote digitalization of the whole cotton industry, according to Luo Yan, secretary-general of the Zhongnong Guoji-backed

Xinjiang Digital Cotton Research Center.

"After years of living with pressure under BCI standards, we just want to build our own cotton brand to have a far greater say in the cotton and textile industry," said Luo, who also is participating in early preparation of the cotton project and recruiting of members in Xinjiang.

Experts associated with the proposed new standard said the BCI's current technical requirements, such as banning the use of certain pesticides that were prohibited in Xinjiang 30 years ago, are "pretty low, and they mainly concern controlling cotton resources instead of certifying quality cotton."

They also said it is time for China to set up its own standards rather than live with the current BCI standards.

According to Luo, the cotton programme will mainly focus on improving production efficiency through digitalization, a fully traceable cotton production process, low-carbon

production and high-quality cotton farming. Zhongnong Guoji said it had started on the proposed cotton program two years ago. This year, with the participation of China Fashion Association and the Ministry of Finance-backed Modern Seed Industry Development Fund, the company has completed the basic preliminary work and the three entities are working on a promotion agreement, standards formulation and the establishment of a digital research and development system.

"The first version of the future cotton standards will be released soon, and we will continue to work with the China Fashion Association and Modern Seed Development Fund to attract more cotton farmers and retail brands. We welcome all enterprises in the textile and apparel industry to join the program," Luo added. "Also, we're open to the possibility of establishing a company to promote the future cotton program and handle daily affairs."



## A ROUND-UP OF MERGERS, ACQUISITIONS, FINANCIAL RESULTS AND OTHER CORPORATE NEWS IN TEXTILES AND APPAREL

**Weyco Group** has announced it has acquired all of the operating assets and liabilities of **Forsake**, a distributor of outdoor footwear. The principal assets acquired were inventory, accounts receivable, and intellectual property, including the Forsake brand name. The aggregate purchase price was approximately US\$2.5 million, plus contingent payments paid annually over a period of five years, depending on Forsake achieving certain performance measures.

**JD Sports** is to offload **Sports Unlimited Retail** to **Iberian Sports Retail Group**, its 50.02 per cent-owned subsidiary based in Spain, for €16.5m. The British retail giant said it has agreed non-binding headline terms for the disposal of Sports Unlimited Retail, which is a wholly owned company based in The Netherlands.

**Authentic Brands Group** and **SPARC Group** have signed a definitive agreement to purchase **Eddie Bauer**, the American outdoor brand, from **PSEB Group**, an operating company owned by **Golden Gate Capital**. The company said in a release ABG will own Eddie Bauer's intellectual property and the brand's core operating business will become a part of the SPARC portfolio of brands.

Online fashion player **Ssense** has secured a minority investment from **Sequoia Capital China**, valuing the company at 5 billion Canadian dollars (US\$4.13bn). The Montreal-based e-commerce giant is one of the industry's leading online stores representing a dedicated mix of emerging

talent, established streetwear and luxury. The investment is the first round of external funding since the company was founded in 2003.

German fashion e-tailer **About You** has set a price range of between €21 and €26 a share for its float on the stock market, valuing it at around €4bn. The company, which is owned by Otto Group, said it aims to raise between €600m and €941m via a private placement which it will use to scale its offering internationally, accelerate the expansion of its software-as-a-service (SaaS), and strengthen its tech infrastructure and distribution centres.

US online marketplace **Etsy** is to acquire British second-hand fashion platform Depop for US\$1.6bn dollars as part of a Gen Z push. Etsy, a marketplace that specialises in handmade and vintage goods, announced it plans to buy Depop primarily in cash as it looks to attract a younger audience.

French luxury group **Kering** has sold an almost 6 per cent stake in **Puma** as it continues to wind down its investment in the German sportswear category. Based on the Puma share price at the time of writing, the transaction would represent an amount of more than €830m.

Second-hand fashion marketplace **Vinted** has launched in Canada shortly after raising €250m in funding. "To us, Canada is a great market fit, and an exciting next milestone on our mission to make second-hand fashion the first choice worldwide," said Vinted CEO Thomas Plantenga. The

launch marks a turning point in Lithuania-headquartered Vinted's growth strategy, which until now has focused its expansion on European markets.

Global licensing specialist **Brand Machine Group** has acquired luxury menswear brand **Duchamp** for an undisclosed sum. In a statement, Brand Machine Group said its primary commercial focus will be restructuring its digital experience, and Jason Eames-Illingworth, who recently joined as chief commercial officer will "slowly reseed the brand back into a premium wholesale channel."

The largest world's retailer **Walmart** has purchased **Zeekit**, the Israeli-based virtual fitting room start-up in a move designed to help the US business push into online fashion. Walmart said customers will be able to use the feature to try on items from both Walmart's private labels and other brands they offer such as Free People, Champion and Levi Strauss & Co.

Online fashion platform **Lyst** has raised US\$85m dollars with plans for an IPO in the works. The company did not disclose the valuation at which it secured its pre-IPO financing round. The London-based company is a marketplace for fashion products across many brands, department stores, and other e-commerce sites. Currently, the platform has 150 million users and sales hit US\$500m last year.





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A close-up, side-profile shot of a woman with brown hair, wearing a green long-sleeved shirt, focused on sewing. She is operating a white industrial sewing machine. The background is softly blurred, showing other sewing machines in a factory or workshop setting. The lighting is bright and even.

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