Written evidence submitted by 'World Circular Textiles Day'

Written evidence submitted by 'World Circular Textiles Day' an organisation to promote the move towards a fully circular textiles economy by 2050.

WCTD Founders include three key organisations; Worn Again Technologies Ltd (Cyndi Rhoades), Centre for Circular Design (Prof Rebecca Earley & Dr Kate Goldsworthy, University of the Arts London) and Circle Economy, Netherlands (Gwen Cunningham).

Executive summary

World Circular Textiles Day, which will take place every year on 8th October, was launched in 2020 to celebrate the efforts of a growing community of companies, organisations and individuals actively working towards a circular textiles future. Its main aim is to record the progress and chart the momentum of circularity in textiles. An ever-evolving roadmap towards full circularity by 2050, created to:

- Raise awareness around achieving a circular textiles world by 2050, across industry and with the wider general public.
- Cultivate an online umbrella to capture the growing community of companies, organisations, academia, government agencies, cities and individuals actively working towards this future and to amplify these efforts.
- Build a framework for a collaborative roadmap to be developed and revised over the next 30 years, as a blueprint for collaborative action.
- To provide a hub for a vision (or visions) for a circular textiles future.

Why does it exist?

The world is waking up to circularity; we know this to be true. But there has been a distinct need for a more positive outlook on achieving it: visceral motivation; vigorous collectivism; incisive joined up thinking. By working backwards, or 'retro engineering' the stepping-stones for getting there, we believe that the roadmap to get there becomes more manageable and we will succeed in our collective goals.

How will we do it?

World Circular Textiles Day is about people, companies and organisations joining forces to build on the great work that has already taken place in this industry. This platform has been designed to celebrate and encourage this momentum towards circularity and World Circular Textile Day is an embodiment of our progress. With the support and engagement of leading brands, organisations, authorities and individuals, we will be able to achieve this goal.

The People On Board

We have a growing community of circular technologies, intra- and entrepreneurs, brands, retailers, conveners, collectors, value chain producers, designers, policymakers, organisers, facilitators and campaigners to make this happen.

Founding Signatories include; Accelerating Circularity, Alante Capital, Canopy, British Fashion Council, H&M, Circular Fashion, Dhana Inc., Dibella Longlife Textiles, Eon, Evrnu, Fashion for

Good, Fashion Revolution, Gap Inc., Global Fashion Agenda, I:CO, Lenzing, Lindex, Otto Group, The Salvation Army, Sustainable Fashion Academy, QSA Partners, Recover, Renewcell, Refashion (Eco TLC), Reformation, Retrievr, Reverse Resources, RRS Recycling, SellHound, TEXAID, Textile Exchange, Textile Recycling Association, Tyton BioSciences, Vivobarefoot, Waste Management, Perpetual, Fashion Positive, thelittleloop, Sourcemap, The Apparel Impact Institute, The Circular Apparel Innovation Factory (CAIF), Futerra, Primark, Sulzer, The Communications Store, Veolia, Himes Sustainable Wear, ASICS, FABSCRAP, The R Collective, Redress, Brink, EILEEN FISHER Inc., LUCKY Textile Mills Ltd., Infinite Fibre Ltd., WRAP, Bank & Vogue Holdings Limited (BVH), LMB Textiles Ltd, ZDHC, Valvan Baling Systems, Infinite X, Textile Recyclers Australia, CiLAB, Lifestyle & Design Cluster, Khushi Kantha, Georgia Rowswell, ASKET, Ereks-Blue Matters, Yellow Octopus Group, COSE361, rén collective, Positive Fibers, AG Textiles Studio, Re-Fresh Global, SustFashWales, MUD Jeans,

Introduction

In April 2020 we convened a group of experts, brands, retailers, conveners, collectors, value chain producers, designers, policymakers to explore the short and long term impacts of COVID-19 on the industry and what it will mean for circularity.

The aim was to describe the current practices, products, services and processes that are in place today, the impact of COVID-19 and what needs to be in place to achieve full-circularity of textile materials. We captured statistics, insights and examples from key people, companies, innovators and industry working groups in order to build a common understanding of the challenges and opportunities ahead and how the industry must evolve.

We focussed on 3 key areas:

Raw materials & planetary boundaries; What can the planet sustainably circulate in terms of our key fibre groups? How can material flows be streamlined, with efficient collection, sorting and pre-processing systems?

Product Systems Design & Manufacture; What will circular product flows, production methods and regional textile hubs look like. What will retail, commerce and reuse become? How can co-ownership frameworks for raw materials be developed? How can retail become a service industry? How can design transform our material systems from a linear practice to circularity?

People & Society; What does circular fashion mean for those living with it and working in its supply chains? What will jobs look like in the industry in 2050? How will people engage with clothes and circulate them back into the system? How can regional textile hubs form and create new types of work?

We have put together some key discussion points from these stakeholder groups in response to the relevant inquiry topics below.

Response to inquiry topics;

Question 2: What impact has the pandemic had on fashion waste?

Post Consumer Textile Markets

- Export channels and end-markets for post consumer textiles in Europe and the UK were largely closed down during lockdown.
- Public perceptions of hygiene and contamination played a part in this shut-down. 'Stop sending your dirty clothes' has been the cry from many African countries, Covid-19 being used as a reason to enforce this. This is likely to be an ongoing trend.
- Volumes of discarded textiles went up, sorting facilities are full, textile banks overflowing, with more clothing going into household waste streams.
- COVID-19 accelerated an already declining sector. Recycling chains were breaking down but this process has been further exacerbated.
- Some collectors have been experiencing price drops on the value of end of use textiles of 30-40%.
- Short-term impacts on pricing (lower), longer term impacts include instability of markets; products will move but pricing will stay low.
- Circularity is more important than ever, from an economic as well as an environmental perspective, for end-of-use supply chains.
- There is a strong business case for a simplified sorting system; separating higher value textile products for reuse plus incineration for textiles with no end markets, as a short-term solution, in preparation for regenerative recycling processes to industrialise and provide a solution.

Consumers - Consumption and Buying Patterns

- Consumerism is still thriving, and has just shifted online. Those companies well set up to trade online are reporting strong sales.
- Simultaneously, many consumers are rethinking their buying habits and looking towards a new era beyond the fast fashion model, meaning greater opportunities for rental, reuse, longer lasting fashion.

On Recycling Behaviours

- People have more time to sort out clothes they no longer want.
- The crisis provides an opportunity to completely reinvent what second-hand clothing looks like, both on the high street and online for purchasing and returning in a different way.
- Second-hand clothing already had a hygiene perception issue with consumers. This is worse now with COVID-19. Environmentally friendly, low costs cleaning technologies (such as Ozone technology) will be important for deep cleaning and purification of garments.

Question 3: What impact has the pandemic had on the relationship between fashion retailers and suppliers?

Ongoing Supply Challenges

- Huge pressure on supply chains, with new stock in limbo (in stores, warehouses, on water in container ships). Containers of textile scraps held in containers in Bangladesh, not able to progress.
- Unsold new stock has been a competitor with the second-hand market for a while now, but with the crisis, it's really going to be a problem with all the unsold end of use piling up, especially when unsold new stock is only 20-30 cents more per kilo... and it's virgin.
- The sharing economy could work with resources on an industry wide level, where materials are shifted from one part of the industry to another.
- The trend of reuse, which was already climbing, will continue due to the economic downturn.
- Holistic recycling – of products and raw materials - needs to happen within UK borders.
- Local and distributed systems of production and recycling are essential to our future resilience.
- Fast fashion will take a serious hit but won't be permanently damaged - new versions of it will emerge if unchecked.
- There are opportunities for brands to leverage stockpiling in warehouses around the world and the growing reuse market, by bringing it in-house and reimagining the second-hand clothing market. There are already great examples like platforms such as 'My Wardrobe HQ'.
- Brands are going to rely less on single markets for their production. Supply chains are getting shorter.
- We're a long way from understanding what these boundaries are for the industry, but a lot of organisations and projects are starting to pick this up as part of a roadmap to circularity.
- Other topics being discussed: supply chain prosperity, ownership of resources, fibre as a digital asset, where businesses provide services throughout a circular system, rather than the one off transactions happening in today's linear supply chain.

World Circular Textile Day founders and signatories will continue to explore these questions and convene stakeholders to develop collective action points for publication during 2021.

References:

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https://www.circulardesign.org.uk/
https://wornagain.co.uk/
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