

# Union of Concerned Researchers in Fashion

## Submission of Written Questions to Planet Textiles 2019 Conference

19<sup>th</sup> June 2019

We, the Union of Concerned Researchers in Fashion, recognize that the response of the fashion sector to the intensifying ecological crisis has been - and continues to be - over-simplified, fragmented and obstructed by the growth logic of extractive business models as they are currently realized and practiced.

As a group of concerned researchers, supported by more than 380 signees from institutions around the world, our view is that textile and clothing researchers can no longer remain uninvolved or complacent, and we need to conduct ourselves in new ways.

We therefore pose the following questions to Planet Textiles conference 2019. We do this because we are concerned about the level of marketing around sustainability themes currently prevalent in the fashion industry and the disconnect between front-facing messaging and back-end real change. We are concerned that if companies and organizations are not open to taking on difficult questions, those questions and the issues that prompt them will be missed and remain unattended to. Specifically we seek to examine three areas:

### Indices

*Question 1* - While transparency continues to be a popular term, it does very little to keep business within the natural limits of earth's resources. No current index links a company's use of resources to the earth's capacity to supply those resources. How can such indices be amended to include real ecological limits? Further, how can the actual volumes that are produced be included in the evaluation of companies' environmental performance?

*Question 2* - The Higg index is the culmination of many years of collaborative work. Yet worthy perspectives have been excluded from it. Carbon sequestration practices in wool production/ranching and maintaining garments in extended use and reuse are just two examples that fall outside the parameters of the index. As the Higg index is rolled out more broadly, how can those involved avoid amplifying the shortcomings of the index and favouring only a narrow range of responses and actions by industry and wearers?

### **Bringing initiatives to scale**

'Scaling up' presupposes the conditions and values of the old industrial and consumer economies. Meeting the scale of the problem of massive amounts of waste generated by the old fashion system is of extreme urgency. Even more critical is to *scale the drawdown of conspicuous production* and the rate of virgin material extraction by the fashion industry.

*Question 3* - How can Planet Textiles make scaling the drawdown of *conspicuous production* the center point of future conferences, including responsible reallocation of jobs and application of knowledge and skills and maintaining living wages as we transition out of the industrial and consumer economies?

### **Circularity**

'Circular' and 'recycled' are terms that are currently used interchangeably in fashion industry marketing and discussions. If it were possible now for all the garments in the fashion industry to flow into reuse and recycling systems, circularity would not be achieved unless the draw-down of virgin material garment production were also achieved.<sup>1</sup>

*Question 4* - Since the infrastructure to ensure true circularity of materials does not yet exist, how can a forum like Planet Textiles call out ways in which the term is being used prematurely in brand marketing claims?

*Question 5* - Brand commitments to being 'sustainable' by a certain date no longer hold potency. We have seen dates pass by and commitments re-calibrated and re-stated many times over. H&M has made a commitment to be fully 'circular' by 2030, we wish to ask H&M at the Planet Textiles conference to detail publicly its plans for:

- a. drawing down their conspicuous production of virgin fiber garments;
- b. tracking and measuring the total percentage of recycled fiber and new fiber in their business (rather than by product) and making this information fully transparent to the public;
- c. tracking and tracing globally sold and distributed garments and the total percentage of the business (rather than number of products) brought into circular reuse systems as well as recycling systems.

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<sup>1</sup> For further reading see <https://steadystate.org/a-journey-of-no-return-not-a-circular-economy/>