

THURSDAY 3RD MAY 00.01 HOURS BST (GMT+1)

PRESS RELEASE

TEXTILE CERTIFICATION SCHEMES ARE OFFERING A FALSE PROMISE OF SUSTAINABILITY

New report finds most schemes failing to achieve any protection for environment

Many certification schemes which supposedly help consumers make environment-friendly decisions when buying clothes and textiles stand in the way of sustainability and should undergo significant reform, according to a new report.

The findings come in new research from the Changing Markets Foundation, which investigated whether voluntary certification schemes for textiles, seafood and palm oil are accurately guiding consumers towards sustainable products. From over 100 green labels identified in the textile sector, the report took a closer look at eight schemes that are widely used in the fashion industry and identified several short-comings in all of them. There is no single scheme or label which ensures transparency, traceability and sustainability at every stage of the supply chain.

“Certification schemes are failing the environment and consumers, who increasingly want to make ethical and sustainable choices. It’s time for a serious rethink about how we achieve sustainability because the current system is broken,” said Nusa Urbancic, Campaigns Director at Changing Markets.

Most of the textiles schemes used by the fashion brands to display their green credentials – for example the Higg Index and Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals (ZDHC) – are run by multi-stakeholder groups including industry associations and NGOs and suffer from a lack of transparency. Others, such as the Oeko-tex or MADE-BY, offer many different certification modules a-la carte and suffer from a lack of completeness. The report says that many schemes are so focused on getting all industry players on board, or meeting the growing demand for certified products, that they are willing to lower their standards in order to get more players on board.

“The main conclusion of this report is that certification has lost its way and that its contribution to creating a more sustainable world is minute,” says the report, which calls for abolition of the least ambitious schemes and for the significant reform of others, based on the principles of transparency, independence, holistic approach and continuous improvements. The report also warns that voluntary certification schemes should not replace strong governmental and international regulations.

The textiles industry uses a quarter of the world’s chemicals and has been blamed for 20% of industrial water pollution, making it the second biggest polluter of freshwater on the planet.

The report finds that:

- Global organic Textile Standard (GOTS) and the EU Ecolabel were the best schemes, because they use a life-cycle approach to textile certification. However, on closer inspection it became apparent that the EU Ecolabel does not cover water pollution indicators for viscose manufacturing, which is a major oversight.
- The Higg Index, which is widely used by fashion brands, currently relies on self-assessment and lacks transparency.
- The report identifies the Better Cotton Initiative as one of the worst schemes, which could have undermined the growth in organic cotton. The BCI's tolerance of the use of pesticides and GM seeds has resulted in farmers switching from organic to GM cotton.

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Further information

About the Changing Markets Foundation

The Changing Markets Foundation partners with NGOs on market-focused campaigns. Our mission is to expose irresponsible corporate practices and drive change towards a more sustainable economy.

www.changingmarkets.org / @ChangingMarkets

About the report

The report, entitled *The False Promise of Certification: how certification is hindering sustainability in the textiles, palm oil and fisheries industries*, is based on qualitative research into the identified schemes, interviews with NGO experts and an extensive review of the academic literature. It is available at <https://changingmarkets.org/portfolio/dirty-fashion/>