PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

9 March 2023

Fashion and plastics in the firing line as EU unveils plan to crackdown on rotten green claims

- Most green claims by fashion brands and consumer brands likely to be swept away by new EU green claims directive.

- The directive could see new powers for authorities to tackle greenwashing in Member States, including seizing documents, court cases, and fines where necessary.

A timeline of greenwashing by the fashion and plastics sectors, launched by the Changing Markets Foundation today, shows that greenwashing has been rampant, and that enforcement and penalties are needed across the European Market. The EU’s upcoming green claims directive, expected to be published on 22 March, seeks to bring clarity to green claims after years of free for all marketing.

The timeline details over 20 cases of greenwashing crackdowns and investigations by authorities across the world. Consumer goods companies such as Unilever1 and Coca-Cola’s Innocent2 have already faced regulatory action for misleading marketing, as well as fashion brands, such as H&M3 and Adidas.4

Changing Markets Foundation Campaign Manager, George Harding-Rolls said: “The days of unfettered greenwashing are drawing to a close. This timeline shows that the crackdown has well and truly begun. Green claims we encounter every day will now need to be much more robust to pass the test, in particular, the fashion industry’s notoriously patchy and inaccurate data will come under fire, with the directive requiring the use of company specific, primary data to substantiate claims where possible. It is also vital that the rules are harmonised across the EU, to avoid a minestrone of competing certifications.”

Changing Markets has been collecting the examples of greenwashing across the two sectors over the last year on its website www.greenwash.com with nearly 100 examples curated to date.

The new EU rules on green claims will require stringent verification of any environmental-based marketing, and will no longer allow companies to create sustainability tags not based on a robust harmonised methodology. They will also

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1 https://www.edie.net/greenwashing-unilever-laundry-detergent-ad-campaign-banned-in-the-uk/
2 https://www.foodnavigator.com/Article/2022/02/22/greenwashing-the-coca-cola-company-juice-advert-rejected-by-watchdog
4 https://apparelinsider.com/adidas-greenwashing/
restrict claims been made for the whole product when only a small part is environmentally friendly, for example products tagged as ‘sustainable’ which the packaging or product only contains a small percentage of recycled content. Likewise, claims around the disposal of packaging, whether plastic, bio-based, or compostable, will need a far greater degree of substantiation than currently seen.

The proposal highlights the potential for the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) tool to be the standard for substantiation of claims in many categories, including textiles and packaging. Whilst a unified approach to verification is necessary, it is important that such a tool covers all impacts across a product lifecycle, including end of life and elements like microplastic release.

At the nexus of packaging and fashion is the growing use of plastic bottles for recycled polyester content by the fashion industry. Research by Changing Markets found that 85% of brands surveyed rely entirely on plastic bottles for recycled polyester. Concerningly, the leaked draft of legislation makes no specific mention of this greenwashing phenomenon, which serves to undermine circularity in the beverage sector and has been one of the main sustainability strategies of fashion brands. This is something that had been promised in the EU Textiles Strategy published in March 2022 (see note to editor).

**Harding-Rolls continued** "Using plastic bottles for recycled fashion is a one-way ticket to landfill or incineration and should be banned as an environmental claim in the upcoming Green Claims Directive, as it was promised in the Textile Strategy. Instead of poaching recyclable material from the beverage industry, fashion brands and retailers should rather invest into fibre-to-fibre recycling for their own waste. The European Commission must not back track on this, doing so would be a step in the wrong direction for circularity."

Consumers are increasingly demanding environmentally responsible products and are willing to pay more for products that align with their values. By investing in sustainable practices and providing transparent information about their products, companies can build trust and loyalty with consumers, which can lead to increased sales and a competitive advantage in the market.

EU harmonised rules on green claims will not only help consumers make more informed choices based on environmental performance, but it will also protect businesses who have worked hard on lowering their products’ impact by levelling the playing field and reducing the costs by ensuring companies only have one set of rules to abide by.

**Ends**

6 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12822-EU-strategy-for-sustainable-textiles](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12822-EU-strategy-for-sustainable-textiles)
Notes to the editor:

- The Changing Markets Foundation’s infographic timeline detailing the crackdown on greenwashing in fashion and plastic since 2020 is available here.

- The leaked proposal of the Green Claims Directive is available here.

- In its Textile Strategy the European Commission stated it “will pay specific attention to this issue in the context of upcoming initiatives such as the Green Claims Initiative, the review of the EU Ecolabel criteria for textiles and footwear, and in the development of binding product-specific ecodesign requirements. The Commission also encourages businesses to prioritise their efforts on fibre-to-fibre recycling and rather make claims on achievements to address this important challenge in closing the loop for textile products.”

- In May 2022, a coalition of NGOs and industry bodies published a joint letter calling for the Commission to address downcycling of bottles to clothing, available here.

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