

Sustainability (19/05/17)

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Australian Fashion Week: Designers must focus more on sustainability, eco-fashionistas say

ABC Radio Sydney

By [Amanda Hoh](#)

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PHOTO: [Australian Fashion Week runs from May 14 to 19.](#) (Facebook: Fashion Week)

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The Australian fashion industry still has "a long way to go" in the production of environmentally friendly textiles according to eco-fashionistas, who want brands to do more to incorporate sustainable practices.

On average, for every metre of fabric used when making shoes or clothing, 20 per cent is discarded as waste.

Traditional dyes used to stain fabrics have damaging effects on the environment, while the widespread use of blended fabrics such as cotton and elastane make clothes impossible to recycle and be repurposed.

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Kelly Elkin from not-for-profit organisation Clean Cut Fashion said an upcoming panel discussion about future industry practices was the only event at this week's Australian Fashion Week in Sydney that was focused on sustainable principles.

"More needs to be done, we're still a long way to go," Ms Elkin said.

"Five years ago, no-one would think that sustainability would be anywhere on the agenda at Fashion Week in Australia.

"And now we're not only seeing panels and fashion leaders openly discussing it, we're seeing the main headlining acts embracing sustainability as part of their core ethos.

"It would be great to see the vast number of brands showing having a really good go at sustainability and ethics, but it's coming."

KitX leading sustainable fashion

Ms Elkin said there were only "a handful" of designers at the event this year that promoted sustainable business models.

One of those spearheading change in the industry is KitX which launched in 2015 by former Willow designer Kit Willow.



PHOTO: [KitX says it aims for designs with "high frequency wear"](#). (Supplied: KitX)

"Fashion is the second largest polluter in the world after the oil industry, with 70 per cent of fashion's impact on the planet made at the material production and agricultural phase," Ms Willow said.

"Because of this KitX focuses on environmentally sustainable and ethically sourced materials.

"We include zips made from recycled plastic bottles, buttons created from reclaimed horn, organic cotton, sustainable silk and reclaimed marine litter upcycled into lycra in our designs."

Growth of small brands

Ms Elkin said big international brands such as Nike, Adidas and Levi's have so far been the main advocates for sustainable practices, with the latter experimenting with ways to repurpose jeans into new denim and operating under the mantra "water less, waste less".

She said younger and smaller Australian brands were also starting to adopt more sustainable practices and had started seeing the value in promoting that ethos to consumers.

She cited processes such as minimising offcuts, using eco-friendly dyes and inks, and being "less trend driven, more style focused" when considering the longevity of a garment.

Materials like organic cotton, bamboo, hemp, linen and recycled polyester were starting to be used in some Australian brands.

Lucy Hinckfuss, founder of brand Ten Pieces, said minimising fabric wastage was "difficult" during production due to certain pattern layouts, although they were starting use more eco-friendly material.

Their collection showing at Fashion Week on Thursday was created using biodegradable Australian merino wool and cashmere.



PHOTO: [Ten Pieces designers Lucy Hinckfuss and Maurice Terzini launched their brand in 2011.](#) (Supplied: Ten Pieces)

"We're starting to steer away from plastic coverings, we use recycled paper for our tags, and we try and cut down on wrapping," she said.

"Sustainable fashion has been around for a long time but it's only just coming into commercial awareness.

"Everyone in Australian fashion should make it an important part of how the industry runs."

Ms Elkin said the concept of sustainable fashion had to extend to business values and principles, not just about clothing production.

"I wish I could say there was a huge amount of initiatives here.

"We, alongside Ethical Clothing Australia, are trying to work with Australian brands, working on ethical local production and creating recycled textile waste initiatives, but it's a really slow process.

"There's a lot of talk about recycling denim ... which is the most common fabric we use, so hopefully something will come out of that soon."