



Five take away messages from Australia's inaugural Responsible Fashion Summit



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Last week I attended the inaugural Legacy Responsible Fashion Summit in Sydney, Australia, presented in partnership with the Australian Fashion Council and Melinda Tually who runs *Ndless: the New Normal* and *Fashion Revolution* in Australia and New Zealand. Tually said the conference was designed to give practical information on the biggest issues facing fashion today. Spread across two days, Legacy contained practical workshops, keynote speakers and panel discussions around how the fashion industry can incorporate sustainability into supply chains. We heard from lawyers, researchers, experts, investors, advocates from non-government agencies, brands who have just started their sustainability journey, as well as emerging designers who have sustainability at the core of their business. The first keynote from Jenny Cermak at McKinsey & Company summarised the key trends from the [State of Fashion 2019](#) Report, noting that in the Australian context:

- We consume 27 kg of new clothing per year (double global average);
- Send 500k tons of textiles to landfill (more than the UKs 300k); and
- Clothing utilisation is down 36%.

Overall, more clothes are made and sold, and we're wearing them less.

I've now taken some time to digest the learnings from Legacy, and drilled down to five key take away messages that relate to the future of fashion and sustainability:

- 1) Climate change is a hot topic, and the most pressing issue for fashion to tackle. Transport between the various stages of garment production was identified as one of the largest contributors to carbon emissions;
- 2) New business models focusing on renting, leasing, garment care and distributing existing

clothes are gaining momentum;

3) Retailers and designers are increasing their use of 'sustainable materials' across a range of product offerings, however the use of recycled materials and designing for circular fashion is quite limited at the moment;

4) There is an increasing demand for radical traceability and transparency. Science-based technology from [Oritain](#) which can trace raw material to their country of origin is fast becoming a preferred way to ensure traceability, and

5) Recent Australian laws, business models and auditing schemes have emerged to combat slavery and abuse in supply chains.

If you wish to know more about each of these insights gleaned from attending Legacy I have written additional notes below. Please note they are quite detailed and information heavy. I am hoping there will be a Legacy 2020 next year!

Take Away 1: Climate change is a hot topic, and the most pressing issue for fashion to tackle

The first 'In Conversation series' at Legacy, Dr Martin Rice from the Climate Council discussed the urgency for climate action. Globally, the fashion industry contributes 8-10 % of carbon emissions, and this is set to grow to 25%. Dr Rice also shared the staggering fact that the fashion industry emits more CO2 pollution than the whole of aviation and maritime combined. Later in a breakout session run by Good On You, we learned that emissions at their current rate need to reduce by around 45.5%. Worst was the fact that global apparel production has doubled between 2000 to 2014 and transport was identified as one of the largest contributors to carbon emissions compared to the operational level of retail. It was estimated that one garment can travel up to 10 countries as it is being assembled. It is clear that the fashion industry has a huge leadership role to play in reducing carbon emissions. Using sustainable materials, reducing transport distances, switching to renewables and engaging with consumers were noted as ways we can start to reduce emissions. I should also add that the Climate Council has a great range of [mythbusting](#) guides around climate change.

Take Away 2: New business models focusing on renting, leasing, garment care and distributing existing clothes

Did you know that by 2027 second hand clothes are estimated to comprise around one third of wardrobes? Business models focusing not on ownership, but on access to a wide range of clothing was noted as a key trend in the [State of Fashion 2019](#) Report, and at the second 'In Conversation' at Legacy, we heard from businesses who are doing just that and how they are shaking up the fashion industry. Dean Jones from the clothing rental platform, [Glam Corner](#), has seen a shift in which brands are taking into consideration how to design for rental, specifically making durable clothes that last for re-wear, subscription boxes or a clothing library. Fanny Moizant from second hand luxury resell platform [Vestiaire](#) said that re-commerce was set to outgrow the fast fashion economy in the future, and the luxury market now embraces luxury re-sellers as an ally. Bryce Alton from [Nudie Jeans](#), told us about their product stewardship program in which anyone who owns one of their organic cotton jeans can have them 'repaired for life'. Noting that wages are the highest cost in retail, staff are trained to sew and repair in store, which creates what Alton calls, 'retail theatre'.

In a breakout session we also heard from charities who are working to divert clothing from landfill. [Thread Together](#) in their first year collected 135,000 new garments destined for landfill and gave them to 80,000 disadvantaged Australians. Aife O'Loughlin from Move the Needle, an initiative by the Salvation Army, explained how they are working closely with retailers to either implement a take back scheme, encourage consumer donation, arrange in store drop off points, donate unsold clothes, offer repairs, and include marketing around how to extend a garments life. Their goal is to divert 20% of clothes destined for landfill.

Take Away 3: Retailers and designers are increasing their use of sustainable materials across a range of product offerings, however the use of recycled materials and designing for circular fashion is quite limited at the moment

Throughout Legacy, retailers and designers shared how they were including sustainable materials into their product range. Transitioning from using virgin synthetics and replacing them with recycled synthetics was one way Elizabeth Abegg from [SPELL and the Gypsy](#) and Kit Willow from [KITX](#) are doing this. Willow spoke about an instance of being unable to use recycled nylon, opting to use virgin nylon and planting trees to 'make up' the materials' contribution to emissions. While some recycled materials are not ready for designers to use yet, Willow stressed that fit and quality drive sales over materials, and that first and foremost, the product needs to look good and be wearable. Abegg from [SPELL](#) said that sustainability

does cost more as suppliers charge more, and certifications costs extra – and this cost is either absorbed by the business or goes to the consumer.

Stella Smith Stevens, menswear designer at Country Road shared some of their sustainable sourcing wins, such as a mainline jean which uses [Refibra](#) (recycled cotton scraps and wood pulp) and their green label wash which uses 35L water (compared to average 70L) per pair of jean. Country Road is also working with the Better Cotton Initiative and Cotton Australia to include more sustainable cotton in their ranges. Brooke Summers from Cotton Australia said that Australian cotton growers have reduced pesticide use by 90%, improved water usage by 60%, and is most land efficient with yields 3 times the world average. Stevens did raise however, that there is a limited selection of sustainable material options and it can take three to four years to "get it [the product] right". Stevens also highlighted that while it might be okay to use or source some recycled material, *she questioned whether the final product could then be recycled?* This is an important question and consideration as less than one per cent of discarded clothing and textiles is currently recycled into new clothing.

In her breakout session on textile waste and circular textiles, Dr Clara Vuletich said "designers should see themselves as borrowers of material." However, Dr Vuletich noted that designing for circularity has its limitations because in Australia "we have had no federal government level engagement with the clothing/textile waste issue and no national investment in textile recycling technologies or systems." One emerging designer who uses circular fashion principles is Courtney Holm from [A.BCH](#), who designs clothes that are made to be biodegradable or recycled at the end of their life. Holm also publishes locations and details of every stage of production, and she established the 'Sustainable Fashion Source Australia' group which shares information on sourcing sustainable materials. Other emerging designers with sustainability at the core of their business include casual wear on demand and made to measure by [Citizen Wolf](#), co-founded by Zoltan Csaki, and New Zealand based retailer [KOWTOW](#), co-founded by Gosia Piatek, which uses ethical organic cotton from India. Another 'In Conversation' series around sustaining artisan communities with Caroline Poiner from Artisans of Fashion, Jacqueline Wessels from MIMCO, and Yatu Widders Hunt from Cox Inall Ridgeway discussed that while artisans may not work within Western fashion business models or timelines, co-creation was key to partnerships and they often achieved better results far beyond original expectations. The business case for 'Made in Australia' was also a topic for the 'In Conversation' series. Mary Lou Ryan co-founder of bassike said 95% of their clothing is made in Australia. Bianca Spender also spoke about local production allowing for collaboration and quality control (although resources are limited). Andrew Cucurrullo from Waverly Mills said there is also great pride from locals around Australian made, and their [kickstarter campaign](#) to keep the last mill in Tasmania running reached the total in just 10 days.

Take Away 4: There is an increasing demand for radical traceability and transparency

'Radical Transparency' across the supply chain was another key trend highlighted in the [State of Fashion 2019](#) Report. However, tracing raw materials in fashion is tricky, for example cotton is usually blended with cotton from other countries in order to create the right consistency for certain products. Sardon Adams from [Oritain](#) gave a Keynote on Day Two about how their science-based technology can trace raw material to their country of origin. Oritain is currently working with the Kering Group and Marks & Spencer, and their technology is fast becoming a preferred way to ensure traceability compared to a paper trail of certifications or Blockchain. One of the key reasons being that testing can be done at anytime, and anywhere - even if the product is finished!

As mentioned above, designers, brands and retailers were open in sharing their sustainability journey throughout Legacy. For example, Jaana Quaintance James from the Iconic, shared how they 'cleaned up' and mapped out all their factories (55 in total) in 14 months, undertook ethical audits and are now moving towards 100% approved factories. Elizabeth Abegg from SPELL & the Gypsy Collective said it was a customer who asked her, 'who made my clothes' that set SPELL on their sustainability journey. Abegg advice was to start by setting targets, and to bring the consumer along for the journey as they'll be more forgiving and understanding if you are honest and fail to meet targets. Lucy King from Country Road Group and David Jones Ltd said they have been careful when talking to customers, steering away from using buzzwords and only communicating accurate and authentic claims.

Take Away 5: Recent Australian laws, business models and auditing schemes have emerged to combat slavery and abuse in supply chains

Slavery is prominent in supply chains. It was estimated that there are 40.3 million slaves in the world. James Bartle from Outland Denim spoke about their [business model](#) which upskills

women who have been rescued from human trafficking and sexual exploitation in Cambodia. Bartle also shared that after Megan Markle wore a pair of Outland Denim black skinny jeans on a Royal visit to Australia in 2018, the increase in sales has had a direct impact on lives and their workforce has doubled to meet higher demands. Dr Anu Mundkur from CARE Australia also disseminated information around her research on Cambodian garment workers, which found that 1 in 3 workers from are sexually harassed and abused. Dr Mundkur asked brands to take action and join their [STOP Sexual Harassment project](#). Dr Kevin Franklin from ELEVATE spoke about their [Responsible Sourcing Standard](#) designed to go beyond compliance and assess supply chains by deep diving into specific priorities and values. For example, an assessment of factory working environments found no yelling = more productive working environment, in turn making the business case for factory managers to create positive, safe and healthy working relationships.

In 2018, Australia passed the Modern Slavery Act at a Federal and State level in New South Wales, and 2019 will be their first year in effect. This means that at the end of this financial year in June, large businesses with revenue totalling \$100 million (under the Commonwealth Act), and small businesses with revenue totalling \$50 million (under the New South Wales Act) will need to report risks of slavery in their supply chains each financial year, and these statements will be available for the public to view. Alexander Coward from the Modern Slavery Business Engagement Unit in the Department of Home Affairs, said the intention of the Act was to consolidate supply chains and rectify the limitations of auditing. Eliza Ward from the Ethical Trading Initiative adds that sub-contracting is one way supply chains can become 'lost' with 40% of suppliers more likely to subcontract to other companies if order prices were low, suggesting to look at their [Guide to Buying Responsibly](#) for more information.

Disclaimer: Zoe Mellick is currently undertaking a sustainable value chain analysis on the Australian cotton industry at Queensland University of Technology. The PhD study is co-funded by the Cotton Research and Development Corporation and the Australian Government's Research Training Stipend.



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Great summary Zoe. I wasn't able to get there myself- so your notes are awesome! A great resource in themselves! Thank you.

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Alice Payne 1w
Lecturer, QUT

Thanks Zoe - terrific article

Like Reply



Jane Milburn 2w
founder of Textile Beat, director of Milburn Media

Thanks for your notes Zoe. Very interesting to see discussions. Lots of work to be done on many fronts. [?](#)

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