

Alliance sees new EU textile legislation as carte blanche for greenwashing / Kirsten Reinhold – TextilWirtschaft 19/10/22

In fact, the planned EU legislation under the Green Deal is intended to prevent greenwashing in the future. However, the 'Make the Label Count' coalition, in which associations and initiatives have joined forces, fears the opposite. She explains why in an open letter to the EU Commission. It is mainly about the irritations around the Higg Index." We, the signatories of the Make the Label Count campaign, welcome the European Commission's ambitious proposals for sustainable textiles under the EU Green Deal and support the EU towards carbon neutral and circularity by 2050. However, if not done properly, EU textile legislation may encourage greenwashing," reads the letter, which was signed by Cotton Australia and the Bremen Cotton Exchange, among others, as well as by manufacturers such as John Smedley.

Criticism of the Higg again

Shortly before the second package of the EU Circular Economy Action Plan, launched in November as part of the "Green Deal", is published, the Make the Label Count (MTLC) coalition calls on the Commission to ensure that the planned textile legislation does not facilitate greenwashing. This mainly concerns the latest news about the material index of the Higg data collection. The signatories believe that the focus on the environmental footprint of products (PEF), which should be used as a basis for claiming product sustainability, is one of the key factors by which the proposed legislation could encourage greenwashing. This would exclude the main indicators of microplastic release, plastic waste and recyclability. Like the currently heavily criticized Higg Index, this can lead to clothing made from synthetic fibers being rated as more durable than it actually is. According to the signatories, consumers will be encouraged to buy more fossil fuel fashion instead of less. Recent warnings from consumer protection authorities in the Netherlands and Norway against communicating product sustainability using the Higg Material Sustainability Index (MSI) have shown that the need for regulation has never been more important, according to the signatories, including George Harding-Rolls as campaign manager of the NGO Changing Markets Foundation..

Too much greenwashing in the industry

"In an industry awashed with greenwashing, facilitated by brand-interested and self-managed definitions of 'sustainability,' the need for regulation and harmonized sustainability steel has never been more important to consumers," the authors write, pointing to the consumer protection authorities of the Netherlands and Norway who have specifically issued guidelines on how to communicate product sustainability to use the Higg MSI. Editions. It states that environmental claims based on the Higg MSI method should be reviewed to reduce the risk of misleading consumers. The letter calls on the Commission to clarify the interaction between different policy initiatives and the instruments to implement the laws. "If the current PEF methodology forms the basis for the future regulation of ecodesign requirements and the substantiation of environmentally friendly claims – particularly for clothing and footwear – we are concerned that its application will not take into account crucial product impacts that are driving the enormous environmental damage to the industry," the authors further complain.

No indicators to measure

The EU cannot cope with what it does not measure, they say. For example, the release of microplastics is currently not measured in the PEF. However, it should be included as the main indicator in the overall PEF assessment and "should be sufficiently weighted compared to the other 16 indicators to have a meaningful effect". In addition, given the "significant share of synthetic clothing in fast fashion and residual waste", a clearly defined indicator for plastic waste should also be introduced. More account should be taken of the environmental impact of plastic waste throughout the life cycle of a garment. In addition, consumers who buy a garment should be informed about its impact on plastic waste.

Circular economy indicator required

In addition, the inclusion of a circular economy indicator is important for achieving the objectives of the EU circular economy. So far, the definition of the circular economy used in relation to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's material cycle indicator has been too narrow and gives too little weight to processes such as the biological cycle and the importance of renewable raw materials for sustainable products. Signatories will offer to the Commission to be part of the solution and to enable consumers to make informed and sustainable choices. The initiators of "Make the Label Count" are Australian Wool Innovation Limited (AWI), The Campaign for Wool, Cashmere and Camel Hair Manufacturers

Institute (CCMI), Changing Markets Foundation, Discover Naturals Fibres Initiative, Fibershed, International Sericultural Commission, Plastic Soup Foundation, International Wool Textile Organisation (WTO) and International Silk Union (ISU).