

Sustainable Fashion: Who really cares?

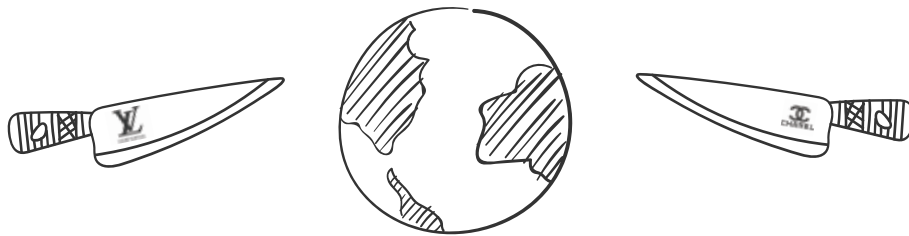


Kelly Green, owner of Maurie and Eve.

Climate change has become the buzz word of the century, yet one of it's major contributors - the fashion industry - has fallen through the cracks.

If there's one thing that gets our politicians squabbling over forgotten climate policy, it's a federal election. With Paris targets that are [barely being met](#), and a recent [Lowy Poll](#) showing two-thirds of Australian adults ranking climate change their number one threat, it's no wonder this area of debate has been so hotly contested this election season.

But how often do you hear the words climate change and fashion in the same sentence? And how often do you hear that sentence in the mouths of politicians?



“I was thinking about even closing the doors. . .”

“I've got three children, so I just felt like. . . What is this really doing to our planet? And having more awareness of what the industry is doing to the earth, it's actually quiet daunting, and quite scary,” said Kelly Green, owner of Australian fashion label Maurie and Eve.

The fashion industry is responsible for **nearly 10 percent of all global emissions**, coming in third as one of the [world's biggest consumers of water](#), yet it flies under the radar in almost every conversation about Australia's climate change policies.

“At one stage, probably about two years ago, I was thinking about even closing the doors because it was just getting so overwhelming for me, about how much damage it was doing to [the environment],” she said.

“... It's not our job to tell industry they need a standard.”

Maurie and Eve has been operating for over 12 years, finding success in a market hungry for high quality Australian design.

Kelly accredits the long-standing ethical standards of Laurie and Eve as key to her success. When talking about the factory in Bali that she's been with for over 10 years, she describes it as "home".



Kelly visiting the factory in Bali



A piece of clothing being hand sewn in the factory

"It's a really beautiful relationship and every time we go over there they show us all these new things that they've done, and they look after their staff. . .It's just this really beautiful place, it's a nice connection, it's a nice feeling," she said.

However, one year ago, when Kelly received a sustainability report that highlighted some of the environmental downfalls of the brand, she knew she had to make some big changes to be the role model she wanted to be for her children.

But the transition to an Eco-sustainable business model hasn't been easy.

“Even down to the little pins, we don't use them anymore.”

Missing standards

"The more we looked into this we were like, we cant wait until the day we can change across all our socials that we are an ethical brand, but like what does that mean and where do you get that from?" Said Green.

Shubham Kedia, from online ethical clothing site Thread Harvest, talks about how the lack of "proper standards" in the industry drove the site to be made in 2014, as "people in the fashion industry were not really educated in environmental ethics."

Without any clear standards or legislation governing the environmental impact of the fashion or textile industries, it's up to the individual whether or not they want to employ Eco sustainable measures in their business model.



Maurie and Eve's new hang-tags that use off-cuts of used fabrics

"Of course companies want to be able to have sustainable practices publicized because it's a very big issue these days, but no one's come to us to say a standard is the solution, despite the fact we think it is, it's not our job to tell industry they need a standard," said Scott McGrath, the Government Relations Manager at Standards Australia.

"It's all industry driven so we respond to proposals. . . 'It [standards] becomes mandatory when the government regulates one of our standards," he said.

Last year, Australia developed ground breaking legislation, [The Commonwealth modern slavery act](#), which requires businesses to report on the risks of modern slavery in their corporations.

This legislation, although vital in ensuring ethical standards are upheld, does not consider the environmental impact of the fashion industry. In fact, [the newest legislation](#) we have detailing environmental health in textile manufacturing is from 1999.

“They are touching your body, you should know where they come from. . .”

That's a huge difference in environmental priority from our allies in the United Kingdom who, in February, were one of the only countries to [propose tax incentives](#) to companies who make environmentally friendly clothes, and penalties to those who don't.

Businesses making the change

For business's like Kelly's who are actively trying to incorporate environmental ethics into their business model, huge changes have been made.

Maurie and Eve now use off-cuts from fabric for their hangtags, they use bio-degradable packaging, they are incorporating more environmentally friendly fabrics into their design, they are incorporating a re-purpose scheme which see's clothes re-made into a kid's line, and they are a member of 1% for the planet – which gives 1 percent of their profits to charity.



*Bio-degradable packaging bags
Source: <https://www.betterpackaging.com/>*

"Even down to little pins, we don't use them anymore. Were thinking more and more about what we can do,"

"In the last twelve months we've gone from selling to over a hundred suppliers and now were exclusively online," she said.

The biggest change of all though will be the move to Creatnet in India. A Eco-sustainable factory in India that thrives on women's empowerment and sustainable materials.

Small businesses aren't the only ones making the shift towards sustainable fashion, with [Mercedes Benz Fashion](#) announcing last week that they will be committing to a three year green plan to reduce cut waste and carbon emissions from the event.

Consumers leading the way

[The State of Fashion report 2019](#) named transparency one of the biggest issues affecting the industry, citing a "Trust Deficit" in terms of business behavior and consumer skepticism.

Kedia said: "If your going to eat a meal at subway, you can ask subway where did you get your ingredients from and they should have an answer right because you are going to consume that. Your wearing clothes every single day, they are touching your body, you should know where they come from."

Consumers aren't just demanding transparency, they are actively choosing brands that uphold ethical standards environmentally and throughout its supply chain.

Kedia talks about traffic on the site doubling, if not tripling since going online in 2014 saying how: "people are ready to engage in ethical fashion, and they're ready to accept it."

“We are all in this together, its not just our resopnsibility. . .”



Workers at Creatnet in India



Eco-ware at Maurie and Eve

This is also reflected in apps like *good on you*, which rates brands on how ethical they are. Its [global ranking](#) has jumped more than 120 000 places in global ranking from January last year to April this year.

Kelly also cites consumer demands for ethical fashion as one of the reasons for the transition to an Eco-sustainable plan saying: "You've got the Maurie and Eve that's still continued to do what we've always done, but then you've got the new crowd that will really appreciate where this is going and I think eventually the good will take over the bad."



Clothing wrapped in bio-degradable packaging at the Maurie and Eve Warehouse

However, with ethically made fashion often coming with a heavier price tag, the reality of a fashion industry being environmentally friendly and accessible to all is unachievable, despite both business and consumer demands for it to be so.

Angelica Bell, from Ethical Clothing Australia, said: "We can only accredit businesses that manufacture in Australia. . . Because of manufacturing overheads, we see more businesses move overseas which makes it harder to get that ethical accreditation in Australia."

So. . . where does responsibility lie to fix the sustainability problem in fashion? Kelly puts it like this: "We are all in this together, it's not just our responsibility. . . It's even down to who your voting for. I think it's everyone and I think it comes down to even the people buying it. It's the consumer, it's the company, it's the government."