



Return to NATURAL FIBRES

Growing concern about plastic in our environment sees natural-fibre industries poised for resurgence if they demonstrate eco-credentials to increasingly discerning customers.

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Natural fibres like cotton and wool have been losing market share to synthetics for some time but the tide is turning, courtesy of the plastic legacy of main alternatives which are petroleum-derived fibres, polyester and acrylic.

Currently two-thirds of new clothing is made from synthetic fibres and washing these clothes is significantly contributing to plastic pollution in oceans, with each polyester garment shedding thousands of microplastic particles, adding up to tonnes of ocean plastic pollution over time.

Microplastic is showing up in seafood we eat, water we drink and air we breathe. The human health effects are still under study, although it is known these fibres carry chemical endocrine disruptors that influence hormone functions and chronic disease.

A recent report from the International Union of Concern for Nature confirmed primary microplastics in the oceans

predominantly come from machine-washed synthetic textiles.

Concern is such that groups like the Ellen MacArthur Foundation are calling for a fashion and textiles redesign, with substances releasing microplastic (virgin and recycled polyester) to be phased out. Another response from Californian regulators is for a wash-by-hand warning label on clothes made from 50 per cent synthetics.

The past two decades saw an escalation in synthetic-fibre production, along with fast fashion supply chains driving consumption to double at least, clothing utility to decline to a few wears, and Australians to become the second-largest consumers after Americans. This is documented in *Slow Clothing: finding meaning in what we wear* along with other issues like waste, exploitation and loss of mending skills and knowledge.

But change is coming. It must. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change continues to issue warnings