H&M, Primark and Arcadia back new Parliamentary group on sustainable fashion

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A coalition of big-name fashion retailers, as well as charities and academics, have voiced their support for a new All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) working to make the UK’s fashion sector more sustainable.

The APPG is made up of MPs from all major political parties, including Conservative, Labour and SNP

The new APPG for Textiles and Fashion was relaunched last week, after Central Government confirmed that it will not take most of the recommendations made by the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) under its six-month inquiry into sustainable fashion on board. Recommendations co-developed with industry, academics, green campaigners and consumers included a 1p extended producer responsibility (EPR) charge for every garment produced and tax breaks for repair services, as well as mandatory environmental footprint targets for large companies.

Lisa Cameron, the SNP MP for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow, is chairing the new APPG. NGO Fashion Roundtable, which describes itself as “the essential link between fashion, consumers and policy leaders”, is acting as Secretariat for the APPG.
According to Cameron, the mission of the Group is to give Central Government “a clear understanding of the policies needed to ensure jobs, livelihoods, and sustainability and to maintain best practice [in the industry]”.

“The UK Textile and Fashion Industry is one of our largest, worth over £28bn annually and is now reported to be the UK’s second or third-largest employer,” Cameron wrote in a blog post.

“We must consider ethical design, diversity within the industry, support regional growth alongside international trade and of course, navigate the impact of Brexit.”

Since the launch of the APPG, the likes of environmental charity Hubbub and high-street retailers Primark, H&M Group and Arcadia Group – the owner of Topshop and Miss Selfridges – have publicly backed its creation and committed to working with its MPs.

Support is also being given by the Sustainable Clothing Action Plan (SCAP), which was founded in 2012 in a bid to help big-name fashion brands minimise their waste, water and carbon footprints while sourcing more sustainable materials.

**A further grilling**

The launch of the APPG came in the same week that the EAC published correspondence between itself and online fashion retailer Boohoo, which was repeatedly criticised throughout its ‘Fixing Fashion’ inquiry over its human rights practices and decision to continue marketing cheap clothing to young women.

Worker rights for those in Boohoo’s supply chain were found to be a key sticking point for EAC chair Mary Creagh MP, who recommended at the inquiry’s close this spring that Boohoo should engage with the trade union Usdaw as a priority and recognise unions for its workers.

The correspondence was published after Creagh received news from Usdaw in June that the union had “continued to experience difficulties in establishing trade union recognition discussions with Boohoo, contrary to the evidence given to the EAC”.

“We want to know what steps Boohoo has taken to engage with Usdaw in establishing formal trade union recognition for workers in its supply chain here in the UK and overseas,” Creagh wrote. “In our fixing fashion report, we flagged our on-going concerns about labour exploitation in the UK’s garment industry. We will continue to monitor developments.”

Responding to these accusations, a Boohoo spokesperson told edie that it has been “in ongoing discussions” with the EAC since November 2018.
“We are committed to being part of the conversation on the sustainability of fashion and continue to welcome engagement with the Committee,” the spokesperson said.

_Sarah George_