The textile recycling sector must lobby government for proposals on extended producer responsibility (EPR) for clothing waste from 2022, the Textile Recycling Association (TRA) has urged.

Alan Wheeler, director of the TRA, made the call following the government’s response to the Environmental Audit Committee’s (EAC’s) ‘Fixing Fashion’ report into sustainability in the textile industry. In the report, EAC called for a ban on used textiles to landfill, and a 1P tax on all garments to fund clothing recycling.

Dismissing these proposals in its response to the report last week, the government instead pointed to its commitment in the Resources & Waste Strategy to explore an extended producer responsibility scheme for some items, including textiles, from 2025 or potentially earlier in 2022.

Items under consideration for EPR schemes include bulky waste, some construction waste, tyres and fishing gear. Of the five waste streams identified as being options for EPR schemes, two of these will be ‘fast tracked’ from 2022, although the government has yet to confirm which of these will be brought forward.

This led to Mr Wheeler’s call for the textile recycling sector to ‘unite’ in its demand for clothing waste EPR to be one of the schemes brought forward in 2022.
“The government still remains committed to evaluating the potential for extended producer responsibility on clothing by 2025, but this is too late. The sector needs to come together now and make the already imperative case to the government to bring this review forward to 2022 even greater,” Mr Wheeler commented.

He also said the TRA “would be happy” to provide advice to the industry on how they can work with textile collectors and processors to “contribute to the circular economy”, as well as expressing concerns that a lack of regulatory intervention means that those who do only out sustainable clothing on the market risked being “undercut by those that have less concern for the environment”.

Report

Along with a landfill ban, one of the core demands in the Audit Committee’s February report was a one-penny-per-garment charge on new clothing items, which it said would raise £35 million for “investment in clothing collection points, sorting and recycling”.

Other measures set out in the report include setting mandatory targets for fashion retailers with a turnover above £36 million, lowering VAT on repair services and to use the tax system to “shift the balance of incentives in favour of reuse, repair and recycling”.

However, these were all rejected by the government, which said that while the 1p ‘levy’ suggestion was noted, it would consider extended producer responsibility (EPR) measures for textiles as part of the existing Waste Strategy commitment.

Mr Wheeler added: “Understandably the Association is disappointed that the government has not committed to going beyond what they have already pledged to do in the Resources and Waste Strategy.”

He added: “The fashion industry is responsible for about 10% of all global CO2 emissions. This staggering figure is more than the entire international aviation and maritime industry put together. People are becoming increasingly aware of the impacts that flying has on climate change, but the fashion industry is an even bigger problem.”