

World first report finds fashion critically lagging on animal welfare

FOUR PAWS urges brands to step up for all animals in the 'new normal'.

Over the past 12 months, major clothing brands have responded to customer demands and announced animal welfare policies, but do they go far enough? New research from global animal welfare organisation FOUR PAWS finds that the fashion industry comes up short between what they say and what is delivered, with only 21% of brands tracing even a portion of the animal derived materials for animal welfare. FOUR PAWS has identified the first steps brands need, to take better care of animals and meet modern customer expectations.

When the COVID-19 pandemic brought the fashion industry to a halt, it also delivered an opportunity for industry to take stock and consider its true impact.

Whilst much of the debate on the social impacts of the fashion industry to date has focused on its environmental impact and how its workers are treated, customer concern for animals is growing exponentially. A 2019 You Gov poll found that 80% of Australians are concerned about the welfare and treatment of animals in at least one fashion category. Now more than ever, people are demanding that brands take responsibility for animals in their supply chains.

FOUR PAWS research estimates that over two billion animals are used in the global fashion industry every year in the wool, fur, and leather industries alone, many of which suffer poor living conditions, brutal physical mutilation practices and chronic stress.

To raise awareness and recognition of these fundamental issues, FOUR PAWS has developed the world's first Animal Welfare in Fashion Report. "Animals are suffering for fashion, and shoppers want change. It's time to make the treatment of animals used for fashion a priority, and recognise animal protection as an essential third pillar of ethical fashion," said Jessica Medcalf, Head of Programmes at FOUR PAWS Australia and report contributor.

This report is based on a study of 77 leading Australian and global brands, with the majority owned by nine of the world's top 20 publicly listed fashion companies which have an estimated market value of over US\$550 billion.

The FOUR PAWS Animal Welfare in Fashion Report assesses the extent to which companies are addressing animal welfare risks in their supply chains, with a focus on four key spotlight issues of material consideration – wool, down, exotic leather and fur.

Using analytical rigour and evidence-based research, the report highlights the risks of animal-based supply chains in fashion, to animals and brands and retailers. While there have been efforts made by several brands on animal welfare, FOUR PAWS research has found that most brands lack:

An awareness of animal welfare issues found in common textile supply chains. Only 38% of the fashion brands consider animal welfare risks to some degree in their supply chains and purchasing practices.

Thorough and effective animal welfare policies. Just 25% of fashion brands have formal animal welfare policies in place to help safeguard animals from these risks. And just 9% of brands have both an animal welfare policy and meet at least three of five best practice animal welfare principles as set out by FOUR PAWS.

Traceability in animal-based fashion supply chains, and end-to-end traceability overall. There is a real gap between what brand's formal policies and statements say, and what they actually do. Only 35% of those with an animal welfare policy are tracing at least some of their animal-based materials, with more than half the brands demonstrating zero evidence of knowing anything about the animal-based textiles they source.

Transparency to customers about where animal-based products come from and the welfare risks for the animals involved. Just 21% of brands implement assurance schemes which prioritise animal welfare i.e. certified wool and down.

But it is not all bad news, as there are many brands that have taken proactive steps forward. FOUR PAWS has also researched the key steps every responsible brand should take to minimise their risk, and maximise their ethical credentials.

To integrate animal welfare in a sustainable fashion future, FOUR PAWS recommends that brands:

1. Need to cover the basics on animal welfare such as developing a robust animal welfare policy with a vision and an implementation plan, for how to achieve and monitor good animal welfare and transparency practices.
2. Make a credible commitment to animal welfare, including the adoption of the best available certification systems, with the highest standard of animal care, to ensure traceability and be able to verify the brand's claims made in relation to animal welfare.

3. Address, monitor and report on animal welfare risks in the supply chain, including the incorporation of animal welfare considerations in decisions by corporate social responsibility and compliance teams and departments involved in sourcing, purchasing and design. "The fashion industry must hold itself accountable for animal welfare in its transition towards sustainability and better corporate social responsibility," said Medcalf.

"Animal welfare considerations have been found to be particularly relevant to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to fashion. If the impact of the coronavirus outbreak this year and the SDGs are any indication, the difference over the next decade, between the good and the best performers in terms of ethical fashion, could be down to the brands who integrate animal welfare considerations in their supply chains versus those who do not."

"Shoppers have the right to know how the clothes they buy impact on animals. Brands should ensure they fully understand their supply chains and communicate their animal welfare practices clearly," said Gordon Renouf, chief executive officer at Good On You, consultation partners on the report.

FOUR PAWS are confident this report will be a useful tool to support and highlight the progress of brands and industry to achieve more kindness to animals, and remains committed to working with brands and retailers in a collective effort to improve the world for animals, people and the environment.

FOUR PAWS recommends brands download a copy of their Policy Development Guidelines for Animal Welfare in Textiles.

"While we have a long way to go to improve conditions for the vast numbers of animals used in fashion, by working together, animal protection organisations, brands, retailers, producers and shoppers can all create a better world for animals," said Medcalf.

The Animal Welfare in Fashion Report is part of the FOUR PAWS global Wear it Kind campaign, raising awareness about key animal welfare issues in fashion and providing vital information to both fashion stakeholders and customers about how to create a fashion industry which values animals, people and the environment they share.

The report can be downloaded [here](#).

In the past year, over 180,000 people have taken a FOUR PAWS animal welfare in fashion action. Head to www.WearitKind.org today for more information.

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