

Position paper

Contribution to the preliminary consultation on the **EU strategy for sustainable textiles**

Background

The recent disruptive global events have marked a turning point in history and made clear that human activity must be considered part of a greater ecosystem. Consequentially, market operators are now compelled to adapt their strategy and take under consideration their businesses, people and the planet through the integrating of **sustainability** into their business model. Sustainability is not only considered from an economic point of view but also from an environmental, social and public health perspective.

The **textile value chain**, is a resource-intensive sector with multiple environmental and social externalities. It has been declared by the European Commission as a **key sector** in the transition towards a greener and more sustainable Economy.

In order to ensure a smoother this transition, the European Commission has put forward the idea of a comprehensive **EU Strategy for Textiles**, with the objectives of strengthening competitiveness and innovation, boosting the market for sustainable and circular textiles and driving new (green) business models.

Purpose of the document

The European Industrial Hemp Association, aims at steering a **transparent and science-based discussion** that takes into consideration the **sustainable potential of natural fibres and clothing materials** in the future of the textile sector. In this sense, EIHA would like to submit some points of consideration to the European Commission.

Contribution

The European Industrial Hemp Association (EIHA), representing the whole European hemp value chain, welcomes the initiative of the Commission to prepare a Textile Strategy for the EU and believes the Commission should take into consideration the following points:

1. HEMP: a GREAT COMEBACK

Given the interest of the Commission to explore **new materials and business models** as well as the high economic and environmental **value of hemp farming** (less water than cotton, few or no phytosanitary products, high yield per hectare), hemp fibre shall be one of the main natural fibre that the EU should look at with the aim of creating a truly European and sustainable textile sector. In terms of **quality and performance**, hemp fibre stands out as probably the strongest and most durable in nature (+25%/30% compared to cotton). More and more scientific publications point at the high absorption properties, IR and UV radiation protection capacity and natural low flammability. Further promising tests also indicate natural anti-bacterial activity against a wide range of pathogenic bacteria of hemp fibres, supposedly resulting from the alkaloids, cannabinoids and other bioactive or phenolic compounds.

2. BACK to the EU

The Commission should actively encourage the **re-localisation of all processing stages** of textile production to the EU, in order to decrease the risks, costs and negative externalities inherent to a global value chain. Furthermore, this would help the EU regaining a partial raw material sovereignty and create jobs and growth. Industrial hemp is a raw material available all over Europe, unlike cotton, jute or flax. By processing it on the EU territory, it could steer a positive cascade effect downstream in the textile product value chain and boost the creation of new jobs, greatly appealing for young farmers and entrepreneurs. A thriving hemp textile industry would give impetus to the **breeding of new varieties**: this would result in an increased quality of the fibre and its coproducts (seeds, shivs, green material), hence enhancing the multipurpose character of the crop.

3. ACCOMPANY the GREEN TRANSITION

The Commission should recognise and value the potential of hemp for **carbon storage** in the soil, the **decarbonisation of manufactured goods** and the other **ecosystem services** hemp farming provides (biodiversity, soil protection and recovering, etc.). Hence, the increase of natural fibre share on the market shall be seen as a valuable alternative and necessary complement of an enhanced synthetic textile recycling, as well as a concrete action for reducing and/or balancing CO₂ emissions.

4. PROMOTE CLOSED CIRCLES of PRODUCTION

The Commission should consider the **recyclability and compostability** of finished goods as an essential part to achieving zero waste levels and encourage full **circularity** across the value chain. The Commission should put major efforts in evaluating the best available technologies, supporting innovation and adopting governance tools that are key for the development of a new but traditional supply chain.

5. WORK for LESS POLLUTION

The Commission should accompany the textile sector in the reduction of **polluting agents** (chemicals, microplastics, etc.) along the whole life of the finished products, from farming to recycling. This should be done via EU R&D projects and relevant policy tools, based on the latest scientific literature, and by steering a multilateral and transparent debate. Considering the urgency of the **microplastic pollution** issue, binding and clear rules should be drawn to compel companies operating within the European market to put an end to microplastic release by a clear deadline (legally binding targets).

6. PROMOTE a TRANSPARENT POLICY-MAKING

The Commission should establish a **multi-stakeholder dialogue**, where all the actors of the value chain can raise their concerns on an equal footing and contribute in full transparency to the designing of policies. They should be accompanied by **academic representatives and research bodies**, in the view of basing the policy decisions on the latest scientific literature.

7. STEER COLLABORATION

The EU should foster the **collaboration and networking across the value chain**, especially between primary producers and final product manufacturers. This should be intended to improve the uptake of innovative processes and products and enhance the position in the chain of the least favoured actors.

8. TRACE and CERTIFY the REAL SUSTAINABILITY

The EU, in collaboration with relevant national and international bodies, should provide **traceability and certification** systems fit for informing consumers on the sustainability of the products, based on verified datasets and scientific validated methodologies that takes into account the ecosystem services provided by each actor of the value chain. Block-chain and matrix barcodes technologies shall be considered as possible ways of facilitating such exercise. **Private certification** schemes already used in the Industry (the Higg Index for example) should not be considered as established standards. Furthermore, their use in B2B and B2C should not be encouraged as it steers a scattered approach, resulting in possible inequalities among operators.

About us

The European Industrial Hemp Association (EIHA) is the only pan-European membership organization in the industrial hemp sector. It represents the interest of hemp farmers, producing and processing companies. EIHA covers different areas for the application of hemp, namely its use for construction materials, textiles, cosmetics, feed, food and supplements.

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