

Fashionably conscious: H&M launches Conscious Exclusive Collection

 By [Ruth Cooper](#)

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True, these days it is super trendy and fashionable to be more conscious of social and environmental issues, "[woke](#)" isn't just a slang word it really is a way of being. Consumers are becoming more conscious of where their food, beauty products and clothing is coming from, how it is produced and who it affects in the process.

There is no denying that the fashion industry and particularly the recent trend of fast fashion has serious negative impacts on the environment. However some fashion brands are taking major strides in trying to address the destructive environmental fashion footprint and create garments as sustainably as possible.



One of the major fashion brands leading this conscious crusade is mega Swedish retailer, [H&M](#). With the recent launch of the Conscious Exclusive Collection in partnership with [Salon 58](#) they are aiming to educate consumers about sustainable fashion choices and have created the range out of recycled and sustainably produced material as well as launching a Garment Collecting Initiative.

H&M have been one of the pioneers in eco championing however in doing so have also received a fair amount of [criticism](#) about their environmental and ethical practises. As there are many threads to this story and doubts if a big retailer (one that relies on a high volume of sales) can really make a significant positive change we got in touch with Amelia May Woudstra, the PR and communications manager for H&M South Africa to find out more about the line and H&M's commitment to sustainability.

❏ **Can you please explain how the partnership between Salon 58 and H&M's Conscious Exclusive collection came about?**



Amelia May Woudstra

Salon58 was the ideal platform for H&M to not only launch our 2017 Conscious Exclusive collection, but to engage with Jackie and her specific target audience/following about the importance of sustainability and our goal of making fashion sustainable and sustainability fashionable.



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■ ***What would your ideal outcome be with the launch of this collection when it comes to ecological awareness?***

For consumers to:

- Become more aware of their fashion footprint and how to manage their fashion waste better.
- Understand that unwanted textiles/clothing could be potential material (when recycled) and not necessarily trash.
- Know that sustainability can be fashionable and that fashion can be sustainable.



▣ ***How feasible is it that more and more big brands start creating more consciously?***

We believe that being sustainable is the only way forward if you want to continue doing fashion and be relevant in the future. Because of our unique position as an influential brand with a long-term commitment to sustainability, we see it as our responsibility to take the lead. We have the size, scale and ambition to lead the change towards full sustainability. By doing so we also hope to inspire other brands who will hopefully follow.

▣ ***What would you say about H&M coming under criticism in the past about environmentally damaging practises and unethical labour practices?***

While we offer our customers extra sustainable options, like this Conscious Exclusive collection, all our products are made with care and consideration for the people who make them and for the environment. This is important to us and at the core of what we do, it would be impossible for H&M to operate if we didn't take responsibility for those working for our suppliers. We want people to be treated with respect and that suppliers offer their workers fair wages and good working conditions. Our work includes a range of initiatives, alone and in collaboration with other partners – like our Fair Living Wage strategy, skill development programs and health and safety training. We are well aware of the challenges that exist within the textile industry and the work that remains, but we can see that the work we do makes a difference and that change is coming about/moving in the right direction. We are proud that through our business we help create jobs for about 1.6m people employed by our suppliers around the world.

Please also visit our sustainability section on our website for more background info on working conditions.



▣ ***Will H&M start creating the rest of their lines in a more sustainable way, not only with certain collections?***

A new goal is to only use sustainable or recycled material by 2030.

We always offer “conscious” products in our stores and it is easy to recognise in store, since items are marked with a green hangtag. At H&M Group, we are constantly on the lookout for innovative materials and processes that can make our products more sustainable. The Conscious Exclusive collection, made from sustainable materials, is an opportunity for our design team to experiment with new interesting sustainable materials.

Our goal is to every year increase the share of such fabrics in our total material use. In doing so, we make more environmentally friendly choices available to a larger group of people, help lifting these materials to scale and create demand for further innovation. Recycled polyester and Tencel are some of the sustainable materials that we have first tried in the Conscious Collection and then scaled up to use in our regular collections. We are currently one of the biggest users of Tencel as well as recycled polyester in the world.

▣ ***How does a more conscious way of creating fashion play out with the current trend of fast fashion?***

We don't see ourselves as a fast fashion company. We want our customers to use, cherish and look after the products they buy at H&M as you do with any other products. At H&M we want to make sustainable, good-quality fashion accessible to as many people as possible. We believe that conscious fashion choices should be available and affordable to everyone – without ever compromising on style. It is also important that customers takes responsibility for the products they have and once they don't use a garment any longer the important thing is that they give it a new life, either by giving it a friend or a charity or hand it in to our stores so our garment collecting initiative can give it a new life.

■ **Can sustainable practises really make any significant environmental difference with the increasingly high volume of garments created by big retailers?**

Absolutely. The change starts with us and we are hoping that others will follow! We are constantly looking to explore new sustainable materials. One example is Bionic, used in our latest Conscious Exclusive collection. Here, plastic has been recovered from shorelines, waterways and coastal communities protecting the oceans from plastic pollution, and has been made into recycled polyester.

We have recently launched a new goal to only use recycled or other sustainably sourced materials by 2030. In 2016, 26% of our total materials were either recycled or sustainably sourced. We are one of the world's biggest users of recycled polyester and last year we used recycled polyester equivalent to more than 180 million PET bottles. We were also one of the world's biggest users of Tencel®Lyocell. It is a silk and viscose-like, renewable material, made from cellulose and the raw material is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. It is produced in a closed-loop system.

We have set a goal that all our cotton should come from sustainable sources, including organic cotton, recycled cotton and Better Cotton by 2020. Last year, 43% of our total cotton use came from sustainable sources; we are one of the world's biggest users of organic cotton as well as the biggest buyer in volume of BCI in the world. Our recycled cotton is made from production waste or from collected garments.

Read [part 2 of the Fashionably Conscious interview](#) with Salon 58's Jackie Burger.

[H&M Sustainability](#)

[Freedom House rewards H&M for transparency article](#)

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ABOUT RUTH COOPER

Ruth is the production manager at Bizcommunity. ruth@bizcommunity.com

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