

Greenwashing UK fashion firms to be named and shamed by watchdog

Entire lines of clothing are being labelled “sustainable” and “eco-friendly”, without the company having proof that the whole process – from manufacture to delivery, packaging and sale – is good for the environment, according to the CMA, the Competition and Markets Authority.

- 5 It is estimated that UK consumers spend £54bn annually on clothing and footwear, and this is expected to continue growing in the coming years. According to some estimates, fashion is responsible for between 2% and 8% of global carbon emissions, as well as causing waste and pollution.

- 10 Cecilia Parker Aranha, the CMA’s director of consumer protection, said: “According to our research, something like 60% of people had said they were willing to pay more for products that were environmentally friendly.”

This means companies have been quick to slap green claims on their products, sometimes without going to much effort to make the items more sustainable.

- 15 “We have taken the view that the growing consumer demand for green products and their willingness to pay for those green products has increased the incentive for businesses to be seen to be green, whether or not they actually are green,” Parker Aranha explained.

- 20 Claims being investigated by the CMA include unfair comparisons that individual items of clothing are “better for the environment” without qualifying how; claims about the use of recycled materials in new clothing; and entire ranges of clothing within stores being branded as “sustainable”.

- 25 Parker Aranha said: “I was really sceptical about anybody that’s making a sweeping claim that a product is ‘eco’ or ‘sustainable’ because the business would be having to really show that every element of the product from production through to disposal will be good for the environment, not harmful to the environment. The other thing I would watch is if they say they’re ‘made with recycled fibres’. They are often only made with 16% to 20% recycled fibres.

- 30 This could cause a loss of faith in sustainable products, with customers giving up on making eco-friendly choices. It could also cause companies that do make an effort to be green to face a competitive disadvantage.