

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Brands must look beyond supply chains to address sustainability

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Positive Luxury hosted a panel discussion reviewing how the luxury industry can make changes toward sustainability. Image credit: Conservation International

By NORA HOWE

Fashion brands must be more proactive about taking concrete steps to combat their negative impact on the environment, as scientists and activists are increasingly concerned about the trajectory of the climate crisis.

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According to panelists on [Positive Luxury's](#) "Extinction is Forever" biodiversity webinar, the luxury industry can play an important role in the conservation and restoration of land and the ocean. Panelists discussed how brands can address the threat to biodiversity by understanding supply chains, showing leadership in regeneration and helping consumers understand the link between nature and the products they purchase.

"The good news is we know what to do, and when we know what to do, nature rebounds really quickly on land and in the ocean," said Kristin Rechberger, CEO of [Dynamic Planet](#), a firm that works with high-impact partners to help restore natural environments.

The webinar was hosted by Diana Verde Nieto, cofounder of Positive Luxury.

Change for a better future

Changing behavior for the benefit of the planet begins with an understanding of how human activity directly affects the land and ocean and how human beings are an element of the environment, according to the panelists.

"The thing that is really important is not to think of the world as two separate halves the part we live in and nature but rather, we must think of ourselves as part of the system," said Dr. Helen Crowley, research fellow and senior advisor for resilient supply chains at [Conservation International](#). "Everything is interrelated and we are a part of it.

"Nature is everything we do," she said.

The experts encouraged consumers to simply be aware of how their activity affects their environments, stressing the importance of awareness of what they purchase, who they purchase from and what impact their purchases have.

"Nothing replaces informing yourself," Dr. Crowley said. "You have to understand where stuff comes from, what it's

made from and what impact it has."

"Inform yourself, stay hopeful, be a discerning consumer and make sure there is a story behind a product that makes it worth buying," she said. "It shouldn't be what the clothes say about you; it's what you say about your clothes."



Experts encourage consumers to become more aware of their purchasing behavior. Image credit: Dynamic Planet

While environmentalists remain hopeful that industry leaders and consumers will affect the changes needed to save the planet, they have also emphasized the severity of the situation.

"We have two ways of going: we can decide to race to the bottom and basically destroy our planet by continuing to do things the same way we have been doing them, or we can decide we want to thrive," Dr. Crowley said. "If we want to thrive, we have to be bold."

Understanding supply chains is a top priority so businesses can address the threat to biodiversity within their own production lines.

"The thing that companies can do now is to really understand their supply chains and start focusing on where they can make a difference," Dr. Crowley said. "That means supporting more regenerative agricultural practices, telling fact-based stories and helping people understand the link between nature and what they wear."

"We have a role to collaborate beyond our supply chains to be transformative," she said. "We must transform the way we talk about nature, the way we work with others to build new coalitions and to build together a force that shows we can make a difference."

Extinction is Forever | Dr. Helen Crowley, Kristin Rechberger, Diana Verde Nieto

Despite how degraded a landscape or seascape might be, Ms. Rechberger expressed confidence that science and knowledge are key when it comes to reviving environments.

"My suggestion would be to pair science with local knowledge, work with the best non-profit organizations and academics you can find to make sure the science is solid," she said.

Sustainability in practice

As the demand for transparency and sustainability grow among affluent consumers, many luxury businesses have started processes towards responsibility including consumer-facing efforts.

British diamond group De Beers has restructured its senior management with a focus on sustainable impact and social purpose.

Among the changes, the company has merged its London-based consumer and brands team with its corporate affairs unit into a new department, brands and consumer markets. By having one team dedicated to consolidating brand marketing with the group's social purpose, De Beers hopes to better engage values-minded consumers ([see story](#)).

From creating collections using recycled materials to hosting seminars on climate change and sustainability, a considerable number of fashion industry leaders have taken strides toward responsibility.

Brands such as Bally, Net-A-Porter and Hugo Boss have encouraged fellow industry leaders as well as consumers to heighten their awareness of these global issues and make the necessary changes to ensure a better future ([see story](#)).

"In this very divided world of politics, the environment should not be political," Dynamic Planet's Ms. Rechberger said. "We all breathe, we all drink water, we all need food.

"It has been politicized and it shouldn't be," she said. "We all need to work together and unify around our life support system to take care of it."

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