

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Planet Textiles makes a big splash in India**

**BANGALORE – More than 340 delegates from 25 countries gathered at the thought-provoking sustainability summit Planet Textiles 2017 on 24 May where in the searing heat of Bangalore, the issue of water availability, use and wastewater pollution was just as topical inside the venue, as it was outside on the streets of one of India’s most rapidly expanding cities.**

Every year since 2012, Bangalore has been hit by drought; last year Karnataka, of which the city is the capital, has received its lowest rainfall level in four decades. Once famous as a retirement home and for its hundreds of lakes, Bangalore now has only 81 left. The rest have been filled and paved over with more than half said to be contaminated with sewage.

It’s also estimated that 44 per cent of the city’s water supply either seeps out through aging pipes or gets illegally siphoned off. As a result, the groundwater level has sunk from a depth of 150 or 200 feet to 1,000 feet or more in many places.

Set against this background, the clear focus on water at Planet Textiles 2017 attracted a wealth of local Indian delegates to the event, who told us they were eager to hear much more about how the textile sector could contribute to improved water conservation in the region – and in the country as a whole.

“The problem for many industries in India – and not just the IT sector in Bangalore – is that because most of the water for industrial use is distributed by private tanker trucks, the owners of these vehicle fleets now have control of the water supply in cities such as Bangalore. It’s become something of a cartel,” was a typical comment from one delegate who refused to go on record for fear of business reprisals.

This way of working poses a real threat to the textile industry in India as a whole given both a rising population and a predicted rising output from the sector. Manoj Gulati, Executive Director, India, from international NGO Water.org which works with the likes of IKEA, Gap and Inditex to equip people with the means to access water and sanitation in textile producing regions, noted: “The value of the Indian textiles industry, currently at US\$108 billion, is expected to reach US\$223 billion by 2021.

“Presently, the Indian textiles sector consumes around 830 million cubic litres of water per annum,” he added, “This pressure on water availability can only go one way unless we start to act now.”

Water.org provides micro-loans so that individuals can improve access to water and sanitation through WaterCredit. So far it has helped to supply 5.2 million people and has a 99 per cent repayment on these loans. “We address both the symptom and the cause: solve for the immediate need by creating access to safe water and sanitation now. Solve for the big picture by setting up a system that works at scale and lives long after we do.”

Keynote speaker Tracy Nilsson, Senior Director of Social Environmental Affairs at Adidas emphasised to the Indian textile mills present at the event how its tier 1 and tier 2 suppliers are expected to reduce water use at a minimum of 20 per cent by 2020.

“Water is not only essentially for life, it is a key resource for our industry. Factors, such as the ever growing population and the impacts of climate change are tipping the scale to a point where water supply may no longer meet demand. With an increases and ever growing issue of water scarcity, we have developed an overall approach to address water efficiency, improve wastewater quality and provide better accessibility to water in communities,” she said.

### **Zero liquid discharge**

One way the Indian textile sector has tackled wastewater problems is through the zero liquid discharge project in Tirupur. Sajid Hussain, Chief Operating Officer of the Tamilnadu Water Investment Company Limited noted the value of either wastewater use through zero discharge when he noted that “According to a UNESCO report, India is the number one country when it comes to annual groundwater extraction. We remove on average 251 cu/km (cubic kilometres per year) compared to

the USA and China which come a distant second and both average water extraction rates of around 112 cu/km.”

Historically, Hussain notes how there has been the indiscriminate withdrawal of ground water ‘free of cost’ in most parts of the country, but that costs are now being applied. “Water has been priced low in many parts,” he said, “ However, the cost of fresh water for industry is now rising due to scarcity. In Tirupur it is Rs.78/m<sup>3</sup>, Vellore Rs.50/m<sup>3</sup>, and Pali Rs. 100/m<sup>3</sup>. One hundred Rupees currently equates to around US\$1.50.

He explained how the ZLD project involves a range of advanced wastewater treatment technologies to recycle, recover and re-use ‘treated’ wastewater and thereby ensure there is no discharge of wastewater to the environment. Typically this comprises pre-treatment, reverse osmosis and an evaporator and crystallizer – so in short a lot of capital expenditure.

Nevertheless, there is both an industrial need and a political requirement to tackle this problem as soon as possible yet there are still technical challenges to overcome for ZLD, most notably the problem of waste disposal once wastewater contaminants have been extracted. “ZLD is a technological challenge, and the focus now must be on Zero Waste Disposal (ZWD). Brine concentration, evaporation, crystallization and disposal are problematic but the focus must be on the recovery and reuse of salts – which can be done in practice.

“In the end, water scarcity, water economics and regulatory pressure will be the main drivers of ZLD and ultimately will determine the financial viability of this technology – which has worked well in Tirupur,” he noted.

## **Chemical management**

Breakout sessions sponsored by Archroma, Oeko-Tex and the ZDHC Group, focused on practical, sustainable, solutions for textile wet processing, chemical management and discharge, and pollution.

Discussing current issues surround textile wet processing, and where implementation in the textile value chain can be accelerated, Elaine Gardiner, sustainability manager, AFIRM Group and Pentland Brands said collaboration was the right way to go: “We are all over-testing when we could be sharing information.”

Agata Kostecka, Senior Manager, Sourcing Strategy, Gap, added: “Transparency is still playing catch-up ... everyone seems to be sharing their Tier 1 suppliers, but Tier 2 suppliers are not there yet. Gap works closely with PaCT, represented at Planet Textiles by Program Manager Mohan Seneviratne, in Bangladesh, which also has similar initiatives on best practises in textile processing in Vietnam.

As part of the discussion in the session, Tracy Nilsson, Adidas, added: “As well as traceability, it is about scalability. For example, if Gap is already there with its own initiative, we can focus on other suppliers.”

Looking to the future of sustainable wet processing, participants called for skill set increases – and the investments to do so, greater data transparency, improved KPIs and responsibilities taken for end-to-end solutions.

“Collaboration is key, said Nilsson. But I also want to see action – companies stepping out of their comfort zone.”

Concluding the Planet Textiles event, Rick Horwitch, Vice President of Global Retail Lead and Supply Chain Strategy at Bureau Veritas, said: “The only thing that touches everyone is clothing and water: have a resource that we need for life, this is a problem we need to address. Planet Textiles has focused on practicalities and solutions.

“I do not believe the answer is to test our way to a solution, it is about being smart and sharing that information ... The challenge is that we need to think and do things differently. Creating an impact, that is what we need to do.”

### **About Planet Textiles:**

Jointly organised by MCL News & Media, publisher of Ecotextile News, and the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC), Planet Textiles 2017 was held 24 May at the JW Marriot in Bangalore, India.

The one-day Planet Textiles summit was part of a week-long series of events on environmental and social issues in the textile sector which included the two-day SAC annual members meeting and the SAC manufacturers’ forum.

An announcement of where Planet Textiles will be held in 2018 will be made very shortly.

## **Sponsors**

Planet Textiles 2017 was produced in partnership with Lenzing – the global producer of wood-based cellulosic textile fibres.

The event was also supported by Archroma, ZDHC Foundation, Oeko-Tex, Covestro, Bureau Veritas and Proviera.

**Web: [www.planet-textiles.com](http://www.planet-textiles.com)**

“Congratulations on a successful Planet Textiles event in Bangalore. As a participant I think it was not only wonderfully organised but also really well attended.” - Deepak Goel, Geetanjali Woollens

“I thought the conference was every informative, on behalf of my colleagues at Bureau Veritas, it was our honor and pleasure to be a sponsor and participant.” – Rick Horwitch, Vice President, Global Retail Lead, Supply Chain Strategy, Bureau Veritas.