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CASE
STUDY



bassike: Certified carbon neutral organic jersey product line

In March 2022, Australian fashion brand bassike announced that their signature organic jersey product line received carbon neutral certification by Climate Active. In this case study, we look at the product stewardship journey the brand took to achieve this certification and what lies ahead for the Australian fashion industry.

Product Stewardship in Action with

bassike

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 2006 by Deborah Sams and Mary Lou Ryan, bassike is an iconic Australian fashion brand known for its quality wardrobe essentials made from GOTS certified organic cotton, premium Japanese denim, and coastal-aesthetic. While still very much a design-led business, bassike is well-regarded in the industry for their sustainability and product stewardship commitments. In recognition of the leadership of the brand in this regard, in 2021, co-founders Sams and Ryan were awarded the Australian Fashion Laureate award for Sustainable Innovation.

In this case study, we look at the sustainability principles at the core of the brand before focusing on the approach bassike took to develop their carbon neutral jersey collection.

SUSTAINABILITY BASICS

By now, it is well-established that the fashion industry faces a multitude of environmental and social sustainability challenges.¹ As co-founder Mary Lou Ryan put it, “you cannot be a fashion business today without thinking about your impact on the environment”. It is increasingly recognised that business-as-usual practices in the fashion industry cannot continue, particularly if we are going to meet commitments of the Paris Agreements. If the industry continues on its current path, by 2050, it could use more than 26% of the carbon budget associated with a 2C pathway.²

bassike is built upon three key pillars: considered design, responsible business, and sustainable manufacturing. Rather than trend-driven design which encourages obsolescence, bassike garments are designed to be worn season after season. Examples of these pillars in action include:

Over 95% of cotton jersey garments are made with Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS)³ certified cotton, while denim is made in Japan from organic and Better Cotton Initiative (BCI)⁴ cotton which has been dyed using non-toxic natural indigo dyes, and processed in an ISO14001 certified wash house which repurposes waste and recycles water.⁵

The brand has longstanding commitments to supporting domestic garment manufacturing. Over 95% of garments are made in Australia, which reduces the carbon footprint of production, spurs investment in local industry, and increases transparency.⁶

bassike achieved zero waste in the production of their jersey collection, with 97% of jersey fabric being utilised in production. Excess raw material is held for future seasons and where offcuts were previously donated to local mechanics for reuse, the brand recently signed a contract with BlockTexx, who will recycle and generate new raw materials – preventing textile waste going to landfill. bassike has a further goal of reducing excess raw materials by 50% by 2025.⁷ It is also important to keep in mind there is the potential for upstream waste associated with raw material processing for fabric production as well as downstream waste associated with packaging.

To bassike, zero waste also means a reduction in material use to avoid waste generation altogether. The brand is conscious of the yield when laying out our patterns during the mark-up process. For example, a cutter will spend time manoeuvring pieces to reduce any offcuts. This also includes placing multiple garment patterns together to utilise any additional space in the fabric – such as cutting pieces for our mini garments alongside womenswear and menswear, to minimise our fabric yield.

Suppliers also commit to following the bassike code of conduct which includes criteria that go beyond legal requirements for animal welfare, energy efficiency, ethical raw material sourcing, chemical and water use, waste, reuse and recycling as a condition of working with the brand.⁸

As of July 2021, bassike became a certified carbon neutral organisation under the government-backed Climate Active Carbon Neutral Standard.⁹ The following operational emissions are covered by this certification: utilities for the head office and retail stores; global freight between customers, partners and suppliers; staff travel and commute; paper



and office equipment; consumer and supplier packaging; third party services such as cleaning and printing; and waste and recycling.

PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP DURING COVID-19

During the early days of Covid-19 pandemic-related slowdowns, the brand took the opportunity to reflect on their operations and renewed commitments to take a leadership position in the Australian fashion industry with respect to sustainability. To guide this process, co-founder Mary Lou Ryan took on the title of Director of Sustainability and Supply Chain. For six months, the business was unpacked from top-to-bottom to develop new frameworks for moving the business forward. This included discussions of what the business wanted to continue and those they wanted to change.

The brand took a data-driven approach focused around a goal of identifying actions to make the business carbon neutral, and developing a methodology to account for a range of social and environmental sustainability indicators to inform brand decisions. bassike developed a sustainable ethical manufacturing index (S.E.M.I.) to quantify and rank the impact of the brand on the environment, labour, and animal welfare across a range of key performance indicators such as energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, living wage, and ethical sourced materials

This included a competitive analysis of brands around the world engaging in sustainability initiatives, particularly those around organic cotton – a material at the heart of many bassike products – to reflect on their strengths as a business while also identifying best practices they could learn from. For bassike, key to this transformation is being able to account for the true cost of the products being made and in turn, communicate this to consumers.

Through engaging in this exercise, the brand identified a key goal: to make all products carbon neutral. To achieve this every season for every product is a difficult task and one the brand is committed to over the next several years. However, as a first step, the brand identified a key opportunity in their collection of organic jersey garments. bassike's organic cotton jersey collection represents a majority of units produced each year accounting for approximately 60% of their business.

In the next section, we will unpack in more detail the process of converting this collection to carbon neutral.

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: CARBON NEUTRAL ORGANIC JERSEY

For 15 years, bassike has been working with the same supply chain partners to produce their organic jersey collections. The brand was able to build upon their longstanding history and relationship with their suppliers as they undertook research activities to increase traceability and quantify the environmental impact in terms of greenhouse gas emissions across supply chains, from cotton production to the impact of shipping raw materials from farm to knitting mill to sewing to retail operations.

Based on this detailed reporting, the process of working through ways to reduce the environmental and biodiversity impact of the collection began, such as identifying opportunities to reduce the amount of water, fertiliser and pesticide used in the growing of cotton, to interventions such as converting energy sources at knitting mill facilities to solar power.

bassike then worked with Climate Active¹⁰ to certify that their organic jersey product line as carbon neutral. As of July 2021, their signature organic jersey product line was certified as meeting all the requirements of the Climate Active Carbon Neutral Certification. Carbon neutrality is achieved “when the carbon emissions from an activity, process or organisation have been neutralised, by reducing emissions where possible and

offsetting the remainder that are unavoidable.”¹¹

As a result, when compared to a conventional cotton t-shirt, a bassike organic cotton jersey t-shirt produces 43% fewer carbon emissions. This is a savings of 1.9kg of CO₂ emissions per shirt, equivalent to 2.5 hours of electricity use (based on the average Australian household electricity consumption).¹²

LESSONS LEARNED

The magnitude of the environmental and social challenges facing the industry means there is a need to evolve beyond niche innovations and engage in the work of transforming the industry. Ryan admits that engaging in the process of becoming carbon-neutral was a daunting, but necessary decision, emphasising that as a business, “we have a choice in the sustainability decisions we make”.

An important part of this transformation was corporate leadership in identifying sustainability and product stewardship initiatives as priorities and setting ambitious, data-driven and measurable goals to work towards as an organisation. This is challenging in highly globalised industries such as fashion, but is an important step to driving change.

However, just as individual industry actions are important, so too are collective, industry-wide schemes to support product stewardship and more sustainable industry outcomes. Ryan also recognised that bassike cannot go it alone and pointed to the importance of industry-wide collaboration across sectors and borders to spur the changes the industry needs.

Here, the Australian fashion industry has an opportunity to set the bar globally for industry-led product stewardship. In November 2021, the Australian Fashion Council was awarded a \$1 million grant through the National Product Stewardship Investment Fund¹³ to address the growing issue of clothing and textile waste in the fashion industry.¹⁴ The Scheme will bring

together key members of the industry, including designers, manufacturers, retailers and charities to design and develop an industry-led scheme to implement a product stewardship initiative across industry supply chains, from designing for circularity and durability to spurring recycling initiatives.

Between November 2021 and March 2023, the Scheme will map the current state of the industry through data and material flow analysis, conduct stakeholder engagement to inform Scheme design, and co-develop and operationalise the Scheme with industry in advance of a phased, national roll-out¹⁵. Deliverables include a data and material flow analysis report, a global scan report of international best practices to support the facilitation of a circular economy in fashion, a scheme recommendation report detailing scheme design, and a roadmap to 2030 in advance of the Minister’s Priority List 2025.¹⁶

NOTE

The content of this case study is information of a general nature sourced from public sources and investigations conducted by the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence. It does not represent advice, direction or endorsement from the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence, nor does it represent the only method or practice to address the topics laid out in this document.

Individuals or organisations are encouraged to conduct their own analysis and consideration of strategic options relevant to their situation before taking action in regards to the matters covered.

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