

# NORDIC WORKING PAPERS

## Ecolabelled Textiles in the Nordic Countries

English Summary to Nordic Working Paper

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**Promoting the supply of ecolabelled products  
Nordic working paper**

# 1 SUMMARY

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## **Ecolabels such as the Nordic Swan Ecolabel and the EU Ecolabel can play an important role in reducing the environmental impact of textiles.**

The textile industry is one of the world's largest industries, which produce 100 million tonnes of textile to the global market every year. The fashion and textile industry is also one of the most polluting and resource-consuming industries in the world, and the size says something about the environmental impact associated with the textile industry. In the Nordic region, there is a high consumption of textiles. The average annual consumption per inhabitants of the Nordic countries are between 13 and 16 kilograms of new textiles (clothing and household textiles)<sup>1</sup>.

The environmental impact from the production of textiles is linked to the production of the fibre and to the various processes involved in the fabric production, such as dyeing, spinning, tanning and finishing. By labelling textiles, with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel or EU Ecolabel, Nordic Ecolabelling wishes to show consumers it is possible to produce products in a more environmentally friendly and health-conscious way, and thereby guide consumers towards choices that are better for the environment.

## **Joined Nordic actions on ecolabels could increase the supply of Ecolabelled textile products (Swan label and EU Ecolabel).**

Ecolabels such as the Nordic Swan Ecolabel and the EU Ecolabel can play an important role in reducing the environmental impact of textiles purchased in Nordic countries. However, the supply of textiles with such labels remains low in Nordic countries despite significant growth in recent years. The project aims to identify barriers to more ecolabelled textiles on the Nordic consumer market and initiate activities and actions to remedy these. The goal is to get a better selection of ecolabelled textiles and more visibility of these products in the market place. The project has also taken a global perspective, identifying how producers in e.g. India and Turkey can be encouraged to engage in eco-labelling.

The project is being carried out by Nordic Ecolabelling with a subgroup of the Nordic Sustainable Consumption and Production group (HKP) as steering group. The market analysis was commissioned to market research company Kantar TNS. The target groups for the project are both Nordic and global textile producers, textile brands, and ecolabeling organizations. The project began with a market analysis of ecolabelled textiles with focus on the Nordic Swan. Kantar TNS carried out qualitative interviews with brands and producers in four Nordic countries and in India and Turkey. The objective was to identify what motivates companies to apply for licenses, what the barriers are and what kind of challenges there are during the process.

Based on the analysis, the team made a number of recommendations for improving the application process for the Nordic Swan and for increasing the market share.

## **Findings from the project – barriers associated with ecolabeling of textiles**

On the commercial side lack of knowledge of the potential benefits of eco-labelled products and uncertainty related to market demand and effects was identified as the major barriers to apply for ecolabeling of textile products for the Nordic market. This was identified as an obstacle early in the process preventing companies to apply for eco-labelling of their textile products. The barrier had two main dimensions. Firstly, many companies reported there had been uncertainty about if there really

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<sup>1</sup> NMR 2014, Towards a new Nordic textile commitment: Collection, sorting, reuse and recycling

was a market demand for ecolabelled textile products and what kind of sales turnover a product range of ecolabelled textiles might deliver. Reasons for the uncertainty was usually that they did not have any earlier experience with an ecolabelled product range and/or no market data to support the demand for this kind of products for their target market. Secondly many companies only evaluated the prospect on the basis of potential sales effects not taking into action other types of benefits, for example internally, ecolabelling of textiles might give in addition.

To address doubts over the market advantages and provide the market with examples about some types of potential benefits of ecolabelled textile products four business cases was made. The business cases featured four different companies within different target markets that have positive experience with ecolabeling their textile products. To document the demand and value of the official ecolabels on textile products on the consumer market a consumer survey will be conducted in 2018.

The other major barrier identified to get more eco-labelled textile products was time, resources and capabilities in the companies to get into and understand the ecolabel requirements. And furthermore being able to meet the requirements and produce sufficient documentation that this was done. One of the major challenges here was to be able to get suppliers and sub suppliers to understand the requirements and what was demanded of them in terms of practice and especially documentation to make sure it was actually implemented and handled in practice. This challenge was reported to be based in cultural differences, language barriers and suppliers not having any previous experience of documenting similar requirements.

The evaluation made a number of recommendations for improving the application process. The revision of the requirements will look into this as well as how to communicate the ecolabel requirements and documentation of them, and thus make the application process more user friendly.

**The evaluation of the Nordic Swan Ecolabel criteria forms the basis for the focus in the revision of the criteria.**

Parallel with this project Nordic Swan Ecolabelling has conducted an evaluation of the Nordic Swan criteria for textiles, skins and leather. As there is a large overlap between these 2 projects, the projects are run together to achieve synergy. This has made it possible to go broader and deeper than otherwise intended, as the deliveries from the two projects complement each other.

The revision of the Nordic Swan Ecolabelling criteria for Textile, skins and hides generation 4 is started ultimo 2017 and is expected to be sent in public consultation in ultimo 2018 or the beginning of 2019, where all stakeholders in the industry have the opportunity to comment on the consultation draft of the criteria. After the public consultation, there will be an update of the criteria after which the criteria will be sent to the Nordic Ecolabelling Board for final approval.

The biggest environmental benefits from ecolabeling of textiles comes from requirement related to; sustainable production of textile fibres, that no harmful chemicals have been used for the processing of the textile itself, and that the textile has a high quality and thus can achieve longevity. It is exactly here, that the Nordic Swan Ecolabel criteria for textiles, skins and leather already sets requirements. In relation to the feedback obtained from licensees, it is often on the chemical part, they have to substitute and develop their products in order to achieve an eco-labelling. It could be a new subcontractor of coloring or substitution of specific chemicals. Other licensees reply, that they have worked with traceability and controllability for the Nordic Swan Ecolabelled production as part of the application process. This has resulted in them knowing their production and supply chain better.

**In addition to the existing requirements that already have positive environmental impact, the following possible future environmental benefits have been identified for Ecolabelling of textiles.**

The evaluation of the criteria finds it important to look at how textiles can contribute to the circular economy – even more than today. There are located several relevant parameters such as; even more focus on prolonging the lifetime of the textile, takeback systems, re-design, fibre composition, requirement for recycled fibres and how to test for hazardous chemical in recycled fibres, as well as requirements for surface treatment of the fabric, that enables recycling of the fibres. The revision will look into where the textile industry is today and see if it is possible with ecolabel requirements to provide a controllable positive effect in relation to these topics.

In relation to the fibres in the textile it will be assessed whether it is possible to increase the proportion of organic cotton and for conventional cotton to set requirement for IMP certified cotton. Textiles are a product group with high diversity - ranging from baby clothes to professional workwear to home textiles. The possibility for differentiated cotton requirements regarding different textile segments will be considered here. Differentiated requirements will also be considered regarding the quality requirements. Especially regarding if the criteria should do differentiated requirements for wear resistance.

The existing criteria have strict chemical requirements with high levels of control. This topic is important for the Nordic Swan and therefore it is considered, whether it is possible to tighten these requirements even more in the revision process.

#### **Into the future**

The project will continue during 2018 with a consumer survey to ascertain the potential market segment of ecolabelled textiles, and the preparation of marketing materials to assist communication with the industry. The recommendations from the project will be used in the ongoing revision of the Nordic Swan label for Textiles, skins and leather. The recommendations will also be sent to the EU's Joint Research Council to assist in their review of the EU Ecolabel criteria for textiles.