

## Ethical Clothing Australia – Supporting the rights of Australian workers

(written by Allan Fong – HOPE researcher NSW)

Ethical Clothing Australia (ECA) is a joint industry and union initiative to protect and uphold the rights of Australians employed in the textile, clothing and footwear (TCF) sector. To be accredited under Ethical Clothing Australia, a business is audited to ensure its workers, including outsourced workers are being paid appropriately, receiving all their legal entitlements and working in safe conditions. The audit covers workers throughout the entire supply chain from design, pattern making, value-adding and dispatch.

### How does the system work?

Ethical Clothing Australia have been operating since 2000 and regularly reviews the relevant Australian legal frameworks which apply to Australian workers. Businesses in the textile, clothing and footwear (TCF) industry may apply for accreditation to demonstrate their supply chain is compliant, ethical and transparent from design to dispatch. Accredited manufacturers can use the ECA certification trademark on their products and other promotional material. An ongoing annual fee and annual compliance audit provides assurance to consumers of ongoing compliance.



### What about environmental factors and the sustainability of fashion trends?

The accreditation program only focuses on the rights and entitlements of workers, and environmental sustainability is not considered. Consumers who are concerned about environmental factors (e.g. use of low-impact natural plant fibres in place of synthetic fibres like conventional polyester and nylon) should reach out to individual businesses with their concerns.









### What about the suppliers to businesses seeking accreditation?

All local suppliers with the business's supply chain are captured in the audit. ECA will work with businesses and their suppliers to help them understand their obligations and requirements under the accreditation process.

### How do I find an ethical brand?

The ECA website lists the brands which are currently accredited [Find a Brand - Ethical Clothing](#). Below is a snapshot showing 8 of the current 60 brands which are accredited under ECA:

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 <b>Ottie Merino</b> → Online	 <b>Veducci</b> → Online	 <b>Melaleuca Rise</b> → Online	 <b>Imagewear</b> → Online
 <b>Ktena Knitting Mills (brand)</b> → Online • 1 physical store	 <b>Smart Stuff</b> → Online	 <b>Juliette et Felicity</b> → Online	 <b>Lenka Couture</b> → 1 physical store

### What about workers in other countries, particularly those from third world nations?

Some Australian businesses produce some of their garments in Australia and some overseas. They are still eligible to apply for accreditation, however the right to use the logo will apply exclusively to those products which are made locally. For international supply chains, separate auditing certifications (e.g. Fair Trade) exist to protect the rights and working conditions of overseas workers.

### Who are outworkers?

Outworkers are people who work at a premise outside of a factory or formal workplace (e.g. at home or from a garage). Many outworkers in Australia are migrant women from non-English speaking backgrounds who may not understand their rights as Australian workers. They make clothing for Australian businesses and may experience unethical working conditions such as:

- Long work hours
- Receive less than the minimum wage
- Irregular work and insecure income
- Poor working conditions leading to work-related injuries
- Do not receive paid annual leave, sick leave or superannuation

It is difficult to determine the number of outworkers in Australia due to the hidden nature of this kind of work, and sadly many outworkers are reluctant to speak up due to fear of losing work.

### Worker Story: Kim



### [Outworker Story: Kim - Ethical Clothing](#)

This is the story about Kim, taken from the Ethical Clothing Australia website.

Originally from Vietnam but now living in Melbourne, Kim started working as a sewing machinist about 20 years ago. Before her current job she was paid per garment meaning her income was irregular with little job security, and often worked long hours, sometimes until 2am to get sewing jobs done. She now works for a business who is ECA accredited, where she has signed a workplace agreement with part-time hours, resulting in better job security, better pay and other entitlements. She chooses to work from home (as an outworker) as it suits her lifestyle. She can drop off and pick up her two girls who are currently in primary school and when they are sick, she can look after them while she works.

### Want to know more?

Visit the Ethical Clothing Australia website: [Ethical Clothing Australia | Buy Ethical Support Local](#)