

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Kering comes full circle on sustainability

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*Kering is committing to brand transparency with an extensive report on circularity. Image credit: Kering*

By NORA HOWE

The circular economy is an opportunity to create a fashion industry fit for purpose for future generations that works with nature rather than against it, according to a new report from French luxury conglomerate Kering.

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The group has outlined its ambition for a holistic approach to circularity in the new "Coming Full Circle" report. It highlights concrete actions its brands have implemented around circularity, and aims at rethinking the way the company produces, uses and extends the life of resources and products.

"The concept of circularity is a critical part of any real sustainability endeavor and the three main principles provide an excellent framework for companies to follow," said Marie-Claire Daveu, chief sustainability and institutional affairs officer at **Kering**, Paris. "We need to make sure that the way we use resources and materials is efficientwe already use 1.6 times the earth's resources as a society and we have to learn to do more with less.

"We need to reuse materials and extend the life of our products, and we also need to look at ways to produce these raw materials and products better right from the beginning," she said. "Raw materials sourced from regenerative agriculture will help replenish nature while being durable and long-lasting within a circular system."

### Circularity ambition

As part of its journey towards sustainability, a priority for the luxury fashion industry is that clothes should be used more. This means that products need to be kept at their highest value for the longest amount of time, using repair services and resale business models.

Measuring the physical durability of one product compared to another has become an integral part of longevity. In April, Kering set up a Test Innovation Lab in Prato, Italy to test technology for safety and durability.

Interest in the culture of repairs is accelerating, and Kering has ensured that all of its brands have repair services as standard after-sales care. For instance, it is using technology to extend the warranty of a watch, guaranteeing its authenticity and owner history, and is exploring ways to up-cycle damaged gemstones in the jewelry sector.

In 2020, Kering's Shanghai after-care services hub repaired 20,000 items, a number expected to increase to 25,000 this year. Problems such as damage to stitching, repairs to handles or faded color can all be corrected as part of the

company's after-sales commitment and two-year warranty.

There is a range of new business models emerging across the fashion industry, from subscriptions and rentals to resale. Kering is looking to the secondhand market as an opportunity for its luxury brands.



*Alexander McQueen's fabric donation scheme has donated materials to more than 20 institutions. Image courtesy of Alexander McQueen*

It plans to authenticate and give value to a product that customers can then sell, either through a service that it offers or using the information Kering provides.

Resale platform Vestiaire Collective partnered with Kering-owned British fashion label Alexander McQueen to launch a new "brand approved" program. Through the collaboration, shoppers are invited to sell their preowned pieces and receive a credit to buy new pieces from specified McQueen stores ([see story](#)).

"We are investigating various solutions to extend luxury products and we consider re-commerce and resale as important elements of building circularity into the luxury business model," Ms. Daveu said. "Our recent investment in Vestiaire Collective is an example of our interest in this space."

Kering believes that it is no longer sufficient to say that the fashion industry is minimizing its negative impact on the natural world. In its report, it argues the industry must do better and act to restore and protect nature, which is why it is prioritizing regenerative agriculture, committing to agricultural resilience and protecting the earth.

The company's Environmental Profit and Loss tool shows that its biggest environmental impacts happen in tier 4 of the supply chain, with goat herders, in cotton fields and the cattle pastures where it sources cashmere, cotton and leather.

As part of its Natural Climate Solutions portfolio, Kering-owned Italian fashion brand Gucci is funding and incentivizing farmers to switch to regenerative agriculture through carbon farming ([see story](#)). Gucci has funded wool growers in Patagonia to enable them to convert to regenerative grazing on 1,800 hectares of grasslands, which will promote soil health, water quality, increased biodiversity, animal welfare best practices and carbon sequestration for the long term.

With a goal to source regenerative raw materials for its products, Gucci has been working on feasibility studies to identify and scale up regenerative agriculture projects within its sourcing regions.

Kering's [Standards for Raw Materials and Manufacturing Processes](#) presents clear criteria and best practices for each material it uses, from cotton to gold. In 2017, Kering committed to 100 percent alignment with the Kering Standards by 2025.

Another key pillar of circularity is that waste and pollution are eliminated from production processes. The main environmental issues occur in the textile mills, with dyeing and printing using significant volumes of water and chemicals.



*Gucci-backed REDD+ project in Kenya, developed by Conservation International. Image credit: Gucci Equilibrium*

Spinning and weaving are also energy-intensive, so to tackle these issues, Kering joined the Clean by Design initiative in 2015 and has introduced the program to a number of its suppliers.

#### Increasing production efficiency

To accelerate more rapidly towards a circular economy for fashion, efficiency in production processes and use of resources will continue to be paramount. Kering's Materials Innovation Lab is a central hub for all of its brands to access a comprehensive library of materials that are recycled or made from non-hazardous and renewable inputs.

To achieve a circular fashion model, Kering is addressing the system and pooling resources to reduce waste, eliminate single-use plastic and ensure best practice. Kering claims it does not destroy products or surplus materials but makes sure they can be reused, recycled and repurposed.

Alexander McQueen is entering the second phase of its fabric donation scheme, expanding on its sustainability efforts.

Sarah Burton, creative director at Alexander McQueen, introduced the fabric donation program in 2019 in an effort to redistribute leftover materials from the label's production cycles. As the scheme enters its second phase, the label will be donating a new shipment of fabrics to students who are studying fashion and textiles at universities and educational programs in the U.K. to assist the next generation of designers ([see story](#)).

Since 2015, Gucci has been working with Green Line, an Italian company specializing in the collection and recycling of textile scraps for reintroduction into fashion supply chains. Since 2019, the brand has reused protective boxes for transporting its accessories to reduce the number of new boxes it makes.

Gucci has already been able to reuse one million of its protective boxes, saving nearly 90 metric tons of plastic since it launched.

"For Kering, we want to ensure that there is coherence between our work on circularity, biodiversity and climate, which are all embedded in our broader sustainability strategy," Ms. Daveu said. "The launch of our circularity report signals an acceleration of our commitment and we are rethinking how to produce our raw materials and manufacture better, and use and extend the life of our materials and products.

"We are also focused on sourcing from regenerative agricultural systems over the next few years and our Regenerative Fund For Nature will help catalyze this ambition."