

Competition watchdog looking into 'sustainability' claims made by Asos, Boohoo and Asda

The UK's competition watchdog is investigating Asos, Boohoo and George at Asda over claims about the sustainability of their products.

The Competition and Markets Authority said it would examine the eco-friendly and sustainability claims made by the three businesses about items including clothing, footwear and accessories.

In January the CMA started to look at sustainability claims made by the fashion sector, where an estimated £54bn is spent by consumers every year.

The watchdog said that an initial review identified concerns, including a number of companies creating the impression that their products were "sustainable" or better for the environment.

Some made claims about the use of recycled materials in new clothing with little or no information about the basis for those claims or which products they related to, the CMA said.

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The ranges being looked at include the Responsible Edit from ASOS, Boohoo's Ready For The Future range and Asda's George For Good.

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The CMA said that the criteria used by some businesses to decide which products to include in these collections could be lower than customers might expect, with some containing as little as 20% recycled fabric.

Sarah Cardell, interim chief executive of the CMA, said: "People who want to 'buy green' should be able to do so confident that they aren't being misled.

"Eco-friendly and sustainable products can play a role in tackling climate change, but only if they are genuine.

“We’ll be scrutinising green claims from ASOS, Boohoo and George at Asda to see if they stack up.

“Should we find these companies are using misleading eco claims, we won’t hesitate to take enforcement action – through the courts if necessary.

“This is just the start of our work in this sector and all fashion companies should take note: look at your own practices and make sure they are in line with the law.”

Retailers respond to investigation

ASOS said it would co-operate with the investigation and is “committed to playing its part in making fashion more sustainable, including providing clear and accurate information” about products.

It declined to comment further.

A Boohoo group spokesperson said: “We have been working closely with the CMA to understand their expectations and support them with their investigation.

“We have clear guidelines and a compliance process for our Ready for the Future ranges, to help us communicate these complex issues.

“We’ve carried out research with over 1,400 customers to understand what they think about sustainability and fashion.

“Our intention is to support our customers in making choices that are right for them and to do this we recognise that we need to provide them with straightforward and no-nonsense information.

“We hope that the outcome of the CMA’s sector investigations provides all retailers with clear guidelines on what can and should be communicated.

“We are proud of the progress we have made and are of course happy to continue to work collaboratively with the CMA to understand how we can further improve.”

An Asda spokesperson said: “We know how important it is that our customers can trust the claims we make about our products, which is why we ensure the statements we make can be supported by industry accreditations.

“We are ready and willing to answer any questions the CMA have about our George for Good range and welcome further work by the CMA to ensure the sustainability claims made by the fashion industry as a whole are robust and clear.”