

## From No Sweat Shop Label to Ethical Clothing Australia

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In January 2010 the Australian No Sweat Shop label will change its name to Ethical Clothing Australia. The Homeworkers Code of Practice under which No Sweat Shop is directed was an initiative set up by union, government and industry organisations in an attempt to phase out exploitation of textiles and clothing workers in Australia.

Uptake in this initiative with fashion and textiles companies has been somewhat lower than anticipated since its start and so it has been decided that a 'carrot' approach rather than name-and-shame should be the best option for gaining support from industry and the public to the cause. For the carrot approach to gain credence it was decided that the name 'No Sweat Shop' label needed to be replaced by something that consumers and industry alike would find more attractive hence the use of 'Ethical' which is in real terms less evocative of a sweatshop.

The Australian fashion industry is at an interesting crossroads with much production shifting offshore but with a stubborn 75 percent of labels still having a significant percentage of manufacturing done domestically. If consumers and industry perceives the importance of clothing that is made ethically in Australia and it aligns with a shift to decreasing a company's carbon footprint by onshore manufacture then the implications for Australian fashion and textiles workers is great if tackled in an appropriate manner.

This research paper will follow the initial effects of this 'naming' reshuffle and immediate reactions to it. Questions that will be investigated are; what happens to the focus of the actual code itself and will that shift to the factory and company accreditation process as opposed to the rather more difficult task of enlisting the homeworkers themselves. Is there an inherent depoliticising of the issues involved in 'sweatshops' when the focus shifts to a positive approach or will the focus remain the same?

What projections might be made for future organisations that shift the scope from a 'homeworkers' code to a broader 'ethical' industry approach; from a 'no' sweatshop approach to 'yes' to ethical production will be emphasised. And most importantly perhaps, the question on many stakeholders' lips: will uptake of the Ethical Clothing Australia be notably more successful than the No Sweat Shop label?

Research methodology will include interviewing various stakeholders including consumer groups and businesses and their response to the name change and perceived differences. Qualitative interviews with key union and industry figures and other invested parties will also be important in garnering opinion. While the results may be premature to make definite statements about the effectiveness of this particular tactic they will certainly give valuable indication as to future possibilities and areas of focus in addressing fashion and textiles worker exploitation in Australia and furthermore internationally.