

TFIA: industry's sun is rising

MELBOURNE: The new head of the textile clothing and footwear peak body has called on the sector to embrace a positive vision for the future.

Just a month into her new role Jo Kellock, executive director of the Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia (TFIA), has already summoned key industry players to a forum to brainstorm a discussion paper titled "A Vision for Australian Apparel" (AVAA).

The meeting's 80-strong guest list included representatives from the TCF Technology network, The Brotherhood of St Lawrence charity - which runs vintage and recycled clothing label Hunter Gatherer - the Home Workers Code of Practice (HCWP) and retailers Just Group and Myer.

Also present were staff from fashion hardware and software companies, pattern drafting businesses, garment fit research companies and educational institutions. Meanwhile, innovative local companies including seamless garment specialist LM Australia and fashion house Mission Brown, which produces the Spencer Lacy lingerie label, also gave presentations on their business models.

Kellock said discussion topics ranged from technical training and technology to the need for updated sizing criteria and the creation of an environmentally-friendly TCF industry.



TFIA by LM Australia has placed innovation and technology at the heart of its culture.

"But the real point was to recognise that there is a very positive future ahead, which is reliant on companies leveraging automated garment technology for sheet runs and concentrating on innovation and intellectual property. They also need to get up to speed with other technologies such as digital printing and web-based technologies," she said.

RMIT University head of fashion and textiles Keith Cowlishaw - who presented on the TCF research hub at the RMIT Textile and Design Specialist

Centre - described the AVAA meeting as "extremely positive".

"It provided a real statement about the new structure of the industry. I've had meetings with DIBD [Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development] in the past and I've been told 'there is no industry'. But this is a \$14 billion industry if you factor in how many fashion retailers are now developing their own product; it's bigger than the auto industry."

Michel Abeysakera, managing director of LM Australia, said

he was "inspired by the fresh and innovative approach" Kellock was taking to rejuvenate the industry.

It was hoped LM Australia could be involved in AVAA in terms of giving guidance to companies undergoing change, he said.

"The old system whereby companies went overseas, bought samples and then created ranges is gone. There's no future in that approach."

Founded 12 years ago as a sleepwear and underwear

wholesaler, the advent of direct sourcing had forced LM Australia to rethink its strategy around six years ago. The company was now known for cutting edge innovation, particularly in the arena of adapting European originated seamless garment technology to the local market.

LM Australia undertook projects for major fashion clients and also produced proprietary apparel brand Cylis, which successfully exported to the US and Europe, he said.

"For us it was a case of innovation or death. Our whole focus now is to offer the market something that nobody else can do, and that can only come from constant innovation and cultural change. As an example of our culture our design team has one day off a week, for the sole purpose of allowing them to think creatively."

TFIA head Jo Kellock described companies such as LM Australia as a "template for the future". A first draft of the AVAA document would be circulated to TFIA members later this month, while the final document would be released "as quickly as possible" for lobbying purposes, she said.

"The crucial point is that TCF is no longer a sunset industry. It's a sunrise industry. This is about recognising that there is a real future for the Australian apparel industry if we take into account what new technologies and approaches can do for us."

Belinda Smart



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