INTERVIEW WITH MR BEY SOO KHIANG VICE CHAIRPERSON OF SUSTAINABILITY STEERING COMMITTEE

Q1. What opportunities do you see in the Singapore fashion industry?

It is well known that fashion is a big business in Singapore. As the world shifts from a fossil fuel based economy, the Singapore fashion industry should be part of this movement by increasing its uptake of renewable and biodegradable materials like viscose. There is an opportunity for TaFF to engage its members like the suppliers, designers, brands and even the consumers to increase the awareness around the positive impacts associated with sustainable materials like the use of viscose for fashion.

Less than 1% of clothes is recycled and globally, that's about $100 billion worth of materials lost to the landfill each year. Given our small land size, it's a huge opportunity in Singapore to set up a collection infrastructure to collect textile waste which can then be channeled for recycling thus avoiding the need for landfill.

Singapore's strength in innovation, research and technology can also help advance circularity in the industry. RGE currently is working with NTU on a R & D project to design and build an urban textile recycling plant that will enable recycling of collected textile waste in Singapore. If this succeeds, the percentage of recycling of textile waste can increase significantly.

Q2. Man-Made cellulosic fibers - or MMCF - such as viscose (rayon), lyocell and modal are the second most important group of cellulosic fibers after cotton. With your 240,000-tonne capacity AP Rayon mill in Indonesia, are you able to meet demand for biodegradable viscose rayon in Southeast Asia?

You are correct to describe viscose rayon as biodegradable because it is made from plantation trees fibres. As such it is also renewable as we replant after harvesting the plantation tree. The cellulose fibre in the tree is used to make viscose rayon and the lignin which holds the cellulose fibre together in the tree is converted and used as renewable energy to generate biomass energy to meet close to 80% of the power needs of the whole manufacturing facility. As the global demand for sustainable textile grows, we see the potential growth in demand for viscose rayon. Today 44% of the 240,000 production is marketed in Indonesia to meet the country's demand for competitively priced raw materials, while the rest of the 56% are exported mostly to international markets outside South East Asia. But if and when the demand for viscose rayon in Southeast Asia grows, we can adjust the volume of export towards SE Asia to meet the new demand. In any case, there is always the option to increase the production capacity in AP Rayon mill.

Q3. APR upholds the principles of No Deforestation and sources wood fibre only from sustainably managed plantations and forests. Do you see that greater use of this material could help the textile and fashion industry in Southeast Asia make genuine progress in its sustainability journey?

I believe that if the textile and fashion industry wants to make genuine progress in its sustainability journey, the first consideration is to use sustainable material at the start. This requires us to shift from the use of fossil fuel based fibres to more sustainable wood based fibres. The next consideration is that the tress used to make the wood based fibres need to be sourced from sustainable suppliers which consistently manage their plantations and forest of high conservation values and high carbon stock to the standards expected from PEFC™ (Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certificate) or FSC® (Forest Stewardship Council) certification standards. Finally the manufacturing facility that converts the plantation trees into viscose fibres must meet the best certified standards in terms of carbon emission, use of water and chemicals. In summary, the use of sustainable materials will help the textile and fashion industry minimise its impact on climate, need for landfills, oceans and biodiversity.

Buying from sustainable sources is critical to upholding our sustainable viscose brand and a priority for our business and stakeholders. To ensure we source from responsible suppliers that is sustainable, we only source from certified producers. This commitment along with other principles are outlined in APR's Sustainability Policy.

We encourage other manufactures, fashion brands and retailers not just in SEA but worldwide to adopt the same approach as APR. In 2021 APR launched APR2030, a set of measurable and science based commitments to significantly address material industry specific challenges which includes supporting and contributing to the achievement of net-zero emissions from land use and the conservation and wildlife habitat protection initiatives in Indonesia by pulp supplier APRIL.