

February 8, 2017

Ekka 2017 honours Queensland grown natural fibres Farming celebrated in iconic fashion parades

From the farm to the runway, in true agricultural spirit, the Royal Queensland Show's (Ekka) iconic natural fibres fashion parades are set to be amped up in 2017 with a host of new initiatives for Ekka's 140th year.

Celebrating Queensland-grown wool and cotton along with fashion favourite's leather, bamboo and silk, the parades pay homage to all things natural during this year's 140th Ekka from August 11-20.

With a theme of 'Back to Nature' the much loved long-running parades will feature fashion designers from across Queensland, a speaker series aimed at providing education on natural fibre fashion, a Makers Market precinct, dual runway and student fashion design display.

The natural fibres parades are expected to assemble more than 20 established, emerging, student and regional fashion designers for a total of 30 shows across the 10 days of Ekka.

Stylist Laura Churchill will produce and direct this year's 'Back to Nature' themed natural fibres fashion parades for the RNA and said Queensland fashion designers have a distinct passion for natural fibres.

"Queensland designers are fiercely loyal to natural fibres – particularly because of our climate - so this year's 'Back to Nature' parades will be aimed at illustrating the connection between farming and fashion," Fashion Event Director Laura Churchill said.

"We want our audiences to experience Queensland farming and then understand how our leading fashion designers interpret natural fibres into ready-to-wear designs and collections," she said.

"Audiences can expect to feel immersed in Queensland countryside with each of our shows."

While the textile supply chain sees most raw materials processed into finished fabric overseas, Laura is keen for audiences to appreciate that Queensland grown raw materials are going full circle and back into Queensland designer fashion.

"Queensland's textile chain is interesting and with cotton alone, we know Australia produces much of the best cotton in the world – valued for its colour, strength, fibre length and lack of contamination with 90 per cent being exported, mainly to Asia," Laura said.

"While much of the production process happens overseas, our Queensland grown raw materials are a vital supply link to fabric houses around the world that then supply our home-grown fashion designers," she said.

"What is exciting is that this year's Natural Fibres Parades will see Brisbane entrepreneur, Meriel Chamberlain revealing how she is producing the first 100 per cent locally grown and finished cotton fabric right here in Queensland as part of our 'Fibre to Fashion' conversation series."

New initiatives for this year's Natural Fibres Parades include:

- **Fibre to Fashion conversation series** - on four peak days of Ekka, the fashion stage will play host to a panel discussion of industry experts canvassing Queensland's natural fibre and fabric production, sustainability issues, how designers work with natural fibres and the design process
- **The Makers Market** - located next to the fashion stage, this new initiative will enable Ekka visitors to shop a host of Queensland designer natural fibre fashion and accessories
- **Double runway** - in an Ekka first, the fashion stage will feature dual runways, offering more opportunity for those coveted front row seats
- **Student design display of natural fibre fashion** - a display will feature winning entries from a natural fibre design competition among students from Brisbane fashion design tertiary institutions including QUT, MSIT, Billy Blue and AICD

This year marks the 26th year of Ekka presenting its Natural Fibres Fashion Parades which is Ekka's most glamorous event.

The fashion designers for this year's 'Back to Nature' natural fibres parades will be announced by May 2017.

For further information about Ekka visit www.ekka.com.au

ENDS

For further media information, images, interviews and photo shoot requests, please contact Fashion Event Director Laura Churchill on 0405 155 002 or email laura@laurachurchill.com.au

FACTS and opportunities around Ekka natural fibres parades:

- Queensland's cotton industry is valued at \$2.5 billion while wool is \$60 million
- Queensland's sheep belt stretches from the northern border of New South Wales to the Gulf of Carpentaria – a distance roughly 1,200 km long and 800 km wide, covering about 55 million hectares
- Cotton is grown mostly in the south in the Darling Downs, St George, Dirranbandi and Macintyre Valley regions and the remainder is grown near Emerald, Theodore and Biloela in Central Queensland
- In an average year, Australia's cotton growers produce enough cotton to clothe 500 million people
- Designer Pia du Pradal is an avid supporter of Queensland cotton visiting farms at least twice a year to understand and help shape her annual collections (interviews available on request)
- Brisbane's Meriel Chamberlain has developed the first fabrics woven from 100 per cent Queensland cotton under her Full Circle Fibres program, and will speak during Ekka as part of the Fibre to Fashion conversation series
- Brisbane company Packer Leather produces and exports kangaroo leather all over the world for use in everything from fashion to sporting equipment
- Brisbane's Merino Country started in western Qld in 1993 and now manufactures 100 per cent Australian merino outerwear and underwear in Brisbane

Media opportunities

A range of exciting opportunities exist for media including:

- Callout for regional Queensland fashion designers working with natural fibres – commencing March 2017
- Model casting May date TBC
- Student design competition judging July date TBC
- Ekka media launch event July 11

Don't forget to follow us on social media #ekka2017

