



# The Healthy Seas Initiative: Turning Fishnets Into Sportswear And Carpets

Fishnets are being returned to life as garments and carpets, thanks to what nylon manufacturer Aquafil has been doing for the past year in conjunction with two partners, the ECNC Group and Star Sock. This operation is already working on a pretty significant scale with Aquafil collecting 400-500 tons a month of fish net from the fish industry, aquaculture and from the sea to be re-used and re-utilised. br>

The transition to a circular economy requires innovation and imagination. Both of those factors are undoubtedly in play with a nylon and fibre company collecting fishnets from the sea to recycle the raw material for the production of carpets and sportswear. The partnership produces the 'Healthy Seas' initiative that is included in the ECONYL® Regeneration System, represents the storyline for products – garments and carpets with a story to tell. br>

## The Healthy Seas Brand

---



Econyl Plant

Successful branding, that is recognizable to the consumer, has clearly been a valuable tool for the initiative acting as an incentive for more companies to get involved. Aquafil CEO Giulio Bonazzi suggested that it was valuable for the initiative's sportswear partners to advertise their products as part of Healthy Seas so; "that the consumer can recognize that there is a story behind that [product]".  
br>

That story is a somewhat unusual, if not unique, one. A combination of volunteer diving teams heading out into the North Sea and Adriatic Sea where they retrieve dumped fishing nets (mainly from shipwrecks), salvage companies separating out marine litter and Aquafil commissioning boats specifically to collect plastic from the sea act as the providers for the program's feedstock. The nets are then cleaned and the polymer material is extracted and recycled before being re-used and re-purposed for a new industry. br>

## Cross-Sector Collaboration

---

While much of the focus falls upon the laudable achievement of removing damaging refuse from the seas, the initiative's most impressive success has to be the collaboration between different organisations across several industry sectors. br>

Engineering such successful and strong cross-sector collaboration has clearly been a challenge. Bonazzi was honest in assessing the relationship; "fish industry and fish net manufacturers are not really our piece of cake. You know we are in garments and carpets". However, he went on to describe what is clearly a developing relationship saying; "nonetheless, we have started very constructive discussions with fish net manufacturing companies." Those discussions have been particularly focused on the possibility of fishnets being designed for recycling and re-purposing. Picking up on the necessity to consider the whole cycle, Bonazzi was also quick to add; "we really need sportswear or garment company to design products for regeneration". br>

## Design for Regeneration

---

'Design for regeneration' is perhaps the final significant piece of the puzzle left to be placed in creating a closed loop design for an initiative that has great potential to grow. While referencing carpet producers such as Desso and Interface as important partners, Bonazzi described the Healthy Seas programme's attitude towards expansion in terms of both volume and diversity positively; "we are an open initiative and we welcome members". br>

Fishnets already make up around 25% of the total recycling done by Aquafil and the potential supply of feedstock from the fishing industry is certainly large. In Norway alone there are over 100 fish farmers producing millions of tons of salmon per year. br>

Aquafil is already working on ways to exploit this potential raw material further. Their most recent method of acquiring fishnets has been to co-operate with harbor masters and fish farmers directly. Bonazzi said that members of the fishing industry were encouraged "to bring fish nets that they would otherwise dump in other places into this collection point". From there the material can be transported to Aquafil's nylon plant in Slovenia, where it is regenerated. br>



Warehouse where waste is prepared for de-polymerisation

Continued co-operation with the fishing industry in general is clearly the way forward for this project and key to its success. Besides the collection points, fishnet acquisition could be made easier if the electronic codes placed in the nets by the farmers were passed onto the parties hoping to recycle the raw material. This could be linked with a broader idea, that has been discussed in EU legislative circles, the 'product passport', which could reveal what parts a product contains, how it could be repaired, dismantled, recycled and re-used. br>

The initiative has been 100% funded by its member organizations. Bonazzi asserted: "There's no government or European money supporting the initiative at all". Rather it is clearly Bonazzi's belief that the project can be self-financing in the long-term, "as long as sportswear brands or carpet brands

can see that the consumer recognize their product then they have an incentive to invest money and resources.” br>

This initiative carries forward two critical features. The first is that it represents recycling/re-utilization on a product level, as opposed to the more prevalent packaging level. Secondly, this is a scheme that looks beyond ‘cleaning up’ and recycling; it moves towards a closed loop design and a new, more sustainable system. br>