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AMA submission to Review of the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice

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The regulation of content via the current Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (the Code) and by the Australian Communications and Media Authority has served the Australian community and its social values very well. The current Code regulates content in accordance with community standards. This is supported by the fact acknowledged on page 3 of the Invitation for Public Comment that ‘complaints figures indicate that broadcasters have very high levels of compliance and are meeting community standards in the delivery of their services’.

The AMA does not agree with the statement in the Explanatory note that refers to free-to-air commercial television as being ‘the most heavily regulated platform for accessing content’. We believe under the current Code it is the most effectively regulated platform. We cannot support any changes to the Code because:

- Free-to-air television remains the first choice for Australian audiences,
- Around 13.6 million Australians watch commercial free-to-air television every day, and
- The average Australian viewer watches 3 hours of television per day, with the vast majority spent on commercial free-to-air stations.

The proposed changes to the Code governing the content and advertising broadcast on free to air television will no longer reflect community standards, and will mean that vulnerable consumers will be exposed to large volumes of inappropriate content. The proposed changes to the Code will put commercial interests of advertisers above the developmental needs of Australian children and young people.

Alcohol advertising

The AMA is significantly concerned about any potential avenues that increase children and young people’s exposure to alcohol advertising. The expansion of M classification times which could see children and young people exposed to alcohol advertising from 7:30pm is just one aspect.

For health reasons, the AMA does not support the advertising of alcohol during sporting events. The proposition that alcohol advertising is entirely appropriate because children watch sport in the company of adults, fails to recognise the underlying impacts such advertising has on young people. A high level of recall and recognition of specific alcohol ads and associated brands have been observed among children who have viewed sporting events (Phillipson & Jones 2007). The AMA does not support any amendment to the Code which will result in increased in exposure to

television based alcohol advertising for children and young people (regardless of whose company they are in).

Gambling advertising

The AMA also has significant concerns about the promotion of gambling to children and young people. Gambling advertising and odds promotion during sporting events, as well as during children's peak viewing times, is problematic because it normalises gambling. Since 2012 the AMA has called for regulations that prohibit marketing associated with gambling during televised sporting events.

Similar to alcohol, the AMA is concerned that under the new Code, children and young people's exposure to gambling and odds promotion will increase. For example, the Explanatory notes suggest that the new Code extends restrictions around gambling advertising and odds promotion, to reduce children's exposure by restricting such as advertising during G or lower programming during the time between 6:00am and 8:30am, and 4:00pm and 7:00pm. However the provisions in section 6.3.2 of the new Code states that these restrictions do not apply during news, current affairs or sporting programs (which may in fact be the predominant content at those times). The AMA is concerned that it is possible that under the new Code, children and young people will have increased exposure to gambling advertising and odds promotion.

In summary, the AMA considers that the current code provides the right approach to content and advertising to ensure it does not undermine the health and wellbeing of Australian children, and young people are not impacted by what they see on television.

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