

Q & A

WE ASK DEBRA RICHARDS, DIRECTOR PROGRAMS, ABOUT RADIO AND TELEVISION CODES OF PRACTICE.

What are codes of practice?

The new legislation has engineered a broadcasting environment with less regulation and the codes of practice can be seen as a cornerstone of this.

Broadcasters are required under the Broadcasting Services Act to develop their own codes of practice relating to programming matters. These were previously covered by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal's standards. Only in the areas of Australian content and children's television have the standards been maintained.

One of the first decisions of the ABA was to carry over all existing ABT standards, as an interim measure. The standards will have effect for two years, or until industry associations, such as the Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters (FARB), the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) and the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA), have developed their own codes.

What happens to the codes?

The industry associations are required to develop their codes and put them to the ABA for registration. The commercial radio codes were registered on 17 May and the commercial television code was endorsed by the ABA on 19 August. The television code will be registered and will come into effect on 5 September.

The national broadcasters are not required to register codes but they do have to notify the ABA of their codes - the ABC did so in December last year and SBS in February this year.

Other organisations, such as the CBAA, are expected to submit their codes following their public consultation process.

How have the codes been developed?

The codes have been developed in consultation with the public and the ABA. The codes for commercial television have generated most consumer and industry group interest when you look at

the number of submissions that FACTS have received on their code.

Putting the codes into the public arena for comment is part of the self regulation process. The first draft of the



Debra Richards, Director Programs

FACTS code was submitted to the ABA in April, before and since that time the code has been exposed to extensive consultation and comment with interested parties. I think the final code clearly reflects this expression of community and industry concern.

What issues created most concern for viewers?

For television it was the maintenance of community safeguards, especially in relation to classification issues. Other issues included the portrayal of women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultural diversity in the media.

How do the codes differ from the standards?

The FACTS code is essentially a package covering seven areas: an introduction which sets out the objectives of the code and proscribed material, classification of program material, program pro-

motions, news and current affairs programs, time occupied by non-program matter i.e. ad time, classification and placement of commercials and the handling of complaints.

The only existing ABT standard not covered refers to fair contests, but it is already covered elsewhere by existing legislation. And of course there are the mandatory television standards covering Australian content and children's television.

The FACTS code is more expansive than the standards. The FACTS classification is more detailed and will include the Office of Film and Literature Classification system of G, PG, M and MA along with onscreen advice on the content of films.

How is information on the television codes made public?

This process will include announcements on television and planned newspaper advertisements to explain the new classifications and the existence of the code.

The onscreen advice for films will also assist viewers to make more informed choices about their own and their children's viewing.

How long are the codes in force?

They are in force for three years from the date of registration, unless circumstances suggest that an earlier review is desirable.

How are the codes monitored?

The ABA has a basic framework for monitoring already in place. The ABA's attitudinal research program to look at community attitudes is already well established. In addition, unresolved complaints are reported to the ABA and we will still receive some complaints which need to be referred to the television stations. We will also get reports about complaints made to the broadcasters. In this way, the ABA is able to monitor the community's concerns, particularly issues as they expand.