

I N S I D E CODES AND CONDITIONS

The Codes and Conditions section of the ABA's Program Services Branch deals with codes of practice and licence conditions. Under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*, most program content is regulated by industry codes of practice developed by the broadcasters themselves. To ensure that codes are in line with community standards, the Codes and Conditions staff consult with industry representatives during the code development and registration process. The section also monitors compliance with codes of practice. Broadcasters report regularly on complaints and section staff respond to the many written and phone complaints and inquiries from the public. Each broadcasting sector is also subject to a set of licence conditions. The Codes and Conditions section monitors compliance with these conditions and investigates possible breaches.

PROVIDING INFORMATION

As the experts on program and operational matters, the section receives many requests for information. Individual station licensees often contact the section for advice on the application of a licence condition or a code. Members of the public frequently call to lodge a complaint, or to ask how the broadcasting industry is regulated and how they, as individuals, can make their concerns known.

A phone call to the section will provide a complainant with advice about their complaint, and an information kit on the complaints process and the role of the ABA.

INDUSTRY CODES OF PRACTICE

Codes of practice are a major responsibility of the section. Just over a year ago the ABA registered the Commercial Television Industry's Code of Practice. Throughout the year, the ABA has received regular reports from the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations on complaints received by television stations. The section has commissioned research



into community attitudes in relation to the new M and MA classifications, as well as the new full screen consumer advice before M and MA films.

The section will shortly be releasing an analysis of the first year's operation of the code which will include the results of the research and a report of complaints made to the industry and those received by the ABA.

The Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters has had its code for commercial radio in place for approximately eighteen months. The national broadcasters, ABC and SBS also operate under codes of practice notified to the ABA.

COMPLAINTS AND INVESTIGATIONS IN 1994

With the introduction of codes of practice, complainants are required to make their complaint to the television or radio station first and approach the ABA if they are dissatisfied with the response they have received. The section has the responsibility to investigate any 'unresolved' complaints, and thus far in 1994 has investigated more than forty unresolved complaints. These include complaints against the national broadcasters.

The section has also responded to more than twelve hundred written and telephone complaints made directly to the ABA. So far in 1994 the program most complained of was the broadcast by the ABC of the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. Others matters complained of include the number and placement of advertisements during the coverage of live sporting events—including the Winter Olympics and the Commonwealth Games—and program material which was perceived to be unsuitable for children.

The recording of the details of these complaints provides the ABA with a useful monitoring tool for helping to assess the effectiveness of the codes.

CODES YET TO BE REGISTERED

The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia is soon to present its code to the ABA for registration. Before registering the code, the ABA ensures that the code has met a series of mandatory requirements, one of which is that the code provides adequate community safeguards. Such requirements apply to all codes presented to the ABA for registration.

In relation to the emerging sectors, the

LANDMARK WORLD SUMMIT TO DISCUSS CHILDREN'S TELEVISION

section is currently consulting with the Confederation of Australian Subscription Television on its draft code, which was presented to the ABA in early September 1994, prior to release for public comment. Consultation has commenced with the Federation of Australian Narrowcasting and Subscription Services on the development of codes for narrowcast radio and television services.

LICENCE CONDITIONS

Schedule 2 of the Broadcasting Services Act imposes special conditions upon all licensees. These conditions relate to matters such as the broadcast of election advertisements and the recording of broadcast matter relating to a political subject or current affairs. The schedule also applies various conditions to the respective categories of service provider. These conditions include matters as diverse as the prohibition of tobacco advertising, the condition that a licensee remain suitable and a prohibition on the broadcast of material which the Office of Film and Literature Classification has refused classification or has classified X. Examples of 'sector specific' conditions include the condition that commercial television licensees contribute to the provision of an adequate and comprehensive range of broadcasting services in their licence area. There is also a condition on community broadcasting services that they encourage the members of the community they serve to participate in the selection and provision of programs.

There are often queries from broadcasters and the public about the obligations these conditions impose. Codes and Conditions section has conducted a number of investigations into possible breaches of conditions of licence by narrowcasters.

STAFF

Staff of the section are Lesley Osborne, Gordana Marin, Sharon Burden, Rosalie O'Neale, Marie McArdle, Glen Farina, Sue Thompson and Lachlan Habgood. ☐

Over four hundred people, representing organisations from 62 countries, have so far registered for the first World Summit on Television and Children, to be held 12-17 March 1995, at the World Congress Centre in Melbourne. Fifty-six speakers so far have confirmed their participation in this landmark event, hosted by the Australian Children's Television Foundation.

Some of the speakers include: **Keith Spicer**, Canadian Radio-Television and Communications Commission; **Mogens Vemmer**, Children's Programmes, Danmarks Radio (Denmark); **Christian Davin**, France Animation; **Ursula von Zallinger**, PRXJEUNESSE (Germany); **Paolo de Benedetti**, Children's Programs,



Dr Patricia Edgar, director of the Australian Children's Television Foundation

RAI 1 (Italy); **Katsura Yaegashi**, Japan Prize; **Feny de los Angeles Bautista**, Philippines Children's Television Foundation; **Dr Ivy Matseppe-Cassaburri**, South African Broadcasting Corporation; **Anna Home**, OBE, Children's Television, British Broadcasting Commission; **Lady Howe**, British Broadcasting Standards Council; **Colin Shaw**, British Broadcasting Standards Council; **Geraldine Laybourne**, Nickelodeon; **James P Grant**, UNICEF (United States).

To receive a copy of the program which details the topics and objectives of the World Summit contact: The World Summit Secretariat, Australian Children's Television Foundation, 199 Grattan Street, Carlton, Victoria, 3053. Phone: (03) 348 1144. Fax: (03) 347 4194. ☐

'WHAT STORIES ARE WE TELLING OUR CHILDREN?'

SYMPOSIUM PRESENTED BY THE STANLEY FOSTER FOUNDATION, REGENT HOTEL, MELBOURNE, 20-21 AUGUST 1994

This two day symposium covered a broad range of topics, featuring speakers from a range of academic disciplines, special interest groups and other organisations, including the ABA. The organisers, led by Dr Helen Caldicott, director of the Stanley Foster Foundation, intended the event to be a stimulus for discussion on how the media, and in particular, television, shape our cultural goals. This allowed for a diverse range of presentations, and some stimulating discussion.

The first day's sessions included: 'The Media is Determining the Fate of the Earth' from Dr Helen Caldicott; 'The Ambiguity of the Press' by Hugo Kelly, environmental writer for *The Age*; and 'From Video Games to Virtual Reality' by Dr Ken Wark from Macquarie University.

Issues discussed included future directions for technology and their projected impact on society. These issues include the 'information superhighway' and virtual reality, and covered environmental issues and concepts of cultural myths and heroes.

The second day featured presentations on 'Media Ownership' by Paul Chadwick from the Communications Law Centre; 'Family Disruption: Different Ways Families Control Television' given by Professor Patricia Gillard, RMIT; 'Kids as Customers' by Barbara Biggins, president of the Australian Council for Children's Film and Television; and 'Kids' Television and Classification Issues' presented by Debra Richards and Linda Sheldon of the ABA. Topics on this day covered education, research-related findings and child development issues, including the influence of television on children and their attitudes and behaviours toward it. ☐