

mandatory standards where codes of practice fail or where no code of practice has been developed.

Thirdly, the Act allows standards and registered codes of practice to be amended by Parliament.

WHAT CAN THE ABA DO IF A CODE OF PRACTICE ISN'T WORKING?

The ABA has a number of options in this case.

The ABA may decide to impose a condition on the licence of the offending station or stations to require the licensee to comply with a code of practice.

If a condition of a licence is being breached stronger sanctions can be applied including hefty fines.

And of course there is the power to make a standard that would apply to all licensees in that section of the industry.

CONSULTATION

I have referred a number of times to the importance of consultation in the code development process. To a large extent consultation has filled the gap left by the demise of the ABT's inquiry processes as a means of gathering information about community needs and concerns. Of course this information is balanced with the attitudinal research conducted by the ABA amongst the general community, and the complaints we receive by letter and telephone.

Because the broadcasting media commands such a wide audience, its viewers and listeners come from every stratum of society, every age group, and represent a very wide range of interests. It is important that the churches feel that there is a place for their views to be heard in that consultation, although I recognise that the churches themselves are diverse communities.

In this context, I was pleased to have recently participated in the launch in Bunbury, WA, of the Media Awareness Project, a broadly based project spon-

sored by the Mothers' Union of the Anglican church. It aims to make its members media-aware and media friendly, so that they can effectively communicate their views about the media to the particular newspaper editor, or radio or television station, or to government bodies such as the ABA. This seemed a very positive initiative to me. (See separate story above.)

This brings me to the last point that I wanted to make about the FACTS code.

Some of you may have seen the report in Saturday's *Sydney Morning Herald* of a recent conference of consumer organisations, where the chief executive of the NSW Chamber of Manufactures talked about the consumers' reluctance to collaborate with industry and a continuing suspicion of industry's motives especially in relation to voluntary codes of practice. He urged consumers to adopt a 'co-regulatory approach' whereby the formation and administration of mandatory rules is shared between governments, industry and the general public. Mr Holt felt this was especially pressing now when industry had undergone unprecedented change and at a time when the competitive pressures were great.

The new framework for the regulation of broadcasting services recognises that methods of regulation should be sensitive to industry costs and seek to minimise them. At least in the development of codes for broadcasters, it has gone some way towards a co-regulation model. The challenge is to entrench this approach before significant changes to the broadcasting environment occur with the introduction of new services such as pay TV, digital audio broadcasting etc. These developments may well put pressure on existing broadcasters, and their capacity and willingness to pursue social objectives to the level we now see.



ABA CLOSES STATE OFFICE IN VICTORIA

The ABA closed the State office in Victoria on Friday 10 December 1993.

The ABA flagged its intention to close the office, located in Marland House, Bourke St, Melbourne, earlier this year. The office was the Victorian state office of the former Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT).

The decision to gradually close all the former state offices of the ABT was made as a result of a review of the structure of the ABA.

'When the ABA was established by the Broadcasting Services Act in October 1992, it inherited the full staff complement of the former ABT and the Station Planning Branch of the Department of Transport and Communications. However the functions and budget of the new organisation were altered significantly in line with the new legislation, with the work of the state offices being particularly affected,' said Mr Brian Johns, ABA Chairman.

The review concluded that budget limitations and the priority for resourcing essential functions made it difficult to justify the continued role of the State offices.

The public and industry will still be able to obtain information and advice by telephoning the Sydney ABA office on freecall (1 800) 226 667.

Copies of ABA publications which were available for perusal at the Melbourne office will continue to be supplied to the State Library of Victoria.

Further announcements about the closure of other regional offices will be made as they arise.

