



Consultation on review of Australian content standard

The ABA began its consultations with various groups as part of the review of the Australian Content Standard for commercial television. The ABA released a discussion paper on 15 July as the basis for this consultation.

Meetings in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth

The ABA has held meetings in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, with a number of groups and organisations.

Michael Gordon-Smith, ABA Member and ABA officers met with representatives of industry and government, including screen funding bodies, in New Zealand on August 19-21.

ABA officers are available to meet with representatives from other organisations who would like to discuss the current review of the Australian Content Standard.

Melbourne International Film Festival

On 8 August, Lesley Osborne, Manager, Standards represented the ABA on a panel discussing free trade and cultural issues at the Melbourne International Film Festival. The panel was chaired by Julie Rigg, of Radio National and an edited version of the presentations was broadcast on the Arts National program on 10 August. Other panel members were Anne Britton, MEAA; Patricia Edgar, ACTF; Mara Bunn, Australian Consumers' Association (ACA); and Jo Tyndall, NZ SPADA.

In addition to discussing the ABA's review process and options, Ms Osborne outlined the background to the High Court's finding that the ABA's current standard is inconsistent with the Trade in Services Protocol to the Australia New Zealand Closer Economic Relations Trade Agreement (CER).

Ms Osborne said the recent High Court decision has placed the ABA at the centre of the debate about free trade and cultural protection. The tension between the demands of free trade in capital, goods and services and the desire of government to promote Australian culture is evident in the controversy following the High Court decision.

Options for change

Ms Osborne said, 'the ABA has not reached any view on the approach it should take in framing a new standard. The ABA's discussion paper lists a range of options but does recognise that there is concern about the potential for change from opening the quotas to New Zealand, as the ABA is required to do'.

Timing

Ms Osborne concluded, 'the ABA would like to conclude the review by the end of this year, but depending on the complexity of issues that arise during the review process, the timetable may need to be extended'.

Update on codes of practice

Commercial Television Code of Practice

In May 1997, following two rounds of public consultation, the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) submitted a draft revised Commercial Television Code of Practice to the ABA for assessment and registration. The ABA's assessment of the revised code has included:

- research into issues of concern identified over the life of the old code and the ways these have been addressed in the revised code;
- an examination of the submissions made to FACTS in the public consultation phase of the review, and FACTS' response; and
- an in-depth comparison of the old and revised codes.

Officers and Members of the ABA have met with FACTS to discuss the way the revised code provides community safeguards on a number of important issues. Some issues relevant to the revised code have also been raised directly with the industry by the Minister for Communications, Information Economy and the Arts, and by the Senate Select Committee on Information Technologies.

Commercial Radio Codes of Practice

The Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters (FARB) has informed the ABA that it is conducting a public review of the Commercial Radio Codes of Practice. Preliminary meetings held between officers of the ABA and FARB representatives have identified matters concern in the codes, as well as questions of process. FARB anticipates releasing the new draft codes for public comment in the near future.

Draft codes of practice - Subscription Television Broadcasting Services

The ABA continues to consult with Australian Subscription Television Radio Association (ASTRA) in relation to the codes of practice for subscription television broadcasting services. ASTRA has recently provided the ABA with the final draft of the codes for assessment and registration soon. ASTRA has also confirmed that it will release an additional code, relating to advertising, for public comment.