



## STQ 7 Regional Queensland

### Violence in program promotions

#### **The complaint**

On 2 November 2000, the ABA received a written complaint concerning the level of violence and the use of guns in program promotions broadcast by commercial television station STQ Regional Queensland during the period of the Olympic Games, 16 September 2000 to 1 October 2000.

The program promotions were for the M classified drama series 'Bad Girls' and 'Blue Heelers'. Both programs were promoted throughout the day (in various classification zones) from Saturday 16 September to Sunday 1 October 2000. During this period, most of the licensee's programming consisted of live or near live coverage of the Olympic Games.

There were three promotions for 'Bad Girls', one timed at approximately one minute, and the other two at 30 seconds. The full version consists of female voiceover introducing the characters as 'good girls' and 'bad girls'. The visuals include close-ups of characters' faces, an upset looking woman being held over a washbasin by another woman, a man and woman kissing, quick shots of women dancing in tasselled outfits on stage, a man carrying a large gun and dangling handcuffs, and a woman looking out of a cell window, then slumping down with an anguished cry. The final voice-over consists of a man's voice saying, 'Come inside, and see just how good bad can be'. Dramatic music runs throughout the pro-

motion, building to a climax at the end.

There are five different program promotions for 'Blue Heelers'. Channel 7 categorised these as 'softer' and 'harder' versions of the promotion. Two promotions were approximately one minute long (one 'softer', one 'harder') and three were approximately thirty seconds (two 'softer', one 'harder').

The one-minute 'softer' promotion comprises a male voice-over stating, slowly and in a sombre voice, 'It will happen to one of them ... a bullet will be loaded ... a gun will be pointed ... and a Blue Heeler will be *shot*'. Voices then repeat, ominously, 'who will it be?' as the camera pans the anxious, attentive faces of the Blue Heelers cast. The visuals then cut to an image of a gun falling to the ground, police officers seemingly searching a field carrying guns, a car being stopped by the police, quick visuals of one person pursuing another, and tense scenes in a hospital.

At various points there are close-ups of guns being pointed, and the promotion ends on a cutaway shot of a trigger about to be pulled as a voice shouts, 'Drop the weapon now!'. Much of the promotion is dark-lit, and dramatic music accompanies the visuals.

#### **Relevant code of practice**

The Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice states:

2.11 Material classified G is not necessarily intended for children but it must be very mild in impact and must



munity Broadcasting Code of Practice 4, as an examination of the written translations revealed that sponsorship announcements were made during the relevant broadcasts concerning numerous organisations. As a result, the ABA concluded that 3WRB had not given 'exclusive rights of advertisement to One World Communications'.

#### **Action taken**

3WRB advised the ABA that following the ABA's findings it had taken the following action:

1. Meetings were held between the Station Manager and the station's Vietnamese on-air presenters in relation to the importance of distinguishing between community service announcements, station promotions and paid sponsorships.
2. These same presenters underwent a period of retraining and were informed that their programs would be closely monitored in the future.
3. The station's computer network, software and scheduling was completely upgraded to minimise the possibility that computer errors could occur in the future i.e. doubling up of sponsorship announcements etc.
4. The ABA's report was distributed to all presenters at 3WRB. This information will also be incorporated into 3WRB's Training Agenda.

The ABA was satisfied with the above response and, as it was the first time that a breach of this nature had been found against the licensee, the ABA decided not to take any further action.



# Investigations

not contain any matter likely to be unsuitable for children to watch without supervision.

**2.11.1 Violence:** Visual depiction of physical and psychological violence must be very restrained. The use of weapons, threatening language, sounds or special effects must have a very low sense of threat or menace, must be strictly limited to the story line or program context, must be infrequent and must not show violent behaviour to be acceptable or desirable.

**2.11.2 Sex and Nudity:** Visual depiction of, and verbal references to, sexual behaviour must be brief, infrequent, contain little or no detail and be strictly limited to the story line or program context. Restrained, brief and infrequent visual depiction of nudity only when absolutely necessary to the story line or program context.

3.7 In other G programs other than those referred to in Clause 3.6, a promotion for a P, C, G, PG or M program may be broadcast, provided that the content of the promotion complies with Clause 3.8.

3.8 Special restrictions apply to the content of program promotions in G viewing periods, or in G programs which start at 3.30pm on a weekday, or which are broadcast between 7.30pm and 8.30pm on any day. All such program promotions must comply with the G classification requirements set out in Clause 2.11, and in addition must include no material which involves any of the following:

- 3.8.1 the use of guns, other weapons or dangerous objects in a manner clearly intended to inflict harm on, or to seriously menace, people or animals;
- 3.8.2 punches, blows or other physical or psychological violence against people or animals (other than in sequences which clearly depict comedy or slapstick behaviour);
- 3.8.3 any form of violence or cruelty to children;
- 3.8.4 sequences that involve loss of life;
- 3.8.5 close-up vision of dead or wounded bodies;
- 3.8.6 any visual depiction of suicide or intended means of suicide;

3.8.7 anything which has more than a very low sense of threat or menace;

3.8.8 visual depiction of nudity or partial nudity;

3.8.9 visual depiction of, or verbal reference to, sexual behaviour except of the most innocuous kind;

3.8.10 socially offensive or discriminatory language.

## Decision

The ABA determined that the program promotions for 'Bad Girls', when screened in G viewing periods, breached clauses 3.8.2 and 3.8.7 of the code.

Clause 3.8.2 requires there be no material that depicts physical or psychological violence against people or animals, other than in comic or slapstick behaviour. Two scenes in this promotion breached this clause. These scenes are very brief but do present both 'physical and psychological violence' (the shorter versions of the promotions contain one or both of these scenes). As a result, all versions of the promotion breached clause 3.8.2 when screened in G viewing times.

Clause 3.8.7 requires that promotions contain no more than, 'a very low sense of threat or menace'. The terse, aggressive nature of some of the dialogue, the dramatic music, and the tone of the scenes mentioned above all contribute to a sense of threat or menace which the ABA determined was not 'very low'. As a result, the promotions also breached this criterion.

Clause 3.8.9 requires that visual depictions of, or verbal references to, sexual behaviour can only be, 'of the most innocuous kind'. The references to sexual behaviour in the promotions were inexplicit and without detail, and were innocuous in nature. As a result, there was no breach of clause 3.8.9 of the code.

Clause 2.11.1 sets out the general requirements for the treatment of violence in G material, and states that visual depictions of physical and psychological violence must be very restrained. Such depictions, as discussed above, do meet the test of being 'very restrained', being generally inexplicit

and cut-away. The use of weapons and threatening language in the violent context have a 'very low' sense of threat, although the ABA considered that the promotion was borderline in terms of meeting this criterion.

Under clause 2.11.2, visual depictions of, and verbal references to, sexual behaviour are brief and contain no detail. The ABA considered that the promotion met this criterion.

The ABA also determined that the program promotions for 'Blue Heelers', when screened in G viewing periods, breached clauses 2.11.1 and 3.8.7 of the code.

In these promotions, the ABA considered the repeated close-ups of guns, characters carrying guns and looking frightened, and the voice-over emphasising the loading of the gun and the fact that one of the cast members will be shot. The ABA concluded that these elements, when combined, create a sense of threat that is not 'very low' as required by clause 3.8.7 of the code.

Nor did the ABA consider that these promotions met the requirements of clause 2.11.1 of the code. Not only was there a sense of threat that was not 'very low', the repeated and close-up shots of guns was considered not to meet the requirement that the use of weapons be 'infrequent' (this is particularly so in the longer version of the promotion).

## Action taken

In response to the ABA's request for comments on the preliminary investigation report, Seven Network Limited stated that:

Channel Seven Queensland has no further comments on the ABA's draft report and accepts the ABA's conclusions in relation to this matter.

A memo will be circulated to all relevant Seven Network staff bringing the ABA's decision to their attention and reminding them the program promotions must comply with the classification zones during which they are broadcast.

The ABA considers that this response is satisfactory and will take no further action in this instance.

