

# Questions raised about reality TV safeguards

**ACMA will report to the Minister for Communications Information Technology and the Arts on its investigation into whether the *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice* provides appropriate community safeguards for reality television programming by 1 April 2007. The Minister directed ACMA to review the code relating to reality television after advice from ACMA about an alleged incidence of sexual harassment streamed live on the *Big Brother* website on 1 July 2006.**

*Big Brother* is a reality television series broadcast by Network Ten in which a group of participants share a house and are filmed constantly for about three months. Every week, participants nominate who should leave the house and viewers vote from these nominations. The last person in the house wins a cash prize. *Big Brother* includes a suite of television programs broadcast in various classification zones, using different portions of the footage available, a website through which material is streamed live from the *Big Brother* house and content delivered to mobile phones.

The code of practice specifies that all material for broadcast, other than news, current affairs and sport, should be classified. It sets out the classification criteria, from G to MA, and the time zones for each classification criteria throughout the viewing day. The current code was registered in June 2004, and is due for review again commencing in June 2007.

A discussion paper outlining issues for comment was published on the ACMA website in December 2006, with comments closing on 1 February 2007. Questions

presented in the paper included:

- Does reality television programming raise issues of community concern?
- Does the code reflect community standards with respect to reality television?
- Are the existing code mechanisms operating effectively to provide appropriate community safeguards with respect to reality television programming, including with respect to classification distinctions and consumer advice requirements?

- Does the code provide appropriate community safeguards with respect to the broadcast of reality television program excerpts in news and current affairs programs?
- Is the complaints mechanism in the code operating effectively and in a timely manner in relation to reality television?

As well as public consultation, ACMA is undertaking quantitative and qualitative research into community concerns with reality television programming and liaising directly with industry stakeholders.

The discussion paper is on the ACMA website at [www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au).

