

Terms of reference for Children's Television Standards review released

ACMA recently released terms of reference for its review of the Children's Television Standards. The review will consider whether current quota levels, time bands and scheduling for C and P programs and limitations on non-program material, such as advertising, remain effective in the current environment. The review will also examine processes relating to the standards, such as the pre-classification of C and P programs.

The current Children's Television Standards have not been substantially reviewed since their introduction in 1990. The review will focus on the provision of children's programs and appropriate safeguards during children's viewing times on free-to-air commercial television. However, ACMA recognises that the government's media reform agenda and continuing technological developments will impact on the range of content standards currently in place and they will need to be revisited.

A program of research to

support the review is under way, including a comprehensive review of relevant research on advertising to children and an analysis of children's television viewing patterns. ACMA will release an issues paper for public comment in the first half of 2007, building on findings from the research.

A new standard is likely to be introduced late in 2007.

The requirement for children's television standards is set out in the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*. The current Children's Television Standards were made by the former Australian Broadcasting Tribunal and took effect on 1 January 1990. They reflected extensive community and industry consultations undertaken at that time and tried to balance:

- public interest concerns that children's special viewing needs are met
 - the commercial television industry's reliance upon advertising revenue and
 - the child audience's lack of earning or 'buying' capacity.
- The Children's Television

Standards were amended on 1 January 1996 to include provisions relating to changes to the Australian Content Standard. The changes to the Children's Television Standards incorporated the following requirements:

- a progressive increase of quality first release Australian children's drama to 32 hours each year by 1998
- eight hours of repeat Australian children's drama each year and
- all P programs must be Australian.

The Children's Television Standards were varied in 1999 following the introduction of the new Australian content standard.

In accordance with the Australia New Zealand Closer Economic Relations Trade Agreement (the CER), the standards allowed for New Zealand programs and Australian/New Zealand programs to be treated equally with Australian programs for the purpose of compliance with the standard.

The Children's Television

Standards were varied again in 2002. The changes related to the removal of the 'primary school' focus, in the definition of 'children' and to the obligation of commercial television licensees to broadcast Australian children's drama. In 2005, the Children's Television Standards were reviewed and amended to clarify technical drafting and minor policy issues.

In December 2005, ACMA announced that a full review of the Children's Television Standards would be undertaken to ensure that children's television needs are still being met in the most appropriate way.

Terms of reference for the review of the Children's Television Standards and the current standards are on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to For the public: Content & advertising > Broadcasting: About broadcasting content controls > TV content & advertising > TV codes & standards > Children's television standards).