



New standards for children's television released

The ACMA has released the new *Children's Television Standards 2009* for commercial television following a comprehensive review to ensure their continued relevance and effectiveness.

Key points of the *Children's Television Standards 2009*

- > The Children's Television Standards (CTS) ensure that Australian children are uniquely catered for in programming on commercial free-to-air television.
- > Advertising restrictions during children's (C) programs are stronger, with popular characters banned from most advertising during C programs.
- > The new CTS do not include general restrictions on food advertising because:
 - > Current research suggests that the association between food advertising and obesity remains modest.
 - > Evidence of the benefits of banning food and beverage advertising is only beginning to emerge.
 - > There is still no agreed standard in Australia to identify high fat/salt/sugar food.
 - > The cost of a general ban on food advertising remains significant.
- > Industry has introduced initiatives to restrict advertising to children during children's programs to ads that contain healthy dietary choices. The ACMA will be monitoring these initiatives over the next 12 months to see if they are effective.

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The standards relate specifically to the provision of children's programs and appropriate safeguards during designated children's viewing times on free-to-air commercial television.

The review of the standards incorporated a strong research component, including literature reviews and economic modelling, and industry and community consultation. The ACMA also responded to requests to meet with interested organisations and industry bodies to discuss key issues in the review.

The new standards replace the current *Children's Television Standards 2005* and will come into operation on 1 January 2010.

The review of the standards incorporated a strong research component, including literature reviews and economic modelling, and industry and community consultation. The ACMA also responded to requests to meet with interested organisations and industry bodies to discuss key issues in the review.

'The ACMA has reaffirmed the major decisions included in its draft standards. Critically, Australian children will continue to be uniquely catered for on commercial television through the maintenance of quotas for children's (C) and preschool children's (P) programs,' said Chris Chapman, Chairman of the ACMA.

'The new standards will now also make it possible for broadcasters to create viewing destinations for children through the introduction of block programming arrangements. This gives licensees the option of broadcasting all C programming in minimum 60-minute periods on at least two days per week to fulfil quota obligations,' said Mr Chapman.

Advertising will continue to be banned during P programs while advertising restrictions during C programs have been strengthened. The use of popular characters in advertising during C programs is now prohibited, unless the popular character is part of a toy or game, or part of a general non-commercial campaign such as road safety.

The ACMA has decided to maintain its initial view not to implement further general restrictions on food and beverage advertising under the new standards.

'The public debate about advertising of so-called junk food on television, and indeed in other media, has been enlivened and significantly advanced since the ACMA commenced this review. As the ACMA has indicated previously, it is not a health body and must rely on the evidence from the health research sector,' said Mr Chapman.

'The ACMA concludes that the relative contribution of advertising to childhood obesity is difficult to quantify and that a causal relationship between these may

not be possible to determine. However, there is currently no consensus in the research that the ACMA is aware of as to whether the association between food advertising and obesity is anything more than the 'modest' association identified in the ACMA report that accompanied the release of the draft standards.

'In addition, there is only limited evidence about the benefits of banning food and beverage advertising, as this is an area where research is only beginning to emerge internationally and locally.

'As required by legislation, the ACMA has taken into account the impact of regulation on broadcasters. It remains the case that the costs to broadcasters of any general ban on food advertising—made necessary by the lack of an agreed, implemented, high fat/salt/sugar food identification standard in Australia—would be significant.

'Without greater confidence that such bans would have a direct and real benefit, the ACMA considers that a general ban would be a blunt regulatory intervention with uncertain results and significant costs to the sector,' said Mr Chapman.

'The ACMA welcomes recent industry initiatives to restrict advertising to children to food that represents healthy dietary choices and will monitor these initiatives over the next 12 months to gauge their effectiveness. This remains an area of continuing interest for the ACMA in determining if industry can adequately address community concern without the need for additional government regulation.

'While the ACMA has made decisions specifically in relation to the standards, it recognises that the Australian Government, initially through its Preventative Health Taskforce, is continuing to look at obesity as a National Health Priority Area.

'The ACMA said at the outset of the review that it recognised that the application of the standards in a future digital environment will be different to their application in the current analog environment. For example, the ACMA put forward a tradeable obligations scheme which it considered likely to be more appropriate and provide better outcomes for the child audience in a mature, multi-channel environment.

'Given the recent pace of change in the digital environment, it may be useful for industry to revisit this idea in the short term,' said Mr Chapman.

The obligations under the new standards will commence on 1 January 2010, which will provide licensees and other affected industry stakeholders with sufficient opportunity to prepare for significant transitions, particularly in relation to strengthened provisions concerning advertising. ☎

The new standards, including a Final Report of the Review and Explanatory Statement, are available on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to For the public: Content & advertising > Broadcasting : Broadcasting content regulation > TV content regulation > Children's television standards > Children's television standards review).