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Advertising Time

There are also concerns about whether the code will guarantee viewers effective limits on the amount of advertising or non-program time. While this section of the code does not appear to differ dramatically from the previous standard (an average limit of 13 minutes in prime time and 15 minutes in non-prime time), the limits refer to the amount of non-program matter 'scheduled'; not the amount actually broadcast. This has been introduced to take account of the impracticality in the old standard of strict hour-by-hour limits and is explicitly 'not intended to allow increased levels of non-program matter', but the change will make monitoring difficult for non-industry observers. The monitoring difficulty is compounded by the code's extension of prime time: it is now 6:00pm to midnight.

Portrayal of Women.....and Men

Two Advisory Notes accompany the codes: the Portrayal of Women and Men and the Portrayal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. They are similar to but less substantial than the radio broadcasters' (FARB) Guidelines on portrayal. The Advisory Notes are principally aimed at program makers and journalists, rather than viewers. They do not provide any commitment to viewers about increasing the on- and off-screen representation of women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. More important though, is the fact that these Notes are outside the scope of the codes which effectively leaves these area outside the complaints handling and monitoring system. There is no Advisory Note or section of the codes addressing the portrayal of people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Program Classification

On a positive note the code's adoption of the Office of Film and Literature Classification guidelines means that viewers will not need to become familiar with a new system of program classification. While TV programs will continue to be classified by the the stations themselves, the same classification categories and symbols as those used by the Censor for films and videos will be used from now on i.e. G, PG, M, and MA. Material which cannot be classified as MA cannot be shown.

Feature films which are classified M and all MA classified programs must carry, in addition to the classification symbol, brief consumer advice giving

the principal elements which have contributed to the classification and indicating their intensity and frequency. These elements are violence; sex and nudity; offensive language; depiction of drugs; and how suicide is depicted (for M classification).

So how is all this going to affect what we see on commercial TV? The short answer is probably not a lot. The real concern is that in making television stations more directly accountable, and responsible for developing standards, we may have lost important avenues for the public expression of, and monitoring of, concerns about the content of commercial television. □

Sue Cowden and Helen Mills

A copy of the code is available from
FACTS ph (02) 960 2622

Annals of the Press Council

“The Press Council made for the bush for its latest deliberations, choosing the attractive little riverside town of Corowa.....A very successful meeting held in the local Court House was packed with an enthusiastic audience.

The Council members were the guests of Corowa at dinner in the bowling club, attended by the mayor and local dignitaries, one of whom, Shirley Nolan, was in charge of the culinary arrangements for the visit of Prime Minister Paul Keating the following night.....

The next day the Press Council was entertained in Albury by the proprietors of the Border Mail.....

Mrs Nolan's menu for the Keatings included the local Bunge pork rolled round smoked salmon; roast rack of lamb; veal medallions, or chicken with local ingredients.

No doubt the Keatings felt - just as Press Council members did - that the hospitality of Corowa was magnificent.

During a lull between our meetings, some of us took a sweep over the border.....

We lunched at Beechworth Bakery, famed throughout Victoria and with good reason. Then on to visit some excellent wineries which lie around Rutherglen.....”

David McNicoll, The Bulletin, 17 August 1993.