

Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007

Submission to the Community Affairs Committee

Centre for Health Initiatives, University of Wollongong: Response to the submission by the Advertising Standards Bureau

In their submission to the Committee, the Advertising Standards Bureau stated that “The University of Wollongong made a series of presentations to media agencies in June 2006 which contained assertions about the way in which the alcohol advertising system worked that were incorrect or outdated. CEO Fiona Jolly worked with the researchers to correct their factual errors before the final report was published.”

This statement is misleading, and calls into question both our independence as a research organisation and the accuracy of our work; and it is our hope that such misleading statements do not contribute to the decision(s) made in this senate enquiry.

1. We in fact made one presentation (rather than a series of presentations) to the media in which we *accurately* reported our findings from a study into the effectiveness of the self-regulatory system for alcohol advertising.
2. In relation to the claim that we made assertions that were incorrect:

The ASB claimed – both directly to us and publicly in the media – that our statement that the ASB did not make decisions on one-off promotions was incorrect. We subsequently provided evidence of the accuracy of our statement, in the form of copies of letters received by complainants from the ASB. For example, in a letter dated 17 December 2004, referring to a complaint about an advertisement for Frangelico in December *Cosmopolitan* (which was submitted by the complainant on 05 December 2004), the ASB wrote:

“Your complaint raises issues appropriate for consideration by the Board. I should point out, however, that the Board does not usually consider advertisements that may have been withdrawn or discontinued and our enquiries indicate that this commercial is a *Cosmopolitan* advertorial for one issue only and will not appear again, it is deemed withdrawn (discontinued).”

Thus our statement was, in fact, both correct and proven.

3. In relation to the claim that we made assertions that were outdated:

The data was collected, and the study undertaken, in 2004-2005. The presentation to the media, and the associated peer-reviewed publication (copy provided with this submission), clearly stated the time period of the study. It is the very nature of research that we report on what was the case at the time the study was conducted – and to do otherwise would be academically unjustifiable. We have conducted several studies into the self-regulatory system, at different points in time (as have other researchers), each of which has found problems with the effectiveness of the system for protecting consumers from inappropriate advertising. The fact that the ASB has apparently modified, and improved, the system each time such findings have been

made is a testament to the quality, and value, of our research in this area. To suggest that we should alter our findings as a result of promised changes after the fact is not dissimilar to suggesting that no-one should ever be issued a speeding ticket if they promise to slow down after being detected exceeding the speed limit.

4. In relation to the claim that ‘Fiona Jolly worked with the researchers’:

CHI is committed to conducting high-quality, independent research (as demonstrated by the publication of our findings in well regarded peer-reviewed journals). We note that we have not ‘worked with’ the ASB, or Ms Jolly, other than to respond to her comments as outlined above.

In summary, we are pleased that the ASB has expressed a commitment to improving the self-regulation of alcohol advertising, and look forward to this being demonstrated by the results of future research in this area. However, we hope that misrepresentations as to the accuracy and independence of peer-reviewed research in this area do not lead the Committee to erroneously conclude that the self-regulatory system is effective in preventing the dissemination of inappropriate messages about alcohol.

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