

# CHAPTER 11

## Sexualisation of children and objectification of women in the media

11.1 Term of reference (k) refers to the effectiveness of the National Classification Scheme in preventing the sexualisation of children and the objectification of women in all media, including advertising.

11.2 In relation to the prevention of the sexualisation of children in the media, the committee notes the 2008 report of the Senate Environment, Communications and the Arts Committee (ECA Committee), *Sexualisation of children in the contemporary media* (ECA Committee report). The ECA Committee report recommended that steps taken to address the issue by industry bodies and others should be further considered by the Senate in 18 months. The committee notes that it has been three years since the ECA Committee tabled its report and the matter has not been given further consideration by the Senate until the current inquiry.

### Previous Senate inquiry

11.3 The ECA Committee report's first recommendation noted:

...that the inappropriate sexualisation of children in Australia is of increasing concern...[T]he [ECA] Committee believes that preventing the premature sexualisation of children is a significant cultural challenge. This is a community responsibility which demands action by society. In particular, the onus is on broadcasters, publishers, advertisers, retailers and manufacturers to take account of these community concerns.<sup>1</sup>

11.4 The ECA Committee made a number of recommendations to address its concern with respect to the sexualisation of children in the media, including:<sup>2</sup>

- The ACMA should consider revising the requirement that Children's Television Standard (CTS) content be broadcast for at least half an hour per day to enable broadcasters to schedule it in extended blocks at times which are more likely to attract children to watch it (Recommendation 3);
- Broadcasters should review their classification of music videos specifically with regard to sexualised imagery (Recommendation 4);
- Broadcasters should consider establishing dedicated children's television channels (Recommendation 5); and

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1 Senate Environment, Communications and the Arts Committee, *Sexualisation of children in the contemporary media*, June 2008, p. 3.

2 Senate Environment, Communications and the Arts Committee, *Sexualisation of children in the contemporary media*, June 2008, pp v-vii.

- The Advertising Standards Board should produce a consolidated half-yearly list of all complaints, including those received by phone, where the impact of an advertisement on children, however described, is a factor in the complaint (Recommendation 9).
- 11.5 In its response to the ECA Committee's report, the Australian Government:
- supported Recommendation 3, indicating that a draft CTS, released in August 2008, provided for flexible scheduling of children's programs;
  - noted Recommendation 4, and stated that complaints statistics indicated that only a small percentage of complaints received by broadcasters were in relation to music videos;
  - noted Recommendation 5, and provided funding for the ABC for the establishment and ongoing costs of a digital children's channel; and
  - noted Recommendation 9, but recognised that the Advertising Standards Board is an independent organisation.<sup>3</sup>

### **Addressing sexualisation of children and objectification of women**

11.6 There are several mechanisms in place which aim to address the sexualisation of children and the objectification of women in all forms of media in Australia.

#### ***National Classification Scheme***

11.7 The Attorney-General's Department's (Department) submission noted the Australian Government's involvement with changes in the advertising industry to address the sexualisation of children.<sup>4</sup>

11.8 The Director of the Classification Board also noted material which may be Refused Classification, and referred the committee to his evidence to the ECA Committee in 2008. In evidence to that committee, the Director stated:

Depictions of exploitative child nudity and sexual activity involving a child, sexual abuse or other exploitative or offensive depictions involving children are routinely refused classification.

The classification scheme does not prevent the exploration of strong themes or the expression of controversial views. As such, films may deal with the issues of child sexual abuse and children's sexuality. The critical point for classification is how such issues are dealt with by the filmmaker.

A key element of classification information is consumer advice, which the [Classification Board] formulates when making classification decisions.

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3 Australian Government, *Government Response: inquiry into the sexualisation of children in the contemporary media environment*, July 2009, pp 6-8.

4 Attorney-General's Department, *Submission 46*, p. 14.

Consumer advice, which is published along with the product, provides consumers with greater clarity in terms of the content that can be expected.

Consumer advice generally lists the principal elements which have contributed to the classification of a film and indicates their intensity and/or frequency. It can also be used to alert consumers to serious or potentially distressing content.<sup>5</sup>

## **Television**

11.9 The committee received evidence from various television networks and industry bodies in relation to measures that the television industry is taking to address the sexualisation of children and the objectification of women on television. The committee notes that a number of those initiatives are direct responses to recommendations in the ECA Committee's report.

11.10 In its submission, Free TV Australia advised:

[N]etworks take classification very seriously and are very mindful of the need to protect children from harmful images, including those which present overly sexual content or unhealthy gender stereotypes.<sup>6</sup>

11.11 Free TV Australia's submission specifically referred to the provisions of the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (Code of Practice):

[T]he depiction of certain sexual conduct, including explicit sexual acts [is prohibited]. It also contains an advisory note on the depiction of men and women in reporting and programming, which provides guidance on such issues as gender stereotypes and the portrayal of sexual violence.

The Code of Practice also contains provisions proscribing discrimination based on gender (Clause 1.9.6) and the presentation of reality television participants in a highly (sexually) demeaning or highly exploitative manner (Clause 1.9.7).<sup>7</sup>

11.12 In evidence to the committee, Ms Julie Flynn from Free TV Australia noted that, in response to the ECA Committee's report, the ACMA has developed a new CTS.<sup>8</sup> Free TV Australia's submission expanded on the role of the CTS:

All networks have specialised children's programming which is classified by the ACMA under the CTS. The CTS strictly prohibits the broadcast of material that may unduly distress children or encourage them to engage in dangerous behaviours.<sup>9</sup>

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5 Senate Environment, Communications and the Arts Committee, *Committee Hansard*, 30 April 2008, p. 67.

6 Free TV Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 8.

7 Free TV Australia, *Submission 50*, pp 8-9.

8 *Committee Hansard*, 7 April 2011, p. 26.

9 Free TV Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 9.

11.13 Free TV Australia's submission noted the conclusions of the ECA Committee in its report that the sexualisation of children in content and advertising during Preschool (P) and Children (C) programming was 'not an issue'.<sup>10</sup>

11.14 Ms Flynn also indicated that commercial television networks have adopted the Australian Association of National Advertisers' (AANA) Code for Advertising and Marketing Communications to Children, which is discussed further below.

11.15 The ABC stated that it 'treats its responsibility to the community seriously and the classification of broadcast content and music videos is treated with due care and attention'.<sup>11</sup> In terms of addressing the issues of the sexualisation of children and the objectification of women, the ABC's submission referred to the ABC's Editorial Policies:

[I]n presenting content, the ABC has a responsibility to treat all sections of society with respect and to avoid the unnecessary use of prejudicial content...

[S]pecial care should be taken to ensure that content which children are likely to watch or access unsupervised should not be harmful or disturbing to children.<sup>12</sup>

11.16 The ABC's submission also noted the role of its complaints-handling framework in providing an avenue to address concerns about the ABC's television classifications.<sup>13</sup>

11.17 As noted above, the ECA Committee recommended in its report that broadcasters should consider establishing dedicated children's television channels as an initiative to reduce the harmful impact of the premature sexualisation of children.<sup>14</sup> In December 2009, the ABC launched its digital children's channel which, according to the ABC, is 'the most watched television service in Australia among children less than 12 years of age'.<sup>15</sup>

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10 Free TV Australia, *Submission 50*, p. 9, quoting from Senate Environment, Communications and the Arts Committee, *Sexualisation of children in the contemporary media*, June 2008, p. 36.

11 Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *Submission 49*, p. 3.

12 Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *Submission 49*, p. 3, quoting from sections 11.8 and 11.13.2 of the ABC's Editorial Policies.

13 Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *Submission 49*, p. 3.

14 Senate Environment, Communications and the Arts Committee, *Sexualisation of children in the contemporary media*, June 2008, p. 44.

15 Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *Submission 49*, p. 3.

## *Advertising*

11.18 The Communications Council stated in its submission that 'advertisers, and their agencies take community concerns about the sexualisation of children and objectification of women seriously'.<sup>16</sup>

### *Sexualisation of children*

11.19 The Advertising Standards Bureau noted that it refers to the sexualisation of children in two contexts: first, the depiction of children in advertisements in sexualised poses; and, second, the exposure of children to sexualised images, themes or words in advertising.<sup>17</sup>

11.20 The Advertising Standards Bureau set out how the relevant provisions operate in relation to sexualised images of children in advertising:

The AANA Code of Ethics (Code of Ethics) contains a requirement that "Advertising or Marketing Communications to Children"<sup>18</sup> shall comply with the AANA Code for Advertising and Marketing Communications to Children (Children's Code).

The relevant provision of the Children's Code that specifically addresses the sexualisation of children is Section 2.4, which provides:

#### *Advertising or Marketing Communications to Children:*

- a) *must not include sexual imagery in contravention of Prevailing Community Standards;*
- b) *must not state or imply that Children are sexual beings and that ownership or enjoyment of a Product will enhance their sexuality.*<sup>19</sup>

11.21 The Advertising Standards Bureau noted that section 2.4 of the Children's Code was inserted in early 2008 as part of a review of the Children's Code by the AANA.<sup>20</sup>

16 The Communications Council, *Submission 47*, p. 7.

17 Advertising Standards Bureau, *Submission 41*, p. 10.

18 In this context, "Advertising or Marketing Communications to Children" is defined to mean: 'Advertising or Marketing Communications which, having regard to the theme, visuals and language used, are directed primarily to Children and are for [goods, services and/or facilities which are targeted toward and have principal appeal to Children].' "Children" is defined to mean children 14 years old or younger: Advertising Standards Bureau, *Submission 41*, p. 10.

19 Advertising Standards Bureau, *Submission 41*, p. 10. "Prevailing Community Standards" is defined in the Children's Code as meaning the community standards determined by the Advertising Standards Board as those prevailing at the relevant time, and based on research carried out on behalf of the Advertising Standards Board as it sees fit, in relation to Advertising or Marketing Communications to Children.

20 Advertising Standards Bureau, *Submission 41*, p. 11.

11.22 The Advertising Standards Bureau stated that sexualised images of children may also be addressed under section 2.3 of the Code of Ethics, which provides:

Advertising or Marketing Communications shall treat sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience and, where appropriate, the relevant programme time zone.<sup>21</sup>

11.23 In addition, the Advertising Standards Bureau advised that images of children must also meet the requirements of section 2.6 of the Code of Ethics:

Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not depict material contrary to Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety.<sup>22</sup>

11.24 The Advertising Standards Bureau noted that the Advertising Standards Board could apply section 2.6 of the Code of Ethics through consideration of 'whether sexualised images of children breach community standards on child health or safety'.<sup>23</sup>

11.25 In terms of protecting children from exposure to sexualised images, themes or words, the Advertising Standards Bureau again noted the provisions in section 2.3 of the Code of Ethics and section 2.4 of the Children's Code. In particular, the Australian Standards Bureau highlighted that section 2.3 of the Code of Ethics provides for a 'relevant audience' test, which provides flexibility to consider the different audiences that may exist for different media, locations and time zones.<sup>24</sup>

11.26 The Advertising Standards Bureau also provided the committee with details of the numbers of complaints in relation to sexualised images of children and exposure of children to sexualised images, themes or words, along with specific examples in relation to the Advertising Standards Board's consideration of complaints.<sup>25</sup>

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21 Advertising Standards Bureau, *Submission 41*, p. 11. The Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) Code of Ethics provides that "Advertising or Marketing Communications" means (a) matter which is published or broadcast using any Medium in all of Australia or in a substantial section of Australia for payment or other valuable consideration and which draws the attention of the public or a segment of it to a product, service, person, organisation or line of conduct in a manner calculated to promote or oppose directly or indirectly the product, service, person, organisation or line of conduct; or (b) any activity which is undertaken by or on behalf of an advertiser or marketer for payment or other valuable consideration and which draws the attention of the public or a segment of it to a product, service, person, organisation or line of conduct in a manner calculated to promote or oppose directly or indirectly the product, service, person, organisation or line of conduct.

22 Advertising Standards Bureau, *Submission 41*, p. 11.

23 Advertising Standards Bureau, *Submission 41*, p. 11.

24 Advertising Standards Bureau, *Submission 41*, p. 12.

25 Advertising Standards Bureau, *Submission 41*, pp 11-12.

### *Objectification of women*

11.27 The Advertising Standards Bureau informed the committee about initiatives the advertising industry has taken to address the issue of objectification of women:

Complaints raising issues about the objectification of women may fall within Section 2.3 of the Code of Ethics, relating to the treatment of sex, sexuality or nudity, or Section 2.1 of the Code of Ethics, which includes discrimination and vilification on the basis of sex...

Section 2.1 provides:

Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not portray people or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, age, sexual preference, religion, disability or political belief.<sup>26</sup>

11.28 The Advertising Standards Bureau noted that the Advertising Standards Board has:

...consistently interpreted this term to include not just the physical characteristics of being a man or a woman (such as having breasts or being pregnant), but to also include discrimination or vilification on the basis of gender.<sup>27</sup>

11.29 The Australian Standards Bureau provided the committee with details of complaints received in relation to the objectification of women, and also specific examples of how the Advertising Board has considered complaints in relation to this issue.<sup>28</sup>

### *Outdoor media*

11.30 The committee notes that the Outdoor Media Association (OMA) has its own Code of Ethics in which the OMA endorses the AANA's Code of Ethics and Children's Code.<sup>29</sup>

### *Recorded music*

11.31 In its submission, the Australian Music Retailers Association (AMRA) and the Australian Recording Industry Association Limited (ARIA) set out how the ARIA/AMRA Recorded Music Labelling Code of Practice (ARIA/AMRA Labelling Code) addresses the issues of the sexualisation of children and the objectification of women. Noting that the ARIA/AMRA Labelling Code is 'conceptually parallel' to the

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26 Advertising Standards Bureau, *Submission 41*, pp 13-14.

27 Advertising Standards Bureau, *Submission 41*, p. 14.

28 Advertising Standards Bureau, *Submission 41*, pp 14-15.

29 Australian Association of National Advertisers, *Submission 28*, Appendix 1, p. 3.

National Classification Scheme, and that community standards are inherent in the National Classification Scheme, ARIA/AMRA argued:

The [ARIA/AMRA Labelling Code] guidelines are sufficiently broad...to encompass the sexualisation of children and objectification of women when these issues arise in lyrics.

The [ARIA/AMRA Labelling Code] guidelines are based on the degree of impact on the listener, generally assessed by looking at the explicitness and aggression in the language, as well as themes and reference to sex, violence, drug use and other matters. The low level of complaints about classified recorded audio product indicates that the link in standards in the [ARIA/AMRA Labelling Code] with the National Classification Scheme is delivering a system consistent with the expectations of the community, suggesting that community standards currently are being satisfactorily reflected. In the absence of any other mechanism to measure effectiveness, we can conclude that the [ARIA/AMRA Labelling Code] is giving adequate advice regarding these issues, and is sensitive to them.<sup>30</sup>

11.32 In evidence to the committee, representatives from AMRA and ARIA indicated that those organisations have not reviewed their code since the ECA Committee's report:

[W]e have not [reviewed the AMRA/ARIA Labelling Code] since the 2008 report....[P]robably in 2006 we had a series of discussions with the [Office of Film and Literature Classification] at that time, reviewing the first three years or so of the application of the code. We took on board then their community values reflection. We took on board their most recent update of that information. The last formal examination of it would be somewhere around that 2006 period.<sup>31</sup>

### **Is enough being done to prevent the sexualisation of children and the objectification of women in all media?**

11.33 The committee received substantial evidence in relation to the issue of whether the National Classification Scheme is effective in preventing the sexualisation of children and the objectification of women in all forms of media.

11.34 For example, in relation to the prevention of the objectification of women, Women's Health Victoria asserted:

[We do] not believe that the National Classification Scheme has been successful in responding to the objectification of women, particularly in relation to advertising. The national voluntary system of advertising self-regulation is ineffective in preventing the objectification of women.

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30 Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA) and the Australian Music Retailers Association (AMRA), *Submission 52*, p. 6.

31 Mr Ian Harvey, AMRA, *Committee Hansard*, 25 March 2011, p. 27.



This is related to the fact that objectification is not identified as a separate factor in the Australian Association of National Advertisers' Advertiser Code of Ethics...As it currently stands, the Code [of Ethics] does not differentiate between experiences of discrimination or vilification, and objectification. Discrimination and vilification are distinct from objectification, which is particularly relevant to women's experiences.<sup>32</sup>

11.35 In contrast, Mr Robert Harvey argued that the 'National Classification scheme has never had [the] objective' of preventing the sexualisation of children and the objectification of women, noting that the role of the scheme is purely advisory.<sup>33</sup>

11.36 The Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association (ASTRA) noted that neither the National Classification Code, nor the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games*, specifically address these issues:

...[T]he [National Classification] Code already contains significant protections for children, providing that minors should be protected from material likely to harm or disturb them, and that everyone should be protected from exposure to unsolicited material that they find offensive. The Guidelines [for the Classification of Films and Computer Games] expressly prohibit depictions of child sexual abuse or any other exploitative or offensive descriptions or depictions involving a person who is, or appears to be, a child under 18 years.

To the extent that the sexualisation of children and the objectification of women in the media are issues of community concern, it is noted that the Guidelines are intended to be interpreted in accordance with prevailing community attitudes.<sup>34</sup>

11.37 The Australian Council on Children and the Media also noted the absence of provisions addressing these issues in the National Classification Code:

The [National Classification Code] is not effective in preventing either the sexualisation of children or the objectification of women. There are no laws that directly confront the dissemination of material that encourages children to see sexiness as a measure of success, nor as important for their self concept.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Research and studies***

11.38 The committee sought the assistance of witnesses in providing research and studies with respect to the impact of the sexualisation of children and the objectification of women, as well as community concerns in relation to these issues.

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32 Women's Health Victoria, *Submission 16*, p. 3.

33 Mr Robert Harvey, *Submission 9*, p. 3.

34 Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association, *Submission 24*, p. 5.

35 Australian Council on Children and the Media, *Submission 44*, p. 7.

## *Sexualisation of children*

11.39 In its report, the ECA Committee referred to two articles by The Australia Institute published in 2006 on the issue of the sexualisation of children in the contemporary media: *Corporate paedophilia: sexualisation of children in the media* (*Corporate paedophilia* report); and *Letting children be children: stopping the sexualisation of children in Australia* (*Letting children be children* report). The ECA Committee noted that these articles 'prompted considerable public debate'.<sup>36</sup>

11.40 The *Corporate paedophilia* report analysed the sexualisation of children aged 12 and under in relation to three types of cultural material: advertising (both print and television); girls' magazines; and television programs (including music video-clips). The report discussed the potential harm to children of 'sexualising pressure', including:

- the evidence of a link between exposure to the ideal 'slim, toned' body type that is considered sexy for adults and the development of eating disorders in older children and teenagers; and
- the psychological impact of the sexualisation of children, such as increasing body dissatisfaction among children and an escalation in the level of sexual behaviour as an attention-seeking mechanism.<sup>37</sup>

11.41 The *Letting children be children* report discussed the regulatory framework in relation to media and advertising, and the reason that the framework is failing to prevent the sexualisation of children. Specifically, the *Letting children be children* report called for:

existing codes of practice for advertising, television programming and children's magazines [to] be amended to allow for recognition of the fact that sexualising children, whether directly or indirectly, leads to a range of risks for children...<sup>38</sup>

11.42 The authors of the *Letting children be children* report also noted the impact that technological developments are having, and suggested a 'restructuring [of] the current regulatory environment to bring all media regulation together under the one organisation', which would provide the opportunity to address the sexualisation of children.<sup>39</sup>

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36 Senate Environment, Communications and the Arts Committee, *Sexualisation of children in the contemporary media*, June 2008, p. 1.

37 E. Rush and A. La Nauze, *Corporate Paedophilia: sexualisation of children in Australia*, The Australia Institute, Discussion Paper No. 90, 2006, pp vii-ix.

38 E. Rush and A. La Nauze, *Letting children be children: stopping the sexualisation of children in Australia*, The Australia Institute, Discussion Paper No. 93, 2006, p. 37.

39 E. Rush and A. La Nauze, *Letting children be children: stopping the sexualisation of children in Australia*, The Australia Institute, Discussion Paper No. 93, 2006, p. 38.

11.43 Submissions and witnesses to this inquiry also noted the findings of the *Corporate Paedophilia* and *Letting children be children* reports.<sup>40</sup>

11.44 A number of submissions referred the committee to a report of the American Psychological Association (APA) in relation to the sexualisation of girls.<sup>41</sup> The APA summarised some of the consequences of sexualisation of girls in the media:

First, there is evidence that girls exposed to [sexualising] and objectifying media are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction, depression, and lower self esteem...Self objectification has been shown to diminish cognitive ability and to cause shame. This cognitive diminishment, as well as the belief that physical appearance rather than academic or extracurricular achievement is the best path to power and acceptance, may influence girls' achievement levels and opportunities later in life.

Girls' sexual development may also be affected as they are exposed to models of passivity, and studies indicate that the media may influence a girl's perceptions of her own virginity or first sexual experience. Interpersonally, girls' relationships with other girls are affected, as such relationships can become policing grounds where girls support or reject other girls for reasons having to do with conformity to a narrow beauty ideal that involves a [sexualised] presentation or competition for boys' attention. Girls' relationships with boys and men are affected in that exposure to [sexualising] and objectifying media has been shown to relate to girls' and boys' views on dating, boys' sexual harassment of girls, and attitudes toward sexual violence.<sup>42</sup>

11.45 In terms of community perceptions with respect to the sexualisation of children, the Advertising Standards Bureau referred to research that it had

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40 See, for example, Anglican Public Affairs Commission, *Submission 18*, p. 6; Media Standards Australia, *Submission 21*, pp 28-29; Collective Shout, *Submission 65*, p. 11; Media Standards Australia, answers to questions on notice, received 21 April 2011. The committee was also directed to the submission of Professor Catharine Lumby and Dr Kath Albury to the ECA Committee inquiry, which criticised the methodology used in the *Corporate Paedophilia* report: Mr Matthew Whiteley, *Submission 19*, pp 7-9. The committee also notes that, since 2006, when the *Corporate Paedophilia* and *Letting Children be children* reports were published, there have been changes made to the advertising industry's Children's Code which directly addresses the sexualisation of children in advertising and marketing materials.

41 See, for example, FamilyVoice Australia, *Submission 15*, pp 22-23; Anglican Public Affairs Commission, *Submission 18*, p. 6; Media Standards Australia, answers to questions on notice, received 21 April 2011.

42 Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls, *Report of the APA Task Force on the sexualisation of Girls*, American Psychological Association, 2007, p. 35.

commissioned into community perceptions of sex, sexuality and nudity in 2010.<sup>43</sup> The premature sexualisation of children was identified by respondents to the research as a key factor that contributes to unacceptable advertising:

Respondents were unanimously sensitive to ads containing sexualised representations of teenagers and children, modelled on 'sexy' adults. The sexual innuendo and undertones within ads featuring and directed at young teenagers was also seen to be highly unacceptable...

Respondents spontaneously raised concerns that these age inappropriate depictions of females in advertising encourage children to adopt sexualised appearances and behaviour at too early an age.<sup>44</sup>

### *Objectification of women*

11.46 In relation to studies which identify the impacts of the objectification of women in the media, a number of submissions referred the committee to the work of the Portrayal of Women Advisory Committee (PWAC) regarding the portrayal of women in outdoor advertising.<sup>45</sup> Women's Health Victoria summarised the issues that PWAC identified in that regard, including:

- failure to represent the diversity of women in terms of body size and shape, as well as race, sexuality, disability and religion;
- use of women's bodies and body parts to sell products, for example, use of images which only show parts of women's bodies or depictions of women as inanimate objects for consumption; and
- association between women with sex, with women represented as sexual objects and/or as sexually available.<sup>46</sup>

11.47 The PWAC's report was released in 2002. Collective Shout, however, noted in its submission that it was unaware of any of the recommendations from that report being acted upon.<sup>47</sup>

43 The Advertising Standards Bureau noted in its submission the experience and knowledge that members of the Advertising Board have in relation to social and child psychology, psychiatry and early education. Many Advertising Board members are also parents and grandparents and involved in community organisations working with children and young people. In addition, the Advertising Standards Bureau now conducts research into community standards on a regular basis, to measure whether the Advertising Board's decisions are in line with community standards: *Submission 41*, p. 13.

44 Advertising Standards Bureau, *Research Report: Community Perceptions of sex, sexuality and nudity in advertising*, produced by Colmar Brunton Social Research, June 2010, p. 21.

45 See, for example, Women's Health Victoria, *Submission 16*, p. 2; Collective Shout, *Submission 65*, p. 11.

46 Women's Health Victoria, *Submission 16*, p. 2.

47 Collective Shout, *Submission 65*, p. 11.

11.48 Media Standards Australia referred the committee to a report of the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality on how marketing and advertising affects equality between men and women. The Explanatory Statement to that report noted:

Research shows that the norms created by gender stereotypes in advertising objectify people, in the sense that both women and men—although women have suffered more up until now—are represented as objects. Reducing a human to an object leaves the individual exposed to violence and insults. Objectification in advertising is of key importance for the process by which an individual builds his/her identity and for how an image is perceived as 'normal'. Stereotyping relates to ideas about women and men and the relationships between them. Stereotyping in advertising is also seen as an instrument of power. The objective of gender equality policy is for everyone to have the power to shape society and their own existence. Constant exposure to objectifying and stereotyped messages impedes this objective.<sup>48</sup>

11.49 The Australian Standards Bureau's research into community perceptions of sex, sexuality and nudity also identified the 'reinforcement of women as sexual objects' as a key factor that contributed to an advertisement being unacceptable to respondents in the research:

Respondents were highly sensitive to ads which objectify women because in their view such ads reinforce and desensitise women as sexualised 'objects'. They believe such ads portray women in this way to the broad community and are particularly concerned about the effect of such ads on developing and impressionable young women.

Again, ads which portray women as sexualised 'objects' were seen to put young females at risk of mimicking or aspiring to these unacceptable [sex, sexuality and nudity] attitudes and behaviours (eg risky and premature sexual behaviours, self esteem and body image issues). Respondents also tied this issue back to their concerns about children's exposure.<sup>49</sup>

### *Improvements to the National Classification Scheme*

11.50 The committee received evidence in relation to how the National Classification Scheme, and other regulatory frameworks for media, could be improved to address the issue of sexualisation of children and the objectification of women in the media.

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48 Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, *Report on how marketing and advertising affect equality between women and men*, European Parliament, A6-0199/2008, 2008, p. 10.

49 Advertising Standards Bureau, *Research Report: Community Perceptions of sex, sexuality and nudity in advertising*, produced by Colmar Brunton Social Research, June 2010, p. 20.

11.51 For example, Ms Melinda Tankard Reist from Collective Shout called for a major overhaul of the National Classification Scheme:

...[W]ith the primary goal of making it more effective in reducing the prevalence and availability of material in all media which contains images or words which reduce women to sex objects, which condone or celebrate sexual violence against women and which promote the sexualisation of children.<sup>50</sup>

11.52 In contrast, Ms Irene Graham indicated that she does not support any changes to the National Classification Scheme for the purpose of preventing the objectification of women:

[Any] such changes would be increased censorship, and censorship is a blunt and largely ineffective tool in terms of changing societal views or attitudes (particularly since the advent some 20 years ago of the world-wide communications system known as the Internet). Changes to classification criteria would...result in censorship of productions by women—history shows that censorship allegedly intended to 'protect' women has also censored female voices/productions.<sup>51</sup>

11.53 The Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) stated that the National Classification Scheme has taken inadequate account of the dual concerns of the sexualisation of children and the objectification of women. ACL suggested that changes to the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games* would address these issues:

As the classification ratings in the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice largely reflect the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games*, changes to the latter would cause there to be inducement for the television industry to also adopt any pro-child or pro-woman measure of the nature proposed when its Code is next updated.

ACL suggests that the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games* should be amended so that any item that sexualises children is given a Refused Classification Rating. Any item that objectifies women as sexual objects must be given an M rating or above. The use of context should not preclude an item with such content from receiving the designated classification rating. Members of the Classification Board should be given appropriate training on how to identify, and understand the social impacts of sexualising children and objectifying women in the media.<sup>52</sup>

11.54 Similarly, Salt Shakers suggested expanding the scope of the National Classification Scheme guidelines to encompass all forms of advertising:

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50 Committee Hansard, 27 April 2011, p. 22.

51 Ms Irene Graham, *Submission 20*, p. 4.

52 Australian Christian Lobby, *Submission 25*, p. 11.

Advertising needs to be controlled and restricted. The use of sex to sell items and services is not a new phenomenon but it seems to be getting out of hand.

Parents lack control over what advertisements are shown on television. Because of this, broadcasting agencies should err on the side of caution and avoid using advertisements which have sexual themes.

However, the broadcasting agencies have failed to do this and, therefore...the classification Guidelines should be expanded to regulate advertisements of all types.<sup>53</sup>

11.55 Women's Health Victoria suggested changes to the AANA's Code of Ethics to address the objectification of women in advertising, and specifically referred to a provision in New Zealand's *Advertising Code of Practice* which incorporates the concept of objectification in addressing how people are represented in advertising:

Advertisements should not employ sexual appeal in a manner which is exploitative and degrading of any individual or group of people in society to promote the sale of products or services. In particular people should not be portrayed in a manner which uses sexual appeal simply to draw attention to an unrelated product. Children must not be portrayed in a manner which treats them as objects of sexual appeal.<sup>54</sup>

11.56 Women's Health Victoria noted that, although this provision mentions objectification of children (rather than women), it demonstrates how broader principles of objectification could be incorporated into the AANA's Code of Ethics.<sup>55</sup>

11.57 Women's Health Victoria provided the committee with a list of similar provisions from advertising codes around the English-speaking world, containing specific sections about the representation of women. For example, the Code of Standards for Advertising, Promotional and Direct Marketing in Ireland has the following clauses in relation to 'Decency and Propriety':

2.17 Marketing communications should respect the principle of the equality of men and women. They should avoid sex stereotyping and any exploitation or demeaning of men and women. Where appropriate, marketing communications should use generic terms that include both the masculine and feminine gender; for example, the term 'business executive' covers both men and women.

2.18 To avoid causing offence, marketing communications should be responsive to the diversity in Irish society and marketing communications which portray or refer to people within [particular] groups...should:

a) respect the principle of equality in any depiction of these groups;

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53 Salt Shakers, *Submission 23*, pp 14-15. See also Family Council of Victoria, *Submission 22*, p. 11.

54 Women's Health Victoria, *Submission 16*, p. 5.

55 Women's Health Victoria, *Submission 16*, p. 5.

- b) fully respect their dignity and not subject them to ridicule or offensive humour;
- c) avoid stereotyping and negative or hurtful images;
- d) not exploit them for unrelated marketing purposes;
- e) not ridicule or exploit religious beliefs, symbols, rites or practices.

2.19 Advertisers should take account of public sensitivities in the preparation and publication of marketing communications and avoid the exploitation of sexuality and the use of coarseness and undesirable innuendo. They should not use offensive or provocative copy or images merely to attract attention...[A]dvertisers are urged to consider public sensitivities before using potentially offensive material.<sup>56</sup>

11.58 The Anglican Public Affairs Commission advocated for a review of the various codes of practice administered by the Advertising Standards Bureau and expansion of the National Classification Scheme to include advertising.<sup>57</sup>

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56 Women's Health Victoria, answers to questions on notice, received 12 April 2011.

57 Anglican Public Affairs Commission, *Submission 18*, p. 8.