

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Effectiveness of the Broadcasting Codes of Practice

We have been expressing our concerns about the content of the various Australian media for many years. We have noted, from our own experience, that making a complaint about coarse and obscene language, sexual innuendo, graphic and non-graphic sex scenes, and excessive violence is:

- rarely attempted, because the initial impetus soon wears off, even if the reaction/strong impression remains;
- difficult to attempt, for lack of easy access to contact information;
- difficult to achieve, for lack of resources, including our own time;
- frustrating to pursue; and
- ultimately, **totally ineffective**.

The ineffectiveness of the complaints process, in its turn, is so discouraging, that we have tended to complain less and less, despite the fact that there is more and more to complain about. Today's radio, television, print, computer, movie/DVD/video, and advertising media is a sewer.

Ironically, some of the responses that we have received after we have bothered to pursue a particular complaint, have been that "Not many people have complained."

This is hardly surprising, since our choices are:

- To waste our time, efforts and other resources attempting something that we know is doomed to failure,
- To sit down, "shut up", and put up with, or
- To turn off the media programmes that offend us so much.

A typical process of complaint

Each time we have seen, or heard, something offensive, either on a billboard, the television, a movie, or whatever, we have had to:

- Note down the time and date that we noted the offensive material;
- Note the nature and details of the offensive material;
- Find details of the appropriate body to whom to address the complaint;
- Write out the details, in an appropriately-worded letter;
- Address and post the letter;
- Await a reply.

Once the letter of complaint is sent, we then receive one or the other of these letters, or ones similarly worded, in response:

- "Thank you for your letter regarding... We have referred the matter to.....[a board of some sort]."
OR
- "Thank you for your letter in relation to..... We are sorry that... offended you. We have reviewed the matter and found that, since very few complaints were received about this particular.....your complaint is unfounded."

If the complaint is referred to a board, the inevitable response is, essentially:

- "The ... board has reviewed your complaint and has found it to be unfounded. The matter is now dismissed."

We append copies of various letters that we have sent and the responses that we have received. Not all are included and not all were easily accessible for reference.

How many people actually complain?

We have no way of knowing how many people object to particular material that we find offensive. It has been our experience, however, to note that:

- People of our acquaintance **often** find material that offends them in the media;
- **Very few of them** make **any effort** to make a complaint, except to their acquaintances;
- Of those who **do** complain, they only complain every now and then, and then it is only about things that they happen upon, and find extremely offensive. Most of us **avoid** TV programmes, TV stations, time-slots, and radio stations for instance, that we find are likely to contain offensive material. We, therefore, can't even see how much offensive material is really there.
- The complaints process is so difficult, and so ineffective, that they eventually give up trying. We are well and truly at that stage. The problem is so huge, and we rarely have the energy to bother trying to complain.

Australia's Regulatory Bodies

It is clear from the amount of offensive, including extremely offensive, material that is seen and heard regularly in today's media environment, that standards have gradually fallen over the past thirty or forty years. The amount of offensive material is extremely alarming, and its effects are equally alarming. Crime rates and family breakdown rates are at an all-time high, creating an unsafe (not to say expensive) society.

We know that there are several regulatory bodies in existence, in Australia. We are aware of the ASB, the OFLC, the Television Codes of Practice, etc. especially since we have had correspondence with some of them.

These regulatory bodies are currently ineffectual. Some are made up of persons within the media industries themselves. With vested interests, they are unlikely to be, and have proven not to be, concerned about the decency of the material produced and presented, but only on its popularity and therefore its fiscal value.

Other regulatory bodies, Government-funded, seem unwilling to pursue **the rights** of the ordinary Australian, and children, **to be exposed to non-offensive material**. For them, it seems that the rights of the consumers/purveyors of pornography, graphic ultra-violence, and obscene language are given much higher precedence. Perverts have more influence on what Australians hear and see in the media than anyone else.

It also seems that the persons on the boards of the Government-funded regulatory boards are chosen from very liberally-minded echelons of society, who, if they do not accept offensive material as inoffensive when they take their places on the board, they soon become so de-sensitised that they increasingly do.

Furthermore, the so-called "acceptance", by contemporary Australians, of the current low standards in the media, is touted as a justification for the current very low standards. This is despite the fact that the media is well-known to actually influence and create standards. This means that the more offensive material that is produced, the more it is shown, and the more acceptable it becomes, paving the way for more offensive material to be produced, to be shown, and on and on.

In addition, the more the concerned citizens who complain can be labelled "wowers", "prudish", "religious right", etc. the more these people, and their complaints, can be disregarded by those who believe they know better.

It is also very unjust, in a country that prides itself on being "anti-discrimination", that certain persons in the community have virtually no say whatsoever, in the media content. In actual fact, no media material should be allowed to offend any one. **How is it that some in society can be offended, and offended very badly, and yet others can propagate their filth with impunity?**

It is the ultimate irony that Australia (and the media) cries "Foul" when a child is sexually abused and/or murdered, and yet tacitly allows media depictions of similar actions to be broadcast in every home from coast to coast.

The Solutions

Censorship in Australia needs to be much more stringent. Other countries are able to protect their citizens from pornography and ultra-violent material, without infringing all of their rights. The freedom of their citizens is protected by prudent and strong limitations put on the profit-making purveyors of perversion and filth. In this they are then secure to be free. We in Australia are imprisoned by our need to protect our children, and to avoid assaults to our own sensibilities. To be confronted by obscene language, pornography or graphic violence is quite literally an assault on one's person.

Children, above all, need to be protected from offensive material totally, until at least 9.30pm. That means no violence, no sexually-based material or sound-effects, no sexual discussion, and no coarse language. After 9.30pm, adults should further not be exposed to excessive violence, sexually-explicit material, or obscene language. There is no need for the current levels of this offensive material, since it never improves the story-line or quality of the programme.

Australia's regulatory bodies, therefore, need to be made more effective by:

- **Being made up of objective** (i.e. non-vested interested) **parties;**
- Being made up of people from mainstream Australia, and especially of those who have the interests of children, and of common decency, at heart;
- Having persons on boards **rotated** so as to prevent de-sensitisation to offensive material.
- Having a well-advertised audition process by which decent, concerned Australians can have a chance to be on a regulatory board.
- Having regulatory guidelines produced that more closely reflect **decency**, and a **protection for children**, in the media.
- Making the complaints process easier.
- Ensuring that each single complaint is considered to represent a much larger number of offended persons than just one. One complaint could actually represent two hundred, three hundred or even five hundred, people who are offended **but who are not complaining this particular time.**
- **Taking complaints seriously**, especially considering the difficulty people have when choosing to make a complaint.
- **Having tighter, effective control over what is seen and heard in the media.**

Currently, it is not worth complaining about offensive material. It makes no difference. The codes of practice are useless. We've stopped bothering; it's hard to do, and gets us nowhere. The regulatory boards are not only ineffective, but have proven to be prejudiced against any who complain over the offensive material.

We strongly suspect that the time and effort put into this submission will go the same way as our other efforts to ask for a clean-up of the media in Australia. That notwithstanding, we are asking the Senate Committee to make changes, and to make a difference, to make Australia a safer and more decent place to live.

Thank you.



Mr Graham Phillips



Mrs Carol V. Phillips

22nd April, 2008

Appendix Documents	No. of pages	Date	OFLC	ASB	SBS	Channel 9	Channel 10	Other	Final outcome
"Cold Comfort Farm" classification	3	27.3.2001	yes						"Not intend to reclassify"
"Rob Roy" classification	3	27.3.2001	yes						"Not prepared to reclassify"
"Lynx" commercial (26.3.2001)	3	27.3.2001						Unilever	"many letters in praise of it"
"Lynx" commercial (26.3.2001)	7	27.3.2001					yes		referred to ABA
"Lynx" commercial (26.3.2001)	5	20.4.2001		yes					"Complaint dismissed"
"Big Brother"	4	8.5.2001					yes		"carries substantial consumer advice"
"Toohey's Extra Dry" advertisement	4	8.5.2001		yes					"Complaint dismissed"
"Novotel - Seven Deadly Sins" ad.	2	10.6.2001			yes				referred to ASB
"Novotel - Seven Deadly Sins" ad.	9	10.6.2001		yes					"Complaint dismissed"
"Wilde" classification	3	23.5.2002	yes						"must apply for a review within 30 days
									of the date that the Board made
									its decision"
"Inspector Rex" time-slot	3	13.10.2003			yes				"Only small minority support" your opinion
Misc. letters of complaint	4	various			1			ABComm. - 2	various
- (Replies missing)								Ch. 7 - 1	various
Misc. letters of response	8	various		1		4	2	Streets	various
- (Complaints missing)									
TOTAL NUMBER OF PAGES	58		3	4	2	5	4	5	