

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

### 1. Frequency of use of coarse and foul language in programs

The Committee should be well aware of the increasing use of foul language. Not that long ago, the “ f “ word would be bleeped out of any programs. In a recent episode of “ Ramsey’s Kitchen “ – screened at 8.30 p.m. – the “ f “ word was used approx 80 times : **I repeat, 80 times!!** In a 1-hour program, which actually ran for approx 45 minutes (allowing for ads) this meant an : f “ word nearly TWICE a minute!!!!

In a recent episode of Unit One on SBS – again screening at 8.30p.m. – the “ f” word was liberally used, as well as the “c” word!! In this program, being a foreign language drama, the words were blatantly printed across the TV screen via the subtitled translation!

In one episode, a young teenager responds to a rebuke by his mother with the exclamation: “ f.... you”.

The committee may say “ well you don’t have to watch that program – just change to another channel “. BUT if it is acceptable and allowable on these two channels; if it becomes commonplace in more and more channels and programs what choice will viewers have???

Already we have seemingly become inured to gratuitous nudity on all channels, even our publicly funded ABC, with the excuse that it is “relevant” to the storyline.

Please ban the further use of such foul language and words irrespective of the excuse of relevancy or reality of the story – we have managed to have nearly a century of film and then TV without such language, and it did not in any way reduce the value and integrity of the drama depicted. Think of the hundreds of screen classics which did not rely on crudity and foul language to depict the reality of the drama.

### 2. Effectiveness of current classification standards as an accurate reflection of the content contained in the program.

The current classification code is totally ineffective in giving any accurate reflection of the program content.

There is no indication of suitable age levels until you reach the MA15+ classification.

Many M-rated programs are arguably better classified as MA or MA15+, and confusion reigns between M and PG – to what age groups and what content level do these classifications apply?

In a recent overseas holiday in Sept/Oct last year, my wife and I were in the U.S. when “ Californication “ was launched pretty well at the same time as in Australia.

The big difference was that in Australia it screened at 8.30p.m. on free-to-air Channel 7 – whereas in the U.S. it screened at 9.30p.m. on Pay – TV, with a higher classification even then.

**I think this says a lot about the effectiveness and appropriateness of current Australian classification codes and the way Australian TV broadcasters apply the codes.**

3. The complaints procedure

What a farce – an absolute farce!!!

A person makes a complaint to a broadcaster, and the station or channel has 60 days in which to respond.

60 days!

Surely they should be compelled to respond within a few days – after all they should know before they screen anything, the content and the classification of every program; surely they know the reason they have given the program such a classification and the time-slot; surely they know the likelihood of some content getting a particular response.

If they don't then they shouldn't be in the business and should relinquish their license ( and their lucrative jobs).

**Make the mandatory period for a response – subject to severe monetary penalties – a period of not more than 7 days, and see how quickly they revert to a more responsible approach to classification and content.**

As for the ACMA, it may as well not exist – the recent case where SBS was reprimanded for a gross breach of code of practice ( screening illegal content, to wit pornography) **some 12 months after the event**, proves the point.

Broadcasters know they are most unlikely to encounter any criticism from ACMA, certainly they are in no fear of any penalty being imposed!

In my submission, the inquiry should lead to a tightening of the standards in respect to foul language and profanity, to overt and gratuitous sexual content, a clearer set of classification codes and standards relevant to age groupings, and a much more responsive time-frame for dealing with complaints.

Finally the inquiry should lead to a much higher level of penalties for breaches of the new set of codes – more meaningful penalties including suspension of licences for short periods of time which will make management stop and think about their responsibility to broadcasting standards rather than their advertising revenue only.

Yours Sincerely

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