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FAREWELL TO FAMILY-FRIENDLY VIEWING ON FREE-TO-AIR-TV

“When the new Free TV Code of Practice commences, families will find it difficult to find any times of the day when they can sit down together to enjoy TV, without having to be constantly on guard” says Prof Elizabeth Handsley, President of the Australian Council on Children and the Media. “The early evening hours, already a minefield of scary news images, unsuitable trailers and promos for M and MA15 movies and programs, and PG programs that stretch the classification guidelines, will become much more hazardous. “

ACCM Spokesperson, Dr Glenn Cupit, said “There will be no G time zones any more, that is, times parents can expect children watching TV not to need their guidance because of program content - it will be PG, Parental Guidance all day. M and MA15+ programs will now be screened from 7.30pm and 8.30pm. The only protection offered to any unsupervised child who continues viewing after 7.30pm will be a ‘clear classification’ and consumer advice, which assumes they are able to understand these. And the long running practice of ambushing parents with scary promos for M or MA15+ programs or movies has not been effectively addressed. The recent breach by the Seven Network in screening a promo for the M rated *Catching Milat* (about serial killing) in the G rated *Better Homes and Gardens*, is a good example, among many, of what is concerning parents now. The revised code views the world through the eyes of the industry and regulators, not through the eyes of parents concerned for their children.”

Dr Cupit drew attention to the real risks posed to children through exposure to age-inappropriate content. He said “as a child psychologist, I know, on the basis of a wealth of research, that exposure to anxiety provoking and frightening content can contribute to the creation of unnecessary fears and anxieties’.

“Sporting programs on weekends will also be hazardous: they will continue to have ads for alcohol, and betting or gambling”

Prof Handsley said that the ACCM had been critical of these issues in its submission to Free TV’s Code review. The process itself, did not include sufficient information to parents about the implications of the proposed changes to the self-regulatory Code, nor was it really open to effective public scrutiny. She is calling for an effective campaign now to alert parents to the changes to the Code.

She said, “Children are heavy consumers of television, and their rights to protection have not been given due regard in this review.” Prof Handsley is a key speaker at the *Rights of the Child Consumer* conference in Sydney on Nov 20, and will be addressing these issues.

The Australian Council on Children and the Media is a peak national community organisation which promotes healthy use of media by children, and advocates for children’s interests in relation to the media. It provides the award winning *Know Before You Go* movie review service and *Know before you Load* app reviews. www.childrenandmedia.org.au

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