

Position Statement on Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice

November 2024

As leading organizations and professionals working on behalf of Australia's children, young people and families, we write to express our hope that the current review of the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (CTICP) will enhance the provision of appropriate viewing experiences for children and families.

It is widely perceived that commercial television licensees are under pressure from modern developments in media and communications, such as online content and streaming. However, licensees retain protected and privileged access to a scarce and valuable public resource, namely the airwaves. This is in addition to their capacity to compete directly with newer providers on the same platforms where they operate. Therefore the grounds for holding them to public interest obligations are as sound as they ever were.

Moreover, free to air television has heightened salience for some of the most vulnerable in our society, such as those living in areas of unreliable internet access, or who cannot afford high speed broadband. This, in turn, heightens the need to treat the viewing audience with respect when settling the industry code.

Past reviews of the CTICP have tended to roll back protections for the child audience, for example the abolition of all G zones in 2015. More recently, in 2021 the industry successfully secured an amendment to the Children's Television Standards, to relieve it of any obligation to provide high quality content for children.

In light of the above considerations, we are concerned at an apparent trend towards commercial television becoming a riskier place for children. Moreover, we see evidence in the current review document that it will continue this trend, including the proposed changes to the M classification zone, which would significantly increase children's exposure to inappropriate content, both programming and advertising. For example they would see over 800 hours open up across the year to alcohol advertising at times when children are watching.

The review document also indicates possible moves towards reducing the information the industry provides to viewers on its programming. Recent research from the ACMA states that 'audiences expect clear and meaningful information to assist in making informed content choices for themselves and those in their care, including children'; and the review nominates the provision of such information as an aim. However, many of the proposed changes pull in the precise opposite direction.

Australia's families deserve better. We call on FreeTV Australia to introduce provisions in the CTICP that will give real protections to the interests and rights of the family audience, and in particular to enhance families' access to, and ability to find, content they can safely enjoy together.

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