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2021 ABAC Scheme Annual Report

COVID restrictions and lockdowns created a record workload for Australia's Responsible Alcohol Marketing Scheme (ABAC) in 2021, the organisation's latest annual report has found.

But independent research conducted by JWS Research found the Australian public continued to support the standards upheld by ABAC regarding alcohol marketing, with a majority (60%) saying they had no concerns with alcohol advertising, labelling or packaging over the past 12 months.

An independent not-for-profit organisation, ABAC provides confidential advice ("pre-vetting") to alcohol marketers on whether proposed alcohol marketing communications (including packaging) comply with the ABAC Code. It also reviews and adjudicates on complaints received from the public about alcohol advertising and other marketing.

ABAC independent chair Henry Jenkins said alcohol marketing adapted in 2021 in response to the changing ways alcohol could be sold during COVID. This in turn drove a surge in demand for ABAC's services.

"Alongside normal activity, in 2021 the industry also had to deal with the closure of licensed premises, a shift toward at-home consumption, new delivery methods and takeaway products," Mr Jenkins said.

"The associated marketing of all of these new measures was subject to the established regulatory framework. As a result, the year 2021 was an extremely busy year for ABAC, with record levels of activity for our Adjudication Panel and the Pre-vetting service.

"Possibly the most pleasing aspect of the record activity during the year was the 3336 requests for pre-vetting, an over one third increase on the previous year. Rejections numbered 501, about 15 per cent of requests. This is important pro-active work, and our pre-vetters deserve congratulations on these impressive results.

"The Chief Adjudicator, Professor Michael Lavarch, and his colleagues are to be commended for dealing with their record workload in an efficient and timely manner, and the clarity and consistency of their determinations.

"The majority of ABAC complaints and breaches related to digital social media posts, with the lack of age restriction on certain social media posts generating particular concern.

"A positive of 2021 for ABAC was the commissioning of JWS Research to explore current public perceptions of alcohol marketing and how the ABAC Complaints Panel determinations align with the understanding of a 'reasonable person'," Mr Jenkins said.

"The research found that the Code's content standards align with community expectations for alcohol marketing and in some cases, appear to be more conservative."

ABAC's Annual Report and Year in Review for 2020 are available online at:

<https://www.abac.org.au/publications/annual-reports/>

More information about the Code is also available at www.abac.org.au

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