



ABAC RESPONSIBLE ALCOHOL MARKETING CODE

MEDIA RELEASE

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Toughest ever Alcohol Marketing Code launched today

Australia will continue to have one of the toughest Alcohol marketing codes in the world following the release today of the strengthened Responsible Alcohol Marketing Code overseen by the independent Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC) scheme.

Chaired by former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Harry Jenkins AO, and with its Chief Adjudicator, former Attorney-General, the Hon Michael Lavarch AO, ABAC is world leading as one of the strictest alcohol advertising regimes of its kind.

Changes to strengthen the Code have been made after an extensive 15 month public consultation process, consideration of a wide range of submissions from government, health organisations and industry and community opinion research to ensure the regulations are in line with expectations on appropriate advertising of alcohol products.

The strengthened Code includes changes in key areas to further protect children from exposure to alcohol advertising and to keep pace with changing marketing and advertising methods on social and digital media. Key changes include:

- Increasing the percentage of adult viewers required before alcohol advertising is permitted around television programmes from 75 per cent to 80 per cent to ensure Australia's Code is best practice globally.
- Expanding the definition of 'Strong and Evident Appeal to Minors' to further ensure that alcohol advertisements do not engage young people.
- Expanding restrictions on the direct marketing of alcohol by toughening requirements to offer opt outs from this marketing and ensure these are honoured.
- Tighter restrictions on what is meant by responsible and moderate alcohol consumption including the unacceptability of treating excessive alcohol consumption as amusing and of negatively portraying abstinence or refusal of alcohol.
- Following concerns raised during the COVID pandemic the review of the Code clarifies that suggesting consumption of alcohol offers a therapeutic benefit is prohibited and this has been expanded to clarify that this includes a health or mental health benefit, and it is not permissible to suggest alcohol helps overcome problems or adversity.
- The Code has also been extended to cover the marketing of 'alcohol alternatives' ie products styled as beer, wine, spirits etc but with an ABV of less than 0.5%. Since the last Code review there has been significant growth in this product sector globally. This extension aims to protect minors by ensuring that alcohol alternative marketing does not inadvertently model inappropriate alcohol use.

Chair of The ABAC Management Committee, Harry Jenkins AO, said:

"The ABAC scheme is already one of the strictest codes of its kind for alcohol advertising in the world.

"It is an example of government, industry and other independent stakeholders joining together to ensure alcohol advertising is appropriate and in line with efforts to reduce harmful consumption and protect young people.

“But we recognize the need for the Code to do more to keep pace with the changing marketing environment, particularly in relation to protecting young people.

“We’ve consulted widely and believe that the changes to strengthen the Code will ensure its continued effectiveness by both pro-actively educating the industry on best practice responsible marketing and also re-actively addressing alcohol marketing that fails to meet these high standards through assessment of public complaints by the independent expert complaints panel.

“Proactively, ABAC offers a wide range of resources that assist companies to meet the Code standards. Last year the ABAC pre-vetting service considered 3,397 items of marketing and rejected 590 before they could enter the market. The pre-vetting service is a key proactive measure and has recently been bolstered by a certificated training course for industry and extensive compliance monitoring that was carried out last year to check that alcohol companies are applying the age restriction controls available on social platforms to prevent minors from seeing alcohol marketing.

“The Independent ABAC Adjudication Panel, led by Professor the Hon Michael Lavarch AO, received 126 public complaints in 2022, resulting in 63 determinations, where 28 of these determinations upheld the complaint and all resulted in the voluntary removal of the marketing that was found to breach an ABAC Code standard.

Chief Adjudicator of the ABAC Scheme, the Hon. Michael Lavarch AO, said:

“As the Chief Adjudicator, the changes to the Code are welcome.

“The strengthened Code gives our independent adjudication panel the authority it needs to continue to meet and exceed community standards when it comes to the responsible marketing of alcoholic products.”

ENDS.

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For background on the ABAC Scheme refer to www.abac.org.au