

Update

Media & Communications

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Commercial Television Code

From 1 January this year, the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has introduced a new code of practice for commercial free-to-air television services.

The Commercial Television Code of Practice (**the Code**) covers matters prescribed in section 123 of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* and other matters relating to program content that are of concern to the community.

The Code deals with program, commercial, and program promotion classification, disclosure of commercial arrangements in factual programming and complaints handling. The Code places some additional requirements on broadcasters, some of these are set out below.

PG-classified programs may now be shown at any time on a commercial television broadcaster's multi-channels (for example, ABC2, ABC3, SBS Two, 7TWO, the Ten Network's ONE and the Nine Network's GO!). However, G classification time zones will still apply to the main digital and analog services before and after school on weekdays and between 6.00 am and 10.00 am on weekends. Broadcasters must also provide consumer advice in respect of any PG-classified program on the multi-channels where material may be stronger than expected by parents and guardians of young viewers and the program corresponds with the main channel's G programming time zones.

The Code provides increased protection for Reality Television program participants. Broadcasters are now prohibited from presenting participants in a highly demeaning, gratuitous or exploitative manner. There are also changes which strengthen the consumer advice requirements for MA15+ programs; all depictions of sexual activity or nudity and all verbal sexual references must now be relevant to the story line or program context and must not be high in impact.

There is now more scope for broadcasters to schedule additional amounts of non-program matter on digital multi-channels, and since 1 March 2010 viewers are able to lodge complaints electronically using a live online form.

According to Free TV Australia Chief Executive Officer, Julie Flynn, "the Code aims to balance the various interests of our diverse society and ensure that commercial television services meet community standards."

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