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ABAC response to announcement re Alcohol Advertising Review Board

The plan announced today to establish the so-called Alcohol Advertising Review Board is yet another stunt by a group determined to grab quick headlines. It will achieve nothing but cause confusion.

The public already has an established and proven vehicle for hearing complaints about alcohol advertising.

The Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC) is recognised by the Australian Government and is one of the most accessible such systems in the world, accepting complaints via email, letter or fax at no cost to the consumer.

Government representatives sit on the Management Committee that directs the scheme, sets standards for content and has complementary arrangements for placement. Complaint adjudication is conducted by three-member Adjudication Panels, which must always include at least one public health representative. Members of the alcohol beverage industry are barred from adjudicating complaints.

ABAC made 43 determinations on complaints received last year, and 13 were upheld – highlighting its commitment to take action if it believes complaints are valid. In only one case did the advertisers not quickly withdraw and amend to comply with Code provisions.

The ABAC system also includes a voluntary pre-vetting service which checks advertisements before they are used. More than 1,000 advertisements and campaigns were pre-vetted last year, and many were significantly amended to comply with the ABAC Code.

Claims that ABAC is toothless or flawed simply because the alcohol industry established it ignore the facts. Indeed, it is “peer review” through industry involvement that helps encourage action when complaints are upheld.

By contrast, the Alcohol Advertising Review Board has no authority other than its own. The danger is that the public will see it as a valid and approved alternative to ABAC. It isn't.

There are also errors of fact in the new group's documents and media statements which compromise its credibility.

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