

researchacma
Evidence
that informs

What TV viewers expect

Safeguards for free-to-air and on-demand TV content

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Executive summary

Almost all Australian adults regularly watch some form of television content, whether it be on free-to-air broadcast TV, free-to-air TV via online streaming apps (like ABC iView or 7plus), paid subscription video on-demand services (like Netflix or Disney+), or other video services.

In response to the changing TV viewing habits of audiences, the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) conducted consumer research in June 2025 to explore audience expectations for TV content, and the community's understanding of existing regulatory safeguards – particularly when viewing TV content online.

The research identified areas where community expectations are evolving, gaps in knowledge about what the current rules cover and emerging areas of concern.

Research highlights

- Australian adults place strong importance on safeguards that minimise harm from TV content but are mostly comfortable with what is being shown – 3 in 4 viewers (74%) consider that either most or all TV content meets current community expectations.
- Viewers have high standards for TV news content. News viewers consider it important that news content provides up-to-date emergency information (95%), is accurate (94%), unbiased (92%), and respects the privacy of people being reported on (89%).
- Viewers also value rules for other types of TV content – 77% consider it important that there are advertising restrictions for 18+ products (including alcohol and gambling). Similar proportions of viewers consider there should be restrictions on content that condones or normalises domestic violence, drug-use or self-harm (76%), that is highly-offensive, indecent or sexually explicit (76%), or is racist, sexist, homophobic or promotes hate speech (76%).
- Nearly three-quarters (72%) of Australian adults are aware of the *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice*. However, many mistakenly assume it applies to all TV content, including on free-to-air apps and SVOD services. Around 2 in 3 (65%) Australian adults incorrectly think the code covers content made available on free-to-air apps.
- A large majority of Australian adults (84%) want rules to ensure TV content meets community expectations, regardless of whether it is free-to-air broadcast TV, streaming or on-demand content. A majority (58%) also support consistent rules for TV content across these services.
- Over half (55%) of Australian adults have faced some form of content-related issues when watching any type of streaming service in the year before the survey, including difficulty finding or navigating to content (37%), encountering inappropriate advertising (36%), or difficulty accessing accessibility features (27%) or parental controls (20%).
- Artificial intelligence (AI) use within TV content is an emerging area of concern for Australians, with almost 9 in 10 wanting there to be rules for media organisations about when and how they use and disclose AI (86%).

About the research

Background

The ACMA registers and enforces industry [codes of practice](#), which are developed by broadcasters under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*.¹ These codes are intended to provide community safeguards for licensed broadcasting services. However, these protections do not currently extend to online streaming and on-demand services, despite the same or similar TV content being available. We commissioned this consumer research to inform ourselves of attitudes towards safeguards in the context of the way content is accessed.

In this report, 'safeguards' refers to rules, measures or technical tools implemented by broadcasters or streaming service providers to protect and support audiences. Safeguards are generally intended to uphold community standards, protect minors and maintain trust in TV content.

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Our research program underpins our work and decisions as an evidence-informed regulator. It contributes to our strategic policy development, regulatory reviews and investigations, and provides a regulatory framework that anticipates change in dynamic communications and media markets. Find out more about the [ACMA research program](#).

Objectives

The key objectives of this research were to explore:

- expectations for safeguards across various types of TV content
- awareness and perceptions of the current regulatory framework and rules governing TV and streaming content
- audience concerns about content on streaming and on-demand services and perceived harms, including complaint behaviour and barriers.

¹ Part 9 to the [Broadcasting Services Act 1992](#).

Methodology

This quantitative fieldwork was conducted by OmniPoll via their online omnibus survey from 19 to 25 June 2025. A national sample of 1,236 Australian adults aged 18+ was surveyed, and results were post-weighted using ABS population data to represent all Australian adults.

The scope of this survey included the following services:

- free-to-air broadcast TV accessed via an external TV aerial or antenna
- free-to-air TV accessed via an online streaming apps (for example, ABC iView, 7plus, 10, 9Now, SBS On Demand) – referred to as ‘free-to-air app’ in this report
- paid subscription streaming services (for example, Netflix, Stan, Disney+)
- other free online TV services with ads (for example, Samsung TV Plus, Pluto TV, Mubi)
- subscription TV services (for example, Foxtel).

In this report, ‘TV content’ refers to the services listed above.

Viewing habits

Survey respondents were asked about their viewing habits to provide context to questions about expectations of content safeguards. Almost all Australian adults (97%) had watched some form of TV content, whether it be on free-to-air broadcast TV or via streaming or on-demand services, in the month before the survey.

Overall, when those who had watched some form of TV in the previous month were asked about the main way they watched TV content, SVOD services were the most common (43%) followed by free-to-air broadcast TV (33%). Free-to-air apps were the main service for 10% of viewers.

Those aged 18 to 49 were:

- more than twice as likely as older viewers to cite SVOD services as their main way of watching TV content (59% compared to 24%)
- less likely to cite free-to-air broadcast TV as their main way of watching TV content (19% compared to 49%).

There were no notable differences by age among viewers whose main way of watching TV content was free-to-air apps.

Relevant groups in the survey data – sample sizes and margins of error

The survey asked questions of relevant groups of Australian adults. Table 1 shows the size for each of those groups and notes the maximum margin of error for findings within each group.

Table 1: Australian adults viewing of various types of TV content

Content type and time period	Incidence (of Australian adults)	Survey base size (n=) (unweighted respondents)	Maximum margin of error*
All Australian adults	100%	1,236	+/- 3.0
Watched some form of TV, including free-to-air broadcast TV, streaming or on-demand content in the month before the survey	97%	1,198	+/- 3.0
Watched news on one of those services in the month before the survey	71%	859	+/- 3.5
Main way of watching TV in the month before the survey was paid subscription on-demand streaming service	43%	534	+/- 4.5
Main way of watching TV in the month before the survey was free-to-air broadcast TV	33%	391	+/- 5.3

* For a result of 50%, calculated at 95% confidence level and accounting for design effect.

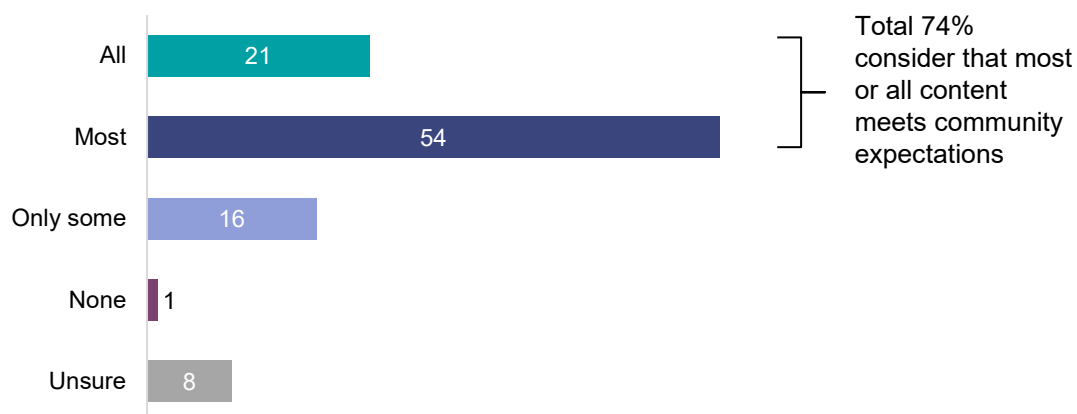
General notes for reading this report

- The research included questions about various time periods prior to the survey fieldwork. 'The past 12 months' referred to late June 2024 to late June 2025. 'The past month' referred to late May to late June 2025. These periods are referred to in this report as "[the relevant period] before the survey".
- Some questions have been filtered, depending on the respondent's previous response (for example, only those who had watched TV content in the month before the survey, were asked a follow up question).
- Unless otherwise stated, all percentages are weighted estimates.
- Base sizes are shown below each chart or table and are the unweighted number of respondents. Care needs to be taken when interpreting the results, so that the data is read in the correct context.
- All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, which may result in minor discrepancies between sums of the component items in a table or chart and the total.
- Totals may sum to more than 100% for questions that invited multiple responses.
- All results shown have been tested for statistical significance at the 95% confidence level.
- The maximum margin of error for the total sample of this survey is approximately +/-3.0 percentage points at the 95% confidence level (with the design effect accounted for), and higher for smaller subgroups.
- The survey data has undergone quality checks by OmniPoll and by the ACMA research team. The analysis and reporting were drafted by OmniPoll, and this research report was prepared by the ACMA's research team.
- The research complies with all research industry standards, the *Privacy Act 1988*, and all other legislation.
- You can request further information about the research by emailing research.analysis@acma.gov.au.

Audience expectations for TV content

Of Australian adults who had viewed some kind of TV content in the month prior to the survey, around three-quarters considered that most or all the available content met community expectations (74%).

Figure 1: Perceptions of how much content meets community expectations (%)



Base: Australian adults who watched at least one form of TV, including broadcast, streaming or on-demand content in the month before the survey (n=1,198).

Question B3: We'd like to ask your views about content meeting 'community expectations' – that is, what most people today think is okay or not okay. Thinking about the content available across all types of TV, streaming and on-demand services, do you consider that... (Select one answer).

Viewers who indicated that TV content did not always meet community expectations were asked to provide a reason for these views. The most common response was 'can't say' (25%), followed by 'community expectations vary' (18%), and concerns around inappropriate content, biased one-sided content and explicit or sexual content (7% respectively).

When asked about the importance of a range of safeguards for news or other TV content (irrespective of type of TV service), more than 2 in 3 viewers (of the relevant content type) considered each safeguard to be either important or very important. This is discussed further below. News viewers considered news safeguards to be higher in importance than general viewers did for other content safeguards.

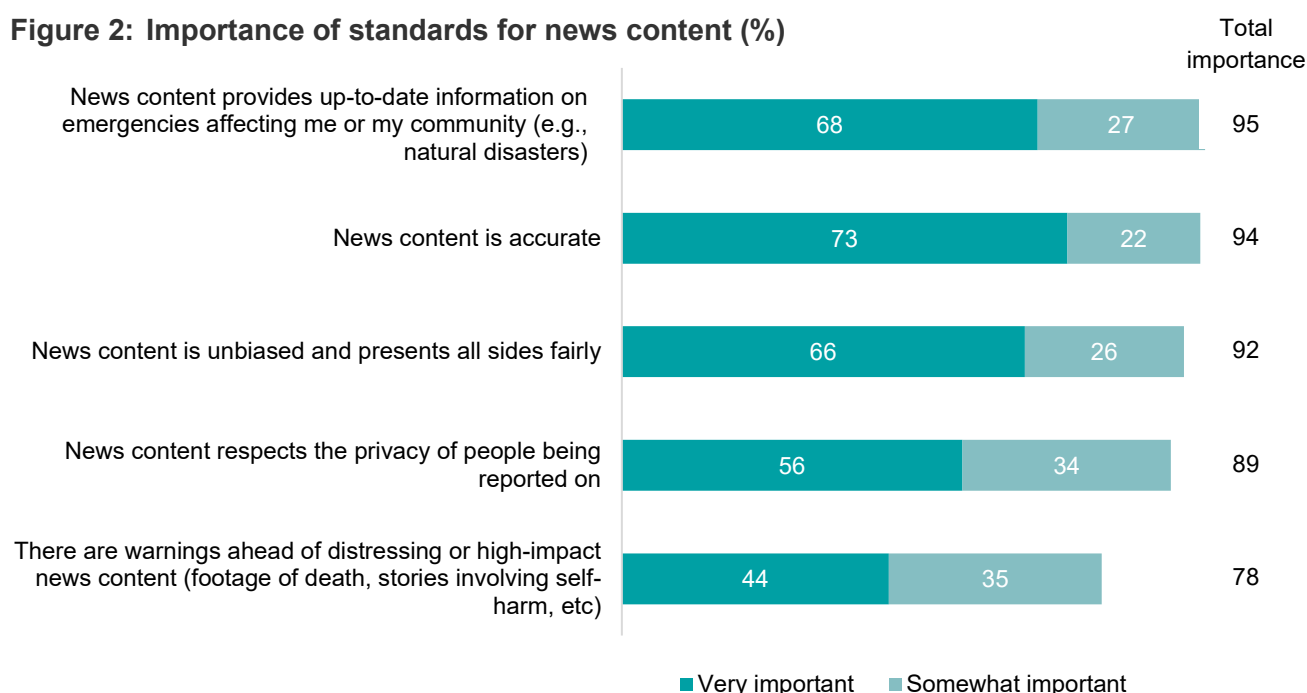
Expectations for news content

Most Australian adults (71%) had watched some form of TV news content in the month before the survey. Over 9 in 10 news viewers considered it important that news content is accurate (94%), provides up-to-date emergency information (95%) and is unbiased, presenting all sides fairly (92%). Around 9 in 10 also considered it important that TV news content respects the privacy of people being reported on (89%).

There was also a high level of support (78%) from news viewers for warnings ahead of distressing or high-impact news content (for example, footage of death, stories involving self-harm).

All content standards relating to news were more likely to be rated at the ‘very important’ end of the scale compared to general content standards, signifying their importance to Australian adult viewers.

Figure 2: Importance of standards for news content (%)



Base: Australian adults who watched news on broadcast, streaming or on-demand TV in the month before the survey (n=859).

Question B1b: When watching news content on TV, streaming or on-demand services, how important or not important are each of the following to you? (Select one answer per item).

Note: ‘Total importance’ is the sum of ‘very important’ and ‘somewhat important’.

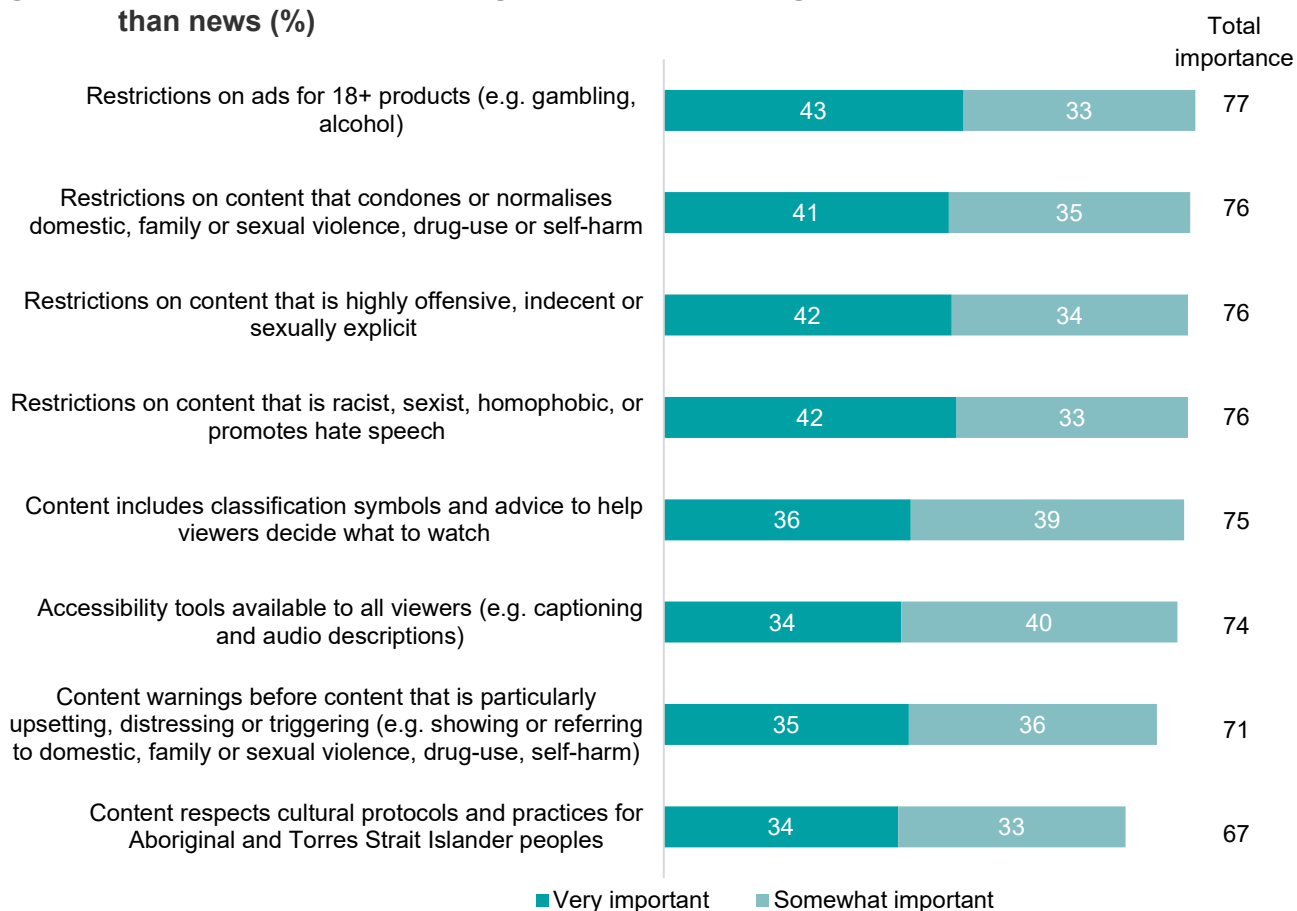
Expectations for general content, other than news

Australian adults also expect high standards and safeguards for other types of content across TV services. Restrictions on advertising for 18+ products, such as gambling and alcohol, were considered one of the most important safeguards for viewers of content other than news (77%). Similar proportions of viewers considered it important to restrict content that:

- is racist, sexist, homophobic, or promotes hate speech
- is highly offensive, indecent, or sexually explicit
- condones or normalises domestic, family or sexual violence, drug use, or self-harm (76% respectively).

Most Australian adults who viewed general TV content also believed it was important to have classification symbols and advice to help viewers decide what to watch (75%) and accessibility tools available to all viewers (74%). Around 7 in 10 viewers reported it was important that there were warnings before particularly upsetting, distressing or triggering content (71%) and that content respects cultural protocols and practices for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (67%).

Figure 3: Importance of various safeguards when watching content other than news (%)



Base: Australian adults who watched at least one form of TV, including broadcast, streaming or on-demand content in month before the survey (n=1,198).

Question B2: When watching TV, streaming or on-demand content other than news, how important or not important are each of the following to you? (Select one answer per item).

Note: Total importance' is the sum of 'very important' and 'somewhat important'.

While importance ratings were high across all viewer groups, they were highest among women, and parents or guardians of a child in their household.



Issues experienced with TV streaming services

Seven in ten Australian adults (70%) had experienced at least one issue when using a TV streaming service (including free-to-air apps and SVOD services) in the 12 months before the survey.

Just over half (55%) of Australian adults had experienced a content-related issue with streaming services in that time, with the most common being:

- difficulty finding or navigating to content (37%)
- encountering inappropriate advertising (36%)
- difficulty accessing captioning or other accessibility tools (27%)
- difficulty finding or using parental controls or similar settings (20%).

Awareness of the code

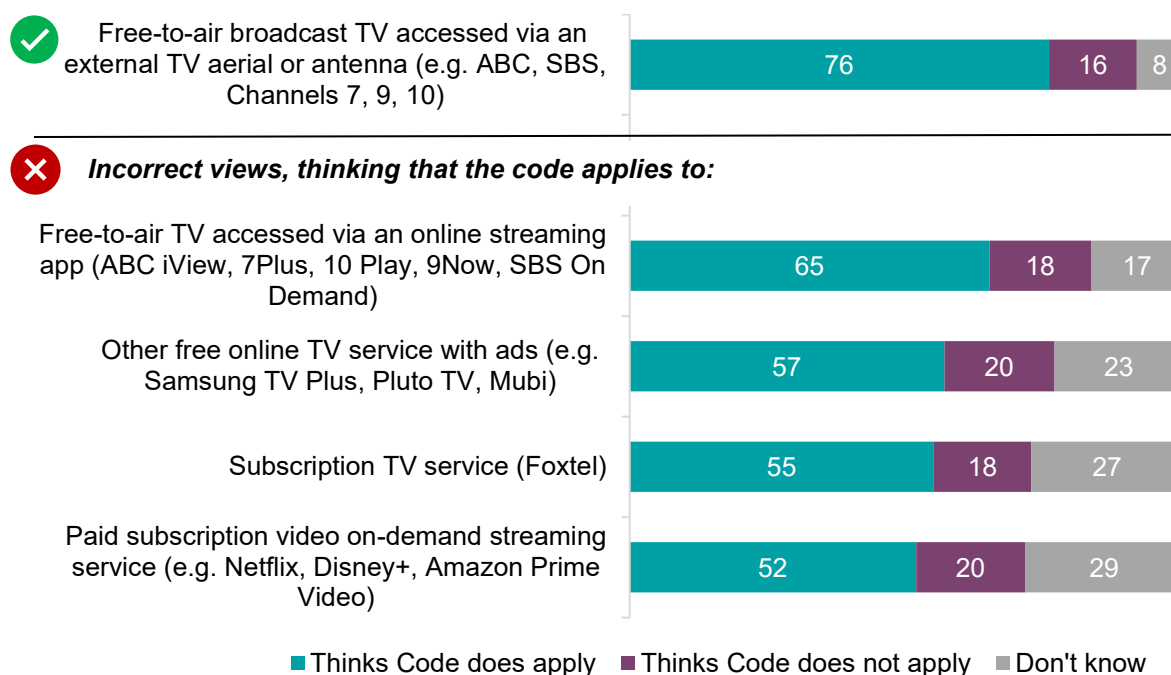
The current *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice* has rules for what can and cannot be shown on commercial TV in Australia. This code only applies to broadcast TV content that requires an external aerial or antenna to access, rather than TV content that is streamed or otherwise accessed online. The code also does not apply to TV content from Australia's national broadcasters – ABC and SBS – each of which have their own set of rules.

While just over 7 in 10 Australian adults (72%) have heard of the code, understanding of the details varies, and a significant proportion of Australian adults misunderstand what it covers.

One third (33%) of Australian adults said they had heard of the code but did not know any details. Two in five (39%) adults indicated they 'knew some details' or 'understand what it does'.

However, the majority of Australian adults who said they knew at least some details mistakenly believe that the code applies across all types of TV content. Around 2 in 3 (65%) incorrectly think that the code covers TV content that is available on broadcasters' free-to-air apps and 52% think that TV content on SVOD services is also covered.

Figure 4: Views on whether the code applies to various types of content (%)



Base: Australian adults familiar with the details of the code (including those who know some details and those who are very familiar and understand what it does (n=499)).

Question E2: To the best of your knowledge, do the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice rules apply or not apply to the each of following? (Select one answer per item).

Those who claimed to be 'very familiar with the code and understand what it does' were the most likely to incorrectly think it also applied to:

- paid subscription video on demand (SVOD) streaming services (72%)
- subscription TV service (Foxtel) (71%)
- other free online TV service with ads (69%)
- free-to-air TV accessed via an online streaming app (67%).



Complaints

Only 7% of Australian adults had made a complaint about TV content in the 12 months before the survey. The majority of those who had complained were satisfied with the outcome (64%).

The main reason for not making a complaint was that they had no significant concerns about TV content they viewed in the 12 months before the survey (70%). Other reasons cited for not making a complaint included:

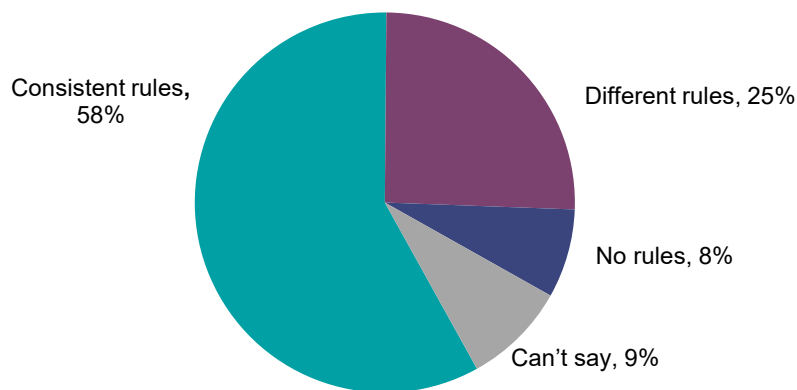
- they did not think anything would change even if they complain (17%)
- they did not know they could make a complaint about content (13%)
- they had wanted to complain but did not know how (5%)
- they wanted to complain but found the process too difficult or too long (3%)
- another reason or can't say (5%).

Expectations for rules

A large majority of Australian adults (84%) want rules to ensure TV content meets community expectations, whether it be free-to-air broadcast TV, streaming or on-demand content.

Over half (58%) think rules about TV content should be consistent and should not depend on the format or service the content is watched on. One quarter (25%) think rules should be different based on whether viewers are watching content on free-to-air broadcast TV or accessing it via streaming or on-demand services. Only 8% believe there should not be any rules for TV content at all.

Figure 5: Views on the need for consistent or variable rules across all free-to-air broadcast TV, streaming and on-demand content (%)

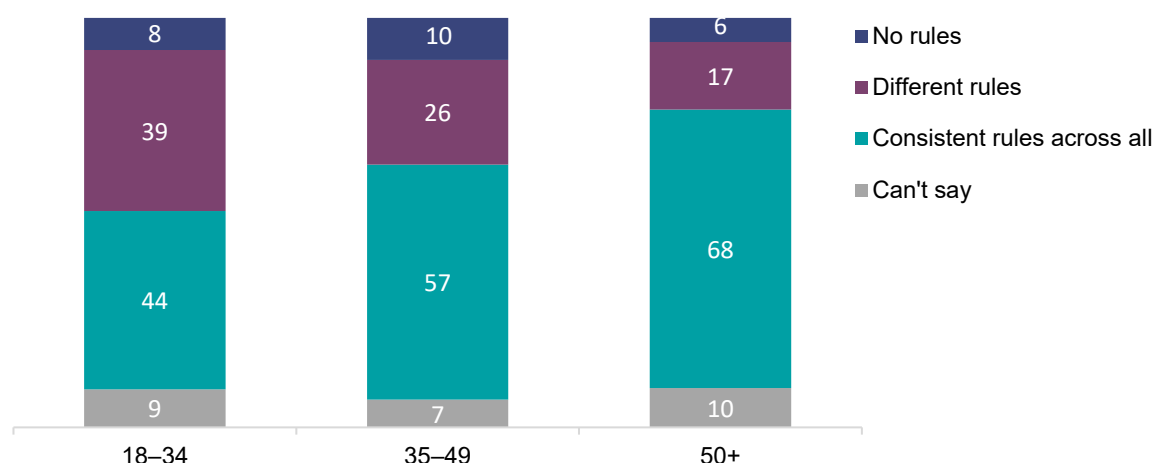


Base: Australian adults (n=1,236).

Question C1: We'd now like to ask your views on rules that help ensure content meets community expectations. Rules can include restrictions on certain types of content and other measures designed to protect audiences. Do you consider that there should be ... (Select one answer).

Support for consistent rules was strongest among older Australian adults (those aged 50+) (68% vs 44% of those aged under 35), while younger age groups (under 35) were more inclined to prefer different rules for different types of TV content (39% vs 17% of those aged 50+).

Figure 6: Different or consistent rules, by age group (%)



Base: Australian adults: aged 18–34 (n=389), aged 35–49 (n=314), aged 50+ (n=533).

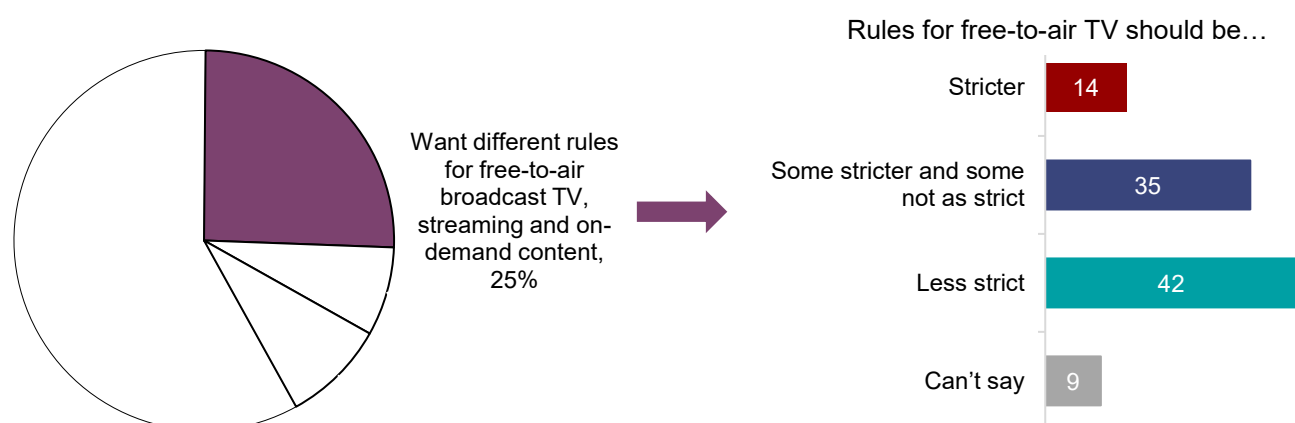
Question C1: We'd now like to ask your views on rules that help ensure content meets community expectations. Rules can include restrictions on certain types of content and other measures designed to protect audiences. Do you consider that there should be ... (Select one answer).

Expectations for rules about content on free-to-air apps

Of the quarter of Australian adults who believe rules should differ by service, 14% think the rules for content on free-to-air apps should be stricter than the rules for free-to-air broadcast TV, and 42% think the rules should be less strict. Around one third (35%) want some rules to be stricter on free-to-air apps and some rules not as strict.

Those aged 18–35 were the most likely to favour less strict rules for free-to-air apps (50%) compared to those aged 50+ (19%).

Figure 7: Rules for free-to-air apps compared to free-to-air broadcast TV (%)



Base: Left-hand side pie chart: Australian adults (n=1,236); Right-hand side bar chart: Australian adults who consider rules should be different based on whether you are watching TV, streaming or on-demand content (n=326).

Question C2: Should the rules for free-to-air catch up/streaming apps (ABC iView, 7Plus, 10 Play, 9Now, SBS On Demand) be... than for free-to-air broadcast TV? (Select one answer).

The most common reasons for wanting **stricter rules** on free-to-air apps:

- It is easier for children to access inappropriate adult content at any time of day on free-to-air catch up/streaming apps (75%).
- Algorithms can influence what content people watch and shape opinions (24%).
- There are libraries of older content which may convey outdated or offensive views (23%).

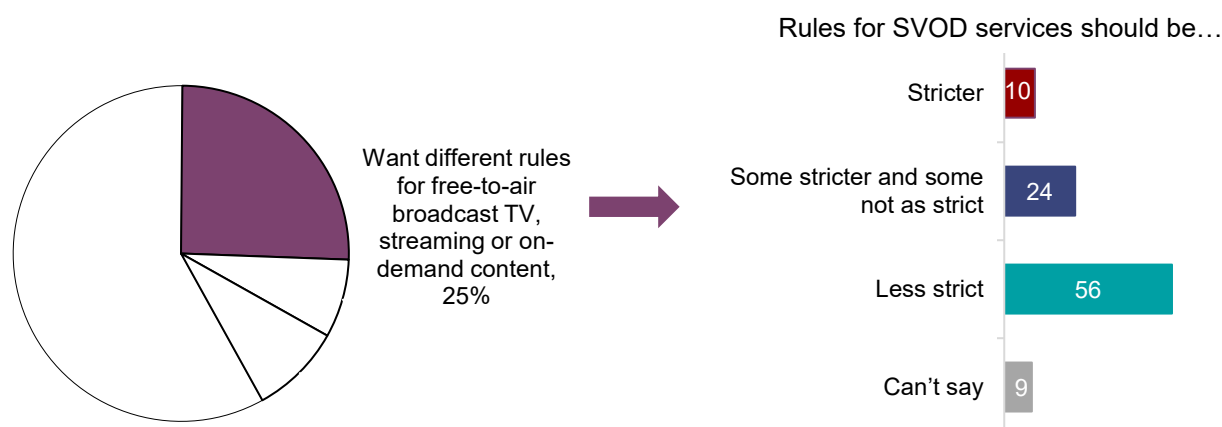
The most common reasons for wanting rules that are **not as strict** on free-to-air apps:

- Viewers are less likely to stumble across inappropriate content by accident compared to free-to-air broadcast TV (49%).
- Viewers are usually provided with more information about content on free-to-air apps before deciding to watch (43%).

Expectations for rules about content on SVOD services

Among the quarter of Australian adults who believe rules should differ by service, 10% think the rules for content on SVOD services should be stricter than those for free-to-air broadcast TV, while 56% think the rules should be less strict. Around one quarter (24%) think some rules should be stricter and others not as strict on SVOD services.

Figure 8: Rules for SVOD services compared to free-to-air broadcast TV (%)



Base: Left-hand side pie chart: Australian adults (n=1,236); Right-hand side bar chart: Australian adults who consider rules should be different based on whether you are watching free-to-air broadcast TV, streaming or on-demand content (n=326).

Question C5: Thinking now about paid subscription streaming services (e.g., Netflix, Disney+, Amazon Prime Video). Do you think the rules for paid subscription streaming services should be... than for free-to-air broadcast TV? (Select one answer).

The most common reasons for wanting **stricter rules** on SVOD services:

- It is easier for children to access inappropriate adult content (60%)
- It has content from years ago that could be offensive today for many people (33%)
- Algorithms can influence what content people watch and shape opinions (32%).

The most common reasons for wanting rules that are **not as strict** on SVOD services:

- Paying for a service should mean subscribers get to choose what is best for them to watch (61%)
- Viewers being less likely to stumble across inappropriate content by accident compared to free-to-air broadcast TV (48%).



Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Most Australian adults support rules for disclosing the use of AI in producing TV content.

- The majority of Australian adults (86%) want rules for media organisations using AI, and how AI use should be disclosed.
- Nearly 3 in 4 Australian adults (72%) think there should be consistent rules to ensure all media organisations clearly tell audiences when and how they use AI to produce content, rather than letting them set their own rules.

AI use is generally considered more acceptable in entertainment content than in news.

- While 52% of Australia adults found it acceptable for AI to entirely create entertainment content such as the script for a drama series, only 35% supported the use of AI-generated presenters in news or current affairs programs, with 55% saying it is unacceptable to use AI presenters in news content.
- Acceptance was slightly higher (46%) when AI was used to create news stories that were then read out or presented by a human.

Glossary

Definitions in this document are based on terminology from the questionnaire used for this research, and terms otherwise defined in other ACMA materials.

aerial/antenna

Defined in the questionnaire as: Aerial/antennas are usually mounted on a roof top to receive free-to-air broadcast TV signals, and a cable connects to the TV via an aerial TV socket. An antenna is not required for streaming and on-demand services.

AI

Short for 'artificial intelligence', AI was referred to in the questionnaire as new technologies or tools that some media organisations are starting to use to help them find and research news stories, and to create media content.

app

Short for 'application'; a software program that allows a user to perform a specific task either on a particular device or online. It is an application or program that can be downloaded on to a mobile phone or other device. In this research it refers specifically to apps that enable streaming of online video content.

code

The *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice* (the code) has rules for what can and cannot be shown on commercial free-to-air broadcast TV in Australia, that is accessed via an external aerial or antenna.

content

Information, data or creative material presented in various forms such as text, images, videos or audio, available on websites, social media or other digital services.

free-to-air broadcast TV

Television broadcasts available to the public without requiring a subscription or payment, typically requiring aerial or antennas to receive a signal. Defined in the questionnaire as: Free-to-air broadcast TV accessed via an external TV aerial or antenna (for example, ABC, SBS, Channels 7, 9, 10).

free-to-air app

Online service typically provided on free-to-air and subscription broadcasters' websites for users to watch content previously shown on TV or programming exclusive to the app, often available for a limited period. Defined in the questionnaire as: Free-to-air TV accessed via an online streaming app (ABC iView, 7Plus, 10 Play, 9Now, SBS On Demand).

news content

Current events, information or reports about recent developments or happenings, disseminated through various media channels. In this survey it referred to news provided online via video services. Includes any factual reporting by journalists or other information on current events at a local, regional, national or international level.

news and current affairs

News is information about current events, and current affairs are events that are current and significant to a community or society, often reported through various media to keep the audience informed and engaged.

other free online TV service with ads

Defined in the questionnaire as: Other free online TV service with ads (for example, Samsung TV Plus, Pluto TV, Mubi) - *Not including video sharing services like YouTube or TikTok.*

safeguards

Safeguards in content refer to rules, measures or technical tools implemented by broadcasters or streaming service providers to protect and support audiences. Safeguards are generally intended to uphold community standards, protect minors and maintain trust in TV, streaming or on-demand content.

streaming and on-demand services

Online services, websites or apps that provide access to media content, including music, movies, TV shows, podcasts and live broadcasts. Users can access content over the internet on-demand or via live streaming without downloading it. Includes free-to-air apps and SVOD services.

TV content

In this report, TV content is an umbrella term for free-to-air broadcast TV accessed via an external TV aerial or antenna, free-to-air catch up/streaming apps (for example, ABC iView, 7Plus, 10 Play, 9Now, SBS On Demand), other free online TV service with ads (for example, Samsung TV Plus, Pluto TV, Mubi), paid subscription streaming services (for example, Netflix, Stan and Disney+) and subscription TV services (for example, Foxtel).

subscription TV service

Television channel or network available to consumers on a subscription basis, offering access to premium or specialised content, including movies, sports, documentaries and entertainment programs, through cable, satellite, IPTV or internet streaming services. The only service available in Australia at the time of interviewing was Foxtel, and that was provided as the example for respondents.

SVOD services

This refers to a paid service model where users subscribe to access a library of on-demand content, typically without ads. Examples include Netflix, Stan and Disney+. Also referred to as paid subscription streaming service in the questionnaire.