

Ad Standards submission

Australian Communications and Media Authority Review of
alcohol advertising rules in the Free TV Code

April 2026





Introduction

Ad Standards is pleased to provide this submission to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) in response to its review of alcohol advertising rules under the Free TV Code.

Ad Standards recognises that alcohol can cause significant harm to individuals, families and communities. Assessing evidence, research and making public health recommendations falls outside Ad Standards' remit.

This submission provides an overview of Ad Standards' role in the regulation of alcohol advertising and draws on Ad Standards data and community sentiment research relevant to the review.

Summary

- Ad Standards is Australia's advertising regulator. We administer the advertising codes developed by the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) and provide an independent, accessible avenue for the community to raise concerns about advertising across all platforms.
- All alcohol advertising on free-to-air television must comply with the placement restrictions within the Free TV Code, and the provisions within the ABAC Responsible Alcohol Marketing Code (ABAC Code) and AANA codes.
- Based on Ad Standards complaints data, alcohol advertising does not appear to be an area of heightened or disproportionate community concern relative to other product or service categories.
- Community sentiment research (Roy Morgan, 2025) also indicates that alcohol advertising is not a leading area of public concern.
- Ad Standards considers that the current television alcohol advertising regulatory framework remains fit-for-purpose.

About Ad Standards

Ad Standards is Australia's advertising regulator. We handle complaints, promote responsible advertising and support industry compliance with the advertising codes developed by the AANA.

Through a transparent, accessible, and impartial complaints process, we provide a vital platform for the public to raise concerns about advertising on all media. Our work supports both community expectations and industry standards, helping to uphold the integrity and accountability of advertising in Australia.



Any member of the public can lodge a complaint with Ad Standards at no cost. In 2025, Ad Standards received 5,256 complaints, demonstrating strong community engagement with the system.

Ad Standards' complaint assessment and resolution processes are highly efficient. In 2025, the average timeframe to resolve all complaints was just 6.7 days, while matters referred to the Community Panel for assessment were resolved, on average, within 30.5 days.

Ad Standards operates at no cost to government or the community and is funded by advertisers through a levy based on advertising spend.

For further information about Ad Standards work, refer to the [2025 Ad Standards Annual Report](#).

The Ad Standards Community Panel

The Ad Standards Community Panel is the independent body made up of community members who adjudicate complaints based on the advertising codes and prevailing community standards.

The Community Panel's composition mirrors the diversity of Australian society. The diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and opinions among Community Panel members is fundamental to ensuring that decisions align with the views and values of the public. Community Panel members are free from any commercial influence. This independence supports the Community Panel's ability to provide objective, unbiased, and representative decisions.

The advertising codes

The advertising codes developed by the AANA operate alongside, and complementary to, statutory regulation and other industry self-regulatory initiatives.

The codes set the standard for responsible advertising across all platforms. The codes reflect international best practice and are updated to keep pace with community concerns and evolving advertising practices.

The [AANA Code of Ethics](#) is the main code that intersects and overlaps with the ABAC Code and Free TV Code. The AANA Code of Ethics imposes minimum content standards for all advertising on all platforms. The Code requires all advertising to be responsible and aligned with community standards in relation to issues such as discrimination, exploitative or degrading sexual imagery, violence, sex and nudity, language, health and safety, and distinguishability.

Compliance

Ad Standards treats compliance with the advertising codes as a core priority and expects advertisers and platforms to take timely and appropriate action where content is found to be in breach of the advertising codes.

The overwhelming majority of Australia's advertisers and platforms support the self-regulatory system and promptly remove any advertising content found in breach. In circumstances where an



advertiser does not comply, Ad Standards escalates the matter to the relevant platform, network or publisher to facilitate removal of the content.

In 2025, Ad Standards recorded an overall compliance rate of 88%, meaning that in most cases, advertisers or platforms undertook remedial action (either by removing or modifying advertising content) following a breach finding or prior to the Ad Standards Community Panel completing a formal assessment.

Free-to-air television

Free-to-air television has a compliance mechanism that sets it apart from many other platforms. Every television ad broadcast on a free-to-air network in Australia must be classified and hold a valid classification number issued by ClearAds, the classification service of Free TV, before it can air.

This requirement creates a strong enforcement mechanism. When Ad Standards finds an ad in breach of the advertising codes, ClearAds withdraws the classification number, and the ad cannot air again in its current form.

In 2025, of the 13 ads seen on free-to-air television that were found in breach of one or more of the advertising codes, all were removed or modified representing a 100% compliance rate.

Alcohol advertising

Regulatory framework

Alcohol advertising on free-to-air television in Australia is subject to a comprehensive regulatory framework:

- The current Free TV Code sets placement and timing restrictions for alcohol advertising on commercial free-to-air television.
- The ABAC Code sets both content and placement standards for all alcohol advertising and marketing across all platforms.
- The AANA Code of Ethics sets baseline content standards for all advertising across all platforms.

Together, these codes regulate both the content and placement of alcohol advertising, constituting a comprehensive and effective regulatory framework.

A further regulatory safeguard for alcohol advertising on free-to-air television is the mandatory pre-vetting by ABAC for all signatories, with advertising material assessed for compliance with ABAC Code standards before broadcast.

Complaints

Complaints relating to alcohol advertising in Australia are initially lodged with Ad Standards (through the Ad Standards website) and are referred to the ABAC Scheme for assessment.



Alcohol advertising faces potential assessment under both the ABAC Code and the AANA Code of Ethics depending on the nature of the complaint and content of the advertising.

Alcohol advertising is not an area of disproportionate community concern relative to other product or service categories.

In 2025:

- Ad Standards received a total of 5,256 complaints about advertising. The categories attracting the highest volume of complaints were political or social advertising (23%), food and beverages (11%), followed by health products (8%).
- Concerns about alcohol advertising represented less than 4% of total complaints lodged with Ad Standards. These complaints were promptly referred to ABAC for assessment under the ABAC Code.
- Concerns about alcohol advertising on free-to-air television and broadcast television on-demand (e.g. 10Play, 7Plus, 9Now) accounted for an even smaller proportion of complaints, with less than 1% of all complaints lodged with Ad Standards raising issues about alcohol advertising on these platforms.

Alcohol advertising assessed by the Ad Standards Community Panel

The Ad Standards Community Panel only assess advertising that raises issues under the AANA codes. They do not adjudicate complaints that raise issues under the ABAC Code.

Of the 254 ads assessed by the Ad Standards Community Panel in 2025, just 7 were for alcohol brands or retailers (3 ads on social media, 1 online ad, 1 in cinema, and 2 on television on-demand).

The Ad Standards Community Panel did not assess any ads for alcohol brands or retailers seen on free-to-air television.

Alcohol advertising assessed by the Community Panel in 2025:

- [Wet Pussy Shot](#) – Instagram – Breach (AANA Code of Ethics, Section 2.2 Exploitative or degrading)
- [Little Ripples Wine](#) – Instagram – No breach
- [Old Richmond Cellars](#) – Online – No breach
- [Itinerant Spirits](#) – Cinema – Breach (AANA Code of Ethics, Section 2.6 Health and safety)
- [Grog](#) – Instagram – Breach (AANA Code of Ethics, Section 2.3 Violence)
Note: This ad was also subject to [review by the ABAC Panel](#) and was found in breach of the ABAC Code.
- [Lion Beer, Spirits and Wine](#) – TV on-demand - Breach (AANA Code of Ethics, Section 2.6 Health and safety)
- [Australian Liquor Marketers: Cellarbrations](#) – TV on-demand - No breach



Community perceptions research

In addition to handling community complaints, Ad Standards conducts regular research to understand general community perceptions of, and attitudes towards, advertising.

The [Ad Standards Community Sentiment Tracker](#) (Wave 1, Q2 FY26) conducted by Roy Morgan surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,024 Australians aged 18+ in November 2025.

When asked to identify issues of concern in advertising, Australians consistently nominated a core set of issues. Gambling advertising was the number one concern (67% of respondents, 24% ranking it as their primary issue), followed by advertising disguised as regular content (64%), and misleading or false claims in political advertising (64%), and misleading or deceptive advertising (61%).

Alcohol advertising was nominated by 35% of Australians as an area of concern, placing it tenth out of sixteen issues tested. Just 1% of Australians nominated alcohol advertising as the most concerning issue.

Children's exposure to inappropriate advertising content was nominated by 58% of Australians, reinforcing the importance of the existing regulatory framework for alcohol advertising on television involving placement restrictions and content safeguards.

When asked to identify advertising platforms of concern, social media was the platform attracting the most concern with 62% of Australians reporting that it was the platform where advertising was concerning. YouTube was reported by 43% of Australians, followed by online/digital (39%) free-to-air television (36%), television on-demand (24%) and streaming services (21%).

Further consultation

Ad Standards welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important review.

Should the ACMA wish to explore any aspect of this submission further, Ad Standards would be pleased to assist.

Sincerely

Greg Wallace
Executive Director
Ad Standards

30 April 2026