



ACMA REVIEW OF ALCOHOL ADVERTISING RULES IN THE FREE TV CODE

NATIONAL RUGBY LEAGUE SUBMISSION

The National Rugby League (**NRL**) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Australian Media and Communications Authority's (**ACMA**) review of alcohol advertising rules in the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice 2015 (**the Free TV code**).

The NRL is a member of the Coalition of Major Professional and Participation Sports (**COMPPS**), the united voice of Australia's sport industry. The NRL supports the position put forward by COMPPS in its submission and makes the following additional submissions.

1. Alcohol consumption is trending downward

Alcohol is a legal, legitimate and highly-regulated product enjoyed safely by millions of Australians each year. The overwhelming majority of Australians consume alcohol responsibly and in moderation.

The ACMA has advised that, in conducting the review, it may look to provide insights into:

- *in-stadia and integrated content advertising, such as alcohol advertising in sporting stadiums, signage on jerseys and sponsored collaborations within programming; and*
- *alcohol advertising placement on mediums, including video-on-demand services, that is subscription video on demand, advertising-based video on demand and broadcaster video on demand.*

Notwithstanding that some of these matters fall outside the scope of the ACMA's authority, in considering its position it's important that the Authority acknowledge that Australian Government data¹ shows there is no causal link between alcohol advertising and consumption. For example:

- **Australians are drinking less alcohol:** per capita alcohol consumption in Australia is at a 50-year low, declining from a peak of 13l in 1975 to 9.8l in 2024, this despite alcohol products being more readily available (e.g. online retailing) and expanded advertising means.
- **Risky drinking is declining:** the percentage of people drinking at 'risky levels' has declined from 38% in 2001 to 31% in 2023.
- **Young people are increasingly abstaining from alcohol:** the proportion of young people (14-17 years) abstaining from alcohol has more than doubled in a generation, rising from 31.8% in 2001 to 69.9% in 2023.
- **Young people are starting to drink later:** the average 'age of initiation' - i.e. when young people first try alcohol - has steadily risen from 14.7 years in 2001 to 16.1 in 2023.
- **Fewer young people are drinking at risky levels:** young people reporting to drink more than 10 standard drinks a week/ 4 drinks a day on average at least once a month has almost halved (9.5% to 5.5%) between 2019 and 2023.

These trends demonstrate there is a long-term trajectory of sustained moderation and behavioural change underway in Australia, and that there is no evidence of an increase in alcohol consumption or harmful consumption, particularly among young people. In this context, potential calls from some stakeholders to ACMA for a further tightening of alcohol advertising rules, including but not limited to stadia and jerseys, is not supported by actual evidence.

2. Alcohol advertising is highly regulated and working

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2025); Australian Bureau of Statistics (2025)



Alcohol advertising in Australia is subject to a mix of robust and comprehensive legislative, self-regulatory and co-regulatory frameworks including, but not limited to, the Free TV Code and the Responsible Alcohol Marketing Code administered by the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (**ABAC**) Scheme.

Given the above-mentioned trends in Australian alcohol consumption patterns, the NRL believes the current regulatory frameworks and existing restrictions on alcohol advertising during sport are working as intended.

3. The importance of alcohol advertising & sponsorships and sport

Rugby league is Australia and the Pacific's #1 sport.

The significant health, social and economic benefits of mass participation in sport and the centrality of rugby league in the Australian sporting ecosystem is self-evident and long recognised by all levels of government, with more than 1.1 million Australians playing the game in 2025 (+7.5% YoY). This growth is particularly strong among female participants (+10% YoY).

Rugby league is the most watched sport in Australia, with 224.2m cumulative average viewers in 2025, (+9.5% YoY), with the NRL Grand Final being the most-watched Australian program of the year with an average audience of 4.55m viewers, and the State of Origin series consistently rating as one of the highest programs in Australia.

Additionally, the 2025 NRLW Grand Final drew a record-breaking average audience of 1.33 million (+42.7% YoY), while 12.5 million people tuned into NRLW across the season. These numbers reflect the growing strength and popularity of the women's game and correlate with increased grassroots female participation, setting a strong platform for a bright future.

Alcohol sponsorship of sport is a legitimate, legal, longstanding, socially accepted and important source of revenue for not only the NRL, but the entire sporting sector.

As the ACMA may be aware, the NRL is a not-for-profit. The NRL and rugby league clubs generate revenue directly from the alcohol sector through responsible sponsorships and indirectly by virtue of the value of its media rights. The nature and value of these sponsorships vary between clubs but often include apparel and in-stadia advertising.

The business model of sport in Australia is such that revenue generated from media and broadcast rights is the most significant source of income for rugby league. The Australian market for sports media rights, particularly for major sports, is small and is already constrained by the anti-siphoning regime, which prevents the NRL from maximising full value via an open, competitive sale process.

The value of these rights is determined, in large part, by the ability of broadcasters to commercialise them and generate revenue through advertising. Alcohol is an important category in the overall advertising market and is not easily substituted.

As an NFP, the revenue the NRL generates is invested in grassroots and community rugby league programs, the growth of women's rugby league, and a range of community health, wellbeing and education initiatives, alongside elite-level competitions.

As mentioned above, rugby league is experiencing record viewership and participation, particularly among young females. Additionally, the NRL premiership is expanding from 17 to 19 teams, with the introduction of the Perth Bears in 2027 and the Papua New Guinea Chiefs in 2028 - a historic moment for the game and the Pacific region, building lasting connections between Australia and the Pacific through the transformative power of sport.

None of this is possible without a solid commercial foundation and regulatory stability.

The NRL appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission and looks forward to further consultation. Please contact Misha Zelinsky, NRL Executive General Manager Corporate Affairs, by email at mzelinsky@nrl.com.au for further information.