

The development of Australia's Alcohol Beverages Advertising (and Packaging) Code

The Alcohol Beverages Advertising (and Packaging) Code (ABAC) provides an effective but flexible framework within which the alcohol industry sets and manages standards for alcohol advertising and packaging in Australia.

Established in 1998 by the Winemakers' Federation of Australia, the Brewers Association of Australia and New Zealand, and the Distilled Spirits Industry Council of Australia, the code was expanded after an extensive review in 2004 and both the Alcohol Advertising Pre-Vetting Service and formal adjudication process for handling consumer complaints were reformed.

These changes reflected the code's increasing authority and reputation and its ability to meet community and government expectations through industry self-regulation.

Of particular note:

- a government representative was included on the management committee for the first time
- industry coverage was expanded to allow alcohol producers who were not members of one of the three industry associations to become signatories
- the Australian Standards Bureau committed to sending every complaint received to the Chief Adjudicator to make a determination in relation to the applicability of the code
- the importance of the public health debate was recognised with a specialist in the field added to the adjudication panel
- the management committee members committed to publish an annual report and make the code available via their websites.

The following provides a snapshot of the scheme's development and operations since 2004.



2004 >>>

In addition to changes outlined previous, four important amendments were made to the code itself following the 2004 review:

- the preamble was amended to include a formal commitment by the industry associations to adhere to the intent of the code, not just a technical reading of its content
- a new definition for the *Australian Alcohol Guidelines* was adopted—the National Health and Medical Research Council alcohol consumption guidelines were cited and the standards were amended to include reference to excessive alcohol consumption
- the code was extended to cover internet and ‘new media’ advertising
- recognising the role of alcohol companies in community events, event-based promotions were also included.

2004 in numbers

Prevetted advertisement	754
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Advertisements rejected	84
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Complaints received	212
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Number of advertisements to which complaints relate	23
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Complaints relating to a single advertisement	180
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Turnarounds

Business days taken to deal with complaints	17.1
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Business days taken to deal with complaints subject to an ABAC determination	35.1
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2005 >>>

The reforms from the 2004 review were fully implemented by the end of 2005.

In addition, to ensure full integration of the entire pre-vetting and adjudication process, the Alcohol Advertising Pre-vetting Service (AAPS) was brought within the ABAC Scheme.

2005 in numbers

Prevetted advertisement	761
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Advertisements rejected	86
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Complaints received	105
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Number of advertisements to which complaints relate	29
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Complaints relating to a single advertisement	54
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Turnarounds

Business days taken to deal with complaints	13.3
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Business days taken to deal with complaints subject to an ABAC determination	33
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2006 >>>

The measures adopted in 2004 to allow non-members of alcohol industry associations to become signatories to the code were used for the first time, ensuring it maintained coverage of nearly all alcohol advertising undertaken by producers in Australia.

The management committee's commitment to education continued, with workshops held in Sydney and Melbourne to help the industry gain a better understanding of the provisions of the code and the associated pre-vetting and complaints procedures.

2006 in numbers

Prevetted advertisement	936
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Advertisements rejected	182
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Advertisements accepted subject to modification	53
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Complaints received	53
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Number of advertisements to which complaints relate	26
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Number within the ambit of the code	13
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Turnarounds

Business days taken to deal with complaints	23.6
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Business days taken to deal with complaints subject to an ABAC determination	78.6
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2007 >>>

Transparency and procedural timeliness were the focus in 2007. The ABAC website was established and three additional appointments were made—an alternate public health representative on the ABAC Adjudication Panel, an additional pre-vetter, and a new administrator to improve the efficiency of the complaints system.

The management committee also published guidelines to help producers and advertising agencies put the ABAC standards into practice.

The scheme's coverage expanded to include the adjudication of complaints about advertisements in trade magazines and an additional clause was inserted into the code prohibiting advertising that refers to the ABAC Scheme in a manner that may bring the scheme into disrepute.

2007 in numbers

Prevetted advertisement	1267
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Advertisements rejected	293
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Advertisements accepted subject to modification	61
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Complaints received	87
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Number of advertisements to which complaints relate	38
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Number within the ambit of the code	25
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Turnarounds

Business days taken to deal with complaints	11.6
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Business days taken to deal with complaints subject to an ABAC determination	29.3
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2008 >>>

The Pre-Vetting Service expanded in 2008, with Winemakers' Federation of Australia members agreeing to include outdoor advertising. The Outdoor Media Association (OMA) supported this announcement, confirming that its members will only accept advertisements that have been approved by ABAC.

In a move that highlighted the advertising industry's responsiveness to community expectation, OMA also announced new advertising guidelines restricting billboard advertising within 150 metres of schools.

Both pre-vetters and the Chief Adjudicator made themselves available to advertisers and alcohol industry members at the information seminars in Sydney and Melbourne.

2008 in numbers

Prevettted advertisement 1110

Advertisements rejected 232

Advertisements accepted subject to modification 29

Complaints received 162

Number of advertisements to which complaints relate 44

Number within the ambit of the code 49

Turnarounds

Business days taken to deal with complaints 8

Business days taken to deal with complaints subject to an ABAC determination 19.8

2009 >>>

The ABAC Scheme was incorporated and a corporate governance framework established to ensure best practice. Administrative services were centralised and expanded and the appointment of an executive officer led to improved timelines for complaint resolution.

The scheme was expanded again to include the naming and packaging of alcohol beverages.

2009 in numbers

Prevettted advertisement 1369

Advertisements rejected 238

Advertisements accepted subject to modification 85

Complaints received 117

Number of advertisements to which complaints relate 42

Number within the ambit of the code 47

Turnarounds

Business days taken to deal with complaints 10

Business days taken to deal with complaints subject to an ABAC determination 22.5

2010 >>>

The code was amended to reflect current NHMRC alcohol guidelines and its scope was expanded to cover producer-generated point-of-sale material.

The OMA, Free TV Australia and the Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association (ASTRA) formally supported the Alcohol Advertising Pre-Vetting Service by announcing they will not place advertisements that have not been pre-vetted by the service. The Publishers' Advertising Advisory Bureau (PAAB) and Commercial Radio Australia also amended their requirements in support of the service.

The panel responded to emerging social media by finding on two occasions that a facebook fan site was covered by the ABAC.

Provision was made for the appointment of an independent chair to the ABAC Management Committee and an additional alternate health sector panellist with expertise in the impact of marketing on public health to the adjudication panel.

ABAC procedures and operations were reviewed, updated and documented. The Alcohol Advertising Pre-Vetting Service was substantially reformed, with the centralised allocation and recording of applications and approvals, introduction of performance reviews for pre-vetters and the codification of expectations of pre-vetters.

2010 in numbers

Prevettted advertisement 1050

Advertisements rejected 77

Advertisements accepted subject to modification 44

Complaints received 87

Number of advertisements to which complaints relate 38

Number within the ambit of the code 31

Turnarounds

Business days taken to deal with complaints 13.8

Business days taken to deal with complaints subject to an ABAC determination 26.5

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Alcohol Advertising Pre-vetting Service enquiries by advertisers should be directed to the Alcohol Advertising Pre-vetting Service duty pre-vetter.

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