

Commercial television code for reality programming to be reviewed

ACMA will investigate whether the *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice* provides appropriate community safeguards for reality television programming in the free-to-air commercial television sector of the broadcasting industry.

The Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator Helen Coonan, directed ACMA to conduct this investigation after receiving ACMA's advice about an alleged incidence of sexual harassment in the *Big Brother* house, which was streamed live on the *Big Brother* website on 1 July 2006. The Minister also directed ACMA to make its final report and recommendations by 1 April 2007.

Big Brother is a reality television series broadcast by Network Ten in which participants share a house for approximately three months, with their behaviour and interactions captured by cameras twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Viewers vote weekly to decide who will leave the house, from nominations by the participants, and the last person remaining wins a cash prize.

Big Brother consists of a suite of programs broadcast in various classification zones, using different portions of the footage available. As well as television content, *Big Brother* comprises other elements including a website (through which material is streamed live from the *Big Brother* house) and content delivered via mobile phones. The *Big Brother* series is broadcast 'annually' and the 2006 series was its sixth season.

ACMA will publish a discussion paper in December 2006, inviting public submissions on issues arising from its review, with a closing date no later than 1 February 2007. ACMA is also undertaking quantitative and qualitative research into community concerns about reality television programming, and is liaising directly with industry stakeholders.

The *Broadcasting Services (Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice) Direction No. 1 of 2006* was registered in June 2004. It instructs ACMA to investigate whether the code is operating to provide appropriate community safeguards for reality television programming in commercial free-to-air television. The investigation is to include whether:

- the code provides appropriate methods of classifying reality television programs
- the code provides an appropriate mechanism for ensuring that classified matter or matter which if classified would be classified at M or above is not shown at inappropriate times having regard to the likely audience
- the complaints mechanism in the code is operating effectively and in

- a timely matter in relation to reality television programming
- the code reflects community standards, taking into account the views of the community and commercial broadcasting licensees
- there is a basis for ACMA to be satisfied that the code is not operating to provide appropriate community safeguards for a matter referred to in subsection 123(2) and
- further action by ACMA or any other person is necessary.

The code specifies that all material for broadcast, other than news, current affairs and sport, should be classified. It sets out classification criteria, from G to MA, and time zones for each classification criteria throughout the viewing day.

The code is on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to Radio & TV > Content regulation > Television > Codes & Standards > Commercial television).

Availability of communications services in Australia improves

Competition, new technology and new infrastructure deployments are helping to improve the availability of communications services across Australia, according to an ACMA report.

The report, *Communications Services Availability in Australia 2005-06*, discusses the availability of internet services, voice services, broadcast services and consumer demand for content and applications. The key findings of the report include:

- more internet service providers (ISPs) deploying ADSL networks, with 19 now actively deploying their own DSLAM infrastructure
- increased availability of ADSL2+ services, which offer significantly higher data rates—now available in more than 50 per cent of capital city exchanges
- emergence of broadband wholesalers other than Telstra
- all four mobile network operators

now providing 3G services in Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Gold Coast, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney, with Telstra's 3G coverage also extending to rural and regional areas and

- Increased competition in the fixed voice market, with 118 residential VoIP service providers operating in the market, up from just 14 providers in 2004-05.

This is the second report on the availability of infrastructure and services to be released by ACMA. The first report, *Telecommunications Services Availability in Australia 2004-05*, examined the increase in the availability of communications infrastructure and services since the Regional Telecommunications Inquiry reported to the Australian Government in late 2002.

ACMA's ongoing collection and analysis of data on the availability of services and infrastructure across

Australia will be used to provide information to the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee to be convened in 2008. The committee will review the adequacy of telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Australia.

By using publicly available information and data already collected for other regulatory purposes, ACMA avoided the need to impose additional reporting burdens on the industry.

ACMA is currently working with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to produce a joint report on the availability of communications

infrastructure, which will merge the ACMA report with the ACCC's *Telecommunications Infrastructure in Australia* report. The first merged report is expected to be released in the first half of 2007.

The *Communications Services Availability in Australia 2005-06* report is on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to Consumer > Telecommunications Services Availability).

