

## Receipt of complaints

The Advertising Standards Board (Board) will normally only accept written complaints – by post or facsimile or via the online complaints form on the Advertising Standards Bureau (ASB) website.

All complaints received are promptly assessed as to their appropriateness for submission to the Board for determination. As the Board secretariat, the ASB replies to all complainants informing them of the status of their complaint.

If the information provided in the letter of complaint is insufficient (in particular, if it fails to adequately identify the advertiser or marketer, product or nature of complaint) then more information is sought from the complainant.

Complaints are not forwarded to the Board if:

- The commercial communication complained about has been previously considered – however all complaints are referred to the advertiser or marketer for its consideration.
- The commercial communication complained about does not constitute an Advertising or Marketing Communication for the purposes of one of the codes ASB administers being section 2 of the AANA Code of Ethics, the AANA Food & Beverages Advertising & Marketing Communications Code, the AANA Code for Advertising & Marketing Communications to Children or the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries' Voluntary Code of Practice for Motor Vehicle Advertising (Codes).
- The complaint would involve determining questions of law or questions of truth and accuracy (other than as provided for under clause 2.2 of the AANA Code for Advertising & Marketing Communications to Children and under clauses 2.1, 2.4 and 3.1 of the AANA Food & Beverages Advertising & Marketing Communications Code).
- The complaint involves trivial issues.
- The complaint involves public advocacy issues.
- The commercial communication complained about is local advertising.
- The commercial communication complained about is the subject of litigation or an order by a court or government agency.
- The complaint is about unlawful business practices.
- The commercial communication complained about has been withdrawn or discontinued before challenge.
- The complaint is about highly technical issues.
- The complaint is about label directions or basic performance of products and services not related to advertising or marketing claims.
- The complaint involves issues covered by specific industry codes, such as:
  - slimming/weight management products and services;
  - therapeutic goods;
  - alcoholic beverages; except in the case of motor vehicles.

An anonymous complaint is not sufficient to initiate a formal complaint. It can however be included as part of a complaint that has already been raised or is subsequently raised. To facilitate this, anonymous complaints are kept on file.

## Initiating complaints

A single written complaint is sufficient to initiate a formal complaint.

## Advising Advertiser/Marketer of complaints

Once a complaint has been accepted by the ASB, the advertiser/marketer is notified about the complaint, provided with a copy of the complaint and is requested to provide a written response and copies of the relevant advertising or marketing communication within sufficient time to allow the complaint to be dealt with at the next meeting of the Board.

If an advertiser/marketer fails to provide a response to the complaint within the specified period or any extension of it, the Board may consider the complaint and the advertising or marketing communication in question without the advertiser/marketer response.

## Complaint resolution

The Board meets twice a month to consider complaints received. The Board also meets between meetings, usually by teleconference, if the Secretariat considers that a matter should be considered as a matter of urgency.

The position of Chair is rotated among Board members on a meeting by meeting basis. The Chair for each meeting during a year is generally determined at the beginning of each year but can be varied to accommodate changes in individual schedules.

Board members must disclose any personal interest in a matter that is the subject of a complaint. The member concerned must withdraw from contributing to the debate and decision or case report approval in relation to those complaints.

If a Board member's duties to another board or organisation require that they breach their duty of loyalty or confidentiality to the Board for a period of time, then the member must disclose this position to the Board.

A general conflict with the Board would require that the member withdraw from their duties to the Board during the period that the conflict continues.

The Board reaches its decision by way of simple majority. In the event of a tied vote, the Chair has a casting vote.

In relation to individual complaints, Board members will consider:

- the complaint(s) received;
- all relevant advertising/marketing communications submitted by the advertiser/marketer;
- the advertiser/marketer's response (if any);



- all relevant provisions of the Codes; and
- any other relevant supporting materials or other representations or submissions.

The Board considers complaints in light of all of the Codes and accordingly may apply any part of those Codes in reaching a determination. The Board is not limited, in its considerations, to issues raised by the complaint.

If the Board is unable to reach a decision until it is in possession of additional information, it can defer its determination until a future date.

### Decisions the Board can make

#### *Determination – complaint upheld*

A complaint is upheld if the Board determines there is a breach of one of the Codes.

#### *Determination – complaint dismissed*

A complaint is dismissed if the Board determines there is no breach of any of the Codes.

#### **Notifying advertisers/marketers and complainants of the Outcome of the Board's decision**

Following the Board's determination, a draft case report is promptly prepared by the ASB and submitted to the Chair for approval. Following receipt of Chair approval, the ASB notifies the advertiser/marketer of the outcome and sends the advertiser/marketer a copy of the draft case report. This usually occurs between 8 and 10 business days of the Board decision. The advertiser/marketer is requested to advise the Board whether it agrees to modify or discontinue the advertising or marketing communication (**Advertiser Statement**) within 5 business days of the covering letter advising of the outcome and enclosing the draft case report. The advertiser/marketer is also advised of the opportunity to include an Advertiser's Statement in the case report.

If an advertising or marketing communication is found to breach a provision of the Codes and the advertiser/marketer does not respond to the opportunity to modify or discontinue the advertising or marketing communication within the allowed time frame, the Board will:

- If appropriate, refer the case report to the appropriate government agency;
- Include the advertiser/marketer's failure to respond in the case report;
- Forward the case report to media proprietors; and
- Post the case report on the ASB's website.

### Publish case report

Within 10 business days of the Board's decision, all finalised case reports are made publicly available.

### Review

If a complaint is upheld, the advertiser/marketer can ask for a review of the Board's decision. If a complaint is dismissed, the original complainant can ask for a review of the Board's decision. There are 3 grounds on which a request for review may be made:

- Where new or additional relevant evidence which could have a significant bearing on the decision becomes available;
- Where there is a substantial flaw in the Board's decision; or
- Where there was a substantial flaw in the process by which the decision was made.

Any request for review should contain a full statement of the grounds, be addressed to the Independent Reviewer of ASB decisions c/o the ASB and be sent within 10 business days of the date of the ASB's letter of notification of a decision. The non-refundable cost of a review is \$500 for complainants, \$1000 for complainants who are Incorporated Associations and \$2000 for advertisers/marketers.

Requests for review will be considered by the Independent Reviewer. If the Independent Reviewer accepts the request for review, the Independent Reviewer will invite further comments on the review from the party who did not request the review.

Unless exceptional circumstances apply, within 10 business days of receipt of the request, the Independent Reviewer will make a recommendation (including reasons for the decision/recommendation and copies of any material relevant to the recommendation) to the Board, stating whether the decision should be reviewed, amended or confirmed. This recommendation will remain confidential until the Board's decision is published.

The Board must consider, but is not obliged to accept the Independent Reviewer's recommendation. Following reconsideration by the Board, a new case report will be prepared. The Board's decision in the new case report is final and not capable of further review.