

17 February 2011

The Secretary of the Committee
House Standing Committee on Social Policy
and Legal Affairs
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
(Sent via email: spla.reps@aph.gov.au)

Dear Committee

Please accept this submission to the Inquiry into the regulation of billboard and outdoor advertising.

I am concerned about the content of billboard and outdoor advertising, particularly the increase in sexualised images and wording, and ask that the Committee consider taking appropriate action to curb this trend.

With advances in technology in recent years it is now possible to place photographic images onto almost any surface. In my local area (north Queensland) there has been a marked increase in the occurrence of sexualised and suggestive advertising particularly appearing on local buses. As an example, there was recently an advertisement for an irrigation company featuring a photo of a young woman in a bathing suit standing in the ocean with the accompanying wording: 'Guaranteed to get wet'. Another was an advertisement for a lingerie store, which covered the whole back of a bus, and featured a larger than life female model in sexualised clothing and pose.

If material of this kind appeared in a workplace it would be considered sexual harassment. However, when driving a car behind such a bus, or walking or doing any activity in public we are not given any choice about being exposed to this material. Ordinary people, particularly children, are increasingly being exposed to sexualised material; they should be able to do something as simple and necessary as using public transport without being confronted by such images. Exposure to this material has been shown to negatively affect attitudes to women in general; it infringes basic human rights and makes equality between men and women impossible. By displaying sexualised images of women in public spaces companies are confirming that such attitudes toward women are acceptable.

This kind of material seems to be appearing much more frequently than ever before and ordinary citizens should not have to be constantly monitoring advertisements and writing letters of complaint every time advertisers decide to push the envelope. I am suggesting that the current system of self-regulation is clearly not adequate and additional measures are urgently required.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards

Maree Hawken