

## COMMITTEES

### Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee

#### Statement

**Mrs MOYLAN** (Pearce) (10.11 am)—On 14 December 2010 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs resolved to conduct an inquiry into the regulation of billboard and outdoor advertising. Earlier this year the committee resolved to widen the scope of this inquiry to consider not just billboards and large outdoor signage but all types of advertising that can be viewed from public spaces and to which the public cannot control their exposure. This includes advertising in train stations and bus shelters, on and in buses and taxis, in shopfronts and windows and even on blimps. Advertising is currently self-regulated by the advertising industry. The committee has held private and public meetings with the Advertising Standards Bureau to examine its self-regulatory system. The committee has also met with the national Classification Board and the Australian Consumer and Competition Commission for a comparison of regulatory bodies that fulfil a similar oversighting role in protecting the public from such advertising.

The committee is holding public hearings in Canberra on Thursday, in Sydney on Friday and in Melbourne on 4 April. Witnesses at the hearings will discuss the efficacy of the current self-regulatory system, the process of making complaints, the impact of sexualised images on children, the role of alcohol advertising in underage and unhealthy alcohol consumption and the domination of public space by images that objectify and degrade women. A common observation is that some images in advertising would be considered a form of sexual harassment if they were displayed in the workplace, yet they are perfectly legal in public spaces.

To date, the committee has received 44 submissions to the inquiry. Many submissions reflect the level of community concern about images in the public arena that are detrimental to children or reinforce negative stereotypes. Some submitters have suggested that the application of prevailing community standards is not the most appropriate for outdoor advertising due to that kind of advertising's unavoidable nature. The concern about some of this material is that people simply have no choice as to whether they view it or not. The material is not always in places that you would expect it to be. There have been reports of this material sometimes being near schools and other places where young people congregate. There is no opportunity to switch the off switch for many people who do not wish to view this material. Children are confronted by larger-than-life images in public places—as I said, sometimes in those places that are unavoidable for large numbers of young people.

I know that many people in the community welcome this inquiry, and they will be interested to see whether there is scope, when advertising is found to be offensive, to improve the response time to remove the offending material—which clearly, in many cases, breaches the advertising standards. I would like to acknowledge the excellent work of members of this committee, particularly the member for Moreton, who is the chair of the committee, for bringing this inquiry to the House. I am sure that, as I said, many people in the community will welcome the opportunity to present before the committee.