

Submission to the Inquiry into the effectiveness of the broadcasting codes of practice

Australia is a free and democratic society. As a nation we cherish the ideals of free speech. However, I would contend that all healthy societies recognise that freedom comes with responsibility.

1) Television Networks Have A Social Responsibility. Free to air television provides a medium for a large variety of content to be broadcast, as it should. However, the argument that the only real censorship should be the censorship of the viewer, conveniently abdicates any social responsibility of the broadcaster. It ignores that at any one time that there are a wide variety of viewers some who are not of an age as to be able to discern for themselves what is of benefit or detriment to them. The networks would argue that it is parents responsibility to monitor what their children watch. While there is truth in this, it does not absolve the media companies of all responsibility. Not all parents do adequately monitor their children's viewing, some are unable to because of other responsibilities like shift work for example. Media companies are licensed by the government to have the great privilege of broadcasting to the whole of Australian society. They pay for the privilege but because of their licence have the capacity to raise considerable amounts of revenue and influence millions of Australians through the content of their programming. Surely this must come with considerable social responsibility. Very few free to air license are issued, surely it is reasonable for democratic elected government to insist they are used responsibly.

2) Television Influences Social Standards. Others may argue that television simply reflects current social standards rather than influences it. I would argue that television reinforces patterns of behaviour and is more influential on social standards than some would have us believe. Ramsay's Kitchen nightmares is a case in point. What is a socially acceptable way to speak to people? If Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares are a reflection of what is broadly socially acceptable then belittling others and constant bad language are the norm. The problem is magnified by the fact that in that show Ramsay is the hero. He is portrayed as the White Knight, sophisticate and knowledgeable ready to save the day for the poor ignorant restaurant owner. In our state primary Schools such behaviour would be seen as bullying and totally unacceptable and yet this show is permitted to be shown at a time when many primary school children might be watching. While the language Ramsay uses is not unusual in our society, few would encourage it and most would view Mr Ramsay's use of it as excessive. I am not suggesting that this one show will change Australian social standards. What I am suggesting is that it and shows like it do have an influence particularly on our children.

For centuries people have recognised that story telling is a powerful way of influencing others. Most television programming is about stories. Be it the story of a crime solved or a restaurant saved, both the story and the way it is told influence people, we deny this at our peril.

3) It Is Appropriate For Government to Provide Boundaries for Media. Surely it is no great attack on our freedom for there to be limits as to when some shows are broadcast. Whatever my personal convictions about foul language and smut on

television are, I am not here suggesting that such shows should be band completely. Surly it is just responsible for the government to insist that there be limits on program content that includes foul language and smut during times like 8.30pm when many families may wish to watch television together or when children may be watching alone. Surely later timeslots after 9.30pm provide a more responsible time for such shows.

Given most media companies are primarily concerned about their ratings and profits, such decisions cannot be left to them alone to decide. Social responsibility must transcends what is convenient or profitable for a media company. It is appropriate for democratic elected government to set and enforce boundaries such when some program content can be shown and I urge the committee to do so.

Rev Jamie Long