



**AUSTRALIAN  
PRESS  
COUNCIL**

# **SUBMISSION**

17 April 2008

Suite 10.02, 117 York Street, Sydney NSW 2000  
Phone: (02) 9261 1930 Fax: (02) 9267 6826

Internet: <http://www.presscouncil.org.au/>  
Email: [info@presscouncil.org.au](mailto:info@presscouncil.org.au)

**Australian Press Council**  
**Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on**  
**Environment, Communications and the Arts:**  
**Inquiry into the Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary**  
**Media Environment**

**Executive Summary**

- Images of children which appear in print publications are regulated by the Classification Act and Regulations
- Australia's print media represents children in a responsible manner
- Advertising which includes images of children or which is directed to children is subject to regulation by the Advertising Standards Board and publishers are required to distinguish between advertising and editorial content.
- Images and editorial content in print publications are subject to the Press Council's principles and guidelines.
- It is preferable to address the issue of the sexualization of children by way of self-regulatory mechanisms rather than to impose censorship restrictions which have the potential to result in unintended restrictions on freedom of the press.

## Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts — Inquiry into the Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary Media Environment

The Australian Press Council is grateful for being provided with an opportunity to contribute to the Senate's inquiry into the sexualization of children. The role of the Press Council, in addition to promoting freedom of the press, is to ensure that the Australian press acts responsibly and ethically and adheres to the highest journalistic and editorial standards. The Press Council advances these aims, in part, by considering and adjudicating upon complaints from readers with respect to material published in newspapers and magazines, including material which is published via the Internet.

The Press Council is conscious of the role of the media in contributing to the psychological development of children in Australia. With this role in mind, the Council appreciates that parents, teachers and others concerned with the welfare of children are apprehensive about the manner in which children are represented in the mass media and are equally concerned about the marketing to children of inappropriate merchandise and the communication of inappropriate cultural messages to children.

While the Press Council is mindful of the potential impact of the media on children, the Council believes that no further regulation of the media would be appropriate or necessary in order to protect children from sexualization. The content of Australian media is already subject to both regulatory and self-regulatory mechanisms. These mechanisms include *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act*, the *Broadcasting Services Act*, and various codes and standards, some of which are administered by government, others being administered by industry bodies or professional organizations.

The Press Council is of the view that self-regulation by way of industry and professional codes of conduct is superior to government regulation and censorship as a means of ensuring that the high standard of media content is maintained. Excessive government control of media content has the potential to result in unintended restriction upon the publication of material which it would be appropriate to publish. Self-regulation provides a mechanism for maintaining the standards for content without excessively impeding media freedom.

Editorial content which appears in Australia's print publications is subject to the Press Council's principles and guidelines.<sup>1</sup> Content which inappropriately sexualises children would be in breach of those principles. In particular, principles number three and number six, as follows:

3. Readers of publications are entitled to have news and comment presented to them honestly and fairly, and *with respect for the privacy and sensibilities of individuals*. However, the right to privacy should not prevent publication of matters of public record or obvious or significant public interest. Rumour and

---

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.presscouncil.org.au/pcsite/complaints/sop.html> to view the full set of Australian Press Council principles.

unconfirmed reports, if published at all, should be identified as such.

6. Publications have a wide discretion in publishing material, but they *should have regard for the sensibilities of their readers, particularly when the material, such as photographs, could reasonably be expected to cause offence*. Public interest should be the criterion and, on occasion, explained editorially.

The Press Council is of the view that newspapers and magazines in Australia, in the vast majority of instances, deal responsibly with material relating to children. This is evidenced by the fact that the Press Council has never been called upon to issue an adjudication concerning the sexualization of children. The responsible attitude of Australia's magazine publishers is illustrated by the recent comments of Jackie Frank, the editor of *Marie Claire*, who criticised the selection of a fourteen year old girl to represent Australian Fashion Week, and further stated that she refuses to hire models under the age of sixteen.

In recent years, individuals and organizations interested in the welfare of children have raised concerns about the tendency of media content to sexualise children. However, many of the concerns expressed by organizations such as the Australia Institute focus on advertising and marketing directed toward children as consumers, rather than editorial content. Advertising which appears in print publications is subject to regulation by the Advertising Standards Bureau. Where such advertising involves the inappropriate sexualization of children this should be addressed by way of complaint to the ASB. If the codes of conduct administered by the ASB do not make adequate provision for complaints concerning sexualised images of children or marketing to children which relies on sexualization, it is appropriate that the ASB revise those codes.

One of the comments made by the Australia Institute in its report on the sexualization of children is that material in children's magazines which is involved in marketing inappropriate material to children often fails to distinguish between advertising and editorial content.<sup>2</sup> With regard this concern, it should be noted that the Press Council has issued a guideline which requires publishers to indicate to readers where material is sponsored content:

Guideline 266

'Advertorials' should be identified by such terms as "advertisement", "advertising feature", "special feature", "sponsored feature" and the like so that readers are not led to believe that their content is based on editorial news values free of commercial influences.

The Press Council's believes that its existing standards and guidelines make adequate provision for the issue of the sexualization of children. Consequently, the Council encourages the committee to refrain from recommending further media regulation as a means of addressing this issue.

---

<sup>2</sup> Emma Rush and Andrea La Nauze, *Corporate Paedophilia – Sexualisation of Children in Australia*, The Australia Institute, 2006, p. 23.