

PAY TV - SUBMISSIONS INVITED

The ABA has begun an investigation into which events of national importance or cultural significance should continue to be available on free-to-air television.

'This investigation will ask the community, broadcasters and major cultural and sporting bodies to identify which events they believe should be available on free-to-air television and not siphoned off to appear only on pay TV,' said Brian Johns, ABA Chairman.

The Minister for Communications and the Arts has directed the ABA to conduct the investigation and to report to him on 26 April 1994. The report will provide options for the Minister's consideration before he finalises a list of

events the rights to which should, in the first instance, be available to free-to-air television services.

The ABA will seek views from the community and the broadcasting industry about events of national importance or cultural significance that have usually been televised by commercial or national television broadcasters. Such events include major sporting events.

The ABA is inviting written submissions from national sporting bodies, sports journalists and commentators, cultural bodies, commercial television stations, the ABC and SBS, pay TV licensees, the Returned Services League,

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DROP IN COMPLAINTS ABOUT COMMERCIAL TELEVISION

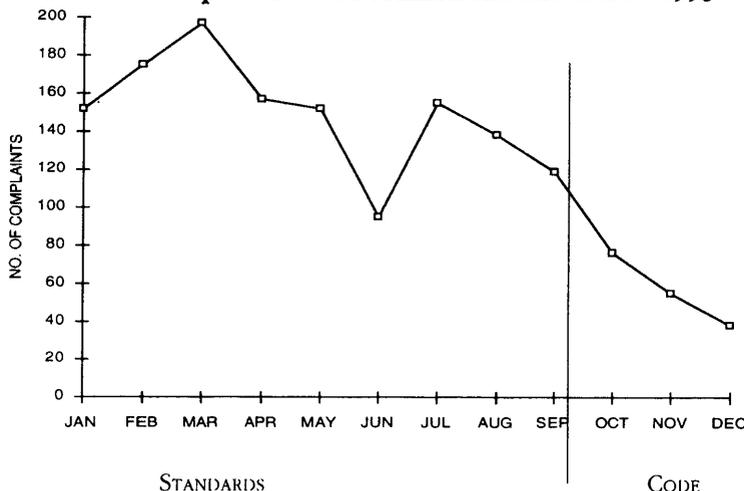
Complaints to the ABA about commercial television dropped in 1993.

In the four months after the introduction of the industry code of practice in September 1993, the ABA

received 288 complaints and comments about television programs, compared with 1221 for the eight months to August 1993.

In 1992, 667 complaints were received about commercial television for

Chart 1: Complaints about commercial television - 1993



This Month:

- 2 Pay tv licence A
- 2 Low power information services
- 3 Q&A - Open narrowcasting television
- 10 Print media inquiry
- 12 Innovations - MPEG
- 15 Conference Report - Cultural Identity and Broadcasting
- 18 International perspective
- 20 Planning meetings
- 23 New in the library
- 24 Letter to the editor
- 24 Cable television services
- 24 State offices close
- 25 Commercial radio advertising revenue

the three months ending 31 December. Total complaints received in 1992 were 4614.

With the introduction of the code of practice, stations became responsible for resolving complaints. Between September and December 1993, the ABA was asked to investigate only three complaints which had not been resolved by the stations (see p.6).

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COMMERCIAL RADIO ADVERTISING REVENUE SHOWS STRONG GROWTH - P. 24

COMPLAINTS

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'The significant drop in the number of complaints last year and the low number of unresolved complaints under the code is pleasing,' said ABA Chairman, Mr Brian Johns.

'We will continue to monitor the level of complaints to the ABA and to the industry and the way broadcasters respond to complaints, to help us assess how well codes of practice are working.'

Complaints about commercial television made up 80 per cent of a total of 1874 complaints and comments received by the ABA during 1993. Complaints about commercial radio comprised 14 per cent, ABC and SBS 4 per cent, and community radio, 2 per cent.

HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

Under codes of practice endorsed by the ABA last year, primary responsibility for resolving complaints about commercial radio and television programs rests with the broadcasters themselves. An industry code for commercial television was introduced in September and commercial radio codes commenced in May.

A viewer or listener who wishes to complain about television or radio must

first complain directly to the broadcaster. If the complainant hasn't received a reply within 60 days, or is unhappy with the response, they can complain to the ABA. The ABA will investigate and inform the complainant of the result.

Broadcasters report to the ABA about complaints they have received and how they have handled them. For the first eight months of the commercial radio code, the ABA investigated one unresolved complaint. Three unresolved complaints about commercial television came to the ABA for the period from September to the end of December 1993.

Complaints about program content on the national broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, should also be directed straight to those organisations. If a complainant has heard nothing within 60 days, or is not happy with the response, they can then complain to the ABA. One unresolved complaint about the ABC is being investigated by the ABA.

ABA RESPONSIBILITY

Under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*, the ABA is responsible for monitoring the operation of industry codes of practice, including the way broad-

casters respond to complaints from the public. Recording complaints and comments made to the ABA about radio and television is one way that the ABA receives feedback about the operation of codes of practice.

The ABA categorises the complaints it receives by subject matter. General taste and decency on television, with 337 complaints, generated the most complaints in 1993. This was followed by news and current affairs in G time with 168. In the latter category, the Michael Willesee interview with the children involved in the Cangai, NSW siege and their abductors was the chief incident complained about.

Program scheduling generated 154 complaints. The concentration of sports programs over weekends and the clash between Wimbledon and the Ashes in July irritating viewers.

Violence on television, with 144 complaints, continued to be a major concern, particularly in feature films such as *Silence of the Lambs*. Programs which were considered unsuitable for children (135) and the portrayal of sexual behaviour (126) also resulted in complaints as did sexism in commercials (95).

COMPLAINTS MADE to ABA in 1993

1993 ISSUES	STANDARDS		JANUARY - DECEMBER 1993	
	JAN - AUG	SEP - DEC	No. of Complaints	% of Complaints
Taste & Decency	263	74	337	22.33
Sexual Behaviour	84	42	126	8.35
Nudity	32	4	36	2.39
Violence	125	19	144	9.54
Language	27	4	31	2.05
Sexism	86	9	95	6.30
Racism	12	9	21	1.39
Discrimination - Other	21	19	40	2.65
Program Scheduling	130	24	154	10.21
Unsuitable for Kids	105	30	135	8.95
Sound Level of Ads	10	7	17	1.13
Misc. Television	58	19	77	5.10
Amount of Ads	41	5	46	3.05
News & C/Affairs	159	9	168	11.13
Misleading Ads	39	3	42	2.78
Sport, Not Live as Advert	2	0	2	0.13
Other	27	11	38	2.52
TOTALS	1221	288	1509	100.00

This table shows the total number of complaints about commercial television for 1993, before and after the introduction of the code on 5 September. The table also denotes the issues of concern to complainants.

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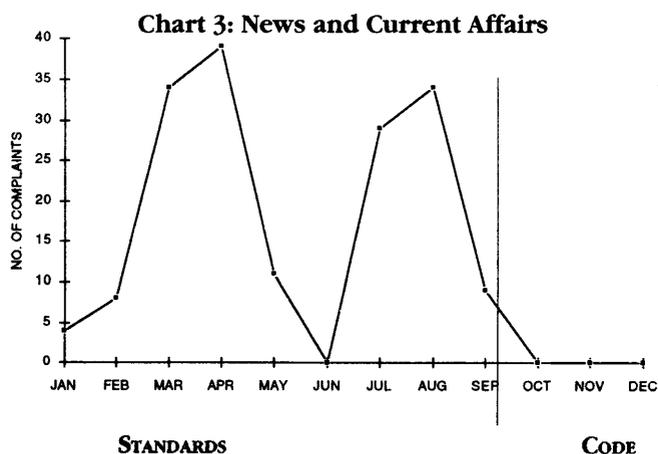
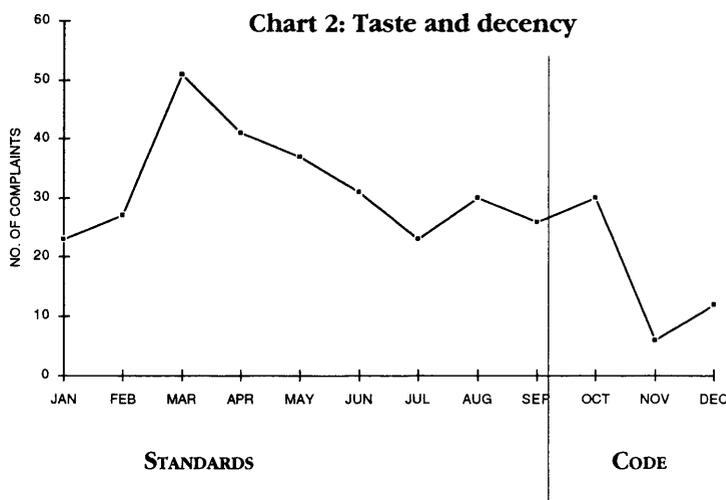
COMPLAINTS

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Complaints to the ABA about commercial television dropped further after the introduction of the industry code of practice (see Chart 1, page 1).

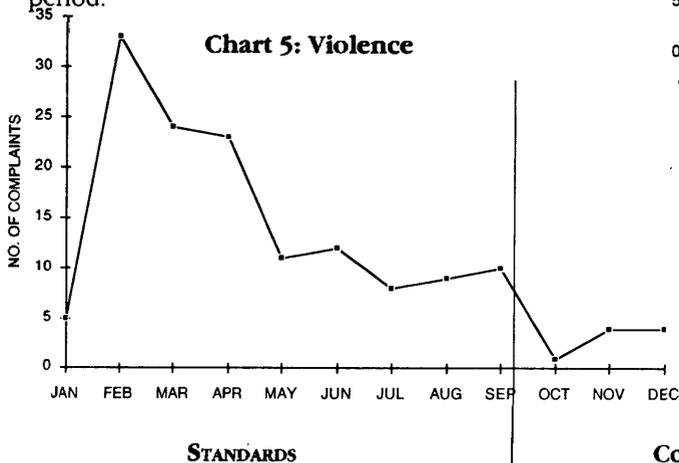
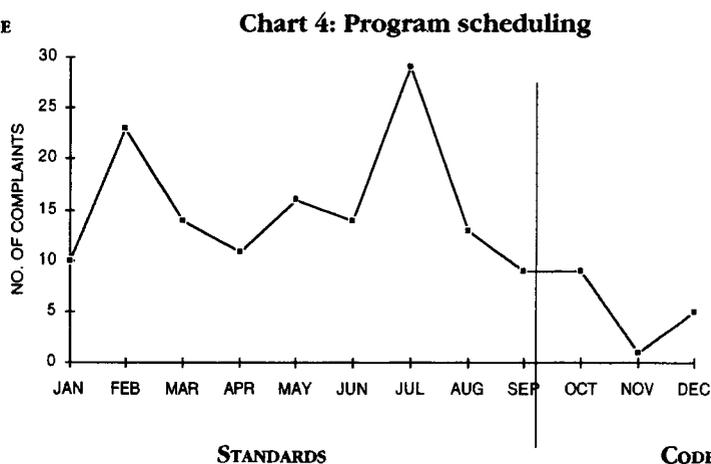
The drop in complaints appears due to several factors, including the fall in the number of controversial programs, advertisements and incidents towards the end of the year, the introduction of consumer advice within the commercial television code, and the change in the complaints procedure.

The taste and decency category covers a wide range of issues including concerns about references to God and the portrayal of prominent public figures or institutions such as the Prime Minister, the Queen and the national anthem or flag. The category also includes viewers concerns that television does not provide positive images of family life and society.

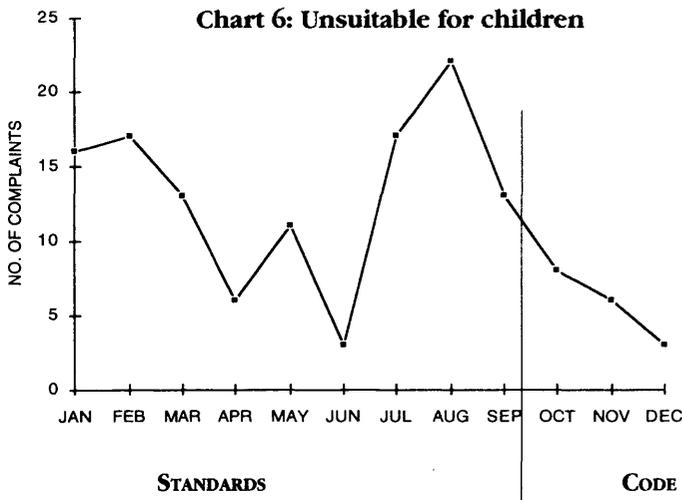


As noted earlier, the Willesee Cangi siege interview was the issue which generated most complaints to the ABA during 1993 and is reflected in Chart 3 as a peak issue for news and current affairs in the March/April period.

Programming scheduling complaints peaked in July, the result of the Nine network having to satisfy the conflicting demands of tennis and cricket fans in relation to its coverage of both Wimbledon and the Ashes series. Program scheduling complaints were also high in February due to the extensive programming of sporting events over the summer period.

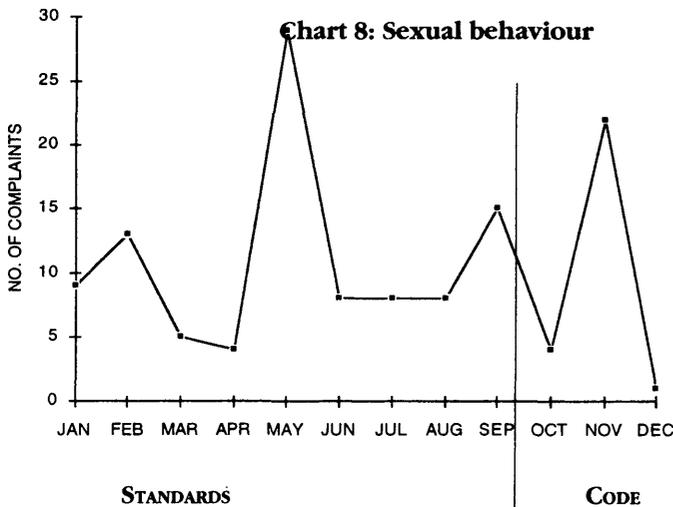
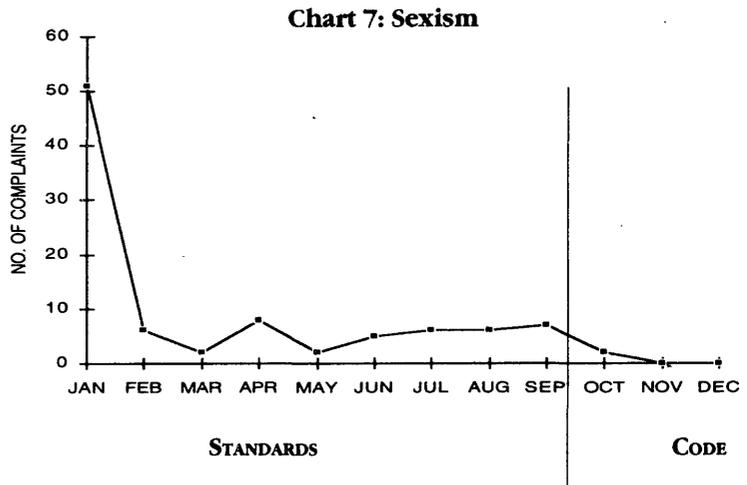


Complaints about violence, an issue of ongoing concern to viewers peaked in February. This is attributable to 17 complaints lodged about the violent undertones of the Liberal Party 'Gun Sight' election advertisement and the broadcast by the Seven network of the movie *Silence of the Lambs*.



In the July/August period most complaints received by the ABA were about material which was perceived to be unsuitable for children. The broadcast by the Ten network of the program 'Boys of St Vincent' resulted in four complaints. The program dealt with the sexual abuse of young boys. Complainants felt that the implied depictions of abuse was child pornography and did not believe that child actors should be used in such roles, regardless of the social good of exposing such abuse.

Complaints about sexism were highest in January when the ABA received 51 complaints about an advertisement for the womenswear retailer, Katies. The advertisement depicted empty offices and desks with a voice-over which said that women would be rushing to the Katies' post-Christmas sale and would therefore be absent from their place of employment. Complainants objected to the advertisement as they felt it portrayed women as irresponsible and superficial.



The substantial number of complaints received about the portrayal of sexual behaviour in May was due in large part to 19 complaints received about a segment on the Nine network's 'A Current Affair' program which included a story on sex in films. Complainants objected to the presentation of the 'sex' segments of films in an early evening timeslot. Such concern was also reflected later in the year when the Seven network broadcast a program on the male dance group 'Manpower' at 7.30 p.m. on a Sunday. Complainants expressed concern as the timeslot was one for 'family' viewing.