

ANPHA Advertising Report falls short

The National Preventative Health Agency reported back in late February on how alcohol advertising is regulated in Australia. Actually, that isn't what the report is about – it is about how effective the current regulation is at “addressing community concern”.

Originally, the then-Labor government asked for a report about how alcohol advertising was regulated. At some point, ANPHA changed the inquiry to be about addressing the community's concerns, which is far more nebulous a concept and a far higher bar for the industry to jump. The level of 'community concern' can be turned up or down according to the public health movement's agenda.

Unfortunately the report is somewhat one-sided in its treatment of the two sides. The industry's evidence in its defence of the current regulations are described as 'claims' and 'assertions'. Every other submitter is treated as honest and their evidence treated as such.

Also, there are several factual errors in the report about the Alcohol Beverage Advertising Code, how it operates and how it has changed or not over recent years. For instance, ANPHA's report believes that ABAC does not apply to internet advertisements. In fact it does and has done so for several years.

The big recommendation in the report is the ending of sports sponsorship. It doesn't call for that directly – just ending the ability to advertise alcohol during live sports on the weekends and public holidays, which amounts to the same thing.

Another recommendation is to apply to subscription TV the same rules that are on free-to-air TV, which ignores the fact that subscription TV has parental controls on which channels that can be viewed by children. At its core the report is alarmed that children could be 'exposed' to alcohol advertising. This must be stopped wherever possible.

Australian research into alcohol advocates' beliefs about advertising make it clear that advertising bans are not about protecting children – the bans about changing the way all Australians view alcohol. It is about stigmatising drinkers and drinking, and de-normalising alcohol – just like with tobacco.