vinetur

Australia’s TV regulator urges broadcasters to end sports carve-out for alcohol ads

The agency said daytime weekend sports expose children to marketing that would otherwise be prohibited on free-to-air television

Friday, November 13, 2026



Australia’s communications regulator on Thursday, November 12, urged the country’s free-to-air television industry to tighten its rules on alcohol advertising, including by ending an exemption that allows such ads during sports broadcasts at times when they would normally be barred.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority said it had completed a review that began in March to examine whether current rules give audiences, especially children, adequate protection from alcohol marketing on broadcast television. The regulator also said the Australian government should consider a broader overhaul of alcohol advertising rules across all media, arguing that the current system leaves gaps and inconsistencies between television, online services and other forms of promotion.

In its findings, the ACMA said community concern about alcohol advertising was lower than concern about gambling advertising, but still remained consistently high, particularly when it came to children’s exposure. The review said there is an established link between alcohol advertising, higher consumption and risky drinking, which can worsen alcohol-related harm.

At the same time, the regulator said submissions to the review showed disagreement over how much commercial television advertising contributes to wider social harm. The ACMA also noted that alcohol advertising on television is a relatively small but important source of revenue for broadcasters and is part of the business model for both the alcohol and sports industries.

ACMA Chair Nerida O’Loughlin said the regulator had concluded that changes should be targeted and proportionate, but that they were needed. The most immediate recommendation was directed at Free TV Australia, the industry body responsible for the commercial television code under the country’s co-regulatory system.

The ACMA said Free TV Australia should remove the current exemptions that permit alcohol advertising during sports broadcasts in time periods when such ads would otherwise be prohibited under classification rules. The regulator said daytime weekend sporting events draw large audiences, including many children, who are exposed to alcohol advertising because of those exemptions.

O’Loughlin said the carve-out for sports is unique to Australia and does not match the treatment of other restricted advertising categories, including gambling. The regulator said that, on balance, eliminating the exemption would better align television rules with community expectations about child protection.

The ACMA also called on Free TV Australia to apply the same code voluntarily to television programs delivered through broadcasters’ online services. It said viewers expect the same safeguards whether they watch a program through a traditional television signal or stream it online from a broadcaster.

That recommendation could matter well beyond traditional TV. If adopted, it could limit some advertising opportunities for beer, wine and spirits brands tied to sports coverage and could add pressure for broader changes in how those products are marketed through broadcasters’ digital platforms. A wider government review, if it moves ahead, could also bring renewed scrutiny to alcohol promotion on the internet and in other settings that now fall outside the current television code.

The ACMA said many concerns raised during the review extended far beyond free-to-air television. According to the regulator, respondents pointed to alcohol marketing online, at sporting venues, on team jerseys and through other channels that are outside the ACMA’s direct authority.

Because of that, the regulator said the Australian government should take a more comprehensive look at alcohol advertising regulation. The ACMA said such a review should examine potential gaps and inconsistencies across platforms rather than dealing with television in isolation.

That recommendation follows a recent call from the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Disability for the government to establish a new mandatory framework for alcohol advertising and marketing.

Under Australia’s current system, the ACMA cannot directly rewrite the commercial television code. Free TV Australia is responsible for drafting and updating it, subject to registration by the regulator. But the ACMA signaled that it could step in if the industry does not act. The regulator said that if Free TV Australia fails to submit a revised code

that provides appropriate community safeguards, the ACMA could move to determine a program standard.

The review drew 96 submissions through a public consultation process. The ACMA said it also consulted broadcasters, sports organizations, public health advocates, alcohol and advertising industry representatives, government bodies and overseas regulators.

The regulator’s report reflects a balancing act between public health concerns and commercial interests. While it acknowledged that television alcohol advertising makes up only a small share of total advertising, it said the issue carries particular weight because of the audience profile for live sports and the visibility of those broadcasts during daytime hours.

For alcohol producers and marketers, the review raises the prospect of a more restrictive environment in one of the sector’s most visible advertising settings. Sports broadcasts have long offered brands access to large audiences and strong association with major events. If the sports exemption is removed and online services are brought under the same code, advertisers may have to rethink parts of that strategy in Australia.

The ACMA said the full outcomes report is available on its website and thanked participants in the review for their submissions.