

Tribunal could ban television ads for alcohol

From DEIRDRE MACKEN

SYDNEY. — The Australian Broadcasting Tribunal is considering banning alcohol advertising on television as part of its review of alcohol advertising standards.

The tribunal yesterday released a discussion paper on the present standards, which highlighted a number of inconsistencies, including the fact that children are being exposed to alcohol advertising through sporting sponsorships.

Under present standards, alcohol commercials are not allowed in early morning or late afternoon programmes, or at other times when large numbers of children are thought to be viewing.

Despite these restrictions, children are being exposed to alcohol advertisements through company sponsorships of sports and particular programmes.

A survey has also shown that children aged five to 17 comprise about 20 per cent of the total audience until 8.30 p.m. — one hour after alcohol advertising is allowed.

The tribunal has called for public submissions on several proposals, including banning all alcohol advertising on television; allowing advertising only during "adults only" viewing times; allowing liquor commercials only during "adults only" and times rated "parental guidance"; and permitting only the industry's voluntary code to dictate standards.

A recent tribunal survey showed that 33 per cent believed

alcohol advertising should be banned on television. Forty five per cent said it should be restricted, and 17 per cent said liquor companies should be allowed to advertise on TV at any time.

A survey two years ago by the Australian Advertising Industry Council showed that 36 per cent believed alcohol advertising should be banned from 7.30 pm to midnight, compared with 63 per cent who said it should not.

The tribunal said that 10 per cent of the complaints it has received in the past year concerned alcohol, and more than half these complaints urged a total ban of alcohol advertising, while about 40 per cent called for the ban to be extended from 7.30 pm to 9.30 pm.

The tribunal's survey of children's viewing times showed that at 7 and 8 on week nights, children comprised 20 per cent of the total audience; at 9 pm this fell to 15 per cent, and at 10 pm it was 10 per cent.

On weekends, children comprise 45 per cent of the total audience at 7 pm; 40 per cent at 8 pm; 20 per cent at 9 pm and 12 per cent at 10 pm.

The proposal to ban liquor commercials completely, would be disputed by the Alcoholic Beverages Advertising Council which has previously argued that there is no evidence to suggest that banning such advertising would help reduce the road toll.

The council has also said that alcohol advertising promotes only brands, and does not encourage an increase in consumption or alcohol abuse.