

22 August 2016

The Coalition for Better Broadcasting welcomes the government's decision to extend responsibility for broadcasting content standards to online content. The move is long-overdue and will help resolve some of the regulatory loopholes between the Broadcasting and Telecommunication Acts. It is also important that content standards across platforms will be underpinned by statute in the final instance.

“Bringing Netflix, Lightbox and all the on-demand services into the same set of rules as the TV channels means they’ll be properly regulated by the BSA. The other option could’ve been a voluntary code which invariably would’ve lead to more wet bus tickets, cynical public and unaccountable distributors.” explained CBB Director, Myles Thomas. “We think Minister of Broadcasting and Telecommunications Amy Adams has got it right.”

“This decision means that anyone wanting to make a complaint about an online programme (such as on-demand adverts for beer appearing next to a youth show like Terry Teo!) can be sure it’ll be dealt with properly and that the distributors will give more than two hoots about the complaint.

The CBB notes that in other respects, however, the Digital Convergence Bill does nothing to address a more fundamental problem - the increasing propensity for market failure in a highly competitive digital media market and the increasing opportunity costs of commissioning and scheduling informative and educational content (such as in-depth current affairs) in prime time.

Even when NZ On Air funding is available, commercial channels are becoming increasingly reluctant to schedule any sort of content which does not maximise eyeballs (e.g. Mediaworks dropped the 3D programme even when public funding was available).

“On that point, we are disappointed in the decision to allow a dilution of the Sunday morning advertising restrictions - the government could extract a commitment to ensure other public interest content is commissioned and scheduled in prime time in return for such concessions. It will be interesting to see if the serious current affairs content, e.g. Q&A, The Hui, the Nation continues. Hopefully they will survive like the similar programmes on Saturday mornings. If they don’t it will leave New Zealand audiences without any substantive television current affairs.”

The CBB therefore reiterates its call for the government to unfreeze the funding for RNZ and NZonAir and to explore the options for re-establishing a non-commercial public television channel which can schedule important genres which have become commercially unattractive.