

Alcopop review written by 12-year-old named year's worst alcohol advertising

Alcohol industry self-regulation under fire as report reveals year's worst alcohol advertising, including Instagram accounts that are accessible by children

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A review of a two-litre cask of pineapple punch flavoured 'Vodka Cruiser' on the website of a major alcohol retailer apparently written by a 12-year-old - who described the drink as having a "gr8 flava" and as being good value for money - has been named the worst alcohol advertisement of 2014-15.

"Had a sip on my 12th birthday, went off my head," the review on the Dan Murphy's website, which has since been removed by the retailer, read.

The Alcohol Advertising Review Board (AARB) released its annual report on Monday at parliament house in Canberra, highlighting the most troubling of the 165 complaints it received in the past year, 92 of which were upheld in full.

Large alcohol advertisements on bus shelters located just outside of school gates; a social media promotion by Thirsty Camel bottle-shops advertising for a 'minister for thirst'; and the Instagram accounts of various alcohol brands which can be followed by children were also highlighted in the report.

Guardian Australia has contacted Dan Murphy's and Thirsty Camel for comment.

The AARB, run by health organisations, is chaired by paediatric epidemiologist Fiona Stanley and reviews complaints from the public based on the Alcohol Advertising Review Board.

It was established as an alternative to the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC), which is run by the Brewers Association of Australia and New Zealand, the Distilled Spirits Industry Council of Australia and the Winemakers Federation of Australia.

The ABAC voluntary system of self-regulation was ineffective, with many alcohol companies ignoring young people's exposure to alcohol advertising and ABAC unable to penalise companies in breach of the code, the AARB report said.

For the third successive year, AARB received more complaints about alcohol advertising than ABAC had, the report said. Guardian Australia has contacted ABAC for comment.

Launching the report, the CEO of the Public Health Association of Australia, Michael Moore, said alcohol companies defended self-regulation because they knew it did not work.

"Industry self-regulation didn't work for tobacco and it doesn't work for alcohol," Moore

said.

“It’s time to legislate so that there are controls that work.”

Governments must legislate to place restrictions on alcohol companies and their advertising to protect children in particular from alcohol-related harms, AARB found. Companies could not be compelled to adhere to codes of conduct and did not suffer consequences for breaches.

An independent national survey of 1,098 people conducted by AARB in July and commissioned by the McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth found 72% of Australians supported legal controls to reduce young people’s exposure to alcohol advertising. Only 10% opposed alcohol advertising being phased out of sport, while 76% agreed alcohol advertising should be limited on television to late-night programming.

A loophole in the current Free TV code meant alcohol advertisements could be broadcast during live sporting events on weekdays and public holidays, the report found, with up to 19% of the viewing audience for major sporting events in the past year under the age of 18.

Liberal backbencher Sharman Stone, Greens leader Richard Di Natale and Labor MP Melissa Parke endorsed the report at its launch on Thursday.

Stone criticised voluntary codes of conduct for the industry and called for tougher restrictions on advertising and labelling on products.

“Why are we still so captured by the alcohol industry?” she said.

“Advertising is not the only reason why people drink to excess - it’s about pricing and accessibility too.”

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