

MEDIA RELEASE

15 October 2008

FamilyVoice Australia

ACMA, *UNDERBELLY* and the TV CODE

“We are relieved to read in the media that the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has finally upheld some of our complaints about the misclassification of Channel 9’s *Underbelly* program – more than six months after we first lodged them,” said Mrs Roslyn Phillips, research officer for FamilyVoice Australia (formerly known as Festival of Light).

“There have been media reports that we only complained about sex and coarse language. These reports are wrong,” Mrs Phillips said. “We complained about gratuitous sex scenes, aggressive coarse language and excessive violence in several episodes of Underbelly. We also complained about explicit scenes of drug use and a graphic teen suicide. We said these episodes should be classified AV and broadcast at 9.30 pm. Sadly, ACMA appears to consider such violence compatible with an M classification (ACMA has not yet informed us about its decision).

“We did not say that *Underbelly* (based, with considerable ‘artistic licence’, on a true story) should be banned.

“We did say that Channel 9 has wrongly classified many episodes as M and broadcast them at 8.30 pm in order to attract the maximum possible viewing audience, even though many young teens are still watching TV at that time. ACMA has upheld some of our complaints in relation to gratuitous scenes of sex and aggressive coarse language.

“Parents and teachers have told us of the impact on students from programs like *Underbelly* and *Ramsay’s Kitchen Nightmares* – including students who have never watched them. When sexual aggression and foul language are normalised by programs broadcast in prime time, even those who “switch it off” suffer when others act out what they have seen and heard. Currently there is a disturbing increase in sexual abuse of children by other children throughout Australia, and teachers tell me the increase in students’ foul language is undermining school discipline and morale.

“No man is an island – TV broadcast into millions of homes has the potential to affect us all,” Mrs Phillips said. “We need a better watchdog with more teeth.”

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