



# Case Report

1	Case Number	0580/17
2	Advertiser	Fonterra Brands (Australia) Pty Ltd
3	Product	Food and Beverages
4	Type of Advertisement / media	TV - Free to air
5	Date of Determination	24/01/2018
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

## ISSUES RAISED

- 2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification Ethnicity
- 2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification Gender

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

The television advertisement features an Italian couple in a kitchen. The woman is using a stir-through sauce to make pasta. She comments how easy it is and the husband replies 'So what do I need you for?'. The wife points at him and states, 'don't you start'.

## THE COMPLAINT

A sample of comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

*The advertisement is blatantly sexist, implying that cooking is a woman's role and that if it is simple then a woman is useless. I find the mans comment "what do I need you for" disgusting. This advertisement is seen by children and reinforces outdated sexist stereotypes*

*Whilst I totally understand that it is considered to be humorous - with the husband saying something so appalling to the wife who then smiles - the fact is that it is totally degrading to women and to suggest that it is something for the woman to smile about which would of course only further encourage such humour is even more offensive. It made me feel sick.*

*The elderly man says "so, what do I need you for?"  
This statement is exploitive & degrading, purposefully debasing a woman's role as mother, grand mother, wife & her ability to feed her family.*

*The ad is sexist in nature in that it implies that women should be in the kitchen and cooking meals from scratch for their husband/men in general. In a society where many women work full time and are no longer home makers this ad can be considered offensive and a step in a backwards direction for equality.*

## **THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE**

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complainant/s regarding this advertisement include the following:

### *1. Description of advertisement*

*The advertisement is a 15 second television and internet advertisement featuring the use of Perfect Italiano stir-through ricotta cheese ("Ad").*

*The Ad opens with an elderly Italian Australian woman in an Italian style country cottage, using the stir through ricotta cheese. Her husband is watching her. The relevant lines are as follows:*

*Woman: See Perfect Italiano is so easy!*

*Husband: So what I need you for?*

*Woman: Don't you start!*

*Husband: [Laughs]*

*The advertisement is not directed at children.*

*The advertised product is not a product primarily directed to children. The advertised product is directed at adult decision makers who purchase cheese for the purpose of cooking.*

*Details of the media schedule and whether or not the advertisement is placed in programming that has a predominant child audience or is in a programme directed to children*

*The Ad claims that the product contains 80% less fat than cream. This is supported by evidence.*

- FSANZ Standard 1.2.7- Nutrition, Health and Related claims - permits comparison claims i.e. '% less fat' provided there is at least 25% less fat than the reference food as outlined in Schedule 4*
- As a reference food consistent with the definition provided in FSANZ Standard 1.2.7, pure cream (35% fat) contains 35.9g/100ml (NUTTAB 2010)*
- Each of the Perfect Italiano™ Ricotta Pasta Stir Through products contain at least 80% less fat than the reference product above:*
  - o Perfect Italiano™ Ricotta Pasta Stir Through Garlic & Herb contains 5.8g/100g which is equivalent to 83.8% less fat than pure cream*
  - o Perfect Italiano™ Ricotta Pasta Stir Through Sundried Tomato contains 5.8g/100g which is equivalent to 83.8% less fat than pure cream*
  - o Perfect Italiano™ Ricotta Pasta Stir Through Four Cheese contains 6.8g/100g which is equivalent to 81.1% less fat than pure cream*

*Complaints and responses*

*A. The Ad portrays discrimination or vilification on the basis of ethnicity - Italian*

*stereotype.*

*The advertiser does not agree that the Ad portrays Italians in an offensive way for the following reasons:*

*(a) The advertiser acknowledges and respects that contemporary Australia is a multi-cultural nation constituted of people from a variety of backgrounds and ethnicities. An Italian accent is not uncommon in mature age persons who may have emigrated from Italy, and is representative of diverse Australian culture. Suppressing a natural accent would be discriminatory and offensive.*

*(b) The couple who appear in the Ad are not professional actors. They are authentic Italian Australians and both speak in their natural accent. They have been married for 59 years.*

*(c) The lines were written by an Italian Australian who based his script on, among other things, his own cultural experience. This was necessary to ensure authenticity and in order for the script to resonate with the audience. The writer also visited the couple in their own home and based the script on their natural and normal interactions. The script was based on the couple's personality and natural dialogue.*

*(d) The script or portrayal does not depict Italians or Italian women in a derogatory manner. Instead, it is contended that the portrayal is one of an experienced, wise and commanding figure with great culinary knowledge and ability, presented in a humorous way. This is consistent with the script writer's experience of his own Italian heritage wherein the matriarch is responsible for handing down culinary tradition.*

*B. The Ad portrays discrimination or vilification on the basis of gender*

*The advertiser does not agree that the Ad portrays women in an offensive way.*

*The common objection in the complaints appears to be the line uttered by the husband character, "So what I need you for?"*

*The complaints allege that the line evinces the following:*

- Disrespect for women;*
- Degradation of women, made more offensive because it was accompanied by a smile;*
- Encourages humour which made one complainant "sick";*
- Exploits women;*
- Debases a woman's role as mother, grandmother, wife and her ability to feed her family; and*
- Implies women should cook for their husbands*

*With respect, the complainants appear to have read a great deal of sub-text in a single line in a 15 second advertisement, and is perhaps more indicative of unconscious bias than any substantive issue in the Ad.*

*Instead, a reasonable viewer under the same circumstances would conclude that:*

*(a) The couple is portrayed as a long married couple, with understanding of each other's humour and idiosyncrasies. Indeed, the couple are married in real life, and have been together for more than half a century.*

*(b) The husband's line was a direct response to his wife's statement that the use of the*

*cheese was so easy, such that even he could use it, without need for her usual wisdom and ability in cooking. This reinforces her role and does not undermine it;*

*(c) The woman responds by saying “don’t you start” as an admonishment to her husband, indicating that she and her husband have had similar light hearted discussions in the past and that she is an equal in their relationship. It is also notable that she silences him with this statement, since he responds with laughter. This indicates she is possibly more dominant and neither “exploited”, “debased”, “degraded” nor “disrespected” by her husband. She does not encourage such behaviour, but being reasonable, accepts the statement as humour from a loved one. As noted above, the script was based on the couple’s real life interactions;*

*(d) The woman is clearly a matriarchal figure. This is not consistent with the complaints in relation to degradation of women.*

*(e) The issue raised by one complainant that the Ad was offensive because it is not acceptable that “women should cook for their husbands” is itself offensive, since it suggests that on the basis of gender ideology, one partner should refuse to cook for another. There is no evidence or otherwise that the husband does not take his turn in the kitchen. Gender politics should not be read into a light hearted 15-second cheese commercial.*

*The Advertiser’s view is therefore that no reasonable segment of the public would or should find the Ad offensive in the ways alleged by the complainants.*

## **THE DETERMINATION**

The Advertising Standards Board (the “Board”) considered whether this advertisement breaches Section 2 of the AANA Code of Ethics (the “Code”).

The Board noted the complainant’s concerns that the advertisement is degrading to women and implies that a woman should be in the kitchen and cooking meals.

The Board reviewed the advertisement and noted the advertiser’s response.

The Board considered whether the advertisement complied with Section 2.1 of the Code which requires that 'advertisements shall not portray or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual preference, religion, disability, mental illness or political belief.'

The Board noted that this television advertisement features an older couple in the kitchen where the woman is preparing a pasta dish, stirring through the advertised product. The Board considered that this is a depiction of an Italian couple and noted the advertiser’s response that the actors are an authentic Italian Australian real life couple, who have been married for 59 years.

The Board noted the Practice Note to Section 2.1 of the Code which provides the following definitions:

“Discrimination – unfair or less favourable treatment

Vilification – humiliates, intimidates, incites hatred, contempt or ridicule”.

The Board noted that the focus in the advertisement is on the light-hearted interaction between the couple and that the focus on the couple as Italian is relevant to the product.

The Board considered that the interaction between the couple was stereotypical of banter between an Italian couple and in the Board’s view was light-hearted and not negative.

The Board considered that the woman’s reaction to the man’s suggestion of her not being needed was a strong reaction showing that she is control of the kitchen.

Overall the Board considered that the advertisement did not portray or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of nationality or gender.

The Board determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.1 of the Code.

Finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on other grounds, the Board dismissed the complaint.