



CASE REPORT

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| 1. Complaint reference number | 110/06 |
| 2. Advertiser | Meat & Livestock Australia Ltd (Evolution - Sam Neill) |
| 3. Product | Food & Beverages |
| 4. Type of advertisement | TV |
| 5. Nature of complaint | Discrimination or vilification Other – section 2.1
Discrimination or vilification Religion – section 2.1
Health and safety – section 2.6
Other - Portrayal of animals |
| 6. Date of determination | Tuesday, 11 April 2006 |
| 7. DETERMINATION | Dismissed |

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This television advertisement features actor Sam Neill sitting in a tree holding onto a branch, and relating “Over 2 million years ago our ancestors took a giant leap. They jumped out of the trees and started to eat red meat”. As he climbs down a ladder it is seen that the tree is only a few feet tall. Sam continues (David Attenborough-style) “The natural proteins helped our brain grow...hunting forced us to think...red meat was helping us come to be”. In a butcher store with several customers, we are told “We desired red meat for nutrients. Omega 3s, iron, zinc, and B12 provided us with vitality and well-being...and nothing’s changed.” Sam leaves the store and peers through a suburban home window observing a family at dinner, which features a close up of a boy eating a lamb chop, and continues “Lean red meat 3 – 4 times a week is still an essential part of the diet of the most highly developed species on the planet.” Sam turns to the camera and concludes “Red Meat. We were meant to eat it”. The butcher, the family, and Sam are seen to dance to “We love to Boogie”.

THE COMPLAINT

Comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

It implies that one has to eat red meat to be intelligent, have a balanced diet and be healthy... explain this to the countless healthy, vital, intelligent vegetarians of the world.

...people are being misled into following dietary guidelines that do not have a scientific basis.

I find this advert incredibly offensive on the grounds of religious discrimination...I resent an advert which portrays the evolution which is merely a theory, as a fact.

It implies that vegetarians are less civilised.

As a committed Christian I find this ad extremely offensive and degrading as well as an insult to our intelligence.

I find it offensive that this ad contradicts with what the Bible says.

This is offensive on religious, cultural and ethnic bases. There are many religions, sects, cultures, groups for whom eating red meat is neither acceptable nor allowable.

This ad suggests that you are not part of the “most highly developed species on the planet” or at least your brain cannot function properly without red meat 3 or 4 times a week.

This advice is contrary to the advice of the majority of nutritionists and food authorities within

Australia .

This commercial...fosters grossly inaccurate assumptions about the idea that meat is beneficial or even necessary.

This advertisement implies that non-meat eaters were not part of evolution i.e. they are below current civilised standards.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complaint/s regarding this advertisement included the following:

MLA takes great care in ensuring all of our campaign messages are based on sound scientific evidence. This particular campaign is based on such evidence from both anthropological and archaeological sources in relation to human development over the past 2 million years.

While we acknowledge that there are some in our community whose religious beliefs are not in accord with these scientific findings, it is worth noting that this communication is not about how we began, but about how humans have lived and developed over the last 2 million years.

With the plethora of health messages and dietary claims being made nowadays, it is important that the community does not lose sight of the importance of lean red meat as part of a healthy balanced diet.

THE DETERMINATION

The Advertising Standards Board ("Board") considered whether this advertisement breaches section 2 of the Advertiser Code of Ethics (the "Code").

The Board noted that some complaints stated that the advertisement was misleading and deceptive in its suggestion that it is essential to a person's health and development to eat red meat. The Board noted that it would not consider complaints about misleading or deceptive elements of the advertisement as this is a matter that comes within section 1 of the Code.

The Board considered other matters raised in the complaints.

The Board noted complaints that the advertisement discriminates against people on account of their religion (such religions or personal beliefs including a belief in the importance of vegetarianism) by suggesting that such people are unintelligent or not fully evolved. The Board noted that it has previously considered complaints that advertisements for meat discriminate against vegetarians.

The Board noted that some complaints suggested that the advertisement discriminates against people on account of their religion because the advertisement promotes a theory of evolution. The Board noted that the advertisement made no comments about 'creationism' nor did it disparage people who believe in creationism. The Board did not consider that the references to evolution were references that amounted to vilification of people of Christian religion nor did it disparage people or a section of the community because of their belief in Christianity.

The Board noted that the advertisement is for red meat and that the advertisement attributes brain development to the consumption of red meat. The advertisement does not specifically state that people who do not eat red meat are less intelligent nor does it specifically disparage people who do not consume meat. The Board considered that the community accepts vegetarianism as a legitimate choice for many members of the community, with an essential part of vegetarianism requiring people to eat foods that provide the full range of nutrients. The Board did not consider that the advertisement's claims that eating red meat contributes to brain development were discriminatory to vegetarians or vilified vegetarians.

The Board also considered whether the advertisement's encouragement to eat lean red meat 3-4 times a week was a matter that was in accord with community standards on health and safety, specifically healthy eating and nutrition. The Board considered that eating lean meat several times a week is considered a normal part of most people's diets. The Board did not consider that the advertisement depicted the consumption of meat in a manner that is contrary to prevailing community standards on health, specifically healthy eating and nutrition.

Further finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on any other grounds, the Board dismissed the complaint.