



CASE REPORT

1. Complaint reference number	188/08
2. Advertiser	Commonwealth Bank of Australia
3. Product	Finance/Investment
4. Type of advertisement	TV
5. Nature of complaint	Discrimination or vilification Nationality – section 2.1
6. Date of determination	Wednesday, 11 June 2008
7. DETERMINATION	Dismissed

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

The advertisement begins in a boardroom as an advertising agency pitches to their clients. Text on screen: Commonwealth Bank Financial Planning Presentation.
Ad Guy 1: So Commonwealth Bank will speak to you in easy-to-understand language about financial planning.
Pan out to see a TV screen featuring a map of Australia.
Ad Guy 2: So you can look forward to retiring....
Ad Guy 1: to . . .
Ad Guy 2: She-bang-a-bang
The TV screen pans from the map of Australia to show New Zealand - the island the ad guys are referring to as Shebangabang.
Ad Guy 1: This little island could be your Florida!
The clients look both bewildered and amused. The agency guys continue their pitch.
Ad Guy 2: Active retiree's can golf . . .
Again we pan to the TV screen to see a golfer surrounded by sheep.
Ad Guy 2: weight lift. . .
The clients are now looking at each other with less amusement.
Ad Guy 1: frolic on the beach . . .
We pan to the TV screen to see people on a beach, also surrounded by sheep.
Ad Guy 2: go dancing . . .
Image on screen is now of people ballroom dancing in a hall filled with sheep.
Client 1: (A bit horrified) Guy's, that's New Zealand.
Senior Ad Executive replies: Call it whatever you want!
Client 2: How about just saying we'll speak to you in easy to understand language about financial planning.
Text on screen: Simple, easy-to-understand financial planning.
Senior Ad Executive pushes on with the pitch: Show them the bungee jumping..
An exaggerated 'Baaaaa' is heard from the TV that is out of view.
Text on screen with Commonwealth Bank logo: 'Determined to be different' and finally 'Commbank.com.au/retirement'

THE COMPLAINT

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

Please this time I think the Commonwealth have gone over board. I am from New Zealand and I don't see the funny side of how they are portraying NZ in there latest ad. What if they had used a country like Iraq or some other small country, I'm sure that there would a greater reaction.

It is Offensive, and extremely Racist by depicting people from New Zealand as animals {Sheep}. This is not humor, it is highly offensive.

New Zealanders have ever right to live within Australia without having any racial taunts made by Banks or any other business.

This ad is culturally insensitive to those of us with a New Zealand heritage. It blatantly derides New Zealand by first showing ridiculous images intimating that every square inch of the country is occupied by sheep, it is then incorrectly labelling the country as some pathetic made up non-existent place before deriding the country as a place no-one would want to go to anyway. I find this add extremely offensive.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

The advertisement this complaint refers to is the latest spot in our new advertising campaign which features a fictional Advertising Agency who make ludicrous recommendations to a fictional Commonwealth Bank Marketing Team. The advertising concept is based on this fictional agency presenting absurd ideas to the fictional Marketing Team. The absurdity of these suggestions is intended to be humorous in nature.

The specific advertisement in question is for financial planning. It features the fictional American Advertising Agency in a boardroom with the fictional Commonwealth Bank Marketing Team. The fictional agency presents their suggestion for retiring to New Zealand, or "she-bang-a-bang", as they mistakenly call it. Use of the word "she-bang-a-bang" is intended to be comical as it demonstrates that the agency presenting the advertising idea has got it wrong again, and does not understand the Bank or the environment they are presenting to.

The complaint in question sits under section 2.1 of the Code of Ethics, which states that advertising must not portray people or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, age, sexual preference, religion, disability or political belief. The advertisement does not discriminate or speak evil of New Zealanders in any way. Instead, it plays on the lack of familiarity the fictitious agency has of Australia and New Zealand, as does so in a way that is intended to be comical.

Please note that it was not our intention to offend in any way.

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 the complaints' concerns and considered the advertisement under section 2.1 of the Code which deals with discrimination.

The Board viewed the television advertisement and noted the obvious humour. The Board considered that New Zealand and Australia have long had a relationship which equates to sibling rivalry and that both countries take delight in poking fun at each other.

The Board further noted that the main character delivered his lines in an over the top manner which clearly demonstrated that the statements were not believable or credible to the other people present.

The Board noted that this advertisement was one in a series which features an American advertising agency that sends itself and advertising agencies up generally.

The Board determined that the deliberate use of the iconic New Zealand image of a sheep was intended not to discriminate against New Zealand culture but to highlight the humorous rivalry between New Zealanders and Australians.

The Board found that the advertisement was light hearted in nature and did not discriminate on the grounds of race or nationality and therefore did not breach Section 2.1.

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