



CASE REPORT

1. Complaint reference number	267/05
2. Advertiser	Woolworths Supermarket (baby corn)
3. Product	food/retail
4. Type of advertisement	TV
5. Nature of complaint	Discrimination or vilification Sexual preference – section 2.1
6. Date of determination	Tuesday, 11 October 2005
7. DETERMINATION	Dismissed

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

The first scene in this advertisement depicts farmers picking baby corn fresh from the fields. The following scene shows a Woolworths buyer and a baby corn farmer standing side by side in a field of baby corn. The Woolworths buyer says: “After 2 ½ years of working very closely with our supplier, Woolies is proud to announce another Australian first. The only fresh baby corn in Australia .” The Woolworths buyer puts his arm around the shoulder of the farmer. The farmer looks uncomfortable with the show of affection from the Woolworths buyer. The farmer says: “Can you step back over there Colin - you’re making me nervous.” The advertisement closes with a close-up shot of the corn. The superscript reads: “The only baby corn grown in Australia . Exclusive to Woolworths. ” The Woolworths logo is then shown.

THE COMPLAINT

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

“... There is a subtle but clear message here for the viewer - that it is not appropriate for two men to be so close together... I accept that it is unintentional on the part of Woolworths and its advertising people but in my view the advertisement clearly promotes homophobia... I believe Woolworths is undermining the good work of many people by the insensitivity contained in the conclusion to this advertisement.”

“... I find it degrading to homosexual men as well as ridiculous that an advertiser could find it acceptable to run such an advertisement in this day and age. I was horrified to see a company of Woolworth’s standing using a cheap gag about homosexuality as the end point of the conversation between the two characters... it is pathetic to stoop to such a level when it contributes nothing to the overall advertisement. It doesn’t reinforce the brand, it says nothing about the advertised care in selection of fresh produce and whoever dreamed up this ridiculous advertisement should be sacked. It pokes fun at homosexual men, which is a deplorable, despicable act...”

“This ad makes a joke out of homophobia. While it might seem light-hearted, in fact making light of a display of intolerance like this implies that it is normal, even admirable, to have a homophobic attitude.”

“I believe a tolerant and diverse society should be encouraged at all points in time, and believe this ad encourages unnecessary fear and intolerance towards homosexuals.”

“... the commercial implies that gay and lesbian people should be the subject of derision and should be avoided.”

THE ADVERTISER’S RESPONSE

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

included the following:

“... The focus of the advertisement is the closeness of the relationship between Woolworths and the growers from whom it purchases its fresh produce, enabling Woolworths to deliver quality produce to Woolworths customers.”

The “ baby corn” advertisement finishes with the “ city type” Woolworths buyer putting his arm around the “ salt of the earth” Aussie farmer. It is a play on the closeness of the commercial relationship between Woolworths and the growers from whom it purchases its produce.”

“We believe that the advertisement could not be construed in any way as discriminating against or vilifying gay Australians. It is calculated to induce amusement in the viewer at the enthusiasm of the Woolworths buyer, rather than to discriminate or ridicule.”

“... we do not feel the complainant’s opinion that the advertisement is a “cheap gag about homosexuality” is one held by the wider community, or indeed the gay community.”

THE DETERMINATION

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

The Board was of the opinion that the advertisement depicted a reserved farmer who was uncomfortable with the amount of affection shown by the Woolworths buyer. The Board considered that the majority of people would understand the actions of the farmer to be a response to an overly affectionate Woolworths representative and would understand that this was not material that sought to discriminate against or vilify a person or a section of the community on account of their sexual preference.

The Board found that the depiction did not contravene the provisions of the Code relating to the portrayal of people (sexual preference).

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