Case Report

1. Case Number :	**0190-25**
2. Advertiser :	**Telstra**
3. Product :	**Telecommunications**
4. Type of Advertisement/Media :	**TV - Free to Air**
5. Date of Decision:	**3-Sep-2025**
6. Decision:	**Dismissed**

ISSUES RAISED

AANA Code of Ethics\2.1 Discrimination or Vilification
AANA Code of Ethics\2.3 Violence
AANA Code of Ethics\2.4 Sex/Sexuality/Nudity
AANA Code of Ethics\2.5 Language
AANA Code of Ethics\2.6 Health and Safety

DESCRIPTION OF ADVERTISEMENT

There are two versions of this television advertisement featuring aliens on a spaceship, a 90 second version and a 60 second version.

The 90 second versions shows a group of Aliens make a repetitive sound with their tongue being addressed by their leader.
The leader says, "My fellow Zalunians. The peoples of Oostralia will soon know the full GENIUS of our evil power. UNLEASH THE SCAMAGEDDON"
An alien presses a button marked "scam". A display reads "blocked by Telstra".
The leader says, "Oh c'mon! What's the friggin' issue now, Craig?"
The alien responds, "Um, your highness it appears our million scams… have been scammed."
The leader says "Telstra. Ok, what was the one rule I said we had to remember when launching the greatest creation of an entire species?"
An alien begins to respond, "Don't…"
The leader responds, "Don't. Target. A mighty network! I guess we forgot."
As he moves across the room a group of aliens starts to make a noise.
The leader says, "Alright, just stop with the uh-la-la-la. Nobody cares."
Text on screen says, "blocking millions of cyber threats every day. Wherever we go".

The 60 second version is a cut-down of the above.

THE COMPLAINT

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

The language. The alien character says "fricken" which i believe is inappropriate in tone and context.

This is a very bad message, especially for children. It promotes bullying and intolerance.

The advertisement seemed to lampoon the Christian faith and the clergy.
The clergy member was dressed in the robes and head dress of a bishop in either the Roman Catholic or Anglican church, advertising a Telstra product.
I found it disrespectful to the Christian faith per se and the adherents of Christianity as well as the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches in particular.

Inappropriate language and body gestures with the tongue.
Using aliens that make inappropriate tongue gestures which I find not suitable for children.

The advert which I just saw at 6.36 pm on channel 9 had the word “friggin” in the content.

The latest security TV advertisement portrays “talking in tongues” which in religious grounds I find extremely offensive.

This ad contains aliens which petrifies my 2 year old. I don’t believe this should be put onto tv.

THE ADVERTISER’S RESPONSE

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

We refer to your letters attaching a complaint received by the Advertising Standards Board about our Telstra Network Security campaign – Scamageddon creative.

Telstra ('We') is a voluntary member of the Advertiisng Standards Board. Community standards are important to us and what we do. We take care to set a standard not only for ourselves but for our industry. In doing so, we ensure that the preparation and publishing of our advertising material is compliant with the AANA Advertiser Code of Ethics ('Code').

We have provided the information requested in your letter below. We follow with responses to each or the parts of the Code to assist your panel's consideration of the advertisement.

Description of the Advertisement
The concept for this commercial is a humorous demonstration of how Telstra blocks nefarious cyber threats. The threats are personified by the emperor of the Zalunians - an alien lifeform - who exist in a made-up retro futuristic world.

We see how the emperor announces his grand plans to release his great invention - 'Scamageddon' - on unsuspecting Australians - to a spaceship full of his fellow Zalunians. They click their tongues in approval - clearly a usual custom amongst them.

At a control panel on the other side of the spaceship, another alien, Craig, presses a big button that says 'SCAM'. He is visibly nervous - this is a big deal. A message pops up on screen saying 'Blocked by Telstra'. The emperor is frustrated with the failure to launch 'Scamageddon'. He questions his underlings why they would target a mighty network like Telstra - it's the one thing he asked them not to do. They are very disappointed with themselves, having let their boss down. Titles come up saying "Blocking Millions of Cyber Threats" and a Telstra logo.

Response to complaint according to clauses of code
AANA Code of Ethics\2.5 Language\Inappropriate language
There is no use of inappropriate language in the advertisement. The word friggin is simply used as an adjective to emphasise and express the annoyance of 'the Emperor" at his evil plan being foiled.
As per the dictionary definition , it is not considered a swear word or inappropriate.
adverb: friggin'
1. used for emphasis or to express annoyance.
"that was frigging awesome!"
As used in the Australian vernacular, we do not consider it to be obscene or strong language.

AANA Code of Ethics\2.3 Violence\Causes alarm and distress to children

The advertisement is set within a clearly fictional, light-hearted space environment designed to entertain. It contains no frightening, threatening, or violent content. The creative concept was thoroughly reviewed and approved by the Commercials Advice division (CAD), receiving a G rating to confirm its suitability for general audiences, including children. Given this context and classification, we do not believe the advertisement is likely to cause distress to young viewers.

AANA Code of Ethics\2.6 Health and Safety\Bullying (non violent)
The advertisement is set in a fictional, light-hearted space environment intended to entertain and engage viewers through playful storytelling. The emperor character, portrayed with exaggerated theatrical flair, expresses frustration when his attempt to scam Australia is foiled—particularly by a mighty network. This reaction is clearly dramatised for comic effect and does not involve bullying or harm toward any character. His frustration is directed at the situation, not at others, and is consistent with the ad's humorous and imaginative tone.

AANA Code of Ethics\2.3 Violence\Causes alarm and distress
The advertisement is set in a fictional, light-hearted space environment intended to entertain and engage viewers through playful storytelling. While the emperor character may express frustration when his scheme fails, his reactions are theatrical and intentionally over-the-top—consistent with the ad's humorous tone. There are no depictions of violence, harm, or threats toward any individuals or groups. The creative direction leans into sci-fi parody, not aggression, and any dramatic moments are clearly stylized for comic effect rather than realistic conflict.

AANA Code of Ethics\2.1 Discrimination or Vilification\Religion
The costumes worn by characters in the advertisement are entirely fictional and were not created with reference to, nor intended to resemble, Catholic or Anglican clergy. The tongue-clicking custom observed by the Zalunians is not intended to resemble any religious practice of "speaking in tongues". It is portrayed as a practice of showing approval akin to clapping. At no stage do the advertisements criticize, mock or denigrate any religion or belief system. The creative intent is purely imaginative storytelling in a fantasy setting, without any religious association. Accordingly, we maintain that the advertisement does not vilify religion in any way.

THE DECISION

The Ad Standards Community Panel (the Panel) considered whether the versions collectively forming this advertisement breach Section 2 of the AANA Code of Ethics (the Code).

The Panel noted the complainants' concerns that the advertisement:

- Was discriminating and vilifying on the basis of religion
- Contained aggressive and disturbing material

- Contained sexualised content inappropriate for children
- Contained inappropriate language
- Portrayed bullying.

The Panel viewed the advertisement and noted the advertiser's response.

Section 2.1: Advertising 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 orientation, religion, disability, mental illness or political belief.

The Panel noted the Practice Note to Section 2.1 provides the following definitions:

- *Discrimination – unfair or less favourable treatment.*
- *Vilification – humiliates, intimidates, incites hatred, contempt or ridicule.*
- *Religion – a belief or non-belief in a faith or system of worship*

The Panel considered that the robe the alien was dressed in did not represent a particular religious figure or ceremonial outfit. The Panel considered that the advertisement did not identify any particular religion.

The Panel noted that the noise made by the aliens was a type of verbal undulation, and this did not resemble talking in tongues and again did not identify any particular religion.

Section 2.1 conclusion

The Panel found that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.1 of the Code.

Section 2.3: Advertising shall not present or portray violence unless it is justifiable in the context of the product or service advertised.

Does the advertisement contain violence?

The Panel considered that while the story of the advertisement is for the aliens to attack Australia with multiple scams, this was portrayed in an over-the-top and unrealistic way. The Panel considered that the overall tone of the ad was not aggressive or menacing.

The Panel considered that the advertisement does not depict or suggest violence.

Section 2.3 conclusion

The Panel concluded that the advertisement did not present or portray violence and did not breach Section 2.3 of the Code.

Section 2.4: Advertising shall treat sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience.

Does the advertisement contain sex?

The Panel considered whether the advertisement contained a depiction of sex. The Panel noted the definition of sex in the Practice Note is "sexual intercourse; person or persons engaged in sexually stimulating behaviour".

The Panel noted that the vocalisations and tongue movements made by the aliens were not a sexual gesture and the advertisement did not contain sex.

Does the advertisement contain sexuality?

The Panel noted the definition of sexuality in the Practice Note is "the capacity to experience and express sexual desire; the recognition or emphasis of sexual matters".

The Panel noted that the vocalisations and tongue movements made by the aliens were not sexual, and the advertisement did not contain sexuality

Does the advertisement contain nudity?

The Panel noted that the definition of nudity in the Practice Note is "the depiction of a person without clothing or covering; partial or suggested nudity may also be considered nudity".

The Panel noted that all the characters in the ad were appropriately covered, and the advertisement did not contain nudity.

Section 2.4 conclusion

Finding that the advertisement did not contain sex, sexuality, or nudity, the Panel concluded the advertisement did not breach Section 2.4 of the Code.

Section 2.5: Advertising shall only use language which is appropriate in the circumstances (including appropriate for the relevant audience and medium). Strong or obscene language shall be avoided.

The Panel noted the Practice Note for this section of the Code includes:

> *"Words and phrases which are innocuous and in widespread and common use in the Australian vernacular are permitted provided they are used in a manner*

consistent with their colloquial usage, for example with gentle humour, and not used in a demeaning or aggressive manner.
Advertising which uses rhyming words, or similar words to strong language, will not be seen to be strong or obscene when used in a light-hearted and humorous manner."

The Panel considered that the term "friggin" is a colloquial term which would not be considered strong or obscene by most members of the community. The Panel considered that the word is used due to frustration with a delay caused by a technical issue, and was not used in an aggressive or demeaning manner. The Panel considered that the word was commonly used in Australian vernacular, and was appropriate to the circumstances.

Section 2.5 conclusion

The Panel considered that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.5 of the Code.

Section 2.6: Advertising shall not depict material contrary to Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety.

The Panel noted the Practice Note for this section of the Code includes:

"The age of the people depicted in an advertisement, their relationship to each other and the nature of the communication are relevant in determining whether an advertisement constitutes bullying and is contrary to Prevailing Community Standards."

The Panel considered that the advertisement was using well-known science fiction tropes of alien hierarchy in a spaceship. The Panel considered that this was not a realistic or recognisable everyday scenario and was highly fantastical. The Panel considered that the advertisement did not portray or condone bullying or material which would be contrary to Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety.

Section 2.6 conclusion

The Panel considered that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.6 of the Code.

Conclusion

Finding that the advertisement did not breach any other section of the Code the Panel dismissed the complaints.