



# Ads free to peddle junk

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A TELEVISION advertisement shown during a children's show after school and depicting students sharing Oreo cookies was not aimed at children, the Advertising Standards Board ruled, because it was appealing to adults' sense of nostalgia.

A complaint about advertisements for Snickers bars shown during *Junior MasterChef* and *The Simpsons* was not acted on because although both shows were very popular with children under 12, they were aimed at an "older and broader audience".

"Not one complaint made to the Advertising Standards Board was upheld on the grounds that the ad was aimed at children," Jane Martin, from the Obesity Policy Coalition, said. "Self-regulation is a charade. The loopholes in the codes are bigger than the safety net they are meant to provide; and when industry is caught flouting its own rules, there are no sanctions. Government agencies must stop passing the buck and start taking action

to protect children from junk-food advertising."

A review of industry self-regulation by the broadcast watchdog, the Australian Communications and Media Authority, found that of the 32 complaints made to the Advertising Standards Board between January 2009 and May this year, only six decisions went against food companies.

Four were reprimanded for accidentally showing advertisements during children's television shows and two for using popular characters.

In no case was a financial penalty imposed.

The broadcast regulator concluded that it was "unclear" whether industry measures to limit children's exposure to junk and fast-food advertising were working but that community concerns about the issue remained high.

However, the watchdog does not want the job of monitoring junk food advertisements.

"As the broadcasting regulator, the ACMA reiterates that it is

neither equipped nor resourced to make independent judgments on issues of preventive health," the authority's chairman, Chris Chapman, said.

"The Australian National Preventive Health Agency is ideally placed to inform and promote a whole-of-government response to the challenges of childhood overweight and obesity."

Last month *The Sun-Herald* revealed the Greens planned to introduce a private member's bill into the Senate that would beef up attempts to stop junk-food advertisements being screened on free-to-air television.

The bill would ban junk-food advertisements on commercial television between 6am and 9am, and 4pm and 9pm on weekdays; and between 6am and noon, and 4pm and 9pm, on weekends and throughout school holidays. But without support from either the government or the Coalition, the bill is set to fail.

► **The high cost of childhood sport**

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