

## Media Release

### Silly season is non-stop for Australian sports

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In Australia, the period between the cricket ending and the footy starting is often referred to as the silly season. It's a short period between competitions where sports fans don't quite know what to do with themselves.

But how would you feel if I told you that the silly season in Australian sport is not a few weeks long, but 365 days a year?

There is a little known loophole in the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice that allows beer, wine and spirits to be advertised during sports programs before 8.30pm on weekends and public holidays<sup>i</sup> – at just the times when children are most likely to be watching.

It makes no sense. On every other day of the week, during every other program on television, there is recognition that alcohol ads are harmful to children and should not be shown before 8.30pm. Why is it acceptable to broadcast these ads during sport?

This decisions lies with the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), which approved and registered the loophole. In 2015 ACMA actually broadened the loophole from just live sports to all sports programs, increasing the potential harms of alcohol advertising to children.

I'm not sure whether or not alcohol companies deliberately use this loophole to target children. That's a question for them. I am sure however that our children are the collateral damage of their campaigns, bombarded by a cumulative *50 million* alcohol advertisements a year<sup>ii</sup>.

I witness firsthand the damage done by alcohol every time I work in the emergency department of a children's hospital. Every shift I see children who are victims – and sometime perpetrators – of alcohol related trauma and violence. That's right, children. Years ago when I started training we rarely saw the side effects of a big night out, but now it is sadly all too common.

Sure, alcohol marketing isn't entirely to blame, but multiple studies point to its impact. Evidence reviewed by the Royal Australasian College of Physicians last year revealed that exposure to alcohol advertising encourages children to start drinking earlier, to binge more often and to start a journey toward established drinking and exposure to other alcohol-related harms<sup>iii</sup>.

Unfortunately, it's not just on our television screens that alcohol companies are reaching young Australians. In fact, every major Australian sport is influenced by alcohol marketing of some kind<sup>iv</sup>.

Cricket fans will know that the season has just finished and we have again seen another Australian victory in the VB One Day International Series. If you somehow didn't realise VB was the naming rights sponsor, you would have been left in no doubt of their involvement after seeing the logo splashed across the shirts of Australian players. Remarkably, the VB

naming rights are only one of more than 20 alcohol-related sponsorships in professional cricket across Australia.

Our footy codes are busily preparing for the 2017 season. As some 180,000 young Auskickers dream of running out on the MCG, are they also aware that the association between Carlton United Breweries (CUB) and the VFL-AFL goes back well over 100 years<sup>v</sup>? Will they also notice the number of alcohol logos that have flashed in front of their eyes even before the first goal of the game?

For rugby league fans, the scene is set for another exciting State of Origin Series. Will the Queensland XXXX Maroons dynasty continue or will the NSW VB Blues bring the shield back to Sydney? As the three games are typically the most watched programs on television every year<sup>vi</sup>, I am sure millions of Australian children will know the answer in May. And evidence tells us that after the game they are just as likely to be able to identify the associated alcohol brands as their favourite sporting heroes<sup>vii</sup>.

I find it very difficult to reconcile the fact that these professional sports, events which captivate and inspire young children to be healthy and dominate schoolyard discussion, are being flooded by the branding of a product that, in excess, is so harmful.

Of course alcohol marketing is not the only cause of dangerous drinking habits, but let me be very clear: it is having a significant impact on young Australians. As a paediatrician, I can no longer stand by and watch while our young people are exposed to the harms of alcohol marketing.

It is time for a national conversation to discuss how big brewers are using sport as a channel to market their product. It needs to stop. It would be silly not to.

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medicine, geriatric medicine and addiction medicine. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients.

The College offers 60 training pathways. These lead to the award of one of seven qualifications that align with 45 specialist titles recognised by the Medical Board of Australia or allow for registration in nine vocational scopes with the Medical Council of New Zealand.

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i The Australian Communications and Media Authority, The ACMA registers new Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice. 2016. <http://www.acma.gov.au/Industry/Broadcast/Television/TV-content-regulation/the-acma-registers-new-commercial-television-industry-code-of-practice>

ii Carr S, O'Brien K, Ferris J, et al. Child and adolescent exposure to alcohol advertising in Australia's major televised sports. *Drug and Alcohol Review* 2015: DOI: 10.1111/dar.12326.

iii Academy of Medical Sciences. Calling time: the nation's drinking as a major health issue. A report from the Academy of Medical Sciences. 2004.

iv The Royal Australasian College of Physicians. Through Children's Eyes: Alcohol Promotion in Sport. Fact sheet; 2016. <https://www.racp.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/through-children's-eyes-alcohol-promotion-in-sport.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

v The Age. AFL season 2016: Beer company makes big cut to sponsorship. 2016. <http://www.theage.com.au/afl/afl-news/afl-season-2016-beer-company-makes-big-cut-to-sponsorship-20160621-gpomq6.html>

vi The Australian. State of Origin scores ratings record. 2016. <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/media/state-of-origin-scores-ratings-record/news-story/c1f34e1c1f523f4e63a9026e7d9aa935>

vii Phillipson L, Jones S. Awareness of Alcohol Advertising Among Children Who Watched Televised Sports. Centre for Health Initiatives, University of Wollongong. 2007.