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Contact: Rebecca Cook - 0438 316 435

## Fast food advertisers permitted to plate up junk through Junior Masterchef



A recent decision by the Advertising Standards Board that *Junior Masterchef* is not primarily directed to children and not covered by food industry advertising codes highlights how ineffective self-regulation is in protecting children from junk food marketing.

*Junior Masterchef* is currently the highest rating program for children younger than 12. The Advertising Standards Board's decision means that junk food advertisers effectively have free reign in the highest rating kids' shows, such as *Junior Masterchef* and *The Simpsons*.

Ads for junk food such as Coke, Fanta, Snickers, Mars, Red Bull, Smith's crisps and Magnum and Drumstick ice creams have recently been shown in these programs.

Jane Martin, senior policy adviser for the Obesity Policy Coalition (OPC), said the food industry advertising codes claim to prevent junk food advertising in children's TV programs; however this recent decision shows them to be a sham.

"Despite nearly 420,000 children in capital cities watching the first episode of Junior Masterchef, the ASB recently rejected a complaint about junk food advertising throughout this program on the grounds that it was not primarily directed to children and therefore not covered by the code.

"If the highest rating children's program is not covered by the code then it effectively allows advertisers to continue to mass market their products in programs children watch most.

"The industry advertising codes are merely a public relations confection to enable advertisers to give the appearance of being good corporate citizens while maintaining business as usual.

"Junior Masterchef is a children's cooking show where the contestants are children aged 5 to 12, the language is designed to appeal to children and the master classes are for children at home – yet the ASB does not consider this to be a children's program.

"We call on the government to step in, end the charade of self-regulation and implement effective legislation to protect children from junk food advertising on TV," she said.

### About the complaint and the codes

Under the Responsible Children's Marketing Initiative (RCMI) of the Australian Food and Beverage Industry, signatories commit not to advertise food products in media "directed primarily to children", unless those products represent healthy dietary choices and promote a healthy diet and lifestyle.

Media release



Similarly, under the quick service restaurant industry's 'Responsible Advertising and Marketing to Children' initiative, fast food chains agree not to direct advertising to children if products do not represent healthier choices.

The OPC submitted complaints to the Advertising Standards Bureau about the broadcast of advertisements for McDonald's Big Macs and Streets' Magnum ice-creams during *Junior Masterchef* (and other programs popular among children, including *The Simpsons* – the second highest rating program for children under 12).

The OPC argued that Big Macs and Magnum ice-creams do not represent healthy dietary choices and that *Junior Masterchef* is a program that is "directed primarily to children". *Junior Masterchef* was the highest rating program for children younger than 12 (between 22 August and 18 September 2010), with 417,000 children under 12 in the metro audience (in the five capital cities surveyed) watching the opening episode alone.

The Advertising Standards Board rejected the complaint about the Magnums ad on the basis that *Junior Masterchef* 'despite its popularity with children, does not have an audience of predominantly children.' The Board conceded that this program is the most popular program currently showing among 5-12 year olds.

The Advertising Standards Board rejected the complaint about the Big Mac ad on the basis that the theme, visuals and language used in the ad were not primarily directed to children.

### **About the Obesity Policy Coalition**

The Obesity Policy Coalition is a group of leading public health agencies who are concerned about the escalating levels of overweight and obesity, particularly in children.

The Obesity Policy Coalition partners include Diabetes Australia - Vic, Cancer Council Victoria, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention at Deakin University.



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