


The Secretary
Select Committee on Campaign Advertising
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	A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE
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Submission by ACTEW Corporation to the Select Committee on Campaign Advertising

Dear Secretary,

I am writing in response to the ACT Legislative Assembly Select Committee on Campaign Advertising. I note the proposed Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Bill 2008 for an Act about campaign advertising by government agencies, presented by Mr Zed Seselja.

ACTEW Corporation Limited (ACTEW) is an ACT Government owned company with assets and investments in water, wastewater, electricity, gas and telecommunications. ACTEW owns the water and wastewater assets and business in the ACT, is a 50% owner of ActewAGL, a multi-utility providing energy, water and telecommunications services. ACTEW has two voting shareholders, the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister of the ACT.

ACTEW aims to prudently manage public assets to provide sustainable water and wastewater services in the ACT region, to maximise the return on its investments, and to ensure a safe and reliable water supply to the ACT and region. ACTEW is committed to ensuring our customers are informed, educated and engaged on these key issues. I refer to our Statement of Corporate Intent, which amongst many other commitments include the following key business priorities that are relevant for this submission:

- working with the ACT Government to achieve a reduction in per capita mains water consumption of 12 per cent by 2013 and 25 per cent by 2023 in keeping with the targets included in *Think water, act water*, and
- engaging and educating our customers on water and sewerage related issues.

ACTEW assumes the meeting of the 2023 demand reduction target in its supply planning, and hence, has a vested interest in ensuring these targets are achieved, otherwise further water infrastructure may need to be brought forward.

In keeping with our commitments outlined above, ACTEW undertakes the following important community education and engagement activities:

- operation of the Water Conservation Office that enforces current water restrictions, manages a public information hotline and attends community events with the objectives to inform, educate, encourage sustainable behaviour and consult the community on water conservation;
- implementation of ongoing public information campaigns under the brand 'Save water for life' to raise awareness and provide the tools needed to save water;
 - This can include various forms of advertising, web-based material, brochures, updates on roadside signs, and relevant giveaways and incentives such as shower-timers, water meter report cards, and water wise gardening workshops.
- proactive media liaison on the water situation and related issues and projects;
- implementation of community consultation programs pertaining to policy matters around water supply and demand, the most recently conducted on:
 - Future Water Options (2004), which canvassed a broad range of water supply options;

- the development (2005-06) and review (2008-09) of Permanent Water Conservation Measures; and
- water purification (indirect potable reuse) as a potential new water source for the ACT (2007).
- an ongoing program of information and engagement activities on major water supply projects that are currently being implemented, including the Enlarged Cotter Dam and the Murrumbidgee to Googong Water Transfer. Community interactions include the establishment of a phone hotline, one-on-one meetings and correspondence, community group briefings and correspondence, newsletters, participation with displays at Canberra-wide events, fact sheets and web-based information.
- implementation of public information campaigns under the brand '*Securing water for life*' to raise awareness about the water supply work and relevant engagement opportunities.

In managing issues pertaining to ACTEW's business, ACTEW is committed to transparency and works above and beyond current statutory community consultation requirements.

Importantly, none of these activities will be effective unless the community is aware they are occurring. Even more important is the need to have an informed community before attempting to seek their views and gain productive feedback. As such, public information campaigns that target the whole community will always play a key role in ACTEW's communication strategies.

Similarly, under the *Utilities (Water Conservation) Regulation 2006*, ACTEW is required to publish details of the water restrictions in place and any relevant exemptions in a daily newspaper and on the website. ACTEW's view is that this is not sufficient in order to gain widespread community awareness, compliance and long-term behavioural change in the area of water conservation. To meet such objectives, ACTEW needs to implement annual public information campaigns, in which advertising again plays a key role.

Through community feedback, ACTEW understands the importance of keeping residents up to date on the water situation, what the community can do to save this precious resource and what ACTEW is doing to secure supplies. The Water Security Major Projects is one of the most significant infrastructure programs to be undertaken in the ACT for many years. Therefore, a strong public information campaign was developed and implemented in July 2008, designed to significantly raise awareness prior to the rollout of future community engagement activities.

ACTEW's research results show high awareness and high approval ratings of the level and depth of information provided by ACTEW through its communications activities. Some examples:

- There is a very high awareness about changes to the water situation, year to year. Each year we ask a standard question, how residents rate the water situation compared to the previous year. At large, participants correctly state if it has improved, is worse, much worse and so on.
- 79% of participants said they were aware that Permanent Water Conservation Measures had been introduced, when asked following a public information campaign (2006).
- 98% of participants said they were aware of the '*Stop the Drop*' campaign (2005).
 - 77% of these said the campaign had at least some impact on their consumption behaviours.
- 74% of participants recalled seeing the '*Stop the Drop*' TV commercials.
 - 73% of these said the commercials were effective in promoting water conservation.
- 62% of participants recalled seeing/hearing ACTEW's information about water restrictions (2005). Of these:
 - 79% said they were likely to access the information from press advertisements and 48% from TV.
 - 90% felt the information was useful.

- 89% of participants had noticed the electronic roadside signs displaying daily water updates. (April 2008) Of these:
 - 62% found them useful for receiving water update information and nearly as many wanted them continued permanently (others felt they should be used during summer only).
- About 45% indicated they had taken new action in their home to save water as a direct result of the information from the various *'Save water for life'* material and an additional 21% said they'd taken new action but the trigger was unclear.
- Awareness that there were major projects underway to improve the water supply infrastructure in the ACT rose amongst research participants from 13% in March 2008 (pre-*'Securing water for life'* campaign) to 37% in September (post-campaign). Overall awareness (those that responded either 'fully aware', 'somewhat aware' or 'aware but have only limited knowledge') increased from 71% in March to 96% in August.

ACTEW is by no means unique in choosing to actively inform and engage the community through advertising. Most other major Australian cities have implemented similar public information campaigns.

ACTEW strongly believes that it needs to engage with the community through advertising and other means in order to effectively fulfill its role as the Territory's water supplier.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on this matter.



Mark Sullivan
Managing Director

29 May 2009