Investigation BI-606 Summary report

| Summary |  |
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| **Licensee [Service]** | TCN Channel Nine Pty Ltd [Nine] |
| **Finding** | No breach of clause 2.1.1 [classification] |
| **Relevant code** | Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice 2015 (revised 2018) |
| **Program [type]** | *Married At First Sight* [reality television] |
| **Dates of broadcasts** | 21 March 2021 (episode 17)  28 March 2021 (episode 21)  30 March 2021 (episode 23) |
| **Date finalised** | 6 October 2021 |
| **Type of service** | Commercial—television |

Background

In June 2021, the Australian Communications and Media Authority (the **ACMA**) commenced an investigation under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (the **BSA**) into 3 episodes of the 2021 season of *Married At First Sight* (***MAFS***).

*MAFS* was broadcast on Nine by TCN Channel Nine Pty Ltd (the **licensee**) between 22 February 2021 and 18 April 2021 and comprised 32 episodes. Some episodes were broadcast on Sunday at 7.00pm and were classified PG; and the remaining episodes were broadcast Monday to Wednesday at 7.30pm, and were classified M.

The 3 episodes under investigation were broadcast on Sunday 21 March 2021 (**Episode 17**), Sunday 28 March 2021 (**Episode 21**), both classified PG, and Tuesday 30 March 2021 (**Episode 23**), classified M.

The matters referred to in complaints received by the ACMA were assessed against the classification provisions of the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice 2015 (revised 2018) (the **Code**).

Television classification is a scheme by which the visual and aural components of broadcasts are evaluated for their impact on the audience and are assigned classification categories for the information of prospective viewers.

Classification relates to a broadcaster’s obligations to correctly categorise programs in accordance with the Code. It does not evaluate the performance of actors or presenters on screen, nor does it pass comment on the worthiness or otherwise of the behaviours of the characters and individuals presented, other than the impact of any classifiable element, such as themes, and the overall impact of a program.

Finding

The licensee did not breach the classification provisions at clauses 2.1.1 of the Code in relation to either the PG or M classified programs.

Reasons

**PG classified episodes**

The Code permits the broadcast of PG material at any time. While the MAFS program does not appear to be intended for a young audience, at the PG level, programs may contain adult themes or concepts but must remain suitable for children to watch with adult supervision and accordingly not exceed mild impact.

In assessing compliance of the content in the two episodes concerned, the ACMA must, consistent with the requirements of the Code, consider whether themes explored in a particular program were justified by context and whether their treatment was carefully handled, such that their impact was mild, and the program remained suitable for children to watch with supervision.

The Code requires that psychological themes including social conflict are ‘carefully handled’ and that the suitability of material for broadcast will depend on the context and frequency and intensity of key elements. The ACMA considers that the material complied with the requirement in the Code that social conflict be carefully handled. In particular, the program included extensive critiquing by program experts of other participants. This discussion would have also created opportunities for parents watching with children to engage in their own discussions about program content.

Another factor that mitigated the overall impact was that the episodes also explored positive aspects of relationships which were interspersed with any perceived negatives.

This resulted in the overall impact of the content not exceeding a mild impact.

**M classified episode**

Programs classified M are intended for mature audiences and most adult themes can be dealt with. However, consistent with the code requirements, the ACMA must assess whether intense adult themes were handled with care and justified by context. The impact of the content must be no more than moderate.

The episode that was assessed against the M classification provisions, explored the same themes of tension, conflict, and questions of compatibility within both interpersonal relationships and wider social interactions as the PG classified episodes. There was one scene which included an exchange that could have potentially been considered an intense adult theme as contemplated by the Code.

However, this exchange was adequately contextualised by the underlying premise of the program; that is, putting pairs of strangers together in faux marriage scenarios. Such circumstances are likely to lead to conflict, including between the different couples involved in the program. In this sense, the intense adult theme was justified by context, as required by the Code.

The ACMA considers that this exchange was handled with care, was brief and restrained and critiqued by program participants. Consequently, the ACMA considers the overall impact was moderate and could be accommodated within the M classification.