

Hard Solo backflip highlights flaws in sham ABAC scheme

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The Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC) is a sham that allows alcohol companies to make their own rules, with today's news that Asahi will reluctantly change the name of its Hard Solo alcoholic soft drink next year only reinforcing the scheme's failure to uphold community standards.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) CEO Caterina Giorgi said the ABAC's reversal of its position on Hard Solo showed that the industry-led scheme is not working.

"After almost four months, a number of community complaints and Parliamentarians calling for action, Asahi and their mates at the sham ABAC scheme have admitted that an alcoholic product based on a popular soft drink appeals to children," Ms Giorgi said.

"It's not even clear from ABAC or Asahi's response, what the plan is with the branding of the product. All that we know from their statement is that they have been dragged kicking and screaming into changing the name of the product next year.

"This is not meaningful action. It's a marketing ploy leading into Schoolies and the Summer season so that Asahi can squeeze every inch of free publicity that they can to promote a product that even their mates on the ABAC has said appeals to kids."

Ms Giorgi said the ABAC had changed its position on Hard Solo only after the product received intense media scrutiny when the product drew the attention of federal Parliamentarians.

"The ABAC, which was set up and is run by alcohol companies and their lobbyists, waved Hard Solo through by 'pre-vetting the product' before it hit the shelves in July. Now the very same scheme is saying that this product appeals to kids," she said.

"It was only after months of scrutiny in the media and by Parliamentarians that the ABAC backflipped and confirmed that Asahi has designed a product that appeals directly to children and young people.

"Today's announcement just confirms the very obvious point that alcohol companies and lobbyists cannot be trusted to set their own rules about alcohol marketing.

"It should not take a viral media story for the ABAC to admit that this multinational alcohol company has breached its own scheme, which is completely voluntary and has no penalties. The fact that the company – Carlton United, is a member of the Brewers Association – a lobby group on the ABAC Advisory Committee – just shows that this process was fraught from the very beginning.

"The ABAC has a consistent track record of allowing alcohol companies to market their products to minors and dismissing community concerns.

"It is time for real government-led regulation of alcohol marketing that adheres to community standards and protects our kids from harmful marketing tactics that are designed to drive up sales."

Interviews are available.

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education** (FARE) is the leading not-for-profit organisation working towards an Australia free from alcohol harms. We do this through developing evidence-informed policy, enabling people-powered advocacy and delivering health promotion campaigns.

FARE has been working with communities across the country to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians for 20 years. To learn more about us and our work visit www.fare.org.au.