

COMPLAINT NUMBER	22/148
ADVERTISER	Meridian Energy Limited
ADVERTISEMENT	Meridian Energy, Television
DATE OF MEETING	23 May 2022
OUTCOME	No Grounds to Proceed

Advertisement:

The Meridian Energy television advertisement shows a quiet town disrupted by a sudden storm and lightning flash followed by the arrival of a woman dressed in a flowing green coat in the character of Mother Nature. She strides through the town, using superpowers to praise some people for their environmentally friendly behaviour and discipline others for their disregard for the environment. For example, she uses telekinesis to throw a man into a pond after he litters, and she lifts an axe from a man chopping a tree and with pinpoint accuracy, throws it into a hole dug by a woman in her garden where it instantly becomes a stand for a climbing vine. The advertisement ends with the woman walking next to a child on a bike. Wind turbines are shown in the background, along with the text, "Be good to Nature and she'll be good to you".

The Chair ruled there were no grounds for the complaint to proceed.

Complaint: Perpetuating negative male stereotypes Basically, all of the characters shown are good if they are female and bad if they are male (with one quick exception). In 2020, 3 times as many males as females committed suicide (444 versus 147) so mental health / suicide are major male issues. I don't think adverts like this will be helping this at all. Maybe they can re-edit it to be more balanced in the gender depictions? Or maybe we can have a positive father nature?

The relevant provisions were Advertising Standards Code - Principle 1, Rule 1(c);

Principle 1: Social Responsibility: Advertisements must be prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility to consumers and to society.

Rule 1(c) Decency and Offensiveness: Advertisements must not contain anything that is indecent, or exploitative, or degrading, or likely to cause harm, or serious or widespread offence, or give rise to hostility, contempt, abuse or ridicule.

The Chair noted the Complainant was concerned the advertisement perpetuated negative male stereotypes which is not good for men's mental health. The Chair acknowledged the Complainant's sincere concerns.

The Chair carefully reviewed the advertisement and said the likely consumer takeout would be that Meridian was a renewable energy company working with nature to support the planet.

Rule 1(c) of the Advertising Standards Code required the Chair to consider whether the advertisement perpetuated a negative male stereotype and if this was likely to cause serious or widespread offence in light of generally prevailing community standards. The Chair said

the advertisement used humourous and hyperbolic situations to show stereotypical polluting activities, where the polluter then faces the wrath of a super-hero version of 'Mother Nature'. The Chair said that apart from the Mother Nature character, which has historically been referred to as female, the gender of the polluters was not a major focus of the story telling.

The Chair ruled the fantastical scenarios and choice of actors featured in the advertisement did not reach the threshold to be likely to cause serious or widespread offence and it was not in breach of Principle 1 and Rule 1(c) of the Advertising Standards Code.

The Chair ruled there were no grounds for the complaint to proceed.

Chair's Ruling: Complaint No Grounds to Proceed

APPEAL INFORMATION

According to the procedures of the Advertising Standards Complaints Board, all decisions are able to be appealed by any party to the complaint. Information on our Appeal process is on our website www.asa.co.nz. Appeals must be made in writing with notification of the intent to appeal lodged within 14 calendar days of receipt of the written decision. The substantive appeal application must be lodged with the ASA within 21 calendar days of receipt of the written decision.