

COMPLAINT NUMBER	22/140
ADVERTISER	Meridian Energy Limited
ADVERTISEMENT	Meridian Energy, Digital Marketing
DATE OF MEETING	26 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: With regards to Meridian's latest advert: "Nature is speaking and it's time for us to listen." <https://vimeo.com/699244666/844885b2a9>

At first glance, this advert is very clever and I agree that as a society we need to address the issues of littering, deforestation and inefficient vehicles that contribute to pollution. But on seeing your advert several times now, there is a darker message to this advert that I have come to find offensive.

At the very beginning of the advert, before we are introduced to who I must assume to be Mother Nature, who acts as a Social Justice Warrior, come Climate Activist, we see a surprised/scared Nun, which can be perceived as representing Western Christianised Society and this assumption is reinforced as this advert progress'.

The first conflict is with a white businessman littering (which I don't agree with) who is humiliatingly put into the fountain, instead of being educated in the error of his way. The second conflict is with another white male who is about to cut down a tree. This then results in Mother Nature's first reckless act. She propels the axe at a white woman who is peacefully gardening. This is a serious incident! The third conflict is with another white man who is driving a car that yes should be confined to the scrap-yard. (I think that he is supposed to portray a boy racer, but he may be an individual who can only afford this car so that he can get to work and feed his young family?) This leads to Mother Nature's second reckless act, she sends his car into an uncontrollable spin that could injure anyone who unfortunately got in the way and the incident damaged the infrastructure that we all depend on – setting fire to the road. The kicker to this is that Mother Nature, this WOKE princess, is friendly to the person of colour who is driving what I perceive to be a fuel efficient car or electric vehicle.

Throughout the full advert, there are numerous incidents where white people are portrayed as evil and insensitive to the climate, for what we assume due to their "white privilege." While,

only children and individuals of colour are acting in an appropriate manner. Therefore, I find your advert offensive and discriminatory towards white individuals because of the way it demeans them and makes assumptions about them.

I sincerely ask that you to look closely at this advert, because I think and I hope that you will agree with me, in New Zealand/Aotearoa we are all equal and any misrepresentation of any kiwi in our multicultural society is not acceptable.

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 was discriminatory for casting European actors as polluters who are insensitive to the environment.

The Chair carefully reviewed the advertisement and said the likely consumer takeout out would be that Meridian was working with nature to make the planet a better place.

Rule 1(c) of the Advertising Standards Code required the Chair to consider whether the advertisement was discriminatory in its portrayal of certain ethnicities and whether this was likely to cause serious or widespread offence in light of generally prevailing community standards. The Chair said the advertisement used humorous and hyperbolic situations to show stereotypical polluters, who then face the wrath of a super-hero version of 'Mother Nature'. The Chair said the ethnicity of the characters was not relevant to the story telling and the "white privilege" takeout of the Complainant was unlikely to be the takeout of most consumers.

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 offensive and 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.

