

## ASA COMPLAINTS BOARD DECISION

**Complaint number:** 25/202

**Advertiser:** Hell Pizza

**Advertisement:** Hell Pizza website and addressed mail

**Date of meeting:** 23 September 2025

**Outcome:** Upheld in part, Not Upheld in part. Email advertisements not to be used again.

### Summary of the Complaints Board decision

The Complaints Board upheld a complaint about three Hell Pizza email advertisements for the "Doobious" pizza, and did not uphold a complaint about two website advertisements for the "Doobious" pizza.

A majority of the Board said the email advertisements encouraged or condoned an illegal practice, consuming recreational cannabis, and were therefore not socially responsible. A majority of the Board said the two website advertisements did not reach the threshold to encourage or condone an illegal practice.

### Description of advertisements

#### Website

The first website advertisement had images of a pizza, a grinder, a small plastic bag of leaves and some leaves scattered around. The text said "Doobious for herb lovers – Free baggie -herb grinder".

The second website advertisement had images of a grinder, a small plastic bag of leaves and some leaves scattered around. The text said "FREE HERB GRINDER when you order a double Doobious Pizza – Use code: DOOBIOUS – Order yours now – limited stash\* – FULL T&C's HERE – \*Grinder must be added to your cart & the code applied at checkout. Grinder is for the supplied sage & oregano only". At the top right-hand corner of the advertisement was the text "Restricted 18+".

#### Emails

The first email advertisement had the subject line "Score a Herb Grinder with our NEW Doobious Pizza". The body of the email included imagery of the Doobious pizza, the grinder and the bag of herbs, as well as the following text:

"If you're partial to something sticky-icky, our latest smoky creation comes with a baggie of herbs and grinder – ready for you to grind up and sprinkle over top... Limited stash ... get your hands on one before they go up in smoke..."

\* Herb grinder is strictly R18, add a double-sized Doobious Pizza and the grinder to your cart and use the code DOOBIOUS. Not available in conjunction with any other offer. Grinders are extremely limited and available for online orders only. Grinders are intended for culinary purposes. Baggies contain sage and oregano. Full terms and conditions at hellpizza.nz.

The second email advertisement had the subject line "Spark up your weekend with something Doobious". The body of the email included imagery of the Doobious pizza, and the contents of the Grinder Pack: the grinder, a bag of herbs, a hat, a tin and a voucher for "your next munchie emergency". The text included the following:

"You've all been blazing through our new Doobious Pizza. If you haven't scored yours yet, now's the time to see what the hype is all about... every Doobious Pizza comes with a free Baggie of our sticky-icky sage and oregano herb blend to sprinkle on top. WIN a limited edition grinder pack. The hook-up continues over on our socials. We're giving away Six Doobious Grinder Packs, fully loaded with a grinder, herbs, a hat, a tin and a voucher for your next munchie emergency..."

The third email advertisement had the subject line "Final Call: Doobious Pizza almost gone!". The body of the email included imagery of the Doobious pizza. The text included the following:

"Well, you've blazed through our new Doobious Pizza stash so fast that this is it, the final call.

Our stash is getting seriously low, and this looks like your last chance to get your hands on this smoky masterpiece...The munchies don't stand a chance! And yes, every Doobious Pizza still comes with a baggie of our herb blend to make the session complete. (Don't worry, it's the kind of special herb your mum would approve of, sage and oregano)..."

### **Summary of the complaint**

The Complainant was concerned the advertisements were not socially responsible because they normalised or glorified illegal drug use by showing drug paraphernalia associated with cannabis use.

**Relevant codes:** Advertising Standards Code, Principle 1, Rule 1(e).

### **Issues raised:**

- Social responsibility
- Safety

## **Summary of the Advertisers response:**

The Advertiser defended the advertisement and said it:

- Did not promote unsafe or illegal behaviour.
- Included clear safeguards to restrict access to adults.
- Used satire to comment on an important social issue.
- Reflected genuine and evolving community conversations.
- Was part of a campaign designed as social commentary to highlight New Zealanders' changing habits and conversations around medicinal cannabis

## **Appendices**

The full complaint is in Appendix 1.

The full advertiser response is in Appendix 2.

Summaries of relevant precedent decisions are in Appendix 3.

More information about the ASA [decisions](#)

## **Codes**

The Complaints Board considered the complaint with reference to the following codes:

### **ADVERTISING STANDARDS CODE**

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

**Rule 1(e) Safety:** Advertisements must not, unless justifiable on educational or social grounds, encourage or condone dangerous, illegal or unsafe practices, or portray situations which encourage or condone a disregard for safety.

#### **Guidelines**

- Obvious hyperbole may be acceptable. Advertisements showing impossible but unsafe scenes may be acceptable, provided this context is likely to be clearly understood.
- Examples of unsafe practices may include, but are not limited to:
  - Reckless activity on roads;
  - The absence of approved safety equipment such as helmets, seatbelts and lifejackets;

- Alcohol consumption in unsafe situations such as driving or sports.
- Glorifying excessive speed; or
- Activity that does not reflect current workplace health and safety requirements.
- Advertisements for products that have legal restrictions for use must include appropriate statements that highlight specific responsibilities to the end user. For example, the use of drones ([Civil Aviation Authority Rules](#)), weapons ([Arms Act 1983](#)), raw milk ([Food Act 2014](#)).
- Safety claims must not exaggerate the benefit to consumers.

### **Complaints Board role**

The Complaints Board's role was to consider whether there had been a breach of the Advertising Standards Code. In deciding whether the Code has been breached the Complaints Board has regard to all relevant matters including:

- Generally prevailing community standards
- Previous decisions
- The consumer takeout of the advertisement, and
- The context, medium, audience and the product or service being advertised, which in this case is:
  - **Context:** Hell Pizza is well-known for pushing the boundaries when it comes to advertising. Cannabis is the most commonly used illegal recreational drug in New Zealand.<sup>1</sup>
  - **Medium:** Website and email (EDM<sup>2</sup>) to existing customers
  - **Audience:** Visitors to the website and existing customers
  - **Product:** Pizza, with a gift of a herb grinder, and a bag of herbs

### **Complaints Board discussion**

The Complaints Board considered each advertisement in turn:

#### **First website advertisement**

*What is the consumer takeout?*

The Complaints Board said the likely consumer takeout of the first website advertisement was you get a gift when you purchase a Doobious pizza. The gift is

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<sup>1</sup> [Report: Drug use in Aotearoa 2022/23](#) – Te Puna Whakaiti Pāmamae Kai Whakapiri/New Zealand Drug Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> EDM – Electronic Direct Mail.

a herb grinder and a bag of herbs ("a baggie"). The Board said the advertisement is a play on words, with its references to "Doobious"<sup>3</sup> "herb" "baggie" and "grinder", which would be seen by many consumers as references to the recreational use of cannabis.

The Complaints Board said it is part of Hell Pizza's marketing strategy to push the boundaries in advertising, and this is another example. The Board said the cannabis references in the advertisement were not about medicinal cannabis.

A minority of the Complaints Board said the advertisement was promoting the Doobious pizza as something to eat after consuming cannabis.

*Does the advertisement encourage or condone an illegal practice?*

A majority of the Complaints Board said the advertisement did not reach the threshold to encourage or condone an illegal practice. The majority said the advertisement was an acknowledgement of the common use of recreational cannabis in New Zealand, even though it is an illegal product. The majority said while the advertisement is a tongue-in-cheek, humorous reference to cannabis use, it is not encouraging or condoning its use.

A minority disagreed. The minority said the advertisement did encourage or condone an illegal practice. This is because the implied references to the use of recreational cannabis suggest acceptance or condoning of the practice. The minority said although recreational cannabis use is commonplace, it is still an illegal activity in New Zealand.

*Was the advertisement prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility?*

A majority of the Complaints Board said the advertisement had been prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility. This is because it did not reach the threshold to encourage or condone an illegal practice.

A minority disagreed. The minority said the advertisement had not been prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility. This is because it did encourage or condone an illegal practice.

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<sup>3</sup> "Doobie" – Urban Dictionary definition: Marijuana cigarette.

## Second website advertisement

### *What is the consumer takeout?*

The Complaints Board said the likely consumer takeout of the second website advertisement was you get a gift when you purchase a Doobious pizza. The gift is a herb grinder and a bag of herbs ("a baggie"). The Board said the advertisement is a play on words, with its references to "Doobious", "herb", "baggie" and "grinder", which would be seen by many consumers as references to the recreational use of cannabis. This version of the advertisement also says the "Grinder is for the supplied sage & oregano only".

The Complaints Board said it is part of Hell Pizza's marketing strategy to push the boundaries in advertising, and this is another example. The Board said the cannabis references in the advertisement were not about medicinal cannabis.

A minority of the Complaints Board said the advertisement was promoting the Doobious pizza as something to eat after consuming cannabis.

### *Does the advertisement encourage or condone an illegal practice?*

A majority of the Complaints Board said the advertisement did not reach the threshold to encourage or condone an illegal practice. The majority said the advertisement was an acknowledgement of the common use of recreational cannabis in New Zealand, even though it is an illegal product. The majority said while the advertisement is a tongue-in-cheek, humorous reference to cannabis use, it is not encouraging or condoning its use.

A minority disagreed. The minority said the advertisement did encourage or condone an illegal practice. This is because the implied references to the use of recreational cannabis suggest acceptance or condoning of the practice. The minority said although recreational cannabis use is commonplace, it is still an illegal activity in New Zealand.

### *Was the advertisement prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility?*

A majority of the Complaints Board said the advertisement had been prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility. This is because it did not reach the threshold to encourage or condone an illegal practice.

A minority disagreed. The minority said the advertisement had not been prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility. This is because it did encourage or condone an illegal practice.

## Email advertisements

### *What is the consumer takeout?*

The Complaints Board said the likely consumer takeout of the three email advertisements, which were sent to existing Hell Pizza customers, was you get a gift when you purchase a Doobious pizza. The gift is a herb grinder and a bag of herbs ("a baggie"). The second email announced the opportunity to win a "Limited Edition Grinder Pack", which includes a grinder, herbs, a hat, a tin and a food voucher. The Board said the advertisements were a play on words, with references to "Doobious" "herb" "baggie" and "grinder", which would be seen by many consumers as references to the recreational use of cannabis.

The Complaints Board said the email advertisements included more references to drug use than the website advertisements. Examples included "blazing<sup>4</sup>", "scored<sup>5</sup>", "sticky-icky", "stash<sup>6</sup>", "tin<sup>7</sup>" and "your next munchie<sup>8</sup> emergency".

### *Did the email advertisements encourage or condone an illegal practice?*

A majority of the Complaints Board said the email advertisements did reach the threshold to encourage or condone an illegal practice. The majority said the reference to "your next munchie emergency" was more obviously encouraging consumers to order the Doobious pizza when they get hungry ("the munchies") after consuming cannabis. The majority said the email advertisements contained numerous references to cannabis use, including the slang terms referred to above.

A minority disagreed. The minority said the email advertisements did not encourage or condone an illegal practice. This is because the advertisements were tongue-in-cheek, humorous reference to cannabis use, they were not encouraging or condoning its use.

### *Were the advertisements prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility?*

A majority of the Complaints Board said the email advertisements had not been prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility. This is because they encouraged or condoned an illegal practice.

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<sup>4</sup> Blaze – Urban Dictionary definition: smoke weed.

<sup>5</sup> Score - Urban Dictionary definition: procure illegal materials – I scored some weed.

<sup>6</sup> Stash - Urban Dictionary definition: secret collection such as drugs.

<sup>7</sup> Tin- Urban Dictionary definition: Container for marijuana.

<sup>8</sup> ["Munchies"](#) – Urban Dictionary definition: The compelling and intense feeling of hunger after smoking weed.

A minority disagreed. The minority said the email advertisements had been prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility. This is because they did not encourage or condone an illegal practice.

### **Outcome**

The Complaints Board ruled the complaint was **Upheled in part** and **Not Upheld in part**, taking into account context, medium, audience and product. The email advertisements were in breach of Principle 1 and Rule 1(e) of the Advertising Standards Code, and the two website advertisements were not in breach of Principle 1 and Rule 1(e) of the Advertising Standards Code.

Email Advertisements not to be used again.

### **APPEAL INFORMATION**

Our process allows any party to the complaint to appeal. Information about our appeal process is on our [website](#). You must notify us of your intent to appeal within 14 calendar days of receiving the written decision. You must send your full appeal application to us within 21 calendar days of receiving the written decision.

## Appendices

- 1. Complaint**
  - 2. Response from Advertiser**
  - 3. Summary of precedent decisions**
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### Appendix 1

#### Complaint

Advertiser website

I initially received via email then noticed it on the website also. I believe this breeches advertising code by encouraging/normalizing drug paraphernalia by:

- The free herb grinder and “baggies” imagery are strongly associated with cannabis use.
- Even if the contents are legal herbs (sage, oregano), the imagery and context may normalise or glorify illegal drug use.
- ASA guidelines require ads to not encourage or condone illegal or unsafe behaviour, regardless of the age of the audience.
- Using everyday food items (pizza) to promote paraphernalia commonly used for illicit drugs can mislead or confuse consumers.
- The promotion could be interpreted as endorsing drug culture, which may fall under “social responsibility” issues.
- Even if the ad is for adults, ASA guidelines require advertising to avoid content likely to cause harm or serious offence.
- Glorifying items associated with illegal substances may be considered inappropriate and socially irresponsible.
- If the promotion could appeal to younger audiences through humour, pop culture references, or novelty (e.g., “baggies”), it may be deemed irresponsible, even if technically restricted to 18+.

## Appendix 2

### Response from Advertiser, Hell Pizza

ASA RESPONSE | HELL DOOBIOUS CAMPAIGN

#### CONTENTS

##### [Introduction](#)

##### [1. Intent and Context: Social Commentary, Not Promotion](#)

##### [2. Social Responsibility: Safeguards and Targeting](#)

##### [3. Accuracy and Legality: No Unsafe or Illegal Products](#)

##### [4. Decency and Offence: Consistent with Community Standards](#)

##### [5. Communications Approach & Methodology](#)

##### [6. Conclusion](#)

##### [6. Appendix](#)

###### [Appendix A – Campaign Creative](#)

###### [Appendix B – Media Activity and Targeting Parameters](#)

###### [Appendix C – Product Specifications](#)

###### [Appendix D – Context and Precedent](#)

###### [Appendix E – Evidence and Research](#)

#### Introduction

We acknowledge the complaint received regarding the Doobious campaign. We take our obligations under the ASA Codes seriously and have taken deliberate steps to ensure the campaign is socially responsible, avoids promoting unsafe or illegal behaviour and is targeted solely at adult audiences.

##### [1. Intent and Context: Social Commentary, Not Promotion](#)

The campaign was designed as social commentary to highlight New Zealanders' changing habits and conversations around medicinal cannabis. Medicinal cannabis has been legal under prescription since 2020, and the 2020 referendum further

demonstrated strong public engagement on the wider issue. Despite being able to hold a prescription for medicinal cannabis use, only 30 per cent of those who use it for this purpose do; sixty per cent of people don't – because they're either too scared to ask their doctor, or it's too expensive. We believe that's a disconnect worth highlighting.

The purpose was not to glorify drug culture or encourage illegal behaviour, but the opposite: to encourage open, mature discussion of a topical issue many New Zealanders already face. The campaign is consistent with the right to advocacy and social commentary within advertising.

## 2. Social Responsibility: Safeguards and Targeting

We carefully designed the promotion to protect minors and prevent misinterpretation:

- **Age restriction:** The Doobious pizza and promotional items were available only to customers aged 18+.
- **Opt-in mechanism:** The food-grade grinder and herb sachet were not automatically included; customers had to actively opt-in online.
- **Separate packaging:** The items were packaged separately from the pizza to avoid accidental handling by children.

These measures ensured the campaign was directed at adults, satisfying the ASA's principle of social responsibility.

## 3. Accuracy and Legality: No Unsafe or Illegal Products

The complaint is based on the inference of cannabis use, not the actual products:

- The pizza contained no cannabis or illegal ingredients and advertising clearly stated this
- The herb sachet was 100% legal and food-safe.
- The grinder was a standard food-grade kitchen accessory.

At no point did the campaign depict, promote, or encourage illegal or unsafe behaviour.

## 4. Decency and Offence: Consistent with Community Standards

HELL has a 25-year history of using satire and irreverence to spark conversation on topical issues and we have a clear precedent when it comes to campaigns of this nature. Doobious is consistent with the brand identity and consumer expectations of HELL; a recent example of precedent includes our AfterLife Pay campaign, which criticises predatory BNPL schemes.

The broader community context is essential when considering this campaign. Medicinal cannabis is legally available, societal attitudes are shifting, and there has been significant public debate around current laws. In this context, the campaign reflects, rather than undermines, prevailing community standards.

## 5. Communications Approach & Methodology

Across all digital platforms used for the "Doobious" campaign, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Reddit, we have implemented robust, multi-layered targeting to restrict advertising content to an adult audience.

Our primary strategy was to use each platform's native audience controls to enforce a strict age gate, ensuring advertisements were only served to users whose registered account information indicates they are 18 years of age or older. Beyond this mandatory age-gating, we further refined our audience by leveraging data matching to target custom lists derived from our own customer database of individuals known by the platform to be over 18.

By combining the platforms' built-in age restrictions with our own customer data, we have been diligent in taking all available steps to limit engagement to a mature audience and minimise the likelihood of an under-18.

In the case of display advertising these placements were specifically targeted at audiences aged between 25-54yrs. All display advertising was processed using Google's DV360 ad GDN.

## 6. Conclusion

In summary, the Doobious campaign:

- Did not promote unsafe or illegal behaviour.
- Included clear safeguards to restrict access to adults.
- Used satire to comment on an important social issue.

- Reflected genuine and evolving community conversations.

We believe the campaign meets the ASA Code's requirements for Social Responsibility, Decency and Offence, and Truthful Presentation, and we respectfully submit that the complaint should not be upheld.

## 6. Appendix

### Appendix A – Campaign Creative

- Digital media files of the Doobious advertisements, including disclaimers (e.g. "contains no cannabis," "18+ only"), covering [display ads, social media assets, website landing page and opt-in flow screenshots, app screens](#)).
- [Email creative](#) sent to HELL Pizza customer database (29 August, 5 September, 13 September).
- [Packaging images](#), including separate placement of promotional items.
- [OOH creative](#) Special Build Billboard

### Appendix B – Media Activity and Targeting Parameters

#### 1. Media Placement Locations

- Facebook
- Instagram
- TikTok
- Reddit
- Online display ads (DV360, GDN)
- HELL Pizza website
- HELL Pizza app
- Email (HELL Pizza customer database)
- Broadcast Video on Demand (BVOD): TVNZ+ and ThreeNow
- OOH – billboard

#### 2. Campaign Dates

- Campaign launch: 29 August 2025
- Email sends: 29 August, 5 September, 13 September 2025
- Scheduled conclusion: 25 September 2025

#### 3. Target Audience and Safeguards

## Social Media

- Facebook: Awareness (25–54), Retargeting, Data Matching (18+)
- Instagram: Awareness (25–54), Retargeting, Data Matching (18+)
- TikTok: Awareness (25–54), Data Matching (18+)
- Reddit: Gamers. While Reddit does not offer explicit age targeting, all HELL Pizza advertising was restricted to 18+.

## Display Advertising

- DV360 Open Exchange: Awareness (25–54), Retargeting
- Google Display Network: Data Matching (18+)

## Owned Channels

- Website, app, and email activity.

## Safeguards

- All marketing materials included a disclaimer.
- All paid digital media targeted to adults only.
- Age-gating applied wherever available.
- Promotional items (herb sachet and grinder) were only available to customers aged 18+, with active opt-in required.
- Items packaged separately from the pizza to avoid accidental handling by children.

## Appendix C – Product Specifications

- [Doobious pizza ingredient](#) list confirming no cannabis or illegal ingredients.
- [Herb sachet specification](#) confirming 100% legal, food-safe product.
- [Grinder product specification](#) confirming it is a standard food-grade kitchen accessory.

## Appendix D – Context and Precedent

- [Examples](#) of prior HELL Pizza satirical campaigns (AfterLife Pay & Greta).

- References to public debate around medicinal cannabis (legal since 2020, widely discussed in New Zealand media).
  - Withanarachchie V, Wilkins, C., & Rychert, M. (2024, June 24). *More women are using medical cannabis but new research shows barriers push some into illegal markets*. The Conversation. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/more-women-are-using-medical-cannabis-but-new-research-shows-barriers-push-some-into-illegal-markets-258797>
  - Weekes, J. (2025, May 6). *Up in smoke: Why New Zealand's medical cannabis industry is struggling to make ends meet*. New Zealand Herald. Retrieved from <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/companies/healthcare/up-in-smoke-why-new-zealands-medical-cannabis-industry-is-struggling-to-make-ends-meet/R37XSBTN5JB4XHPPQHOYGBBAOA/>
  - Nielsen, S., & Graham, M. (2025, August 25). *Medicinal cannabis is most often prescribed for pain, anxiety and sleep. Here's what the evidence says*. The Conversation. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/medicinal-cannabis-is-most-often-prescribed-for-pain-anxiety-and-sleep-heres-what-the-evidence-says-262429>

## Appendix E – Evidence and Research

- Massey University. (2025, January 14). *Survey shows one-third of medical cannabis users now have a prescription for legal prescribed cannabis products*. Massey University News. Retrieved from <https://www.massey.ac.nz/about/news/survey-shows-one-third-of-medical-cannabis-users-now-have-a-prescription-for-legal-prescribed-cannabis-products/>
- New Zealand Drug Foundation. (2024). *Drug use in Aotearoa 2023/24*. New Zealand Drug Foundation. Retrieved from [https://drugfoundation.org.nz/assets/PageBlocks/Downloads/Drug-use-in-Aotearoa\\_2023\\_24.pdf](https://drugfoundation.org.nz/assets/PageBlocks/Downloads/Drug-use-in-Aotearoa_2023_24.pdf)
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- New Zealand Drug Foundation. (2025, January). *Medicinal cannabis bulletin* (No. 10). Retrieved from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59152c88b8a79bdb0e644f2a/t/678438d79d8b2c4bba668480/1736718567838/10-Medicinal+cannabis+bulletin-final-release.pdf>

## Appendix 3

### Summary of precedent decisions

**Decision 23/022** concerned a Hell Pizza advertisement for the Unholy Donut, which appeared on both the Stuff and the Hell Pizza websites. Next to the image of the Unholy Donut, and two chocolate fingers, was the text “This Valentine’s Day, get two fingers in your donut...”.

There were two complaints about these advertisements. The Complainants said the advertisement contained inappropriate sexual innuendo.

The majority of the Board said the advertisements were not likely to cause serious or widespread offence. The majority noted it is part of Hell Pizza’s marketing strategy to push the boundaries in advertising, and this is another example. The majority took into account the advertisement was seen on the Advertiser’s website and consumers visiting the site are likely to be aware of the messaging it uses. The majority said the audience viewing the advertisement on the Stuff website was predominantly adult and the sexual innuendo would not have been the takeout for all viewers. In assessing the threshold for serious or widespread offence, the majority noted two complaints had been received.

In accordance with the majority, the Complaints Board ruled the complaint was Not Upheld.

**Decision 25/120** concerned a Turners YouTube advertisement, presented by “Tina from Turners”, which encourages viewers to sell their cars at Turners, included the following lyrics and imagery: “Sell us your Ford, Lorde” (image of a car doing a burnout), “The one your auntie says looks shit” (as a woman (an “auntie”) throws a jandal), “The cops are looking out for it” (as a spotlight is being shone on a car) and “You got so fat, the seats don’t fit!” (as Tina is shown trying to get into a car, wearing an inflatable Japanese sumo outfit).

The Complainant was concerned the advertisement showed an illegal activity – a car doing a burnout. It also referred to the cops looking out for a car, implying it was stolen, used the word “shit”, was offensive to obese people, directed towards Māori and was a disgrace to kiwis.

A majority of the Complaints Board upheld the complaint saying it was not socially responsible to condone a dangerous, illegal or unsafe practice, by showing a car doing a “burnout”.

A minority disagreed. The minority said the advertisement did not reach the threshold to encourage or condone a dangerous, illegal or unsafe practice or show anti-social behaviour. The minority said the image of the car doing a burnout was only shown briefly, was incidental to the main message in the advertisement and was part of the light-hearted and quirky song and images that made up the ad.