

**Product:** Confectionery (Crisps)  
**Advertisers:** Largo Foods (Hunky Dorys)  
**Medium:** Posters/Billboards

**Advertisement** The advertising campaign consisted of a number of posters featuring women rugby players in various playing poses. Each poster had a different strap line but all featured the wording “Proud sponsors of Irish Rugby”. Examples were as follows:

One poster featured a woman rugby player, staring out at her audience, carrying a rugby ball under her arm. She was wearing a cropped sports top and brief shorts, the strap line on this poster read “Others Haka We Hunky”.

Another poster featured two women, similarly attired, jumping for a rugby ball while the other women in the picture appear to be also grappling for the same ball with some of the players holding on to one woman’s thighs. The strap line read “Mine”.

A further poster featured a woman, once again staring out at her audience; she was also holding a rugby ball. Her sports clothing appeared similar to those worn in the other posters but in this instance her cropped sports top is low cut giving spectators a view of her cleavage. The strap line here read “Are you staring at my crisps?”

**Complaints:** Over 300 complaints were received, from both men and women in relation to this advertising campaign.

- The common theme running through most of the complaints was that the campaign was offensive, exploitative, tasteless, degrading and sexist towards women and brought advertising into disrepute.
- Some complainants considered that the images used had nothing whatsoever to do with the sale of crisps and were merely used to objectify women as sex objects.
- Other complainants considered that the advertising was demeaning to women who like to participate in sports and insulting to their integrity.
- The Rape Crisis Network Ireland, while reiterating what most consumer complainants said, also said that they found the campaign, which featured images of women only, to be cynical and unhelpful in terms of building a society that is free from sexual abuse and violence.
- The Union of Students in Ireland considered the campaign to be irresponsible.
- RENEW, a support group, made similar comments to the other complainants but they also considered that shock tactics and complaints made in relation to advertising campaigns led to an increase in product sales and free advertising for the companies concerned.

**Intermediate Action:** In view of the volume and nature of complaints received by the Authority, the Secretariat considered the case to be particularly grave. In accordance with Paragraph 15 of Section 4 of Chapter 2 of the Code, the Secretariat requested Largo Foods to take interim action pending the completion of the investigation and adjudication of the complaints by withdrawing the Advertising.

**Advertisers' Response:** The advertisers in their response said that following on from the ASAI's request that the posters be withdrawn, Largo Food Exports Limited ("Largo") instructed their media buying company, Mindshare, to take down the posters without delay. This instruction was communicated verbally by the advertisers but to verify that this is what happened the advertisers provided evidence to the Authority of the number of posters that had been removed. Largo Foods said that it was their understanding that within three business days ninety per cent of the posters had been withdrawn. They said that they wanted to emphasise that Largo undertook this action in deference of both the IRFU and the ASAI and not because they believed that the campaign was either flawed or offensive or in any way compromised the standards of the advertising Code.

The advertisers went on to address a number of the points of principle that had been highlighted in correspondence from a number of interest groups, as follows:

- **Bringing advertising into disrepute:** This they said was a simple, entertaining campaign with a timely, sporting angle that sought to appeal to all elements of society. It was photographed by Walter Iooss, a world renowned and respected sports photographer who had worked for many years for Sports Illustrated.
- **Causes grave or widespread offence:** Largo said that they had received unprecedented support from the Irish public on radio, in the newspapers and on the internet. They had been asked, they said, by many people not to withdraw the poster campaign. They provided the Authority with a sample of emails received in support of their campaign.
- **Exploitation of sexuality:** Largo said that the Hunky Dorys campaign was a good natured and funny campaign that presented women in a sporting role. They said that there had been many recent campaigns comprising of men and women which they considered to be much more sexual in nature.
- **Condone dangerous behaviour or unsafe practices, provoke violence or anti-social behaviour:** The advertisers said that they found it difficult to grasp how the Hunky Dorys campaign could in any way be deemed to encourage such behaviour.

In conclusion, Largo said that the Hunky Dorys campaign had been a light hearted, funny and enjoyable campaign that had received unprecedented support throughout the country, particularly in such difficult economic times. It had never been their intention, they said, to offend any individual or group of individuals. They said that they had apologised on radio unreservedly to anybody who had been offended by the campaign.

Without prejudice to its position, Largo said that they respected the views of various interest groups and had removed the posters. They believed that they had behaved in a professional and respectful manner and, as a result, should not be sanctioned by the Advertising Authority.

- Code Sections:**
- 2.15 A marketing communication should contain nothing that is likely to cause grave or widespread offence.
  - 2.16 Marketing communications should respect the dignity of all persons and should avoid causing offence on grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race or membership of the traveller community.
  - 2.17 Marketing communications should respect the principle of the equality of men and women. They should avoid sex stereotyping and any exploitation or demeaning of men and women. Where appropriate, marketing communications should use generic terms that include both the masculine and feminine gender; for example, the term 'business executive' covers both men and women.
  - 2.24 A marketing communication should not mislead, or be likely to mislead, by inaccuracy, ambiguity, exaggeration, omission or otherwise.

#### **Chapter 2, Section 4 – Complaints Procedure**

- 14 A marketing communication which has contravened the rules of the Code is required to be amended or withdrawn.
- 15 Notwithstanding the above, the investigation procedure and the consideration by the Complaints Committee may be accelerated or otherwise varied where circumstances warrant. If a case is considered by the Secretariat, in its absolute discretion, to be particularly grave, the Secretariat may request interim action by the advertiser/promoter or agency, including the immediate amendment or withdrawal of a marketing communication or promotion pending completion of the investigation and adjudication by the Complaints Committee.

**Conclusion:** The Committee reviewed the response from the Advertisers and all information provided by the Advertisers which consisted of emails and positive media comment. They also reviewed the contents of a randomly selected sample of the complaints. All of the complaints were provided to them for consideration.

While the Committee accepted that evidence had been provided that a section of the population found the advertisement to be amusing and inoffensive they recognised that over 300 complaints had been received from individuals and groups who found the advertisements to be unacceptable on a variety of grounds including the exploitation of sexuality and the use of provocative images to attract attention.

Having regard to the nature and unprecedented level of complaints received, the Committee decided that the advertisements had caused grave and widespread offence.

The Committee decided that the advertisements constituted a grave breach of the provisions of the Code as set out in Section 2.15, 2.16 and 2.17.

**Action Required:** The advertisements (which have been withdrawn) should remain withdrawn on a permanent basis and the advertisements should not be published again in any media, including the advertisers' website.

The Committee decided that the advertisements were in grave breach of the Code. It is a matter for the Authority to decide whether any further sanctions will be imposed.