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AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT Government Advertising 2015-16

Effectiveness of peer review in NSW Government advertising

Overall, the peer review process provides good assurance that government advertising campaigns are necessary and cost effective, according to a report released today by the NSW Auditor-General, Margaret Crawford.

In NSW, the *Government Advertising Act 2011* requires government advertising campaigns with a likely expenditure over \$50,000 to be independently peer reviewed before launch. The Department of Premier and Cabinet manages this process, which includes allocating and coordinating peer reviewers to assess campaigns against the Premier's 'Government Advertising Guidelines'.

Noting that the peer review process is generally effective, the NSW Auditor-General focused on some areas needing improvement:

- Peer reviewers do not currently share a consistent understanding on the purpose of the peer review process and the role of peer reviews.
- The process for allocating reviewers to campaigns could be improved. While this was not an issue for the majority of campaigns reviewed as part of the audit, there were some occasions where peer reviewers allocated to a campaign did not have the right mix of skills and experience for the campaign being assessed.
- The current process does not fully satisfy the requirements of the Guidelines because peer reviewers do not consider whether mainstream advertising is the most appropriate medium to achieve campaign objectives.

Additionally, the Department does not provide regular feedback to reviewers to support improvement in the quality of peer reviews. A significant proportion of peer reviewers indicated that they would find feedback useful.

The Auditor-General recommends the Department publish clear guidance around the purpose of peer review, and the roles and responsibilities of those involved.

Further information

A full copy of the report is on the Audit Office website.

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