

SA retailer Big Blue criticised for offensive "Water Polo Teacher's Pet" t-shirt

South African fashion and gifting retailer Big Blue has come under fire for selling a t-shirt printed with the words "Water Polo Teacher's Pet".



The controversial clothing item makes light of two separate events over the last two years in which former [Parktown Boys' High School](#) assistant water polo coach was found guilty of 144 counts of sexual assault and 12 counts of common assault, and a former [Bishops Diocesan College](#) teacher and water polo coach was accused of engaging in acts of sexual misconduct with a handful of pupils.

A host of South Africans took to Big Blue's social platforms this week to express their disgust that the t-shirt was allowed on shelves, calling the item in question "offensive", "insensitive" and "triggering to anyone who has been a target of sexual abuse". Among the social media critics was child protection activist and Advocacy Manager for Women and Men Against Child Abuse (WMACA) Luke Lamprecht, who posted a series of questions in a post on Facebook.

"Now, a few things come to mind: disbelief - is this true or are we reading too much into this? What did the brief for this design sound like and/or what were the 'creative discussions' entered into to come up with and to approve this? Was it Big Blue who designed it? If not, what would make them buy and stock this over the massive shopping frenzy over the festive season?" questioned Lamprecht.

He continued: "What did shoppers think when they saw it and who picked it up? Who bought it, for whom and in what context will they use it? Was it bought as a 'gift' or for themselves? What will the responses of people, both known and passing strangers, be? Will they laugh, be shocked into silence or call them out?"

"Most importantly, how do the Parktown [Boys High] and Bishops victims feel about now being made into pets?"

Big Blue responds

Big Blue subsequently issued a swift statement on Wednesday apologising "unreservedly" for the "offensive t-shirts" and confirming that the product has been recalled and will be destroyed.

Read Big Blue's full statement below:

"Big Blue apologises unreservedly. We messed up and we are sorry. These offensive T-shirts have been recalled from our stores and sent for destruction. We apologise for not picking this up earlier during this busy festive period. All customers who have purchased these T-shirts are welcome to return them for a full refund. They can be returned to any Big Blue Store, alternatively, customers can contact online@bigblue.co.za so that we can arrange collection of the T-shirt and refund their money.

This is one very bad judgment call that was not thought through. The insensitive nature of this T-shirt detracts from a much broader issue that we face in our country and the world today. Big Blue does not condone abuse of any nature and is truly apologetic."

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