

FAMILY COUNCIL OF VICTORIA Inc.

PO Box 864, North Melbourne, Vic 3151

Incorporation No. A352 37K

www.fcv.org.au



Submission

Inquiry into the Australian film and literature

Classification scheme

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee

Due: 4 March 2011

From

Family Council of Victoria

The Family Council of Victoria believes that the natural family is society's most important and vital institution

We believe that a caring society will put the needs of children ahead of the demands of adults.

The Family Council of Victoria consists of a wide range of pro-family pro-life affiliate organizations representing many thousands of families across Victoria.

Contact:

**Peter Stokes,
President**

FAMILY COUNCIL OF VICTORIA Inc.

PO Box 864, North Melbourne, Vic 3151

Incorporation No. A352 37K

www.fcv.org.au



Section A – Our Key Concerns

The Effect on children from films, publications and computer games

The Family Council of Victoria believes that the ultimate authority for children is the parent, not the government. Parents should be able to expect all governments to support and compliment their roll, not undermine it by passing anti-family laws and legalizing that which is contrary to preserving the family unit, developing disciplined and well adjusted young people without undue outside influences and pressure.

Children are affected by the computer games they play and the material they see and hear – that affect can be good or bad depending on the values our society sets.

As a community we have a responsibility to ensure that they are not adversely affected by films and computer games. We must err on the side of great caution and seek to protect them, especially in their developing years, up to age 21.

- In July 1999 the *Royal Australasian College of Physicians* released a report entitled, *Getting in the Picture*. It said that young children are not intellectually, socially and emotionally mature enough to interpret what they see on television.
- They cannot understand the emotional cause and effect which lies behind what they see on television. Consequently, they may copy the action they see without really understanding the consequences and may harm themselves or other children as a result (pp.10, 11).

This also applies to what children hear and what they see in movies and on video as well.

We are extremely concerned about the constant sex, violence and bad language that confront our children and young people today.

The growing adverse effect on young people from largely uncensored social networking and the internet - with it's all too easily accessed explicit X-rated pornography – is of major concern.

In this initial section we consider the various classifiable elements in the classification scheme, particularly with reference to the adverse effects of inappropriate material on children.

1. Language

The language of children is adversely affected by what they hear in films. When characters in a film swear profusely children think that this is acceptable behavior. The change to regulations on television allowing swearing after 8.30 pm has led to declining standards and increased swearing on television. Films are becoming full of the 'f' word and this lowers the tone of the film and the subsequent language of children.

2. Sex

The viewing of sex scenes removes the natural inhibitions of children and teenagers. It alters their understanding and perception of how relationships develop and what is appropriate behavior.

FAMILY COUNCIL OF VICTORIA Inc.

PO Box 864, North Melbourne, Vic 3151

Incorporation No. A352 37K

www.fcv.org.au



Their understanding of relationships and family can suffer greatly when they see fleeting relationships and people having sex when they have only just met each other. Young children are clearly adversely affected when sex is shown on the screen, especially when these depictions appear in G-rated and PG films.

3. Violence

We are living in an increasingly violent society, much of this violence appears to have a correlation with the increased violence seen on TV, in movies, and contained in video games,

Children often view thousands of shooting and murders by the time they are 18. It is not rocket science to see that this exposure will affect the minds of children and teenagers. It is clearly responsible for developing the violent culture we see all around us as it sends that message that violence is normal and an acceptable way to seek revenge or restitution.

All too often today computer games involve violence and killing – this also must affect the way children relate to other people.

Army educator, Col David Grossman, has written an insightful research paper highlighting the incredible reflexes found in young people who have repeatedly played computer games. He links that to the rise in school shootings in the USA where the accuracy rate is incredible because they have ‘trained’ their reflexes by playing computer games. Prior to that, he says that it was extremely difficult to train people to actually shoot at a target with the intent to kill and have any sort of accuracy.

His paper, along with further research, is located on <http://www.killology.com/index.htm> and now posted on the Warrior Science Group website <http://www.warriorsciencegroup.com/>.

His main arguments are presented in this paper:

Teaching Kids to Kill at http://www.killology.com/article_teachkid.htm

4. Adult themes

‘Adult themes’ should be for adults not children.

The term is extremely vague and has very broad meanings.

Children exposed to such ‘themes’ which usually include adult sexual relationship situations will be adversely affected, especially by repeated viewing.

Constant portrayal of these often dysfunctional situations will prematurely sexualize young people and suggest to them that such behavior is normal.

ALL street visible advertising of ANY sort – from shops to bus shelters to billboards - must conform to a new ‘G’ classification similar to that proposed in section ‘B’ for film and TV. They should not contain ANY nudity, sex, sexual suggestion, bad language or adult ‘themes’.

These forms of advertising are on public display and our children are vulnerable because parents have absolutely no control mechanism to avoid sexualized explicit images

The [American Academy of Pediatrics](http://www.aap.org/) launched a new policy statement in September 2010, that said ‘pediatricians, parents and media companies need to be more cognizant of the sexual material that

FAMILY COUNCIL OF VICTORIA Inc.

PO Box 864, North Melbourne, Vic 3151

Incorporation No. A352 37K

www.fcv.org.au



children and teens are exposed to through television, music, the Internet and other media’.

Quote from report in [HealthDay/USA Today](http://www.healthday.com/HealthDay/USA_Today) and in article on *Medical News* at <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/200436.php>

The policy statement: *Sexuality, Contraception, and the Media*

At <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/126/3/576>

The Policy statement says “American children and teenagers spend more than 7 hours/day with a variety of different media.⁷ Those media are filled with sexual messages and images, many of which are unrealistic.”²

They go on to say “Numerous studies have delineated the media's powerful influence on adolescents' sexual attitudes, values, and beliefs.”^{2,39-42}

In particular, the statement considers the impact that exposure to sexual activity in films, magazines and TV leads to early sexual experimentation and intercourse and the early sexualisation of our children.

The statement says:

“Nine longitudinal studies have given potential answers to the question of whether sexy media contribute to early sexual activity, and the answer seems to be “yes.”^{41,55-62}

Results of 7 of these studies have shown that exposure to sexual content in TV and other media in early adolescence— particularly for white teenagers—can as much as double the risk of early sexual intercourse. Adolescents whose parents limit their TV-viewing are less likely to engage in early sex.⁵⁸ Younger children who have viewed adult-oriented TV shows and movies are more likely to begin having sexual intercourse earlier.⁶¹ The study samples together total nearly 10 000 teenagers nationwide, and the most ambitious studies included other media such as movies, music, and magazines.⁵⁷ In addition, a recent study revealed that early exposure to sexual content doubled the risk of teen pregnancy.⁶⁰ Clearly, the media play a major role in determining whether certain teenagers become sexually active earlier rather than later,⁶³ and sexually explicit media may be particularly important.^{41, 64}

Donna Rice Hughes, notes the harm done to children from pornography on the website *Protect Kids*.

She lists a variety of consequences, one of which is the acting out of the behaviors they view.

She says “Children often imitate what they've seen, read, or heard. Studies suggest that exposure to pornography can prompt kids to act out sexually against younger, smaller, and more vulnerable children. Experts in the field of childhood sexual abuse report that any premature sexual activity in children always suggests two possible stimulants: experience and exposure. This means that the sexually deviant child may have been molested or simply exposed to sexuality through pornography.”^{viii}

In a study of six hundred American males and females of junior high school age and above, researcher Dr. Jennings Bryant found that 91 percent of the males and 82 percent of the females admitted having been exposed to X-rated, hard-core pornography. Over 66 percent of

FAMILY COUNCIL OF VICTORIA Inc.

PO Box 864, North Melbourne, Vic 3151

Incorporation No. A352 37K

www.fcv.org.au



the males and 40 percent of the females reported wanting to try out some of the sexual behaviours they had witnessed. And among high schoolers, 31 percent of the males and 18 percent of the females admitted actually doing some of the things they had seen in the pornography within a few days after exposure.^{ix}

To See *How Pornography harms children*, please visit <http://www.protectkids.com/effects/harms.htm>

5. Drug Use

The adverse effects of illicit drug taking are well-known and well documented.

The fact that Classification Guidelines today allow for depictions of drug use in films that are watched by children and teenagers is totally irresponsible.

Recently, research has **yet again** highlighted the correlation between cannabis use and mental illness. See 'Cannabis use 'accelerates' mental illness', The Australian, Feb 9, 2011.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/cannabis-use-accelerates-mental-illness/story-e6frg6nf-1226002449477>

It is reprehensible that the 'G' and 'PG' classification categories actually allow the depiction of varying degrees of drug use.

G rating: "Drug use should be implied only very discreetly, and be justified by context.

PG: "Drug use should be justified by context."

This is the same as in the M and MA15+ categories.

The depiction of **ANY** drug use in these classifications on **ANY** media is totally unacceptable.

We **strongly** recommend that the Classification Guidelines on '**G**' and '**PG**' categories should be revised so as to remove all depiction of drug use in TV, films and computer games.

Effect on the general community

Adults can also be adversely affected in the same ways by exposure to violence, sex, drug use and 'adult themes' in film and computer games.

Ted Bundy, serial rapist and murderer in the USA, has described how he watched increasingly violent and sexually explicit films before acting out these themes in real life. His story is recorded on the *Focus on the Family* video *Pornography: Progressive and Deadly*.

The interview is online at <http://www.pureintimacy.org/piArticles/A000000433.cfm>

For adults, violence in films encourages the belief that violence can solve problems. Repeated exposure to violence leads to an unbalanced view of life.

Poor relationships between men and women can be a consequence of viewing casual sexual

FAMILY COUNCIL OF VICTORIA Inc.

PO Box 864, North Melbourne, Vic 3151

Incorporation No. A352 37K

www.fcv.org.au



relationships on the screen.

Repeated swearing reduces our ability to discern what is good and noble behaviour. Increased blasphemy in films (using the name of God or Jesus) reduces the respect for religion in the community.

Recommendations - Section A

One: ALL guidelines terms, such as ‘Discrete’, “mild”, “moderate” must be strictly defined rather than left to the discretion of the review panel.

Two: Publishers or producers of serial publications, and TV series must be required to submit the whole series to the Classification Board to be classified.

Three: As outlined in section ‘B’ all categories should be moved upwards by up one level (eg: current G becomes PG etc) and create a new children/family-friendly G-rated category

Four: Explicit sex, sexual violence, torture and degradation, and full frontal nudity should all be elements that would cause a film to be classified as ‘Refused Classification’.

Five: Re printed publications – All publications containing full frontal nudity should be banned from non-restricted point of sale outlets such as newsagents, petrol stations, and book shops. They should be rated Category 2

All Category 2 publications should remain behind closed doors in restricted 18+ areas.

Such areas should not be part of another store but at separate locations, outside regular shopping precincts.

All magazines containing nudity should be placed into Category 1.

All Category 1 magazines and publications should be out of the general sight of children – held under the counter and not placed on public display.

Six: All artwork, art books etc that contain nudity should be classified under the Classification guidelines as Category 1.

So called, ‘artistic merit’, should not be able to override the classification Guidelines.

Seven: Music lyrics, themes and videos should be brought under the National Classification Scheme.

Eight: All advertisements should be regulated by classification Guidelines with the same scrutiny as films and publications.

ALL street visible advertising – shops, bus shelters, billboards, etc must conform to a new ‘G’ classification similar to that for film and TV. Therefore, containing NO nudity, sex or sexual suggestion, bad language etc.

Nine: The ‘Refused Classification’ category should retain all its current elements. In addition, all sexually explicit activities currently in the X18+ category should be classified RC and all sexual violence should be moved from the R18+ category to the RC category.

FAMILY COUNCIL OF VICTORIA Inc.

PO Box 864, North Melbourne, Vic 3151

Incorporation No. A352 37K

www.fcv.org.au



Section B - Classification Guidelines overhaul

A major issue with the classification Guidelines is the ‘slippery slope’ effect that has occurred in the past. This “evolution” of the guidelines is reflected in the lack of clarity in terms such as “mild” or “moderate”.

Terms need to be clearly identified in the guidelines, rather than be open to the interpretation of censor:

Additional problem arise if TV programs, films and games contain *several* “classifiable elements”. Clearly, the more “classifiable elements” a particular media contains the greater will be the impact.

For instance, a film may contain discrete ‘adult themes’, moderate sexual activity, some mild coarse language and some even moderate violence but because there are several different elements, however ‘mild’ or ‘moderate’, the total impact of the film will be much greater.

The compounding of these ‘elements’ in a film or game must be taken into consideration and should result in a higher classification.

This is particularly relevant in games because games are inclined to have greater amounts of violence packed into a reasonably-short (depending on the game) time-frame. The continuous flow of violence in a game needs to be taken into consideration when being classified. Just because a game’s violence only reaches a “moderate” level this does not mean the game should receive an M-Mature rating. Because of the frequency of the “moderate” level of violence the game should be classified as at least MA15+.

We believe there should be a dramatic overhaul of current guidelines.

Over many years there has been a creep downwards, resulting in today’s ‘G’ and ‘PG’ categories containing elements that only a few years ago were M or even M-15+..

M-15+ today contain elements that were RC Refused Classification just a few years ago.

This is especially dangerous in the case of the internet and for free to air TV which is, as the name suggests, freely available in almost every home. Children and young people of any age can access these media in their own home unless they are constantly monitored - which all adults should appreciate is an impossibility. It is not sufficient to simply say “There is an OFF switch. We owe our vulnerable children and Young people a great deal more than that pathetic response.

Therefore we recommend the following:

G – General

The ‘G’ General Category should NOT contain any ‘very mild sexual activity’, ‘very mild coarse language’, ‘very discreetly implied drug use’ or any ‘nudity (even that supposedly justified by context)’.

Children must be able to watch ‘G’ category TV, and video and play ‘G’ rated games without being confronted by any such material.

FAMILY COUNCIL OF VICTORIA Inc.

PO Box 864, North Melbourne, Vic 3151

Incorporation No. A352 37K

www.fcv.org.au



PG – Parental Guidance

Only ‘mild’ violence, No sexual activity, No coarse language and No drug use and No indiscreet nudity (even that ‘supposedly’ justified by ‘context’) should appear in a ‘PG’ movie, TV program or video game.

M – Mature

Even those who are thought old enough to watch ‘M’ material do not deserve to be confronted by what this category currently allows. Sadly ‘M’ category films are also too easily viewed by young teens and even children.

For the sake of the whole community there should be NO sexual violence, No direct portrayal of sexual activity and definitely NO drug use, in this category.

This category should only allow ‘very mild’ coarse language and ‘very mild’ violence and only ‘discreet’ nudity in context. Sexual activity should only be allowed if ‘discreetly implied’ and justified by context’.

‘Sexual violence’, even that supposedly justified by context’ is still unwarranted violence and a very bad example to any young person or adult.

MA15+ - Mature Accompanied

MA15+ films and games now allow far too much violence and coarse language. These should be limited to moderate amounts and in context ONLY.

This category should only allow ‘mild’ coarse language and ‘mild’ violence and ‘discreet’ nudity. Sexual activity should only be allowed if ‘implied’ and justified by context’.

NO sexual violence, only ‘discreet’ in context drug use should be included as elements in this category.

R18+ - Restricted

Today’s R18+ category films clearly have virtually no restrictions. We believe it is in ever society’s best interests if violence, sex and course language are limited, even for adults.

The ‘idea’ that adults should be able to see, hear play, whatever they want to, regardless of the affect that has on society, is nonsense.

The whole society needs to act with restraint and with responsibility in a whole range of areas towards the weaker and more vulnerable members of that society. We are all responsible for the wellbeing of the whole society and restrictions properly place on a community benefit everyone.

Therefore we contend that sexual violence should not be permitted even in R18+ material, furthermore, drug use and nudity should still be required to be “justified by context”.

What we have effectively tried to suggest is the reversal of the current trend - that all material be moved into the category above where it is in the current guidelines and that ‘G’ becomes a new much

FAMILY COUNCIL OF VICTORIA Inc.

PO Box 864, North Melbourne, Vic 3151

Incorporation No. A352 37K

www.fcv.org.au



more restricted guideline, a completely family-friendly category.

Section C – Response to Specific Issues Identified by Committee

We applaud this Inquiry for investigating several valid issues regarding classification and the sexualisation of children. We have addressed each issue brought before this Inquiry in succession.

a) the use of serial classifications for publications;

Serial classification for publications, such as *Playboy*, do not work. There is no reason that each print of a serial publication should not undergo classification. It is rather redundant to classify only a handful of issues and apply them to the complete series of publications.

Furthermore, there is a lack of stringency in the system that regulates these classifications and it is not unknown for a publication to lapse into releasing an edition that does not meet the serial classification that has been imposed upon it. This is a further compelling reason to require every edition of a publication to be classified.

b) the desirability of national standards for the display of restricted publications and films;

We believe in and encourage National standards so as to provide uniformity and reliability..

We have suggested that both category 1 and category 2 publications not be on display in shops service stations etc.

Category 1 material should be behind the counter and category 2 should be behind closed doors, in separate premises – not attached to other retail outlets as is currently allowable.

This is particularly in the best interests of children who need to be protected from the display of these magazines in shops as they frequent are at the moment.

c) the enforcement system, including call-in notices, referrals to state and territory law enforcement agencies and follow-up of such referrals;

We have found that nobody regularly checks many magazine outlets.

We have discovered that self regulation allows publishers to creep into magazines material that impinges on a higher guideline usually without detection.

The enforcement system must be enhanced by random but regular policing, especially in regards to publications. There needs to be stringent monitoring of the display pornographic material.

FAMILY COUNCIL OF VICTORIA Inc.

PO Box 864, North Melbourne, Vic 3151

Incorporation No. A352 37K

www.fcv.org.au



We have observed deliberate attempts to sell Category 2 material in amongst Category 1 material to entice interest in greater levels of pornography. This is deliberate seduction by those who put profit ahead of social responsibility.

d) the interaction between the National Classification Scheme and customs regulations;

We accept that our nation is bounded by sea but we need far more stringent controls on the by our Customs service to intercept material being brought in from overseas.

We need to have much harsher penalties for those who try to circumvent the legal system and the classification guidelines.

e) the application of the National Classification Scheme to works of art and the role of artistic merit in classification decisions;

“Artistic merit” should not be allowed to be a scapegoat for pornography.

All material needs to be restricted to certain age groups, even so-called works of art’. So we recommend a regulated National Classification Scheme for all media including ‘art’

f) the impact of X18+ films, including their role in the sexual abuse of children;

There can be no doubt about the impact of films that fall into the X18+ category and as we have already stated, video games have an even greater impact on the mind and can inevitably lead from game to reality.

The desensitization of the viewer and even greater desensitization of a player of violent games has been the clear cause of so much violence by young people. IF we believe advertising works, and clearly it does because many millions of dollars are spent every year on it, then we must accept the danger of minds consumed by sex and violence. Especially interactive sex and violence.

g) the classification of films, including explicit sex or scenes of torture and degradation, sexual violence and nudity as R18+;

As we have stated above, a drastic overhaul of our Classification guidelines is long overdue.

The ‘creep’ downwards has been blatantly obvious to all those who work to maintain a value based society rather than an ‘anything goes’, ‘if it feels good do it’, society.

Families suffer greatly because society’s standards are falling. We must protect the family and its vital role in society

FAMILY COUNCIL OF VICTORIA Inc.

PO Box 864, North Melbourne, Vic 3151

Incorporation No. A352 37K

www.fcv.org.au



All violence, but especially sexual violence, along with explicit sexual activity corrupts younger and younger people. Society must have limitations.

h) the possibility of including outdoor advertising, such as billboards, in the National Classification Scheme;

The Advertising Standards Board should be brought into line with the same guidelines as stated above. These media must be included in censorship guidelines and must comply with a Child/family friendly 'G' category.

i) the application of the National Classification Scheme to music videos;

The same guidelines suggested above for film, TV, video games etc, must apply to Music videos.

All three elements of music videos, music, lyrics and actions should be taken into consideration when evaluating this media as should themes and language, provocative dancing and adult themes.

j) the effectiveness of the 'ARIA/AMRA Labeling Code of Practice for Recorded Music Product Containing Potentially Offensive Lyrics and/or Themes';

The current voluntary Code of Practice clearly isn't working. We need a review and a new and enforced code of practice.

k) the effectiveness of the National Classification Scheme in preventing the sexualisation of children and the objectification of women in all media, including advertising;

There can be NO doubt that the National Classification Scheme is far too liberal and completely failing to prevent the sexualisation of our children and young adults.

Our recommendations are stated above as an initial thrust to redress this situation. – policing or the guidelines is another issue that must be addressed.

All public media advertising needs to be controlled and restricted.

Using sex to sell any item or service is not a new phenomenon but it is clearly getting totally out of control.

Parents lack control over what advertisements are shown on television and in public places including shopping centers. Broadcasting agencies have failed properly monitor TV programs; therefore, this Media must come under the National Classification Scheme to regulate advertisements.

l) the interaction between the National Classification Scheme and the role of the Australian

FAMILY COUNCIL OF VICTORIA Inc.

PO Box 864, North Melbourne, Vic 3151

Incorporation No. A352 37K

www.fcv.org.au



Communications and Media Authority in supervising broadcast standards for television and Internet content;

ACMA provides a voluntary code of practice - this **MUST** stop. There is no legitimate reason to allow television shows to remain outside of the National Classification Scheme.

Once a TV show has been aired, it is too late to do anything about it – the damage is done.

ALL free to air and Pay TV programs should be classified **before** they are broadcast. Yes, this will be expensive, but it is a necessary expense if we are to protect society from unwarranted sexualisation and violence.

The internet is a very valuable education and communication resource, but it should not have a free reign to also corrupt our society. A society without values simply leads to anarchy.

We need a public and media ‘think tank’ with representation from industry, government, and society/family, to evaluate the right way forward.

ISP censoring is a limited response and also tends to negate personal responsibility.

National software availability and personal responsibility must work hand in hand. Education of society about the dangers of pornography/sexualisation, similar perhaps to that which has successfully reduced smoking in our nation, should be used.

m) the effectiveness of the National Classification Scheme in dealing with new technologies and new media, including mobile phone applications, which have the capacity to deliver content to children, young people and adults;

If the National Classification Scheme is to remain relevant to new technologies its scope needs to be expanded. Mobile phones now have internet access and so many different downloadable apps. This needs to be included in a broad bipartisan government / society ongoing review.

n) the Government’s reviews of the Refused Classification (RC) category; and

We want to see a greatly expanded list of issues included in the RC classification. Everything in the Refused Classification (RC) section should remain there and more. The excessive violence, sex and drug use that are depicted in these films and games should remain unavailable to the public. As stated above, everything in the X18+ category should be refused classification.

There is no logical reason why the ACT and Northern Territory should be out of step with the rest of Australia. **BUT** we **DO NOT** want to see the lowest common denominator win. The ACT and NT must come into line not the other way around.

FAMILY COUNCIL OF VICTORIA Inc.

PO Box 864, North Melbourne, Vic 3151

Incorporation No. A352 37K

www.fcv.org.au



o) any other matter, with the exception of the introduction of a R18+ classification for computer games which has been the subject of a current consultation by the Attorney-General's Department.

No, except to say exactly what you have attempted to exclude in this question – an exclusion for which I see no valid reason,

We totally oppose an R18+ classification for computer games. In fact the M15+ category needs to be brought into line with our recommendations for films as outlined above.

Thank you for the opportunity to have input into this important enquiry.

Peter Stokes

President

Family council of Victoria.