

PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

**Senate Select Committee on Community Standards  
Relevant to the Supply of Services  
Utilising Electronic Technologies**

**REPORT**

**ON**

**THE PORTRAYAL OF VIOLENCE**

**IN THE**

**ELECTRONIC MEDIA**

**FEBRUARY 1997**

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends that organisations such as Young Media Australia, the Australian Broadcasting Authority and the Australian Film and Television School be given a financial allocation to run seminars for script writers and film and video games producers aimed at highlighting the need for a more balanced and realistic portrayal of the long term effects of violence.

(Recommendation 1)

The Committee recommends that the Australian Broadcasting Authority undertake, at different times and for limited periods, a review of television stations practice in the area of program promotion between the hours of 3.30pm and 8.30pm against their written codes to assess the extent of compliance (or otherwise) with their Codes of Practice.

(Recommendation 2)

The Committee recommends that:

(a) a telephone/fax *Hotline* be re-introduced by the Australian Broadcasting Authority for the public to register complaints about television programs. The *Hotline* could work in a similar way to the one operated by the former Australian Broadcasting Tribunal.

(b) that the ABA report on the operation of the *Hotline* in its annual report.

(Recommendation 3)

The Committee recommends that the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* be amended to allow the Australian Broadcasting Authority to impose penalties, including "on the spot" fines of up to \$100,000.00 on television stations for proven breaches of their own codes of practice.

A decision on whether non-compliance had occurred would be required to be made within a 48-hour period.

(Recommendation 4)

The Committee recommends that the ABA be made responsible for the classification of all children's programs (including cartoons for children).  
(Recommendation 5)

The Committee recommends that the current on-air information campaign by the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) be modified so that, in addition to telling viewers that classification and consumer advice is available, information should be given about the meaning of each classification symbol.  
(Recommendation 6)

The Committee recommends that separate guidelines be introduced for the classification of videotapes to ensure that higher standards are applied to videotapes than for the equivalent categories of film for cinema release.  
(Recommendation 7)

The Committee recommends:

(a) That the Australian Broadcasting Authority, in association with the OFLC undertake at different times throughout the year a random audit of films classified for television by the television stations themselves and require the television stations to state:

(i) how much footage they have cut in the process of modifying the film for TV broadcast

(ii) their reasons for the classification they chose to give to the film under review.

and

(b) That the Australian Broadcasting Authority report on its findings in its annual report.  
(Recommendation 8)

The Committee recommends that television stations vary the use of the symbol V to indicate the level of violence in a film ranging from V-low level violence to VV-medium level violence and VVV- to indicate high level violence. (Recommendation 9)

The Committee recommends that the Attorney General increase the level of fees imposed by the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) for classification if the material to be classified is found to contain high level violence. (Recommendation 10)

The Committee recommends that the funds raised by the increased fees be used to finance public education campaigns aimed at highlighting the possible adverse effects of watching large amounts of violent material. (Recommendation 11)

The Committee recommends also that State and Territory Ministers consider proposals to require that all R-rated violent videos carry a label indicating that the content of such videos might be harmful to the mental wellbeing of children and those adults suffering from depression and other mental disorders. (Recommendation 12)

The Committee recommends that when reporting news items which are identified by the television stations themselves as being accompanied by "disturbing footage", that footage should only be shown in later evening news bulletin and not during the early evening news bulletin when large numbers of children are watching television. (Recommendation 13)

The Committee recommends that the ARIA Code of Practice Guidelines No. 3 for "material which are not permitted to be sold" be amended to add the word "suicide" after the words "incest" and "child abuse". (Recommendation 14)

The Committee recommends that State and Territory education ministers take steps to encourage schools to offer a compulsory course on a critical evaluation of the media at some stage during the latter primary school years. (Recommendation 15)

The Committee recommends that the federal government fund a public education campaign through the media to make parents and teachers aware of the means (such as the classification symbols, the V-chip as it becomes available and PICS labelling on the Internet) available to them to control material that their children watch and play with. The campaign should include information on how to find out more about how those control systems operate. (Recommendation 16)

The Committee recommends that the federal and state governments increase, through the relevant departments, funding currently available to organisations that run conflict resolution programs and other programs designed to promote a culture of non-violence in the community. (Recommendation 17)

The Committee recommends that the Australian Broadcasting Authority review the number of viewer complaints about the amount and levels of violence shown by a television networks in order to:

- (a) highlight those television networks showing the most violence
- (b) encourage a reduction in violent programming by linking it to the commercial television licence renewing process. (Recommendation 18)



Senator John Tierney

Chairman

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**Senate Select Committee on Community Standards  
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**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Portrayal of violence in the electronic media and related matters arising from submissions to the Committee of Ministers on the Portrayal of Violence in the Media.



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