

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This inquiry was the first major review of the National Classification Scheme since it was introduced over 15 years ago. The inquiry presented the committee with an opportunity to examine a range of important issues relating to the National Classification Scheme and to assess the effectiveness of regulatory regimes for media not included in the National Classification Scheme.

In the committee's view, the National Classification Scheme is flawed, and cannot be sustained in its current form. This is primarily because the scheme has not been successful in achieving a uniform and consistent approach to classification in Australia. Further, the current situation where the National Classification Scheme is loosely paralleled by co-regulatory and self-regulatory systems is far from adequate, particularly given the increasing convergence of media.

Therefore, the committee recommends major reforms to the operation of the National Classification Scheme, in order to provide consistency and uniformity with regards to classification decision-making, while maintaining a touchstone to community standards.

Fundamentally, the committee recommends that an express statement should be included in the National Classification Code to clarify that the four key principles to be applied to classification decisions are to be given equal consideration and balanced against one another in all cases. Further, the committee recommends that the principles in the National Classification Code should be expanded to take into account community concerns about the sexualisation of society and the objectification of women.

Following adoption of these underpinnings, the committee recommends that the Australian Government take a leadership role through the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General in requesting the referral of relevant powers by states and territories to the Australian Government to enable it to legislate for a truly national classification scheme.

The committee further recommends that the scope of the National Classification Scheme should be expanded so that it covers all mediums of delivery. The committee supports a continued role for industry self-assessment for classification decision-making; however, this must be balanced with appropriate oversight, spot checks and compliance checks, and must include harmonised standards across all media.

The committee therefore recommends an expansion in the size of, and funding for, the Classification Liaison Scheme, including provision for representatives to be based in each state and territory. The committee also proposes that the Classification Review Board should become the final arbiter of classification decisions for all media in Australia in order to ensure uniformity and consistency. The committee believes that

the reforms it proposes will provide sufficient oversight of industry classification bodies, without overburdening them with excessive regulation.

The committee also recommends that complaints-handling should be improved with respect to classification matters, with the establishment of a 'one-stop shop' for processing complaints: a 'Classification Complaints' clearinghouse where complaints in relation to matters of classification can be directed and subsequently forwarded to the appropriate organisation for consideration and review.

The committee also makes a range of other recommendations covering topics including:

- classification of artworks;
- exemptions for cultural institutions to exhibit unclassified films;
- the development of national standards for the display and sale of material with a Restricted classification;
- prioritising enforcement actions for the failure to respond to call-in notices; and
- accreditation of industry bodies wishing to exercise classification decision-making functions.