



Australian Government

Classification Review Board

21 May 2019

23–33 Mary Street
Surry Hills, NSW

Review of Classification Board's decision to classify film '*Rocketman*'

Members:	Ms Sue Knowles (Convenor) Ms Rechelle Leahy (Member) Mrs Susan Bush (Member)
Applicant:	Paramount Pictures Australia Pty
Interested parties:	None
Business:	To review the Classification Board's decision to classify the film <i>Rocketman</i> , MA 15+ (Mature Accompanied) with the consumer advice 'Strong coarse language'.

Decision and reasons for decision

1. Decision

The Classification Review Board (the Review Board) unanimously classified the film M (Mature), with the consumer advice 'Mature themes, drug use, sex scene and frequent coarse language'.

2. Legislative provisions

The *Classification (Publications, Film and Computer Games) Act 1995* (Cth) (the Classification Act) governs the classification of films and the review of classification decisions.

The Review Board

Part 5 of the Classification Act outlines the provisions relevant to the Review Board and its procedures.

Section 42 of the Classification Act sets out the persons who may apply for review of a decision:

- a) the Minister
- b) the applicant for classification of the film, or the likely classification of the film under section 33
- c) the publisher of the film, or
- d) a person aggrieved by the decision.

Section 43 sets out the conditions regarding the manner and form of applications for review, including time limits. Under section 44, the Review Board must deal with an application for review in the same way that the Classification Board deals with an application for classification of a film.

Classification of films/computer games under the Classification Act

Section 9, subject to section 9A, provides that films are to be classified in accordance with the National Classification Code (the Code) and the classification guidelines. Section 9A states that a film that advocates the doing of a terrorist act must be classified RC.

Section 11 of the Classification Act requires that the matters to be taken into account in making a decision on the classification of a film include the:

- a) standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults, and
- b) literary, artistic or educational merit (if any) of the film, and
- c) general character of the film, including whether it is of a medical, legal or scientific character, and
- d) persons or class of persons to or amongst whom it is published or is intended or likely to be published.

The National Classification Code

Relevantly, the Films Table of the National Classification Code (the Code) provides that:

Films (except RC films, X 18+ films and R 18+ films and MA 15+ films) that cannot be recommended for viewing by persons who are under 15 are to be classified M.

The Code also sets out various principles to which classification decisions should give effect, as far as possible:

- a) adults should be able to read, hear, see and play what they want
- b) minors should be protected from material likely to harm or disturb them
- c) everyone should be protected from exposure to unsolicited material that they find offensive
- d) the need to take account of community concerns about:
 - (i) depictions that condone or incite violence, particularly sexual violence and,
 - (ii) the portrayal of persons in a demeaning manner.

The Guidelines

Three essential principles underlie the use of the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films 2012* (the Guidelines), determined under section 12 of the Classification Act, the:

- importance of context
- assessment of impact, and
- six classifiable elements—themes, violence, sex, language, drug use and nudity.

3. Procedure

Three members of the Review Board met on 21 May 2019 in response to the receipt of an application from Paramount Pictures Australia Pty on 17 May 2019 to conduct the review of the film, *Rocketman*, which had previously been classified MA 15+ (Mature Accompanied) with consumer advice of 'Strong coarse language' by the Classification Board. The Review Board determined that the application was a valid application.

The Review Board was provided an oral presentation and written submissions from the Applicant.

The Review Board viewed the film.

The Review Board then considered the matter.

4. Evidence and other material taken into account

In reaching its decision, the Review Board had regard to the following:

- (i) Paramount Pictures Australia Pty - application for review
- (ii) Paramount Pictures Australia Pty - written and oral submissions
- (iii) the film, *Rocketman*
- (iv) the relevant provisions in the Classification Act, the Code and the Guidelines, and
- (v) the Classification Board's report.

5. Synopsis

The film, *Rocketman* chronicles the life of Elton John. It follows his life from childhood to stardom and his issues relating to alcohol and drug use and journey to sobriety.

6. Findings on material questions of fact

The Review Board found that the film contains aspects or scenes of importance under various classifiable elements:

(a) Themes—

The impact of this element is no higher than moderate and can be accommodated at the M classification level.

(b) Violence—

The impact of this element is no higher than mild and can be accommodated at the PG classification level.

(c) Sex—

The impact of this element is no higher than moderate and discreetly implied and can be accommodated at the M classification level.

(d) Language—

The impact of this element is no higher than moderate and can be accommodated at the M classification level.

At 106 minutes Elton John is in an emotional moment of self-reflection when he refers to himself using strong coarse language that can be justified by context.

(e) Drug Use—

The impact of this element is no higher than moderate and justified by context and can be accommodated at the M classification level.

(f) Nudity—

The impact of this element is no higher than mild and can be justified by context at the PG classification level.

7. Reasons for the decision

Frequent coarse language can be justified in context at the M classification. There is frequent use of the words 'fuck', 'shit', 'bitch', 'bastard' which can be accommodated at this classification and a lower classification, in their context.

While the Review Board would routinely classify the word 'cunt' in the strong coarse language category (MA 15+), on this occasion the Board believes the non-aggressive, emotive context mitigates the usual impact of such a word. In this specific instance, the Board finds that such a single use of the word can be accommodated at the M classification.

8. Summary

The Review Board unanimously classified *Rocketman* at the M classification with the consumer advice of 'Mature themes, drug use, sex scene and frequent coarse language'.