



1 Canberra Community Assessment Panel

1.1 Canberra Panel Composition

Urbis Keys Young used the services of an ACT-based specialist recruitment firm to select suitable participants for the Panel, in line with the specifications agreed with the Research Reference Group (RRG). Table 1 lists the main demographic characteristics of the Canberra Panel Members.

Group A consisted of people with less experience playing computer games, and Group B consisted of those with more computer gaming experience. The recruiter was instructed to select a broad spectrum of community members for each group. Demographically, Group A tended to be slightly older and have more married people, as might be expected when limited experience in computer game playing was a key criterion for placement in this focus group. However, a wide range of ages, family types and occupations and a gender mix were represented in both groups, as is evident in Table 1. For the purposes of this report, Group A is hereafter referred to as less experienced gamers and Group B as more experienced gamers.

For the discussions relating to the films, the Panel was divided into Groups A and B in accordance with Table 1. However, it became apparent during the preparation for the game play session that one of Group B's members – participant 17 – had in fact little familiarity with computer games. This Panellist was therefore moved to Group A for the discussions about the games.

1.2 Canberra Panel Procedure

The Canberra Community Assessment Panel took place on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday, between the 2nd and the 4th of April. Panellists were shown films on the Friday and Saturday at the Australian War Memorial's Telstra Theatre, with group discussions taking place in a function room immediately after the screenings. The films viewed by the Panel were *Welcome to Mooseport* and *Intermission*.

The computer games session took place at a computer training facility in Civic, ACT. After watching a short demonstration on how to play the game, Panellists played each game in pairs, having been matched with others of a similar level of computer gaming experience. After playing the game, Panellists were shown a number of scenes from the game, to help them become familiar with the storyline and to ensure that the strongest classifiable elements within the game were taken into account. The two games played were *Castlevania: Lament of Innocence* and *Whiplash*.

Synopses of each film and game, as well as copies of the Board's report on each, are provided in Appendix B.



Table 1: Key characteristics of Canberra panel members

Participants	Age	Gender	Education Level Completed	Location	Family Status	Occupational Group
<i>Group A</i>						
Participant 1	27	M	University	Queanbeyan	Married – no children	Publications Writer/ Editor
Participant 2	38	F	University	Fernleigh Park	Married – no children	Professional Writer
Participant 3	41	M	Secondary school	Charnwood	Married – no children	Pizza Delivery Driver
Participant 4	45	F	Secondary school	Queanbeyan	3 children aged 23, 20 and 18 years	Disability Pensioner
Participant 5	52	F	University	Monash	3 children aged 18, 17 and 12 years	Public Servant
Participant 6	56	M	University	Rivett	6 children aged 32, 31, 28, 25, 22 and 19 years	Public Servant
Participant 7	57	F	Technical/ further education institution	Torrens	2 children aged 25 and 23 years	Paralegal/ Secretary
Participant 8	60	F	Secondary school	Aranda	3 children aged 40, 37 and 33 years	Housewife
Participant 9	60	M	University	Kaleen	3 children, aged 26, 24 and 20 years	Retired
<i>Group B</i>						
Participant 10	16	M	Secondary school	Garran	Never married – no children	Sales Assistant
Participant 11	20	F	Technical/ further education	Gordon	Never married – no children	Child Care Worker
Participant 12	20	M	Technical/ further education	Giralang	Never married – no children	Student
Participant 13	20	M	Secondary school	Monash	Never married – no children	Student
Participant 14	25	F	Secondary school	Ngunnawal	1 child aged 4 years	Graphic Artist
Participant 15	31	M	Secondary school	Queanbeyan	Never married – no children	Customs Officer
Participant 16	37	F	Secondary school	Chisholm	2 children aged 8 and 5 years	Personal Assistant
Participant 17	46	M	University	Gowrie	2 children aged 17 and 15 years	Manager – Public Service
Participant 18	52	M	Secondary school	Gowrie	3 children, aged 12, 8 and 6 years	Policy Officer

1.3 Canberra Panel's Responses to *Welcome to Mooseport*

The Board's synopsis of the film is as follows:

The ex-president of the United States runs against a local handyman in the race for Mooseport mayor.

The Board classified the film PG and its Consumer Advice was: *Sexual references, Low-level coarse language, Nudity.*

1.3.1 General response

The Panel responded positively to the film, describing it as '*light*', '*feel good*', '*easy to watch*'. One of the lead actors in the film was well known to many Panellists as Raymond, a popular television sit-com character. His presence helped to establish the comedic tone of the film. The participants generally found the film amusing and undemanding while not particularly original or memorable. Many Panellists largely enjoyed the political angle that was incorporated into the storyline and felt that this worked well with the film's romantic theme.

Both groups responded to the film in a similar manner.

Good feel-good type of family movie: fun, some good laughs and good citizen values promoted. Everyone was a winner with a happy ending for everyone.

I think the film was quite funny in parts. Not an award winner. Very light hearted.

I enjoyed this film. It was amusing and light hearted - easy to watch. It was a little similar to another film about an American president and a dog whose name escapes me but which was shown on TV.

I greatly enjoyed it, although it was a bit of a 'chicks' film. I enjoyed the comedic aspects.

Very light and funny. No thinking required.


Harmless entertainment

I did not find the film very entertaining. I would regard it as a comedy but laughs were few and far between.

The following sections report on participants' responses to the parts of the film they perceived as relevant to classification. The Panellists thought nudity and sexual references to be the strongest classifiable elements to consider. Initially they also discussed the themes of the film, but decided that their opinions on *Welcome to Mooseport's* themes had more to do with the film's likely appeal to suitability for younger viewers than concern about its impact. Other elements, such as language and violence, were generally regarded as less central to the classification discussion.

1.3.2 Themes

The Panel members said that the film was about politics and romance and, while some Panellists believed the narrative might not interest children, they generally thought that the story line would be inoffensive to most people.



The film was based on adult type themes but it was mild and justified within the story and comedy format as a whole.

With a few exceptions, the participants felt that the film promoted 'good' values.

Good values were promoted – it was innocent, safe.

He asked the girl to marry him at the end. They all did the right thing at the end.

Ultimately it all came out good in the end, even the way they came clean about voting.

Some Panel members expressed concern that the film took a cynical approach to romance and politics, but the more prevalent response was that the film was a reasonable reflection of life, even if it was exaggerated for comic effect. Those participants who were concerned largely worried about the impact of the cynicism on younger viewers, with their concerns reflected in the classifications they gave the film.

The theme was plausible – realistic to the American presidential campaigns with the hype and razzamatazz interspersed with the romantic theme or thread that ran through it as well as light-hearted humour.

It was funny and gave an insight into the politics of small towns and US government election policy.

Everyone knows that politics and politicians cannot be relied on and should not be taken seriously.

I didn't like how two people had been married for so long could hate each other so much. It said horrible things about marriage and divorce.

Most participants reported that the romantic theme added to their enjoyment of the film. They felt that it was handled in an amusing manner.

An interesting storyline mixing politics with long-term personal relationships.

1.3.3 Nudity

The first scene, which showed a naked elderly man from behind running down the main street of a small town, slightly unnerved some of the participants but they reported that this disquiet did not last and it was generally felt that the scene set the light hearted tone of the film.

In the beginning I thought 'what is this?' but it only lasted until I saw how the town reacted to the naked man.

It was commonly noted that the impact of the nudity would have been higher if the person had been younger and female. The choice of an older male viewed from behind was reported as the least sexual, most humorous choice.

The impact of the nudity was reduced by the fact that it was an old man. It would have had much higher impact if it was a woman, especially a younger woman. Then it would have had sexual connotations even if the context was the same as it was and if it was just as funny.

1.3.4 Sex

The Panel members noted that the film contained some verbal sexual references but, partly because these were not visual, the references were generally perceived as subtle and part of the humorous tone of the film.

There were sexual references but they were mild and discreetly implied.

She squeezed him on the butt. Technically it is sexual harassment but it was totally harmless.

There was some feedback that the scene with dogs copulating might be inappropriate for younger viewers, but most Panellists felt that younger viewers would either not recognise the dogs' activity as sexual or would be accustomed to seeing animals behave in this way. Virtually all participants felt that the humorous setting of the scene meant that the impact was very low.

That the dogs were having sex would go right over small kids' heads.

You would probably have to explain what they were doing to some kids, others would not notice enough to ask.

Dogs mating doesn't really come under sex. Kids might ask what is that and you could tell them. It needs some supervision even though sex is mild and infrequent.

One group felt that repeated discussions about 'panties' raised the impact of sexual references in the film.

Talking about previous experiences associated with the colour of her panties and looking up her dress.

These participants also noted the restaurant scene in which a mystery parcel extended the underwear theme.

A number of participants were concerned that the main characters in the film assumed that romantic relationships always involved sex before marriage, although others noted that the lead couple were not living together.

He said 'have you had sex yet?' implying it was inevitable.


All the main protagonists were involved in sexual relationships that did not involve marriage. Question is whether it is reasonable to portray as normal to young people.

1.3.5 Language

Panel members were aware that there was some swearing in the film but thought that it was relatively harmless and infrequent. Top of mind recollection of words that might cause concern was limited.

Bad language was used but it was infrequent and generally mild. 'Shit' was used once and 'crap' and similar used a few times.

The language was mild and infrequent.



A couple of Panellists were concerned that the swearing in the film would encourage young children to use language inappropriately.

They would think it was OK but my kids would get into trouble for using those words.

Some participants did not notice the language, in part because it was so subtly handled.

1.3.6 Violence

There was general agreement that violence was not a significant element in this film. Indeed, one group did not mention violence until they had discussed the elements noted above and were asked by the moderator if there were any other issues. The issues they did then raise were similar to those raised spontaneously by the other group.

The Panellists identified a number of violent incidents but reported that there was little or no menace associated with the violence. The fight scene that followed the second debate was reported as amusing and unthreatening.

There was no blood and no-one really got hurt. We didn't see anything.

The dream sequence in which one character went to attack another with a knife was said to be instantly recognisable as a fantasy.

The audience would work out pretty quickly that it was a dream sequence.

The many instances of the female lead hitting a male character was seen as an ongoing joke which did not involve injury. The Panellists acknowledged that the 'role reversal' was critical in determining the impact.

It was funny when she hit him. It was a role reversal and obviously not serious.

If he had hit her that wouldn't have been funny – that would have been domestic violence.

Panellists said such incidents were unlikely to have a significant impact because of the way they were portrayed and the context in which they appeared.

1.3.7 Drug use

A participant in one group initially identified the use of alcohol in the film as an element that affected their classification while the other group only raised this when they were asked about other issues that may have impacted on the classification.

Panellists recalled three scenes in which drug or alcohol use was evident or referred to. These scenes were: two female characters consuming a large amount of alcohol at the golf club; the male character visiting his ex girlfriend while he was drunk; and a reference by the ex president to smoking marijuana.

The scene in the golf club was felt to have a lower impact because of the humour involved. It was also noted that the scene was not very realistic because the women appeared to have no ill effect from the alcohol and sobered up very quickly.

It was funny in context, not at all real and obvious that the characters were not drunks.

The alcohol wasn't dependency and it was very light hearted.

Humour was also seen to alleviate the impact of the male character's consumption of alcohol. It was also felt that younger viewers might not realise that he was drunk.

It would not be apparent to a younger person that the bloke was actually drunk. He could have been being extra goofy.

Few Panellists recalled the reference to marijuana smoking. Among those who did hear the reference a few noted that there was some implied approval for this activity, in that it was regarded as normal behaviour, however these Panel members did not think that the marijuana reference needed to be considered in classifying the film.

1.3.8 Initial Panel assessment

Shown below are the initial preferred classifications of the Panel. Immediately after viewing *Welcome to Mooseport*, nearly two-thirds of the participants assessed the film as PG and just under a third preferred a G classification. Two Panellists gave the film an M classification.

Initial Panel classification assessment for *Welcome to Mooseport*

	Group A	Group B	Total
G	4	1	5
PG	4	7	11
M	1	1	2

1.3.9 Classification debate

Many Panel members felt the film could be enjoyed as a family film while others were sure it was unsuitable viewing for younger people. Some participants thought younger viewers, especially those under 10 or 12, would be negatively affected by the some of the classifiable elements of the film, others argued that younger viewers simply would not be interested or would not understand the themes of the film. (The Panellists had been told in the training session and were reminded by the moderators that interest was not considered in classification; that is, a turgid documentary might be of no interest to children but still receive a G classification due to the absence of classifiable elements with impact. Even with this instruction, some Panellists mentioned 'interest' while discussing this film's classification.)

Lack of any violence, very mild sexual references and a bit of nudity but it was all fairly harmless.

I see this movie as one that everyone could sit down and all get something out of it – there is an element for everyone.

The themes had a mild impact and the sexual references were subtly implied.

The feel of the film also contributed to this decision as I feel that older people would enjoy and understand the film on greater levels.

I would assume that this movie would not appeal to children based on the storyline and that people over the age of fifteen would be the most likely viewers.

The subtle undercutting political side of the story would be lost on a young child.

Funny, good family film.

Justification of G classification

Panellists gave the following reasons for giving the film a G classification

I wrestled with this, but I thought it was milder than the Simpsons which is PG.

The nudity was really low impact and it was funny.

I didn't think the language was a big deal, it was very mild.

Most of the things that the kids would need guidance on would go over their heads.

The impact of most things was mild or the kids would just miss it.

Couldn't see any themes that were threatening. There was no violence, almost nil language (mostly Americanisms), no drug use and only the back of an 80 year old man, how exciting is that?

Justification of PG classification

Panellists gave the following reasons for giving the film a PG classification

Very young people would have trouble with the nudity and the canine copulation.

The sex and language was mild rather than very mild.

Mild language, no direct violence, no menace or threat, the reference to drugs is very mild. The sex references are mild and discreetly implied.

Occasional mild language, mild violence and mild nudity.

The dogs mating was not appropriate for all audiences without supervision.

The nudity is in context but it takes it out of G.

Justification of M classification

Panellists gave the following reasons for giving the film an M classification

The impact of the language and the sexual references and the themes. It was anti marriage, pro pre-marriage sex and cynical about politics and the way of the world. There were destructive subliminal messages.

The nude bum was not OK for a little girl to see.

There was bad modelling behaviour.

The sexual morals it was portraying. The other morals were OK, honesty and such. I think a young person might have trouble handling the old guy.

Most Panellists believed that a G classification for *Welcome to Mooseport* would be more likely if it contained less swearing and fewer sexual references.

1.3.10 Final classification assessment

There were several people who stated that their classification assessments were borderline, although only one person changed the rating following the group discussion. One of the two Panel members who initially assessed the film at M changed their classification to PG after discussing the elements of the film. No other participants changed their rating after the discussion.

Final Panel classification assessment for *Welcome to Mooseport*

	Group A	Group B	Total
G	4	1	5
PG	5	7	12
M	-	1	1

1.3.11 Response to the Board's classification

The overall response to the Board's rating was that it was reasonable. Most of the Panel members who had rated the film G felt that PG was a fair rating and, on reading the Board's reasons for the decision, could understand why the Board had given it the PG classification. However, while most Panellists agreed with the classification, some had trouble seeing how the Board had used the classification guidelines to come to this rating.

If you were applying the guidelines you could not give it a PG so I would like to know how they did this. I would have given it a PG but when I went back to the guidelines I had to give it a G. The impact bit, which was mild and very mild, made it G.

1.3.12 Consumer advice

Before reading the Board's advice, Panel members were asked to suggest the consumer advice they thought the film should carry. The following points show how they felt potential viewers should be advised about the film.

- Thirteen participants mentioned 'language'. Approximately half of these people noted 'low level' or 'mild language' while a similar number noted 'some coarse' or 'bad language'.
- Nine participants mentioned 'sex' or 'sexual references'.
- Seven participants mentioned 'nudity'. Approximately half of these people noted 'low level nudity'.
- Four participants mentioned 'violence', three of these noting 'low level violence'.
- Four participants mentioned 'adult themes', and

One mentioned 'drug use'.

1.3.13 Response to the Board's consumer advice

Overall the Panel thought that the Board's consumer advice suggested that the film contained stronger elements than were contained in the film.

The phrases don't describe accurately what we saw. It is not a good description of the film.

I would find the nudity advice a bit confusing. I don't think of it containing nudity. It is a very harmless film.

While some participants thought the level of nudity was covered by the Board's PG rating, other Panellists thought that the 'nudity' advice was overstated. It was described as 'overkill' and did not really reflect the low key film as they had assessed it. A number of parents said the consumer advice would have deterred them from letting young children see the film whereas, having seen it themselves, they would be quite comfortable allowing their younger children to see it. 'Guardians' such as uncles and babysitters said that they paid particular attention to consumer advice, as they were not prepared to risk exposing children in their care to inappropriate material. These participants seemed less willing than parents to select a film that might contain elements that were inappropriate for children. Most Panellists thought the advice would mislead them into thinking that the film was not suitable for children aged under twelve.

I would not have shown it to them when in fact it would have been OK for them if they watched it with an adult.

PG nudity is maybe a naked young man or a young woman's breasts.

While many Panellists were sure that they wanted more detailed advice than 'nudity', they were not sure what this advice should be.

Should it be 'full frontal nudity' or 'partial nudity'?

Maybe 'glimpses of an old man's bum', but not 'nudity'.

A few participants also found the 'sexual references' advice too strong. They said that they would interpret this as meaning that the film was unsuitable for children when in fact the children would not notice the references.

I didn't notice any of the sexual references and I don't think a child would have picked it up. There was fairly sophisticated sexual implication but a child would not have picked that up.

Others found the term 'sexual references' too broad to be helpful as a guide to suitability.

The sexual references – you don't know what they are. Can you take a school group? You would have to explain to all of them about the panties and the dogs.

Some Panellists said that a website that provided further details on the classification and the consumer advice provided by the Board would be very useful to them. Some of these participants noted that they already use the web to check out a film's suitability and such a resource might help to avoid the confusion generated by the consumer advice on this film.



Is there a site on the Internet when you check it out further? I'd use that if there was one. They could put up these paragraphs that explain their decisions and then you would know what you were getting into.



1.4 Canberra Panel's response to *Intermission*

The Board's synopsis of the film is:

Intermission is an urban love story about people adrift and their convoluted journeys in the search for some kind of love. When the desperately insecure and emotionally inarticulate John breaks up with Deidre to 'give her a little test' his plan backfires leaving her broken-hearted and him alone and miserable. Through chance and coincidence, their break-up triggers a roller coaster ride of interweaving escapades in the lives of everyone around them.

The Board classified the film MA15+ and its Consumer Advice was: *Frequent coarse language, Sexual references and Infrequent Violence.*

1.4.1 General response

The Panel members thought this film provided a realistic portrayal of a life that they did not know much about. Most enjoyed the film, although many found the violence and the language confronting. Many of those who did enjoy the film would not go to the cinema to see it because of the topic or because of the violence in the movie. There were also some participants in each focus group who disliked the movie and did not enjoy watching it.

The two groups responded to the film in similar ways.

Exciting, action filled lots of interest, great acting and colourful characters

Music, photography and sets very well done. Personally, I didn't like it and would have turned it off in the beginning. As it progressed I put up with it. I can't say I enjoyed it but it was OK.

A slice of Dublin working class life, hopefully greatly exaggerated. An anthropologist may enjoy it. I enjoyed it up to a point. The plot was good, characters believable enough, humour not too dark with a happy ending in the romantic scene.

I did not like this film because of the high level of violence and coarse language.

I really enjoyed this film. It had a good interesting story line that kept me entertained.

The violence was confronting. There were funny moments. It was real life, seeing different cultures.

I disliked the film. It was very well acted and had an interesting story line but it is not a theme which appeals to me.

Stimulating, yet not my kind of movie. It kept me thinking but not entertained.

The following sections report on the participants' responses to the parts of the film they perceived as relevant to classification. Violence was the most important element to the Panellists, but they also were also concerned about themes and coarse language. Other elements raised by the Panel were sex and nudity, although these were regarded as less central to the classification decision.



1.4.2 Violence

The Panel spoke at length about the violence in *Intermission*, identifying it as the element with the most impact on them. Panellists were very concerned about the impact the violence would have on younger viewers.

The realistic responses of the victims of the violence was one of the reasons given by Panellists for the strong impact of the violence. They did not recall having seen lots of blood or close-ups of the violence, but Panel members still found the violent scenes very convincing, for many disturbingly so.

They were girls and they were hit and he was a big guy and they crumbled down and were crying. There was not a lot of blood but it was true. I thought it was really realistic.

It was very realistic, not gory but real. She cried and looked hurt.

Panel members noted that the impact of the violence was heightened because so many characters were involved. It was not restricted to the 'baddies' but also perpetrated by the policeman, by children and was generally part of the everyday life portrayed in the film. It was also of considerable concern that young women were the victims of quite gratuitous violence at the hands of male characters.

However, many participants were also aware that the violence could have been made more explicit and that much of what they 'saw' was actually implied.

The violence was not dwelt on and we didn't actually see much. It could have been much worse.

The Panel explored a range of aspects of the violence in the film. These aspects are discussed below.

Violence against women


The Panellists found the violence against women particularly confronting. The two scenes that were discussed at length were the opening scene in which a male character hits a female character (a cashier) in the face, and the scene in which the same male character hits a female in the face as she attempts to escape from him.

Several Panellists reported that the shock attack in the first scene stayed with them throughout the movie. The attack on the female cashier took them completely by surprise and participants reported that they were particularly disturbed because the banter between the characters had been light hearted and enjoyable. Panellists felt that the female character had also been enjoying the moment and there was no warning that she could be hurt. The impact of the violence was further increased for Panel members because they thought the male did not need to hit the female in order to rob her. The wooing and the violence were unnecessary to his purpose, and Panellists concluded that this meant the male character had behaved as he had because he enjoyed it.

It lured you in. The violence was so unnecessary and unexpected.

He was almost making love to her above the counter.

It was so disgusting that he enjoyed it.



After the first scene I was literally on the edge of my seat for the whole movie, waiting for the next shock.

The Panel members were unsure whether they had actually seen the female character get hit. Some said that the noise of the fist hitting the woman's jaw was extremely realistic.

The noise was so real you knew it had happened.

Some Panellists were disturbed by later parts of the opening scenes which they recollected involving a mother swearing at her child and a criminal threatening a car driver with a shovel. The group spoke about the swearing incident in the context of violence rather than language, although they did not think that the woman physically harmed the child. Panel members felt that such incidents illustrated the pervading culture of violence in the community.

A later scene in which a female character is hit in the face while trying to escape her captors was also upsetting to many Panel members. They were not particularly surprised by this episode but found it had a significant impact on them.

It was high impact even though she was not very hurt. It was in her reaction to the hit, his menace, and the injury looked realistic.

Another participant said, rather uncomfortably, that this scene didn't bother him quite as much as the earlier one of a young woman being hit, because:

She was trying to escape, so there was at least a reason for the violence.

Gratuitous violence

Panel members felt that much of the violence in the film was 'unnecessary' in that the characters could have achieved what they wanted without it and that it often happened unexpectedly. They did not see the violence as a case of cause and effect but more as a series of random events. This increased the impact for many Panellists, because they could not predict when the violence would happen or who would be involved.

It was violence without cause or provocation and it was so sudden. Furthermore they appeared to enjoy it.

The violence had the strongest impact, especially the gratuitous violence where the woman was punched in the face and then it was repeated later.

The cop wandering around punching people was gratuitous.

Other Panellists argued that the seemingly gratuitous violence, for example the policeman attacking people without provocation, was necessary for the characterisation of particular individuals in the film.

Menace

Panel members said that the feeling of menace ran through much of the film. The feeling of menace was perpetuated by ongoing instances of sudden, unexpected violence.

You knew that something else bad was always going to happen.

Having characters on both sides of the law exacerbated the feeling of menace.

The policeman

The fact that there was a policeman who was violent as well as violent criminals increased the feeling of menace that Panellists reported characterised the film. The policeman was seen as a powerful man out of control. The episodes of violence in which he was involved had a significant impact on the Panellists, especially his initial encounter with the main criminal character in the pub toilets and his attack on a suspect in the suspects' home. Interestingly, many Panel members thought the pub scene was the more violent of the two episodes, even though they thought the suspect sustained more injuries.

When he wee'd on the guy's shoe, it was hugely menacing.

The violence with the cop was not violence between equals, it was the violence of an authority figure.

Most Panel members did not recall seeing the suspect actually being beaten by the policeman. They recalled the sound of the beating, the intense focus of the policeman while he was involved in the attack and the reaction of the journalist filming the attack.

You did not see much. It had a lower impact because it was mostly sound.

When he was beating up the scumbag, it was not really gory. You didn't see much but the sound effects were very real.

We didn't see the body, we saw the documentary maker and feet of the guy on the ground.

Sexual violence

The attacks by a female character on a male while they were in bed together and engaged in sexual activity were not regarded by most Panel members as 'real' sexual violence, but as mildly amusing. Their lack of concern was based on the perception that the male character could look after himself and that the female character did not inflict real pain. Panellists also reported that the impact was lessened by the nature of the relationships between these characters, in particular the female character's relationship with her husband.

I did not see the sexual violence between Noeleen and Oscar and Noeleen and her husband as violence. It was more humorous. The attack on the husband was not really violence. The attack on Oscar was desperate and sad and had a low impact. An MA scene at most.

I think the sexual violence was just exuberance – what would push it into R was when someone got hurt, not when the women were violent.

Some of the older Panellists felt that the violence committed by women towards men should be judged as harshly as violence from men on women but even these participants did not believe that these particular scenes had a great impact.

One Panellist approved of the male character's refusal to participate in the type of sex that the female appeared to be seeking.

I thought it was good when he said I don't like it and I'm going to leave – I thought that was a good message.



The rock-throwing boy

The young boy who threw rocks at a bus causing it to crash, who tipped a crashed car over a drop causing the driver further injuries, and who at the end of the film threw a rock through the window of a car driven by an unsympathetic male character, was seen by Panellists as a 'bad seed'. For many Panel members the boy personified the desperate state of the people in the film.

I was horrified by the kid. I just couldn't get over him, he had no regard for any other person or property. I thought he was just a little horror.

Bit of a problem if you look at it as modelling behaviour, especially for anyone younger.

Many Panellists had confused views about this character. They did not condone the behaviour, seeing it as dangerous and leading to harm. They were also concerned that the boy appeared to enjoy throwing the rocks and that he was not caught. On the other hand, they felt it was in context. They also noted that the boy was almost a hero at the end of the film.

He got the bad guy in the end.

The shooting

The scene in which the policeman and the main criminal character are shot did not have a significant impact on the Panellists. They found it less shocking than other violent scenes. This was partly because little gore was shown and also because Panel members had little sympathy for the characters involved. It is also possible that the use of a gun at a distance proved less confronting than the immediacy of a graphic bashing scene.

There was some discussion about the scene in which the journalist replays the shooting. Some Panellists felt that the repetitive playing of the video, especially the close up of the gun, was a celebration of the killing while others felt that the scene was all about the journalist coming to grips with an action he found horrific. Nevertheless, Panellists did not consider this scene to be a key consideration in the classification process, whatever their interpretation of the scene.

Sally's story


Sally was a character who had been subject to an extreme case of domestic violence. She had been left tied to a bed for several days after her male partner had defecated on her. Panel members felt great sympathy for her character when they heard her story. But while they thought the story was 'disgusting' they did not think it would have an impact on the classification, given the other instances of violence in the film. This was because they heard, rather than saw, the story.

1.4.3 Language

Panel members reported that the language used throughout the film was an important classification element. They were struck both by the way coarse language was used in a relentless, everyday, thoughtless way and also how it was used with menace and 'attitude'. Many Panellists said that the language appeared to be used in context, which in some ways lessened the impact, but most still found it confronting and a major consideration in their classification assessments.

The language was used as if it was acceptable, normal.

The aggressive use of language was infrequent but it was real.



The language went from R to MA, it was mainly 'fuck' and I counted only six 'cunts' – 'fuck' was repeated again and again, and it was as though they were talking normally.

The foul language was restricted to only about six words – the limited range brought it down to MA.

1.4.4 Themes

The Panels thought that the themes of the film were relevant to the classification, being unsuitable for younger people. Panellists were particularly concerned about the depressing portrayal of life, the amount of crime depicted and the lack of negative consequences for much of it, as well as some of the sexual themes.

That life is violent, hopeless and really like that.

It was all so hopeless.

There was armed robbery, assault, kidnapping.

The people who did the really bad things didn't get caught out.

The adultery was punished more than the ones who committed the greater crimes.

On the other hand, many Panellists thought that most of the characters got their 'just desserts' – the lovers were reunited, the harsh boss was going to be in an accident, the lonely male and female characters got together, the vicious criminal was killed, the bullying policeman injured. The positive outcomes for characters and sense of justice in the narrative softened the impact of the film, and even justified the strength of the classifiable elements for many Panellists.

Happy endings and moral resolution.

It wasn't all bad, there was a lot of personal growth out of the bad stuff.

1.4.5 Sex

The sexual scene that many Panel members felt had the greatest impact on the classification was a male character's sexual frustration and masturbation. In particular these Panellists were concerned about the impact on young women of the way sex is talked about in these scenes.

The masturbation discussion was absolutely unsuitable for teenage girls. It would have a high impact and affect their ideas of men and sex.

A few Panellists thought that the impact of the masturbation scenes was lessened by a comic tone.

Masturbation was played for laughs.

The impact of the sex scenes between male and female characters in bed varied for different Panel members. Some felt that such scenes were not very explicit and definitively not erotic.

It was a bit desperate and a bit sad.

The sex scenes weren't all that different to what you might see on the tele most nights of the week – I don't think it was that graphic.

Other Panellists thought that the sexual activity was quite explicit, influencing the film's classification.

Two people in a bed naked is not implied. It's simulated.

Others challenged this position, arguing that the viewer could not see the couple's bodies as they were covered by a sheet, and pointing to examples of films where sex is actually simulated. (Note that the ability to distinguish between 'implied' and 'simulated' sex requires training people in how these words are used in the classification system.)

Overall, Panel members were considerably less concerned about the impact of the sexual scenes in the film than they were about the impact of the other classifiable elements discussed above, especially violence and language.

1.4.6 Drug use

Panel members agreed that drug use had little bearing on the classification of this film. They saw it as a passing reference which was wholly in context, and in fact some missed the drug references altogether.

It hardly rated.

1.4.7 Nudity

Only a few Panel members noticed Oscar's testicles in view in one scene. They did not think that the nudity was a significant factor in classification.

Just a bare bottom, not an issue.

In relation to everything else it barely rates a mention.

1.4.8 Initial Panel classification assessment

Shown below are the initial preferred classifications of the Panel. Immediately after viewing *Intermission* Panel members were divided between MA15+ and R18+.

Initial Panel classifications for *Intermission*

	Group A	Group B	Total
MA15+	3	5	8
R18+	5	4	9

* One participant did not provide a written classification

1.4.9 Classification debate

Generally speaking, Panel members found the classification to be '*borderline*'.

The film was very borderline between MA and R. There are some parts of the film where the impact is higher and others where it is cloudy – it wouldn't take much to push it from one to the other.

Some Panellists were more concerned with certain elements than others. For instance, some felt the level of violence alone pushed the classification into R18+, while others thought that sex scenes automatically gave it an R18+ rating. However, most Panel members felt the classification to be an outcome of the level of violence, language and sex.

The frequency and impact of the violence – the first scene, shooting John and the bus crash were more than enough.

Language would have to be the main element. The impact of the language was moderate to strong and it is used very frequently.

I didn't see any bare bodies and the guidelines on sex pushed it down to MA.

Violence, especially sexual violence, sex, language and themes are all strong.

Many Panel members felt that the responses of people aged 15 would vary widely. They believed that some people of that age could cope with the film, but for others the impact could be detrimental.

The attitude of the men, the violence, the depressing nature of the film would negatively affect many.

Particular concern was expressed about the possible effect of the film on some young women.

It would reduce their ability to trust men as well as being shocking for them.

Some Panellists who rated the film MA15+ noted that it was a 'high MA' and could move into the R18+ category if there was additional 'gore' and stronger language.

It would have had to be more violent – much more blood and guts and gore.... The blood was nothing. The language would have had to have had much more variety to make it R.

Those who rated the film R18+ thought several changes would need to be made to the film to change its classification to MA15+, namely: changes to the opening scene, removal of the characters' enjoyment of the violence, less strong language and less menace.

Justification for R18+

Panellists gave the following reasons for preferring an R18+ classification:

Sudden, excessive violence and swearing.


The high impact of the violence and language.

The language was used aggressively as well as in an everyday way. There was high emotional force behind some of it.

There is actual sexual activity.

The repetition of the killing on the video clip at the end of the film.

The masturbation references and the masturbation scene.



I had no trouble with an R on this one, because of the guidelines on sex.

There was sexual violence and coarse language and masturbation.

Justification for MA15+

Panellists gave the following reasons for preferred an MA15+ classification:

Sexual violence and frequent use of strong coarse language.

High-level violence and coarse language and nudity.

There was strong, coarse language but it was used in an everyday way. It was in context.

The aggressive use of language was infrequent.

The violence was tuned down after the first scene - where it was necessary to set the tone of the film.

You didn't actually see much sex, it didn't feel like an R.

The sex scene was funny.

Both the violence and the language was justified by the context.

If it had been more gory I would have put it into R.

Violent scenes were moderate. Sexual themes and references were mild.

Understanding of an MA15+ classification

Panel members discussed their understanding of an MA15+ classification. Many Panellists were surprised when it was clarified that this classification meant that the people under 15 years of age were able to view the movie if they were accompanied by a parent or adult guardian. They had assumed that an MA15+ classification meant that people aged under 15 were banned from viewing the film in the same way that an R18+ classification restricted people under 18 from viewing a film.

Other Panellists understood that an MA15+ rating provided parents and adults with freedom of choice over whether or not their children could see the film, and a number of people said that the classification was useful in providing guidance on the suitability of a film.

People should have freedom of choice to decide, but you need to be told what you are in for.

I am sure parents would have enough sense not to let a 10 year old go. MA gives you the flexibility – it doesn't say it is suitable for everyone under 15.

However, some participants were concerned that in providing this choice the classification did not provide sufficient protection to minors. For at least a few Panel members, the need to ensure that people fifteen or younger did not see the film was a factor in giving the film an R18+ rather than MA15+ classification.

People under 15 need to be banned, otherwise they might see it inadvertently.



1.4.10 Final classification assessment

Two people changed their classification assessment following the group discussion. Nine Panel members initially preferred an R18+, but three of these changed to MA15+ after discussing the film.

Final Panel classification assessment for *Intermission*

	Group A	Group B	Total
MA15+	5	6	11
R18+	3	3	6

*One participant did not provide a written classification assessment

1.4.11 Reaction to the Board’s classification

The overall response to the Board’s decision was that it was understandable, and that the Guidelines had been applied correctly in this instance. Most of those who had rated the film R18+ said they could understand why the Board had elected to classify the film MA15+ when they read the Board’s reasons for its decision. However, many Panellists – including those who opted for MA15+ – remained hesitant about the appropriateness of the MA15+ classification for *Intermission*, and retained concerns about people in the 15 to 17 age group viewing the film.

1.4.12 Consumer advice

Prior to being given the Board’s report, Panellists were asked to write down what they felt to be the most appropriate consumer advice for *Intermission*. All participants mentioned ‘Violence’, while almost half of these noted ‘Strong’ or ‘High Level’ violence. Most mentioned ‘Language’, and many noted ‘Frequent’ or ‘Strong Coarse Language’. Most wrote ‘Sex’ or ‘Sexual References’, while around half suggested ‘Nudity’ and ‘Adult Themes’. A small number also noted ‘Drug Use’.

There was some discussion among one group of the difference between ‘adult themes’ and ‘mature themes’. The group drew a distinction between the depiction of social themes (such as domestic violence), which were seen to be ‘mature,’ and sexual violence, seen to be an ‘adult’ theme.

I would think a ‘mature theme’ would, for example, be poverty in Dublin, but an ‘Adult Theme’ would be sexual violence.


Panel members were then given a list of possible consumer advice phrases¹ and asked to tick those which they deemed appropriate for *Intermission*. The most commonly chosen phrases were: *Frequent/infrequent Coarse Language (15)*, *Sexual References (14)*, *Drug References (14)*, *Domestic Violence Theme (11)* and *Strong Violence (11)*.

1.4.13 Response to the Board’s consumer advice

The response to the Board’s consumer advice was mixed. Overall Panellists agreed with the phrase ‘frequent coarse language’ although some of them thought this should be amended to include ‘strong’.

¹ The list of consumer advice phrases is provided in Appendix B.





Frequent coarse language sort of covers it but should have strong as well - 'frequent strong language'. How much worse can it get than f and c, which they said all the time.

The participants had trouble agreeing on the adequacy of 'sexual references'. Many felt that the film contained simulated sex and that it should therefore read 'sexual scenes'.

They should have said sex scenes because they were in bed and there was some nudity.

Many Panellists strongly felt that the Board's 'infrequent violence' did not provide adequate information on the level of violence in the film nor warn potential viewers of the high impact of some of the violence.

'Infrequent' doesn't seem as high impact as occurred in this movie. 'Infrequent' is just one or two scenes. I would call this 'frequent'.

Other Panellists noted that the impact of the violent scenes was such that the whole film felt violent to them.

Although the actual violence was not frequent it underlay the whole film, it was always there.

1.5 Canberra Panel's response to *Castlevania: Lament of Innocence*

During the introduction to the game, Panellists were provided with a background to the storyline of *Castlevania: Lament of Innocence*. This background statement was as follows.

Castlevania is an action-horror game set in the 11th Century. The hero of the game is Leon, a knight who fights vampires and other monsters in a dark castle with many rooms. The storyline and imagery are based loosely on the classic novel Dracula.

Leon's wife has been captured by an evil vampire and put under a spell. To rescue her, Leon must enter the vampire's castle and defeat the vampire's many monsters.

Leon has been given a magic whip and a magic glove by a sorcerer. The whip can be used to kill monsters, while the glove can block their attacks and even add to Leon's strength. Leon can also find useful items around the castle and use these to cast spells, restore his strength after being injured or buy magic potions.

The Board classified the game M15+, with consumer advice: 'Medium Level Animated Violence'.

The responses detailed below apply to both groups of Panellists, unless differences in the opinions of more experienced gamers and less experienced gamers became apparent. If differences did emerge, the opinions of Panellists are attributed to either Group A (less experienced gamers or 'less exp') or Group B (more experienced gamers, or 'more exp').

1.5.1 General response

Responses to *Castlevania* were mixed in both groups. Several people in Group A (less experienced gamers)– those relatively unfamiliar with computer games – had a positive reaction to the game, describing it as 'fun', 'exciting' and 'entertaining.' One person who had never played a computer game before said she was not looking forward to the experience but was pleasantly surprised, although others found the game boring.

The fact that I enjoyed it surprises me greatly because I didn't think I would – I really would like to know how it finished up. (less exp)

It didn't draw me one way or the other – I'm not addicted to it. I'd rather be gardening. (less exp)

Those in Group B (more experienced gamers) also had diverse reactions. Although some enjoyed the game because they found it easy to play, many were frustrated by its repetitive and disorienting nature.


The whole game all seemed the same to me. (more exp)

You didn't really seem to be progressing at all. (more exp)

The game got annoying, if you were disoriented and you went back into the same room you had to kill the monsters all over again. (more exp)

A number of Panellists in both groups found navigating through the game confusing, colouring their response to the game.

More experienced gamers commented on how the gameplay could have been improved.



Picking up a new weapon and using new combinations would have made it more stimulating – I definitely couldn't play seven levels of that. (more exp)

Less experienced gamers, on the other hand, were struck more by the 'content' of the graphics than the gameplay.

I must say I found it very boring – I wouldn't go back. There was a total unreality about it because of the shape of the opponents. There was a bit of blood and a bit of vomit: it was just so horrible with all that crap going on. (less exp)

1.5.2 Violence

Panellists agreed that the strongest classifiable element in *Castlevania* was violence. The effect of the violence on the player, however, was a matter of some debate. Some more experienced gamers felt that the regularity of the violence made it almost routine rather than shocking. They appeared to take the game in their stride, almost seeming to expect the sort of violence displayed in *Castlevania*.

Because of the repetitiveness it reduced the impact of the violence. (more exp)

No-one here was overly shocked by anything – even when the guy was getting hit. (more exp)

There's a lot of games that are exactly like it, so I wouldn't take much out of it. (more exp)

One person in the group of more experienced gamers felt that the repetitive violence made its effect stronger, referring to 'the constant menace – you're always under attack.' However, this point of view was not shared by most of the other more experienced gamers.

The degree of graphic realism in the game also influenced the assessments of Panellists in both groups, with some pointing out how the gameplay might compare to 'reality'.

The blood spatter just appeared on the ground and then just disappeared. (more exp)

You could hear metal on bone – that was pretty realistic. (more exp)

The vomit was like a pool of slimy green – it didn't come out of their mouths or anything. (less exp)

The blood did appear but I noticed that when you hacked up the skeletons they disappeared. Then we got to the part where there were little goblin creatures and there was a lot of blood. I was surprised by that ... the impact of that was greater. (less exp)

For some more experienced gamers, those violent aspects of the game, which appeared more realistic, were viewed favourably, being 'true to life.'

For the less experienced gamers, on the other hand, the realistic parts were felt to hold more menace and were seen in a more negative light. The fact that the violence in *Castlevania* was directed against non-human aggressors (zombies, skeletons, ghouls, etc) was seen by less experienced gamers to lessen its impact and give it an air of unreality.

If there were real people it would have a much greater impact. It would be real blood and that would have been much stronger visually. (less exp)

Less experienced gamers cited children's entertainment to make sense of the possible impact of the violence on younger age groups.

Look at these martial arts cartoons that are on after 3pm everyday for a general exhibition audience. They have far worse violence than what was in there [Castlevania], and are more realistic. (less exp)

The categories seem to be missing something. My son reads violent books, and with the books they're reading and the movies they're seeing, why can't they play the computer games? (less exp)

The effect of the third-person perspective on the player was also the subject of some debate among less experienced gamers. Several people were of the opinion that the impact of a third-person game is not as strong as that of a first-person game.

I wouldn't say because it's first-person it automatically makes a huge impact, but I think it definitely adds to the impact. (less exp)

In the third-person contact, it's like ten-pin bowling. (less exp)

One person in this group disagreed, arguing that the content of a game makes more difference than its perspective.

Control is still control and the violence is still violence.

The group of less experienced gamers also raised more general concerns about the effect of computer game violence on younger people.

I'd like to ask if anybody thinks this encourages children to be violent? That worries me. (less exp)

As described in Section 2 (Methodology), Panellists were shown clips of different parts of the game, to allow them to experience as much of the game as possible in the time available. One such scene, in which the main character is hit a number of times without fighting back, attracted comments from both groups.

When the person wasn't defending himself it was more menacing, when he falls to his knees and kept getting hit and hit and hit. (more exp)

The bit towards the end which we didn't get to, that's troubling. They just abandoned him and let him die. (less exp)

1.5.3 Themes

There was disagreement among Panellists about whether the story behind the game should be considered in assessing its impact. In *Castlevania*, the main character, Leon, is attempting to save his wife from the clutches of an evil vampire. One person in Group B (more experienced gamers) felt that those of a certain age would not understand the rationale behind Leon's quest. If a child does not understand why they are 'performing' violent actions, he argued, the violence becomes unjustified – and possibly gratuitous – for the child.

I don't think anyone under 15 would understand that I'm doing this to save my wife and the drive behind that. (more exp)

Less experienced gamers generally felt that the objectives behind the game had a significant effect on its impact.

It wasn't so menacing because he's actually trying to rescue someone. (less exp)

Most more experienced gamers, on the other hand, were of the view that the overall objectives of the game, and the moral message it carries, have little effect on the player. These sentiments were also supported by a small number of less experienced gamers.

It doesn't really matter whether you are looking to kill the vampire who has the wife – you just want to finish the game. (more exp)

The theme about saving the 'princess' is irrelevant and almost incidental – just get in and use the whip and away you go. (less exp)

The reason they've put the 'princess' up there is to justify using whips and exposing violence to children – it's just killing monsters. (less exp)

One person in Group B (more experienced gamers) said that the influence a game's quest has on its impact depended on the level of violence in the game itself.

If there was more violence and gore it would have played a little more in my mind.

References to supernatural phenomena, such as magic potions, evil vampires and the like were raised by Panellists as possible elements to consider for classification purposes. It was generally felt, however, that these aspects of the game were not strong enough to influence the final classification.

There were very mild references to occult type scenes: zombies, potions, magic spells, that sort of thing. Some kids interpret those things differently to others, but they don't play a big part in the game.

1.5.4 Other classifiable elements

Although a couple of Panellists raised the issue of whether the 'magic potions' referred to in Castlevania constituted drug use, it was generally agreed that such issues were not strong enough to influence any classification decision.

1.5.5 Suitable audience for the game

Asked what audience(s) the game would be suitable for, most Panellists nominated similar age groups, such as 'high school kids', or '12 year olds and older'. A small number of those in Group A (less experienced gamers) felt that the game was suitable only for people 15 and over.

Much younger children shouldn't play it, but I could see a 12 year old playing it.

The characters were a bit scary and gross and I don't think younger children could handle that. The zombies and the spew, say 10 or younger – once you get to high school it's okay.

I think it would be scary for young children – scary dark passages and those monsters, especially if were playing it late at night. I think it's slightly menacing.

Realistically, a 14, 13, or 12 year old is very similar to a 15 year old as far as I'm concerned as a parent.

It was also felt that the suitability of a game was to a large extent dependent on the individual child, with examples raised of children becoming desensitised to the violence in computer games or in popular culture more generally.

My little cousin, he's ten and he's always playing those games and he's become immune to it.

1.5.6 Parental responsibility

Panellists in both groups generally agreed that the decision to allow children to play violent games was the responsibility of parents, particularly for non-restricted games.

M15+ is only a recommendation, so children below 15 can still buy it, but allowing for the fact that some are more sensitive than others I think M is appropriate.

The M15+ is not recommended for people under 15, but they can still play it ... parental guidance might be appropriate and young kids under 15 might be able to play it.

1.5.7 Initial Panel classification

Immediately after playing the game but before the group discussion, Panellists recorded what they thought to be the most appropriate classification for *Castlevania* in a short questionnaire. In comparison with the other game played by the Canberra panel, the classification assessment for *Castlevania* appeared to quite easy and immediate for most Panellists. One person in each group gave the game an MA15+ rating, with the remainder of Panellists rating it M15+.

Initial panel classification assessment for *Castlevania*

	Group A (less exp)	Group B (more exp)	Total
M15+	9	7	16
MA15+	1	1	2

Justification of M15+

The Panellists who classified *Castlevania* M15+ were of the view that the violence in the game was moderate.

I thought it was moderate because it was in the third person and the blood was very fake, and sometimes it was green and quite Harry Potterish.

You couldn't say there was a low sense of threat with the skeletons and all that, but it wasn't strong, so it wasn't G8 or MA.

There were no visible injuries, and when the enemies are hit they just disappear, and there's just grunts and groans.

I kept wavering between G8+ and ended up on M15+, but I have children under 15 and over 8 and I've had plenty of experience with children and computer gamers, and I know my children would be playing that ... there's a huge difference between that and the M15+ games that I wouldn't let them play.

I'm for the M15+. Don't ask me why, that's just what I felt I should give it, because I don't really think I would like anyone of 8 years old looking at it ... that was a gut feeling for me.

I was comparing it to Mortal Kombat and it wasn't nearly as gory and that was high MA.

Justification of MA15+

The following comments were made by those who initially classified the game MA15+.

I thought there was some menacing and threatening situations where the violence occurred, and it wasn't suitable for children at all.

It's just continuous combat and attack, and then as you go along you start seeing the blood – that just put it into the MA category for me.

I looked at the impact, and I thought it was more strong than moderate, because there were strong vibes, vomit and the weapons they used.

1.5.8 Final classification assessment

After discussing the game, the two Panellists who had originally assessed the game at MA15+ changed their preferred classifications to M15+, meaning the Panel unanimously agreed with the Board's decision on the classification of *Castlevania*.

Panel classification assessment after discussion

	Group A (less exp)	Group B (more exp)	Total
M15+	10	8	18
MA15+	-	-	-

1.5.9 Response to the Board's decision

Panellists were in general agreement with the Board's comments on the game. Concern was expressed over the fact that the Board did not describe the violence as '*frequent*', with one person arguing that '*the whole thing is going around whipping people to death.*' Some people also pointed out that other games might have a comparable level of violence but on a less frequent basis, meaning that some distinction needed to be made regarding frequency. This issue is further addressed in relation to consumer advice (see below).

In its report, the Board included a reference to a dagger as a weapon used by the main character, in addition to a whip. Not many Panellists noted the dagger and some said this may have influenced their assessment of the classification, although it appeared this was not seen to be a serious issue.

1.5.10 Consumer advice

Panel's unprompted consumer advice

Prior to seeing the Board's report, Panellists were asked to write down what they thought to be the most appropriate consumer advice for the game. Responses included *Frequent*, *Medium Level*, *Low Level* and/or *Moderate Violence*, with *Moderate* being the most common descriptor of the violence in the game. Other phrases Panellists used were *Not Suitable for Young Children*, *Menace*, and *Very Mild Horror*.

One Panellist suggested that '*supernatural themes*' should be part of the consumer advice, leading to some debate among the group. A number of people thought the phrase was quite an apt way of describing what they felt was not quite 'horror'.

I didn't want to write adult themes, but I was toying with it – but in the end that's not telling you anything at all, and I think supernatural themes is a good one to use.

Others, particularly those more familiar with computer games, felt that such advice was not necessary.

I wouldn't have put either supernatural themes or horror in – it's pretty obvious from the title what the games about.

I think that kind of stuff should be in the synopsis [inside the game package] rather than in the consumer advice.

Panel members were then given a list of possible consumer advice phrases² and asked to tick those which they deemed appropriate for *Castlevania*. The most commonly chosen phrases were: *Some Scenes May Frighten Young Children* (16), *Fantasy Theme* (12), *Horror Theme* (12), *Moderate Violence* (11) and *Supernatural Theme* (8).

Responses to the Board's consumer advice

The Board's consumer advice for *Castlevania* is '*Medium Level Animated Violence*.' After looking at the Board's report, Panellists were asked to comment on this advice.

The word '*animated*' was the subject of some discussion. Some Panellists said that it helped them discern how stylized a game's graphics would be, and felt it reflected the graphical content of *Castlevania*.

'Animated violence' tells you it's going to be fantasy and not as realistic.

Other people, particularly more experienced gamers, were of the view that all computer games are by their very nature animated (there was recognition that certain games also contain filmic preview clips and the like, but these were seen to be an exception). To call a game '*animated*,' these people said, was not helpful for the (more experienced gamers) consumer.

As mentioned above, Panel members said that the word '*frequent*' should be part of the consumer advice, to distinguish *Castlevania* from other games with more non-violent game play. The proportion of a player's time spent in a violent situation, it was felt, should be taken into consideration when deciding on consumer advice.

² The list of consumer advice phrases is provided in Appendix B.




Finally, Panel members debated whether it was appropriate to include 'supernatural themes' or 'horror' in the consumer advice. It was felt by some people – in particular less experienced gamers – that some reference to these elements should be made in the consumer advice, especially given that the M15+ category is a recommendation only, and such a game might be played by people significantly younger than 15 years. Generally speaking, the Panel believed that 'supernatural' could be applied to games with a milder impact – like *Castlevania* – while 'horror' involved stronger violence and overtly frightening scenes.

Supernatural is ghosts and other frightening things, but it doesn't have any element of menace.

Supernatural is Lord of the Rings, horror has more blood and stuff.





1.6 Canberra Panel's responses to *Whiplash*

As part of the introduction to the game, Panellists were provided with a summary of the storyline of *Whiplash*. This description was as follows:

Whiplash follows two animals, Spanx (a weasel) and Redmond (a rabbit), as they try to escape from an animal testing laboratory, called Genron. The two animals are chained together, and must cooperate to find their way out of Genron's corporate headquarters. Along the way they will encounter guards, scientists and other Genron employees (whom they must avoid or attack) as well as other captive animals (whom they must attempt to free).

The player controls Spanx, who can swing Redmond by the chain to attack Genron employees and to perform various feats.

The Board classified *Whiplash* G (8+), with consumer advice: 'Medium Level Animated Violence'.

The responses detailed below apply to both groups of Panellists, unless differences in the opinions of more experienced and less experienced gamers became apparent. If differences did emerge, the opinions of Panellists are attributed to either Group A (less experienced gamers) or Group B (more experienced gamers).

1.6.1 General response

Most Panellists reported enjoying playing *Whiplash*, comparing it favourably with *Castlevania*. Panel members in both groups appreciated the humorous aspects of the game.

I liked the comic side of things – it made it really light-hearted. It got you in the mood.

I thought it was fun and addictive.

I felt a warm fuzzy relationship with the characters and their interaction – you get feedback from the rabbit every now and then and you laugh to yourself and get on with the game.

I liked the irony: two animals trying to escape from a lab, but you're just beating the crap out of a rabbit to do so.

One person in Group A (less experienced gamers) found the game quite unpleasant.

I thought it was disturbing – it made me feel quite ill actually.

Some people used other examples of popular culture in describing their responses to the game.

I think it's very similar to Looney Tunes cartoons and I can remember laughing my head off at those kinds of cartoons.

It reminded me of Coyote and Road Runner, and it was no more violent than that.

I grew up with Hanna Barbera, like Scooby Doo and those sort of cartoons, but the kids now watch Japanese animation ... this one was a bit more old-style, 80s classic-looking, and the slightly different animation gives it a different tone.

Panellists in both groups debated the moral messages conveyed by the story behind *Whiplash* and its game play. On the one hand, Spanx and Redmond were seen to be on 'a good cause', getting 'revenge on the human scientists who experiment on animals'. On the other hand, the fact that Spanx wields Redmond (an indestructible rabbit) as a weapon appeared, for some, to be unnecessarily malicious. 'If the rabbit wasn't used as a weapon,' said one person, 'it would have been more indisputable good versus evil.'

1.6.2 Violence

Panel members agreed that violence was the strongest classifiable element in *Whiplash*, and the bulk of the discussion related to the depictions of violence. A number of factors appeared to influence how the violence was interpreted, including the comedic tone of the game, the stylization of the graphics, animal cruelty, and the purpose and consequences of violence. In response to an additional question, Panellists also made comments on how the interactive nature of the game affected the impact of the violence (and other elements). These latter comments are reported in the section on interactivity (Section 1.6.10).

Tone

The comedic tone of the game was seen by different Panel members to either dampen the impact of the violence or hide its insidious effects. Again, the two groups expressed quite distinct views on how the humour influenced the impact.

Even the toaster in the water with the apes ... and the hamster cannon ... they're still alive, and there's no death or blood and they're giving points like a competition – it's all a gag like a cartoon, and it minimises the amount of menace. (more exp)

You're still hitting things whether it's ghouls or computers, and you can make it funny but at the end of the day it's about destruction of property. (less exp)

Discussing the morality of depicting violence against scientists, one person in Group A (less experienced gamers) began to remonstrate against the message such actions might send to children, but ended up laughing at the absurdity of 'beating them unconscious with a rabbit.' Indeed, a number of people in this group appeared to feel they *should* be outraged at the violence in *Whiplash*, but found their attitudes softening as a result of the humour in the game. Clearly, their own ambivalent responses to *Whiplash* were unsettling for some less experienced gamers.

Stylization

As reported above, Panel members in both groups were struck by the visual and thematic similarities between *Whiplash* and television cartoons like Looney Tunes. Less experienced gamers, in particular, commented on the 'animated' quality of the game's graphics and its comic qualities, and made judgements of the game's impact in that light. For most, the non-naturalistic elements lessened the impact.

It's a distance issue, you're not as close to it. (less exp)

It lessens the impact because it's clearly unreal. (less exp)

The way they get hit, it's funny, there's stars coming out of them, there's not blood or anything. (more exp)

A small number of the less experienced gamers, however, expressed the view that the levity with which violence is treated in *Whiplash*, as well as the cartoon-like representations, risk sending the wrong message (particularly to younger players) about the consequences of real-life violence.

Is this kind of violence more insidious than Castlevania? Because you're bashing things over and over again, but it looks okay to kids, and there's even less consequence – this actually pushed it down to G8 for me but I could see how it could push it up to M. (less exp)

Animal cruelty

The idea of wielding an animal as a weapon, as well as the general theme of animal cruelty on which *Whiplash* is based, was an area of concern for a number of Panellists, in particular the less experienced gamers. These people argued that the concept of animal cruelty might not be suitable for children below a certain age, especially given the humour which the game's storyline attaches to such scenes.

The first thing that struck me was the cruelty to the rabbit. (less exp)

It's funny in some sense but I think some people would find it quite offensive. A lot of greenies would chuck up a huge stink about it. (less exp)

Other Panellists disagreed, both because one of the objectives of the game is to free captive animals – seen as a 'worthy cause' – and because the humour made the animal cruelty less confronting. These people also pointed out that the animals in *Whiplash* were never 'killed,' and always recovered from their 'torture.' Such arguments tended to be put particularly by the more experienced gamers, although some less experienced gamers also held similar views.

[Discussing a scene in which the rabbit is put into a furnace] *Because he sort of tried to run away and you could see he really didn't want to go in there it was a lot more funny. (more exp)*

The rabbit wasn't always a weapon, it was also a tool – he had to use it to accomplish his goals. (more exp)


I don't think this game would make kids get violent to humans or animals – this rabbit that's tied to him can't be hurt, and they're escaping and rescuing other animals from these bad scientists. (less exp)

Purpose and consequences of violence

A number of those in Group A (less experienced gamers) felt that the 'vandalism' depicted in *Whiplash* should be taken into account for classification purposes. As well as violence against humans and animals, the destruction of property was seen to be unsuitable for children below a certain age to view. Panellists drew on their personal experience in assessing the impact of the scenes in which the main character needs to destroy computer equipment to accomplish his objectives.

Canberra's got a lot of vandalism and graffiti and games like that might put ideas in their mind. (less exp)

Only one person from Group B (more experienced gamers) expressed the same unease.



While it didn't really bother me, I had a slight concern for younger viewers watching all that vandalism and enjoying it so much. (more exp)

Conversely, one person in Group B (more experienced gamers) argued that violence against property is necessarily more mild than violence against human or animal characters.

The actual violence against somebody was fairly infrequent – you're only attacking one at a time and most of the time you're destroying equipment.

The consequences of violence were also seen by Panellists as having a major effect on the impact of the game. In particular, the fact that characters which ran out of 'health' appeared to just go to sleep rather than 'die' was seen to influence the impact of the violence in *Whiplash*.

If you attacked someone there was no blood, they only fell asleep. The player didn't die, and the characters didn't die, they just got up again.

There was no blood, there was no menace, the character just went down and got up again ... and it wasn't as if you were injuring anyone.

1.6.3 Other classifiable elements

Although animal cruelty and vandalism could all be interpreted as 'themes,' most references by Panellists to these concepts were made while discussing the game's violent aspects. As a result, these topics are covered in the passages above.

After discussing the major classifiable elements, groups were asked whether there were any other issues which would influence the classification they gave the game.

1.6.4 Activities unsafe for children

A number of people in both groups (but particularly the less experienced gamers) raised concerns about several scenes in *Whiplash* where the characters perform actions which could be dangerous for children to imitate. Depictions of these kinds of actions, it was felt, did not need to be overtly gruesome or graphic to be worrying – just imitable by young children in ordinary situations. One such instance particularly influenced the classification assessments made by Panellists in Group A (less experienced gamers).

As a parent I was a bit worried about the toaster in the water, I'm terrified of that kind of thing.

A number of Panellists in Group A (less experienced gamers) also related instances of children mimicking violent or dangerous behaviour seen on television, suggesting that the same dangers apply to computer games.

What concerns me is not that they'll go out and do that but whether they're at the age where they can't distinguish between the consequences of different actions.

By contrast, one person in Group B (more experienced gamers) argued that the need to educate kids about the kinds of unsafe activities depicted in *Whiplash* is a parent's responsibility.

Something that a parent's probably going to drum into their kids is don't play with fuse boxes, don't put toasters in water, don't hit adults.

1.6.5 Suitable audience

The opinions of Panellists on the suitable audience for *Whiplash* appeared to vary somewhat according to their level of familiarity with computer games. Both groups focussed on the classifiable elements in the game and the impact of the violence on people of particular ages.

I think 10 to 12 is the cutoff for kids being able to tell the difference between fantasy and reality, so it's just not suitable for anyone younger than that. (less exp)

While these sentiments were to a certain extent echoed by some of the more experienced gamers, these people tended to nominate younger ages, and then went on to consider how enjoyable *Whiplash* might be for children of different ages. For those in Group B (more experienced gamers), the notion of 'suitability' appeared to embrace not only the need to protect kids from harmful influences (the parent's responsibility) but also the likelihood of positive stimulation – or just plain fun – on the part of the player.

I put 5 to 15 – anyone in that age group could play it, understand it and have some form of appreciation for it. (more exp)

Pretty much everything I've seen is mild, and I don't think for someone of 14 or 15 who plays the game it will be too intellectually stimulating. They've sort of evolved and matured a bit more since that 8 to 12 age bracket. They just wouldn't find enough interest in the game itself. (more exp)

1.6.6 Initial Panel classification assessment

Immediately after playing the game but before the group discussion, Panellists recorded what they thought to be the most appropriate classification for *Whiplash* in a short questionnaire. Overall, most people assessed the game at G8+, although a majority of those in Group A (less experienced gamers) preferred an M15+ classification.

Initial panel classification assessment for *Whiplash*

	Group A (less exp)	Group B (more exp)	Total
G8+	4	7	11
M15+	6	1	7

Justification of G8+

Those who classified the game G8+ made the following comments.

I think the violence and menace without consequence is what makes it G8 – everything comes back to life.

I didn't think it was worth an M because it was a bit cheerier and sunnier [than Castlevania].

There was no blood or gore – there was nothing very strong or even moderate. If the rabbit hadn't been used as a weapon it could have been used to bring out social themes.

I gave it G8+ because of the humour, that brought [the classification] down.

Justification of M15+

The following comments were made by those who assessed the game at M15+.

I sat there thinking G8 or M, but I went with M in the end because the vandalism part of it worried me a little bit, so maybe it was a conscience or community sort of vote. I don't agree with the message that 'if you don't agree with something someone's doing it's okay to break the law against them' was one that was appropriate for G8. The cruelty to animals I could have put in G8 but the vandalism I put into M because I thought you needed a certain level of maturity.

In this day and age where parents are warned they can't smack their children, to show animal cruelty, I don't think it's acceptable that kids can be shown that.

1.6.7 Final Panel classification assessment

After discussing the game, the one person in Group B (more experienced gamers) who had assessed the film at M15+ changed her preferred classification to G8+. The classification assessments in Group A (less experienced gamers) remained unchanged.

Panel classification assessment after discussion

	Group A (less exp)	Group B (more exp)	Total
G8+	4	8	12
M15+	6	-	6

1.6.8 Reaction to the Board's report

Most Panellists in both groups expressed agreement with the Board's report on *Whiplash*. Some of those in Group A (less experienced gamers) disagreed with the classification itself, but the reasoning behind the decision was seen to be sound by the majority of Panel members.

A small number of people in Group A (less experienced gamers) voiced their disagreement with the Board's decision, with one calling it *'irresponsible'* to allow younger children to be exposed to behaviour that might be dangerous for kids to imitate (see the discussion above). These people did concede, however, that the need to consider imitable behaviour might not be part of the present classification guidelines, and that the correct classification may have been assigned according to the system currently in place.

1.6.9 Consumer advice

Prior to being given the Board's report, Panellists were asked to write down what they felt to be appropriate consumer advice for *Whiplash*. For those in Group A (less experienced gamers), the violence in the game tended to be described as *'moderate'* or *'frequent'*. Many of those in Group B (more experienced gamers), by contrast, thought *'low level animated violence'* was more apt.

The less experienced gamers also included a number of concepts raised as part of the discussion in their recommended consumer advice, using such phrases as *'dangerous behaviour depicted'*, *'animal cruelty'*, *'parents to be aware of safety issues'*, *'property damage'*, and *'recommended parental guidance 15 and under due to dangerous concepts/actions'*. Conversely, only one person in

Group B (more experienced gamers) felt that concepts such as animal cruelty and vandalism needed to be referred to in the consumer advice.

Panel members were then given a list of possible consumer advice phrases³ and asked to tick those which they felt were suitable for *Whiplash*. The most common responses were: 'Animated violence' (15), 'Comedic violence' (9) and 'Some scenes may frighten young children' (7).

The consumer advice recommended by the Board– 'Medium Level Animated Violence' was a matter of confusion for some people. The consumer advice, it was observed, was the same for both *Whiplash* as for *Castlevania*, despite the different classifications given to each game. The word 'animated' was considered to be more appropriate for *Whiplash* than *Castlevania* because of its more stylized, 'cartoon-like' representation.

1.6.10 Interactivity

In response to a request from representatives of the OFLC, Panellists were asked at the end of the discussion on *Whiplash* to comment on how they felt the interactive nature of computer games (as compared to film viewing) affects impact. Comments were also made during the *Castlevania* discussion which relate to the influence of interactivity on players' responses to computer games.

There was some disagreement over whether the interactive nature of games increases or mitigates the impact of violence. For some less experienced gamers, the ability to control the violence was seen to heighten the impact, with one person describing himself as '*the perpetrator*' of the violence in the game.

Other less experienced gamers, as well as the bulk of the more experienced gamers on the Panel, felt that playing rather than watching the game can distance the viewer from the effects of the violence.

It's the difference between driving and using a remote control car – you're manipulating and controlling a character as opposed to being in that game. (less exp)

Nevertheless, any mitigating effects of interactivity on the impact of computer games were seen to depend on the game in question, as well as the individual playing it.

More experienced gamers compared the impact of the violence in computer games to violence in films, arguing that the lack of identification with characters in computer games, as well as the degree of control the player holds over the course of events, made the effect of the violence less strong. However, it was contended that the longer one plays a computer game, the closer its impact came to that of a film. Some more experienced gamers expressed concerns that the repetitive nature of 'frequent' violence might have an effect on the player, conscious or otherwise.


It gets into your subconscious –you dream the action. That must increase the impact on you at some level. (more exp)

I got a message [on the screen] at one stage that now you've got to cause as much damage as you can and I think if you played it any longer that would be reinforced. (more exp)

However, these concerns appeared to be not as strongly felt as in Group A (less experienced gamers).

The repetitive violence without realistic consequences I find really disturbing. (less exp)

³ The list of consumer advice phrases is provided in Appendix B.



A number of less experienced gamers expressed the view that experiencing virtual violence (whether in films or computer games) might encourage actual violent behaviour in the viewer/player. These people argued that children need to be protected as much as possible from exposure to violence in computer games, especially given their interactive nature.

I get concerned about children playing these games and then going out and being violent, and hitting each other etc. It's the build-up of adrenaline that they can't get out by pressing a button. (less exp)

Other people in the same group pointed to the violent play in their younger days to argue that computer games have little effect on people's behaviour.

We used to have rock fights and that's before any of these guys [computer game characters] were around. (less exp)

There were also positive reactions to the interactive aspects of the computer games that panellists played, even among those who conveyed the kinds of concerns reported above. The ability to influence the outcome of events, and the degree of control players have on the nature of events depicted in the game, had a marked effect on how they interpreted the action. One Panellist who had never before played a computer game was surprised at how much she enjoyed it; for this person, the level of engagement with the action on-screen evinced a positive response to the game.

I was concentrating so hard and saying, 'What do I press now?' ... We actually enjoyed doing it, I hate to tell you ... I don't know what I really thought about the game because I was too busy, but I enjoyed it, which surprises me greatly because I didn't think I would.

A number of other panellists also commented that the ability to 'fight back' against enemies made the impact of depictions of violence less strong than being 'hacked to death' without the character defending himself.

If one person isn't fighting back it turns it from a fight into high-level abuse.

One person in Group A (less experienced gamers) said that their lack of familiarity with computer games made less experienced gamers ill-qualified to make definitive judgements on how interactivity or third-/first-person perspective might influence their impact.

A lot of this is theoretical, and it's very hard to get a handle on it because everyone's got a ... certain view of the world. You use your ethical standards and make your judgement, but when you get into an unknown technology, it's very hard to make a judgement – to me it's all so artificial.



2 Alice Springs Community Assessment Panel

2.1 Alice Springs Panel Composition

Urbis Keys Young used the services of an Adelaide-based recruitment firm to select suitable participants for the Alice Springs Panel, in accordance with the recruitment specifications agreed by the Research Reference Group. Table 2 lists the main demographic characteristics of the Alice Springs Panel members.

Group A consisted of eight less experienced gamers, and Group B consisted of eleven more experienced gamers. Both groups reflected a broad range of ages, family types, gender and cultural backgrounds. Six people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent were on the Alice Springs Panel.

2.2 Alice Springs Panel Procedure

The Alice Springs Community Assessment Panel was held on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday, between the 14th and the 16th of May. Panellists were shown films on the Friday and Saturday at the Alice Springs Cinema, with group discussions taking place at the nearby Aurora Hotel. The films viewed by the Panel were *Bad Santa* and *Jersey Girl*.

The computer games session took place at the Alice Springs Convention Centre. After watching a short demonstration on how to play the game, Panellists played each game in pairs, having been matched with others of a similar level of computer gaming experience. After playing the game, Panellists were shown a number of scenes from the game, to help them become familiar with the storyline and to ensure that the strongest classifiable elements within the game were taken into account. The two games played were *R: Racing* and *Kill.Switch*. Panellists played *R: Racing* for around 20 minutes, but were given around 45 minutes to play *Kill.Switch* because of its more complex game play.

Synopses of each film and game, as well as copies of the Board's report on each, are provided in Appendix B.



Table 2: Key characteristics of Alice Springs Panel members

Participants	Age	Gender	ATSI	Education Level Completed	Location	Family Status	Occupational Group
<i>Group A</i>							
Participant 1	18	M	No	Secondary school	Alice Springs	Never married, no children	Retail
Participant 2	31	F	No	Secondary school	Alice Springs	Four children aged 12, 11, 8 and 5 years	Teachers Assistant
Participant 3	32	F	No	Technical/ further education	Alice Springs	One child aged 5 years	Apprenticeship/ Traineeship Field Officer
Participant 4	40	F	No	University	Alice Springs	Married/ de facto	Indonesian Language Teacher/ Mental Health Rehab Worker
Participant 5	50	F	No	Secondary school	Alice Springs	Two children aged 33 and 31 years	Supply Specialist
Participant 6	50	M	N/a	University	Alice Springs	Married/ de facto	Community Service Worker
Participant 7	50	M	No	Technical/ further education	Eastside Alice Springs	Never married	Blacksmith/Farrier
Participant 8	53	F	Yes	University	Alice Springs	Two children aged 24 and 13 years	Writer/ Novelist
<i>Group B</i>							
Participant 1	19	F	Yes	Secondary school	Alice Springs	Married/ de facto, no children	Receptionist
Participant 2	22	M	No	Primary school	Alice Springs	Never married, no children	Workshop Manager
Participant 3	24	F	Yes	Secondary school	Larapinta, Alice Springs	Never married, no children	Payroll Officer – Local Council
Participant 4	29	F	No	Secondary school	Braitling, Alice Springs	Two children aged 11 and 2	Recruitment Officer
Participant 5	30	M	No	University	Alice Springs	Never married, no children	Senior Section Officer, OATSIH
Participant 6	34	M	Yes	Secondary school	Alice Springs	Two children aged 2 and 3	Unemployed
Participant 7	37	F	No	University	Alice Springs	Married/ de facto, no children	Full-time Student
Participant 8	38	M	No	Secondary school	Alice Springs	Five children aged 17, 14, 12, 11 and 11	Airport Security Officer
Participant 9	40	M	No	Secondary school	Alice Springs	Two children aged 15 and 12	Warehouse Manager
Participant 10	40	M	Yes	Secondary school	Alice Springs	Two children aged 16 and 14	Unemployed
Participant 11	48	M	No	University	Alice Springs	Two children aged 16 and 14	Regional IT Manager for NT Government

2.3 Alice Springs Panel's responses to *Bad Santa*

The Board's synopsis of *Bad Santa* is as follows.

Each Christmas, Willie the drunk and Marcus the dwarf find employment at a local mall where they play Santa and his elf until Christmas Eve, when the pair rob the store, taking off with thousands of dollars in cash and merchandise. After another drunken stint in Miami, Will, having spent all his money on booze, returns for his regular season of robbery only to find his plans are not as he expected when he runs into an inquisitive child, Thurman Merman.

The Board classified the film MA15+, with consumer advice: *Frequent Coarse Language and Sexual References.*

2.3.1 General response

Most Panellists had very positive reactions to the film, particularly with regard to the storyline and the casting.

I thought it was excellent. It was an unusual portrayal of a classic Christmas story.

I was struck by the endearing quality of the relationship between Santa and the kid and how the kid rescues him, and the end when you think he's dead but he's not dead.

Having Billy Bob Thornton helped, because of his history as a bad boy.

The casting was good – they were all misfits.

A number of people said they thought at the beginning of the film that they would see a traditional Christmas story, and were pleasantly surprised as the movie progressed.

The child featured in the film – Thurman Merman – attracted comment from a number of Panellists.

I was moved by the innocence of the child up against the adult world – he doesn't understand what's going on.

He just accepted what was going on because it was Santa Claus.

A few people found the film slightly unsavoury, although some of these seemed to enjoy it nonetheless.

I thought it was funny from a personal point of view, but I kept putting myself in a mother's shoes and feeling sorry for the kid and comparing myself to the parent.

I wouldn't like my kids to see it.

I'd be embarrassed watching it with certain people.

There was a bad message and it was a bit bland.

A few of the comments were a bit disgusting and unnecessary.

The following sections relate to the elements in the film that Panellists felt were relevant to its classification.

2.3.2 Language

Of all the classifiable elements, language and themes attracted the most discussion from Panellists. A number of people expressed concerns about the frequency of the coarse language in *Bad Santa*, particularly when it was directed at, or in the presence of, the child character.

The language got on my nerves a bit – I thought a lot of it was unnecessary.

The language was insulting and derogatory.

You can have swearing in a movie, but that just went beyond what was acceptable. What was he trying to prove? When they have a kid in the movie it changes the whole thing. When you have adults that's fine, but put a kid in there and it's wrong.

It sends a message that if you use foul language you will get attention.

Panellists discussed a scene in which Santa swears aggressively at a mother and her young child. Many felt that this scene had a higher impact than other scenes with similar language because of its tone and the obvious effect on the mother and child.

They were traumatised by Santa's language.

Other people, by contrast, felt that the coarse language in *Bad Santa* was relatively contained, and justified by the film's plot and tone.

The language was all the same – the range of language was common. The coarseness was more a question of frequency, and once you'd heard it a few times you became used to it.

I don't think the language had a strong impact. If you take it away, the movie loses its appeal. It wasn't aggressive; it was how the humour was made.

These people felt that there was little need to protect teenagers from the kind of language in *Bad Santa*, because they would be regularly exposed to it elsewhere.

My sister, she's fourteen, and you go round the schoolyard and you hear that all the time. It wasn't very broad and not over the top – it was mainly f this and f that, and most kids would know that language anyway.


Addressing this issue, one person expressed concern about the effect of popular culture on younger people in today's society.

Maybe the fact that they're watching that is why teenagers use that kind of language.

Several Panellists appeared to be more worried about the young actor playing the Thurman Merman character than the impact of Santa's language on younger audiences.

Most of the kids of his [Thurman Merman's] age would have full knowledge of that language and wouldn't be shocked at all.

It's hard to justify the language with the kid there, so there's a contradiction.



I wonder how it works with the actors, and how it affects the kid? Were the scenes shot separately? [ie so that the young actor wasn't exposed to the coarse language]

2.3.3 Themes

There were several themes in *Bad Santa* which Panellists believed were relevant to the film's classification.

Suicide

A scene in which Santa attempts to commit suicide was troubling for quite a few Panel members.

The suicide theme for me was very strong.

When I was fifteen I had a friend do that to herself, so you don't want to show a kid that sort of thing, especially with all the depression around nowadays.

Other people felt that the suicide scene did not play a major part in the film, and that it reflected an aspect of real life. For these people, the fact that Santa did not end up taking his life lowered the impact of the scene.

Alcohol and suicide do happen and can destroy your life, and you can say no and overcome it.

Alcohol use

Santa's alcohol dependency was discussed at length by members of the Panel.

I think substance misuse is one of the strongest themes, because he is drinking at the start and just doesn't stop, and he doesn't seek help.

You know he's had a hard life and that's why he's an alcoholic.

Bad Santa's not just going to rob a store without some kind of [substance] problem.

Some Panellists felt that Santa's alcoholism had little effect on the film's impact.

If you want to drink you'll drink, and that movie's not going to influence you at all.

The alcoholism was treated pretty lightly.

The alcohol had an educational element as well. I think children that went to the movie could analyse it like that.

Although there was consensus that there was no illicit drug use in *Bad Santa*, Panellists discussed whether alcohol and tobacco use were relevant. While they acknowledged that the present classification system does not recognise alcohol and tobacco as 'drugs,' some people felt that some accommodation should be made to consider the messages that their use sends to viewers.

It does seem to be a standard in society these days that alcohol is not a drug, and is not to be classified as one.



Crime

The criminal activity depicted in *Bad Santa* was also seen as a prominent theme.

The crime wasn't something someone committed on the spur of the moment – it was a culture of crime that they operated in.

The fact that Santa was not punished for his misdeeds was interpreted by a couple of Panellists as sending the wrong message to younger viewers.

He never suffered any repercussions for his actions – he was made out to be a bit of a hero even though he's been stealing and drinking all the time.

Others argued that the Christmas film sub-genre made such an outcome acceptable.

Maybe with a Christmas story things that aren't plausible can be made plausible.

Discrimination

A small number of Panellists in both groups raised the 'midget theme', wondering whether the portrayal of an alcoholic and in particular a dwarf as professional thieves ran the risk of demeaning such people.

There'd be some people who would say you shouldn't have people like those two in a movie and take the piss out of them.

It's possibly controversial. You might associate this behaviour with small people.

2.3.4 Sex

Although most Panellists agreed that sex scenes did play not a major part in the movie, they were felt to be strong enough to be considered for classification purposes. One scene in particular attracted a number of comments. In the scene, Santa is seen thrusting a girl or woman of uncertain age against a pinball machine from behind. Some people found the possibility that the girl was underage confronting, and the sequence unnecessary.

It doesn't need to be explicit. It doesn't have any justification in the movie except that he's drunk.

That scene didn't need to be in the film.

A few Panel members thought that the sexual activity between Santa and 'Mrs Santa's sister' and references to anal sex constituted unsuitable material for younger people.

Screaming out 'Fuck me Santa!' during sex was a little inappropriate for a child. They see Santa as a role model, pure and a fantasy in a way.

One of the reasons I gave it MA was the anal sex thing – the violence and the language were subjective, but there was anal sex implied.

Other people disagreed, arguing that the relationship between the two characters brought a positive tone to the film and was treated tastefully.



It was quite wholesome in a weird way.

I didn't find it offensive – I found it really funny.

2.3.5 Violence

The violence in *Bad Santa* was not seen to be overly graphic or explicit. Instead, the motivations behind and the consequences of the violence were of more relevance.

They had the opportunity to make the violence more graphic and they didn't.

It's good not to see guns in a movie all the time. It wasn't a major focus and it wasn't bloody and detailed.

It did have a continual undertone of violence – not explicit violence, but threatening language.

A number of Panellists commented that the scene in which Santa confronts Thurman's bullies was uplifting. Others disagreed, finding it in bad taste.

Santa brought the kid out of himself and gave him the right to stand up for himself and not be pushed around and bullied. That's a message in itself for a lot of young people.

I don't think it was a very good example to have Santa beating up the bullying kids – it might tell an audience that's a good thing to do.

A grown man beating up a young boy, that was distasteful I thought.

A few Panellists agreed that this scene, in which Santa picks a fistfight with some teenage bullies, was more 'violent' – had a greater impact – than a scene in which a character is rammed between two cars, because the latter victim 'deserved it' and because the former scene was more prolonged.

He was destined to die anyway.

2.3.6 Suitable audience

Panellists were asked for what audiences they felt *Bad Santa* was suitable. Most agreed that children younger than twelve or thirteen years should not watch the film, particularly those who still believe in Santa Claus.

Small children in particular shouldn't see it, even by accident.

I wouldn't let anyone younger than a teenager go.

There are kids at ten who still believe in Santa Claus.

It was too visual for children, with all the vomiting.

You don't want children to copy insults and language from the movie – they were very frequent and inappropriate.

Once you reach fifteen you're going to do what you want anyway.

2.3.7 Initial Panel classification assessment

After watching the film but before the group discussion, Panellists were asked to record what they thought to be the most appropriate classification for *Bad Santa*. The majority of people assessed the film at MA15+, while a further five preferred M and one PG.

Initial Panel classification assessment for *Bad Santa*

	Group A	Group B	Total
PG	1	-	1
M	2	3	5
MA15+	5	8	13

2.3.8 Classification debate

The following comment was made by the Panel member who initially preferred a PG classification.

I can see kids of twelve watching that film no worries at all.

The following comments were made by those Panellists who preferred an M classification.

I swung between PG and M, because I think children of ten and over here in Alice Springs would go and see that movie. I have a thirteen year old daughter, and I know her and her friends would go and see a movie like that with an M rating, and I would let them see a movie like that. They'd hear that language, and they wouldn't necessarily talk like that but associate it with the sort of themes it was trying to portray. Besides the language I think everything else was mild.

The language was frequent, but it wasn't coarse.

Some positive messages came across, and that should keep the rating down.

The following comments were made by those Panellists who preferred an MA15+ classification.

I gave it MA because of the strength of the elements, and the language and the sex. It wasn't much but it was there, and beyond what under fifteens could handle.

There were very strong themes like committing a crime and being excused for it, and there's the issue of where we draw the line. For kids it's like, why is he not going to jail? For me it was the strong themes that meant there should be a parent or guardian there.

Because of the language I started at R, but because of everything else I went to MA.

It's disturbing that someone wrote the script. How do you come up with something like that?

Showing you how to commit suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning is inappropriate.

2.3.9 Final classification assessment

After discussing the film, the one person who had initially preferred a PG classification changed their assessment to M. Another person who had originally assessed the film as MA15+ also decided on M.

Final Panel classification assessment for *Bad Santa*

	Group A	Group B	Total
M	4	3	7
MA15+	4	8	12

2.3.10 Responses to the Board's classification

After reading the Board's report on *Bad Santa*, some Panel members commented on what they regarded as an overly cautious classification. Although they acknowledged that younger people needed to be protected from inappropriate material, these people repeated their assertions that the coarse language in the film would not be unfamiliar to many young teenagers.

Several people also pointed out that sex appeared to play a greater role in the Board's decision than was necessary. For these people, the impact of other classifiable elements was greater, and therefore more relevant to the classification.

The sex scenes obviously have a big influence [with the Board], more than I would have thought.

I was surprised that the sex side of it got so much of a mention. I also think my views on violence are different to the classifiers'.

The sex is very subtle and doesn't play a big part in the movie – it's more by the by.

Despite these reservations, most Panellists agreed that the Board's decision regarding *Bad Santa* was appropriate.

2.3.11 Consumer advice

Before reading the Board's report on *Bad Santa*, Panellists were asked to write down what they felt to be the most appropriate consumer advice for the film. Common responses included 'Frequent/Strong/Excessive Coarse Language', 'Low Level Violence', 'Adult Themes' and 'Sexual References'. A small number of Panellists also suggested 'Frequent Alcohol Usage' and 'Alcohol Dependency Theme'.

The Board's consumer advice for *Bad Santa* is *Frequent Coarse Language* and *Sexual References*. Generally the Panel found the Board's advice to be suitable, although there were some suggestions that the alcohol abuse depicted in the movie warranted a mention in the consumer advice. As noted above, some Panel members commented on the issue of alcohol not being treated as seriously as illicit drugs.

Some things like that send people over the edge.



It can't possibly hurt to have just a little bit more information.

Why is alcohol not seen as a drug when classifying movies? There needs to be a specific element of alcohol abuse so as not to confuse with other illegal substances which are recognised under drug abuse.



2.4 Alice Springs Panel's responses to *Jersey Girl*

The Board's synopsis of *Jersey Girl* is as follows.

Oliver Trinke has everything: a great job, wife and idyllic life in New York, before tragically losing his wife during the birth of their first baby. At first Oliver can't cope with his new daughter, loses everything and moves back to his father's home. Back in New Jersey Oliver rebuilds his life with his daughter and father, and discovers love once again.

The Board classified the film M, with consumer advice: *Sexual References, Mature Themes, and Low Level Coarse Language.*

2.4.1 General response

Reactions to *Jersey Girl* were generally very positive. Several Panel members remarked on how they identified with its characters and storyline.

A feel good movie. It was heart wrenching.

It was very subtle. It seemed to tear at the heart without sex, violence or language.

It got an emotional reaction, I believe, from people of all ages without the use of graphic or explicit material.

It was very emotional, and it had a nice emphasis on the value of family, and that family can be many different things, not just the traditional mum, dad and kids. I liked that aspect.

It was a work/life balance movie: the high paid job versus time spent with your family.

Jersey Girl was the type of movie where you don't think – you just feel the whole way through.

A few Panellists were less enthusiastic, calling the movie 'predictable' or 'inoffensive.'

It was harmless. It was what it was supposed to be – sad and manipulative.

It was very American and biased.

2.4.2 Themes

Of the classifiable elements, the themes in *Jersey Girl* were the subject of the most debate. The mother's death in particular was a concern for some people.

The hospital scene where the mother died was a bit traumatic.

I thought the impact was quite strong. The scene in the hospital and the funeral theme, that was very sad.

Some of the 'life' scenes, with death and stuff, weren't right for some kids. You sit there with your mum or dad and they can guide you.

Other Panel members felt that the movie's treatment of 'real life' themes was a reflection of the kinds of issues that ordinary people might encounter at any stage in their lives.

Even though the parent might need to explain some things, that's life and we all have to deal with it.

It just seems realistic – it's life and it happens everyday.

The movie was dealing with real issues like death, masturbation, work, family, and it was tastefully done. It wasn't like there was a meteor crashing into the earth or anything like that.

Other Panellists argued that the themes in *Jersey Girl* were directed at an adult's level of understanding without being explicitly confronting. These people believed that the film was most appropriate for older audiences, and that its impact on children would be lower than for adults.

I don't think that children would even want to sit and watch it. I don't think there is enough in it to keep them interested.

Adults have been through those experiences and we relate to the emotional side of it, but the kids won't necessarily know about that.

As a mother I feel it a little bit more, but for a child the impact wouldn't be too strong and you could reassure them.

I think the movie's directed at adults, because there were no scenes where the child was talking to kids her own age.

2.4.3 Sex

Panellists generally considered the sex scenes in *Jersey Girl* to be quite mild, with most comments directed at the film's sexual references.

The sex was tastefully done. The shower scene – there was nothing wrong with that and it was quite funny.

They don't exactly get naked – it's what you would expect to see from your parents.

Some Panel members were concerned about the ability of children to comprehend allusions to pornography and masturbation.

A child wouldn't understand them talking about masturbation and porn. Kids wouldn't understand what it's about, the birds and the bees.


2.4.4 Language

Most Panel members agreed that the language used in *Jersey Girl* was low level and justified by context.

The language was fine – it was said in the heat of the moment.

When he said 'fuck you' it was when his wife died. It was warranted.

Some people believed that the tone of any coarse language was just as important as the words themselves in assessing their impact.



It was the way it was said – there was a lot of emotion in it. It's a swear word plus the emotion that makes it easy to pick up on.

When he called the daughter a little shit because he's missed out on his life – that's something we need to be aware of.

One Panellist wondered whether the classification system could accommodate the word 'fuck' at his preferred PG level.

Is one 'fuck' not allowed in PG? Does it make a difference to the classification?

Another person argued that parents need to be aware of any coarse language in a film when making decisions about its suitability for their children.

My two year old would pick out the shits and stuff, and as parents we need to decide if we want to expose them to that. Any movie that is in the G or PG category shouldn't contain that kind of language.

2.4.5 Other classifiable elements

Discussing a simulated murder scene in the context of a Broadway musical (*Sweeney Todd*), a small number of Panel members wondered whether the violence in *Jersey Girl* needed to be taken into account for classification purposes.

If you look at the slashing of the throat young kids might not know what's going on and it might not appeal to them, even though it was part of a play.

The consensus among the majority of Panellists was that the impact of this scene was not strong enough to regard violence as a classifiable element. Similarly, the Panel found no drug use or nudity in *Jersey Girl*.

2.4.6 Suitable audience

Asked about the suitable audience for *Jersey Girl*, Panellists discussed the relevance of its subject matter to various age groups rather than the impact of the classifiable elements. As noted above, several people felt that the emotional tenor of the film made it more appropriate for adults than younger audiences. Others disagreed, drawing attention to the prominence of the child actor in the storyline.

I don't think younger kids would be able to sit through that; they wouldn't know what's going on. Eight years old or thereabouts.

It's all adult stuff. It's the decisions you need to make as an adult; it's not dealing with anything about the girl.

I thought the star of the movie was the little girl, and a movie where the star is a child makes it appealing straight off for kids.

Panellists also recognised that the classification system was based on the various elements rather than a film's supposed target audience. By this measure, *Jersey Girl* was seen to be suitable viewing for younger teenagers.

I think it's fine for kids under fifteen because they would understand what's a common occurrence in life – death and all that – but they might not enjoy it.

2.4.7 Initial Panel classification assessment

Immediately after watching the film but before the group discussion, Panellists were asked to record what they thought to be the most appropriate classification for *Jersey Girl*. The majority of Panellists assessed the film at PG, while several preferred an M classification.

Initial Panel classification assessment for *Jersey Girl*

	Group A	Group B	Total
G	1	1	2
PG	1	10	11
M	6	-	6

2.4.8 Classification debate

The following comment was made by a Panel member who initially preferred a G classification.

I thought the adult themes like death and sexual references were handled very tastefully and carefully, and the scene where the guy got his throat 'cut' wasn't menacing at all.

The following comments were made by those who preferred a PG classification.

The reason I gave it PG was that they were talking about porn, even though the language was fairly veiled.

Watching the effect it had on the little girl, she was concerned that her mother had died but didn't show it, and she handled the scene in the shower well. If it had affected her more the impact would have been stronger, but she took it in her stride.

Some of the emotional things – really young children might struggle a bit if there wasn't any sort of explanation.

The ending tipped me towards PG – if it was a bit tragic I might have gone the other way.

The following comments were made by those who preferred an M classification.

The sex scenes – as far as I'm concerned a G film shouldn't have any of that. It's a parent's decision to decide that, so it shouldn't be in a film a kid accidentally sees. And also the porn and the masturbation.

The sexual references were troubling. I was struggling between an M and PG because of those.

2.4.9 Final Panel classification assessment

After discussing the film, several Panellists who had initially assessed the film at G or M changed their rating to PG. After the final classification assessment, the Panel was almost unanimously in favour of a PG classification.

Final classification assessment for *Jersey Girl*

	Group A	Group B	Total
PG	7	11	18
M	1	-	1

2.4.10 Reaction to Board's report

Most Panellists conveyed surprise at the Board's classification of *Jersey Girl*, feeling that the film's 'family focus' and its inoffensive treatment warranted a lower rating than M. The following comments were typical.

I don't think it's quite worth an M.

Parental guidance should be sufficient – it was a bit harsh.

If anything I would've gone the other way [to a G classification]. It's all in context and very mild.

I'm of the view that it's PG, and I'm disappointed it's an M. When the kids are away and you go to the video store and look at the consumer advice and get that one, you think, 'that was terrible – I could have watched that with the kids.'

In some senses it would be a good thing for some kids to watch it with parental guidance.

If you read that [the Board's report] and then watched the movie you wouldn't think it was the same movie.

I just figured they can still go and see it but it's recommended they don't. It's not the sort of thing that would appeal to kids.

Kids can still watch it if they want, so they're not losing out.

For several Panellists, the subjective dimension of any classification decision was seen as a factor in the Board's report. These people argued that the Board had concentrated too heavily on the sexual aspects of the film.


It's basically just a matter of opinion, I find.

From a personal point of view and from what I've seen in this movie and the other one, I think the Board obviously pays a lot more attention to sex than we do.

I think perhaps they had two men on the Board reviewing this film. If they'd been mothers of teenage girls I think perhaps they would've been persuaded towards PG. Maybe fathers don't want their daughters or sons at that age to be sexually aware or enter a frank discussion of sexual issues, and maybe mothers are a little bit more willing.

2.4.11 Consumer advice

Before reading the Board's report on *Jersey Girl*, Panel members were asked to write down what they thought to be the most appropriate consumer advice for the film. Common responses included



'Sexual References', 'Low Level Sex Scenes', 'Low Level/Occasional Coarse Language' and 'Adult Themes'.

Panellists were then given a list of possible consumer advice phrases and asked to select any that they felt were more appropriate than what they had written down.⁴ The most commonly selected phrases were *Mature Theme* (14 people), *Incidental Coarse Language* (11) and *Sexual References* (11).

The Board's consumer advice for *Jersey Girl* is *Sexual References*, *Mature Themes* and *Low Level Coarse Language*. Although there was some disagreement about the Board's classification of the film, Panel members by and large concurred with the Board's consumer advice.

We all agreed that there was mature themes and sexual stuff, but that doesn't mean it should be an M rating.

The consumer advice was fair enough, but with a PG not an M rating.

You look at the rating before you look at the consumer advice, so if you get that film thinking it's going to be for adults you're going to be disappointed.

2.4.12 MA15+ classification

Panellists were asked about their understanding of the MA15+ classification. Some thought that the difference between M and MA15+ was a little unclear.

M and MA is a bit of a waste of space really.

I would get rid of M, and go straight from PG to MA.

Other Panel members, however, regarded the distinction between the M and MA15+ classifications as useful, particularly for parents.

I think that all the classifications [G, PG, M, MA15+ and R18+] belong there, because each child is different and you have to make a decision based on the child.

It's good to have those guidelines. It's not the parent being the bad person.

M is just a recommendation and you can make your own decision, but MA says you really shouldn't be watching this.

You need to have it, otherwise you leave out the mid-teens in a way.

Some Panellists conveyed the view that the MA15+ classification was as much a way to attract older audiences as to restrict young people from certain films.

It may be more attractive to some viewers.

Some moviegoers may not want to be sitting in a cinema full of kids.

In addition, the difficulties relating to enforcement were seen to make the MA15+ classification problematic.

⁴ The list of consumer advice phrases is given in Appendix B.



Fifteen is just an age and a number, and the difference between one fifteen year old and another is huge. It's putting a huge onus on the cinema owners to let these people go through, and that shouldn't have to happen.

If you can get away with it, you will.

We need to have parental control. I don't think the whole onus should be on the Board.



2.5 Alice Springs Panel's Responses to *R: Racing*

The authorised assessor's description of *R: Racing* is as follows.

The game is an arcade car-racing game. It involves winning races, upgrading your car and winning money. There is also a story-based element to the game, which tracks the development of a female character's driving ability. The tracks are a mix of real world and fictitious tracks.

Based on the authorised assessor's recommendation, the Board classified the game G, with no consumer advice.⁵

2.5.1 General response

Most Panellists enjoyed playing *R: Racing*. The less experienced gamers (Group A) in particular were struck by the game's realism.

The graphics were impressive – you almost feel like you're there. (less exp)

It's exciting and interactive. (less exp)

There's a lot of detail on the screen, a lot of options. (less exp)

There's always something to keep you interested. There weren't any down points. (less exp)

It's just like a good car should be. (less exp)

When you crash you feel part of the game. (less exp)

A number of male Panellists in the group of more experienced gamers made some critical comments about the game play and the storyline. Females in this group, on the other hand, were pleased that they were able to play the game easily.

The game is too slow; it's not challenging enough. (Male more exp)

It's a pretty standard game. I wouldn't play it again; it wasn't that fun. (Male more exp)

The storyline was very unrealistic, and it distracts you from the game. (Male more exp)

My confidence built as the game progressed – I didn't feel like I would lose control. It was fun to actually be able to finish the race. (Female more exp)

Panellists discussed a number of elements that they felt to be potentially relevant to the game's classification, including language, nudity and themes.

⁵ Although the authorised assessor recommended a G classification for *R: Racing*, it became apparent during the preparation for the Alice Springs CAP that one of the elements – namely language – was more appropriate at a G8+ level.

2.5.2 Language

Generally the language contained in the game was regarded as quite low in impact, with some people regarding it as true to life. However, concerns were voiced about very young children being exposed to some of the language in the game.

The language is justified. I know when I'm not too happy with other drivers it's what happens behind the wheel anyway.

You don't want someone under eight hearing the word 'bastard' if you can help it, even though they would probably just skip over it.

Other Panellists argued that concentrating on the gameplay distracted the player from any extraneous aspects of the game (such as dialogue).

Because it's such an interactive game you just want to play and win. You don't really notice the other aspects of the game, like the words coming up.

2.5.3 Nudity

As with the language, the impact of the 'nudity' in *R: Racing* – an animated female's back in a shower stall – was seen to be mild or very mild by Panellists in both groups.

The nudity wasn't relevant to the classification.

It's no different to the ads for shampoo on TV.

One person thought that the gender of the animated character was the only reason nudity was discussed at all.

Is nudity only mentioned due to a female back, or would it be the same if it was a man's back?

2.5.4 Themes

Speeding

Some of the less experienced gamers wondered whether playing racing games like *R: Racing* tended to encourage dangerous behaviour among young people, while those more experienced computer games did not appear to regard this as a concern.

I find the concept of speeding troubling. How do we balance the dangers of speeding and where do we draw the line? (less exp)

It's fantasy – in real life it doesn't happen. Some of the young people could think yeah, I could speed. (less exp)

I think that's something you might have to explain to your children, the difference between doing that on the computer screen and doing it in real life. (less exp)

If they do that in real life they're a danger to others as well as themselves. (less exp)

For a few less experienced gamers, the lack of real 'consequences' of speeding – such as damage to the car – was seen to contribute to the possibility of detrimental behaviour on the part of younger

players. Others in same group argued that the lack of realism reduced the impact of the game, making it more suitable for younger audiences.

When you went off the track you didn't get any penalty for it. In real life you'd be gone and there'd be mudguards flying off and headlights broken. (less exp)

It's only realistic to a point, isn't it? It doesn't roll or anything. (less exp)

That did lower the impact, because it's less realistic. They've taken the realism out of it. (less exp)

Other themes

Panellists also noted the gambling theme in the storyline of *R: Racing*. Generally, the impact of the gambling was seen to be 'very minor'.

The gambling was justified – it's a racing game, after all.

In sports there's always high stakes gambling.

One animated scene, in which the main character is forced to race for her 'freedom' from a manipulative racing consortium, drew comments from Panellists in both groups.

The competitiveness – you have to win to survive – that sends a bad message.

There's implied violence, racing for your freedom. You have to think about the kind of impact that has on the people that play that.

Other people disagreed, arguing that players, and especially younger players, would tend to ignore the animated clips interspersed between races because of their eagerness to compete. Along with the fact that young children would probably not understand some of the themes, this was felt to lower their impact.

The storyline does not have a strong impact on a child. Generally kids skip through the story and go straight to the race.

Kids of that age, they don't care about the rest of it. They're going to go straight to the competitive bits.

It does have a bit of a mature storyline which might go over their heads.

2.5.5 Suitable audience

Asked what audiences would be suitable for *R: Racing*, Panellists mostly nominated ages between eight and twelve years. As well as claiming that children younger than that would not be able to work the controller properly, people in both groups drew attention to the language in the game.

Any language at all is not acceptable for children.

2.5.6 Initial Panel classification assessment

Immediately after playing *R: Racing* and viewing excerpts from the game but prior to the group discussion, Panellists were asked to record what they thought to be the most appropriate classification. The bulk of the Panel assessed the game at G8+, with several people choosing M15+.

Initial Panel classification assessment for *R: Racing*

	Group A (less exp)	Group B (more exp)	Total
G	-	1	1
G8+	5	7	12
M15+	2	3	5
MA15+	1	-	1

2.5.7 Classification debate

The following comments were made by those who preferred a G8+ classification for *R:Racing*.

You wouldn't have to be fifteen to understand what was going on.

The language was pretty mild, but there was the gambling and the nudity.

I don't think there's anything in there that can't be explained to young people.

Most of the scenes where the stuff's happening, most people are going to go straight through it, because it's a waste of time.

I think the storyline itself isn't anything that's going to have a strong impact on a child. If anything it just gives a bit of interest. A lot of kids skip through the story and just get to the race – that's why they get a racing game.

The following comments were made by those who preferred an M15+ classification.

For me it was close between G8+ and M15+. I just felt that eight year olds were too young, and you are recommending it for an eight year old if you make it G8+.

I'm not too sure about these things, but I have some deep-seated feelings about the desensitisation of children.

I know an eight year old wouldn't play it. They wouldn't understand the controls.

The following comment was made by the Panellist who initially assessed the game at MA15+.

I gave it MA because of the danger of driving and the need to explain it. What are we telling young people if they drive at speed and they become a winner?

2.5.8 Final classification assessment

Following the discussion the majority of Panel members amended their classification assessments, with all but three of those who initially gave the game M15+ or MA15+ opting for G8+.

Final Panel classification assessment for *R: Racing*

	Group A (less exp)	Group B (more exp)	Total
G	-	1	1
G8+	5	10	15
M15+	3	-	3

*One Panel member in Group B (more experienced gamers) did not record a preferred classification. This person's initial classification assessment (G) has therefore been taken as their final assessment.

2.5.9 Response to the assessor's report

Several Panellists in both groups expressed surprise at the Board's classification. They argued that a G classification implied a total absence of elements like nudity and coarse language.

I was shocked. I was worried about some of it.

I think the G rating underestimates some of the subtle things we have been talking about.

There appears to be a different rating system used for films compared to computer games. Films have a higher rating than computer games for the same kinds of elements.

G is the lowest level. To me that should be something very innocent.

Other people, particularly more experienced gamers, accepted the decision more readily, arguing that the game's impact was very mild.


Eight year olds already know that kind of language. What difference is this game going to make? (more exp)

2.5.10 Consumer advice

Before reading the assessor's report on *R: Racing*, Panellists were asked to write down what they thought to be the most appropriate consumer advice for the game. Common responses were 'Adult/Mature Themes', 'Low level/Mild Adult Themes' and 'Low level/Mild Language'. Other phrases included 'Nudity' and 'Very Low Threat of Menace', while several people thought no consumer advice at all was necessary.

Panellists in one group were then given a list of possible consumer advice phrases and asked to tick any that they felt were more appropriate than what they had written.⁶ *Incidental Coarse Language* was the only phrase selected by several people.

⁶ The list of consumer advice phrases is given in Appendix B.



Because the assessor recommended that *R: Racing* be classified G, no consumer advice was provided. A number of Panel members in both groups believed that parents should be as fully informed as possible about the content of a game, even if it receives a G classification.

A G rating should have absolutely no language, or at least a consumer advice warning that it is there.

I think a parent should know that there is some language in there, especially in something that a child's going to play all day. They have the right to know.

It definitely should have some consumer advice.

2.6 Alice Springs Panel's Responses to *Kill.Switch*

The authorised assessor's description of *Kill.Switch* is as follows.

Adept in the handling of a huge array of weaponry, you specialise in solo missions, taking out hordes of enemy soldiers whilst making clinical use of the environment to stay alive and get the job done.

Your objective is to complete tactical missions in global 'hotspots' including the Middle East, the Caspian Sea region and North Korea. If you live through those, you just might begin to piece together an explanation; with every successful deployment you take a step closer to understanding exactly who is giving the orders, and why the military is using your skills for seemingly less than honourable reasons.

The Board accepted the authorised assessor's recommendation for *Kill.Switch*, classifying it M15+ with consumer advice: *Medium Level Animated Violence*.

2.6.1 General response

There were positive and negative reactions to *Kill.Switch* in both groups.

Of those who were positive about the game, more experienced gamers (Group B) tended to praise the game play, while those less experienced gamers (Group A) were impressed with the graphics and its overall feel.

The graphics were excellent. It was very realistic. (less exp)

*I think the storyline had a sense of *The Matrix*. (less exp)*

Great music. (less exp)

I'm not into video games, but I thought it was great fun. (less exp)

You get an adrenalin kick when you remember how to crouch and shoot at the same time. (less exp)

I found it exciting. We were into it. (more exp)

Awesome. (more exp)

The whole time I was playing I was thinking, 'When I master this game I could be off to Iraq.' (more exp)

Negative responses were more varied; some people found the game boring and repetitive or had difficulties mastering the controls, while others regarded the violence in the game as distasteful.

Standard genre – guns, bombs and things. (exp)

I don't really like those sorts of games. I don't find them very interesting. (more exp)

I got bored with the game and the music. (less exp)

The format is exactly the same as years ago: change weapons, reload – there's nothing new about it. (less exp)

I found it really hard to play. (less exp)

I didn't like it – I couldn't control it. (exp)

It was just violence and death - it was kill, kill, kill. (more exp)

2.6.2 Violence

Panellists agreed that the major classifiable element in *Kill.Switch* was violence. Again, there were divergent views across both groups, with several people expressing concern at the frequency of the violence and its effect on the player. Indeed, one person in the group of less experienced gamers thought the emphasis on war and violent killing so pervasive as to consider banning the game altogether.

It was promoting killing, basically. (less exp)

There is no real objective; you just go around killing people. (less exp)

I'm looking at it thinking murder is extreme violence. It doesn't matter how you dress it up, it's still murder. To me that game is all about killing. If it was occurring in a real war setting that's one thing, but you've got this indestructible soldier who kills everybody. It's not a real war setting, with real blood and ambulance officers and that kind of thing. There's no redeeming factors there – there's no help for the wounded and no respite. The player is just a killing machine. (more exp)

Other Panel members, particularly more experienced gamers, drew attention to the lack of realism in *Kill.Switch*. These people believed that the lack of explicit details, and the fact that much of the action takes place at a distance from the 'enemy,' reduced the impact of the game.

It wasn't extreme because you don't see the guts spurting out. If you shot him and saw it go splat it would be a different thing. (more exp)

It's more like a lot of target shooting really. (more exp)

It was violent but not in a savage way. You just shot him and he fell to the ground. (more exp)

It was limited violence, even though it was all killing. There was no blood. (less exp)

You couldn't see the faces of the people you were killing, so you had that detachment. It depersonalised it. (less exp)

One more experienced gamer felt that the limited detail made the game less interesting.

I was a bit disappointed that no-one lost arms or anything like that. (more exp)

The group of more experienced gamers also discussed whether the game's setting – in what was perceived as a war zone – influenced the impact. These people believed that the same level of violence committed in a suburban setting, for instance, would be much more confronting.

It makes a difference being in a war setting if kids are going to play it day in day out. In a suburban setting you would worry about what effect that has, but in a war setting it doesn't seem as real. (more exp)

Because it's a theoretical war zone place and it's not based on people's everyday lives, it has a low sort of impact really.

2.6.3 Other classifiable elements

The Panel was asked whether any classifiable elements besides violence were relevant to the classification of *Kill.Switch*. A small number of people in both groups said that certain themes – such as war, death, crime and racism – should be considered, or at least be mentioned in the consumer advice. The consensus in both groups, however, was that most or all of these could all be incorporated under the rubric of violence.

The Panel identified no other classifiable elements.

2.6.4 Suitable audience

Panellists were asked about who they thought to be a suitable audience for *Kill.Switch*. People in both groups believed that older teenagers could handle the content, but those under around fifteen years needed more guidance. Even some of the more experienced gamers who had referred to the game's lower impact compared with more graphic games felt that young children and younger teenagers needed some degree of protection.

I'd call it strong violence because it's so repetitive, and a younger person might not necessarily be able to determine the difference [between real violence and animated violence]. (more exp)

I wouldn't think that the game would be suitable for anyone under fifteen, purely because of the violence. (less exp)

2.6.5 Initial Panel classification assessment

Immediately after playing *Kill.Switch* and viewing selected excerpts from the game but before the group discussion, Panellists were asked to record what they thought to be the most appropriate classification. Most people opted for M15+, with several choosing MA15+ and one person placing the game in the RC category. Interestingly, all those who assessed the game at MA15+ were in the group of more experienced gamers.

Initial Panel classification assessment for *Kill.Switch*

	Group A (less exp)	Group B (more exp)	Total
M15+	7	6	13
MA15+	-	5	5
RC	1	-	1

2.6.6 Classification debate

The following comments were made by Panellists who preferred an M15+ classification for *Kill.Switch*.

I gave it M purely because it's just about violence.

The level of skill required made it M. I think with G8+ they just wouldn't be able to do it.

I thought it was moderate. I wouldn't call it strong – it didn't have severed heads and spurting blood. Yes, it's bad, but I wouldn't call it strong.

I've played these kinds of games before and they just don't seem realistic to me. They all look the same and I don't think their impact is strong on me.

More than killing, I found self-preservation was more the theme.

The following comments were made by those who assessed the game at MA15+.

MA because of the violence generally. It was promoting war and killing.

I think it's extreme violence but I don't think it's portrayed in an extreme manner. The intention of the game is to kill everyone in sight, not to take hostages or anything. There was one guy begging for mercy and you had to kill him.

The following comment was made by the person who placed *Kill.Switch* into the Refused Classification category.

It should be banned. There were too many violence issues.


This Panellist was concerned about the whole ethos of the game, which she saw as normalising racially and politically based killing.

2.6.7 Final classification assessment

Following the discussion no Panel members changed their initial classification assessments.

Final Panel classification assessment for *Kill.Switch*

	Group A (less exp)	Group B (more exp)	Total
M15+	7	6	13
MA15+	-	5	5
RC	1	-	1



2.6.8 Response to the assessor's report

Most Panel members were in agreement with the assessor's recommended classification for *Kill.Switch*. There were, however, a number of comments made in relation to the recommended consumer advice (see below).

2.6.9 Consumer advice

Before reading the assessor's report, Panellists were asked to write down what they thought to be the most appropriate consumer advice for *Kill.Switch*. Common responses included 'Moderate Level/High Level/Strong Violence', 'Frequent Violence', and 'Mature Themes'. In addition, 'War Scenes' and 'Death' were also suggested.

Panel members were then handed a list of possible consumer advice phrases and were asked to tick any that they felt were more appropriate than what they had written down. The most commonly selected phrases were *Frequent/Infrequent Violence* and *Mature Theme*.

The assessor's recommended consumer advice for *Kill.Switch* is *Medium Level Animated Violence*. After reading the assessor's report, several people expressed the view that the consumer advice was not entirely appropriate, for a number of reasons. First, reference to the *frequency* of the violence in the game was thought to be necessary.

It should have 'frequent violence' in it because the whole thing is shooting, isn't it? (more exp)

Some Panellists who classified *Kill.Switch* MA thought that the violence in the game was more than 'medium level,' especially when assessed at the M15+ level. Other people regarded the assessor's recommended advice as quite appropriate.

To me that isn't just medium level violence, it's a lot more than that. It means a nine year old can go to the shop and buy that game.

The medium level animated violence tells you what you need to know to make a judgement about the game.

Some Panellists felt that the stronger aspects of the game that were not strictly violent needed mentioning in the consumer advice.

What about themes with the death and the girl and all that?

'Strategy and war' would have been quite appropriate, don't you think?

One person pointed out that all computer games were by nature 'animated', implying that there is little need to include the word in any consumer advice.

It's not real – there's no blood. Of course it's animated.

A number of more experienced gamers argued that the nature of the game, particularly its title, was a very good indication of the content consumers were likely to encounter, perhaps better than any consumer advice which might be provided.

The title says it all. What do you expect?

2.6.10 Interactivity

At the end of their discussion about *Kill.Switch*, Panellists were asked what effect they thought the interactive nature of computer games has on their impact, when compared to film. More experienced and less experienced gamers expressed quite different views on interactivity.

People in Group A (less experienced gamers) largely felt that playing rather than watching computer games lowers their impact on the player. For these people, concentrating on the game play rather than the superficial appearance of the game tends to distract the player from any classifiable elements. Moreover, the obvious unreality of animated activity (particularly violence) was seen to be less confronting than depictions of violence in film.

Playing it made it more fun. I mean, you were laughing while you were playing it, whereas if you were watching somebody play it it's not as funny. (less exp)

When you play you don't put as much emphasis on the violence, because you know you're not killing someone. It's just a game. (less exp)

A movie may get a higher rating than a video game, because you judge what you see when watching it, but you just want to win when you play. (less exp)

When you watch a film you tend to relate to the victim, you empathise with the victim. In a game you are the aggressor. (less exp)

Before I did this exercise I thought interactivity would increase the impact of the violence, but it didn't. It lowers it. (less exp)

It reduces the impact on the player, but not necessarily the watcher. (less exp)

You are too busy looking at your level of skill to concentrate on the themes. (less exp)


By contrast, many of the people in the group of more experienced gamers thought that the act of playing computer games added to their impact. Some people thought that interacting with the game environment made the player the 'perpetrator' of any violence in the game. Others observed that males and females often have different responses to the same games.

I think that playing the game makes the impact worse, especially to a child, because you're partaking in the act of killing someone. (more exp)

You're more involved; you're taking part. If you're at the end and you get killed you get frustrated and want to get back into it. I think the frustration makes you angry and makes you more determined to keep going. I think it's also more intense with a game like this, where someone can sneak around the corner and just shoot you. (more exp)

It would have a lower impact watching a competent player, compared to playing it yourself. You get in threatening situations and it becomes fight or flight. It becomes an emotional experience rather than intellectual observation. (more exp)

*I suspect it has a different impact on men and women, because men have different levels of testosterone and get more aggressive and controlling. I think for that reason playing that game [*Kill.Switch*] would be different to watching it in a movie. In a sense, I'm participating in it. (more exp)*



Females just think it's stupid, but guys will get very aggressive. I've seen that happen so often. (more exp)

These sentiments were supported by the personal experience of one female Panellist:

I just got so frustrated and said, 'It's stupid, I won't play anymore.' (more exp)

There were also a small number of Panellists in the group of more experienced gamers who expressed similar views to the less experienced gamers, contending that the act of 'problem solving' in the context of computer gaming can lower the impact. One such person agreed that she may have given *Kill.Switch* a higher classification if she had watched someone else play the game rather than playing it herself.

One more experienced gamer pointed out that each game has such a large range of options open to the player that any one experience of game play can be utterly different from the next. In other words, it is the choices taken by the player which dictate the content they see and hear. Because each instance of game play is just as representative of the game as another, any judgement regarding the effect of interactivity on impact is necessarily difficult.

If you can go up to people on the ground and shoot them in the head and blood spurts out you might say it's a more violent game than you thought. What happens in the game may give you a skewed perception of how violent the game is. (more exp)

Interestingly, the views of the two groups conveyed in the *Kill.Switch* discussion appeared to be slightly different to the opinions on interactivity expressed in relation to *R: Racing*. While the issue was not explored thoroughly, experienced gamers in the *R: Racing* discussion emphasised the repetitive nature of computer gaming when considering impact.

A game could have a higher impact than film since it is played continuously, whereas a film may only be watched once. (more exp)

Meanwhile, less experienced gamers expressed more concern about the impact of interactivity in the *R: Racing* discussion than they did towards the end of the computer games session.

I think we were a lot harsher on the game than on either of the two movies because of the interactivity. Maybe it's new to us, or maybe it's the interactivity. (less exp)

I have real worries, because it's a new genre and the effects haven't been researched well enough yet. (less exp)

One possible explanation for the change in attitudes from one discussion to the next is the comparative levels of difficulty of each of the two games. *Kill.Switch* required significantly more facility with the controller, as well as more time becoming familiar with the game play, than *R: Racing*, and it is possible that the level of concentration required for the different games generated different responses among the Panel. Another (possibly complementary) explanation is that the views of Panel members evolved over the course of the games session, with the attitudes of less experienced gamers in particular developing at the same time as their ability to play computer games progressed.

A further explanation could be related to the relative levels of gaming skill among Panellists in the two Alice Springs groups. Although every effort was made to split the Panel into two distinct groups according to their level of familiarity with computer games, doing so relied on Panellists's own self-assessment of their abilities. It became evident during the gameplay sessions that the



differences between Group A (less experienced gamers) and Group B (more experienced gamers) were not as pronounced as in the Canberra Panel. Any conclusions founded on the relative responses of more experienced and less experienced gamers, therefore, should be treated with caution.





3 Melbourne Community Assessment Panel

3.1 Melbourne Panel Composition

Urbis Keys Young used the services of a Melbourne-based recruitment firm to select suitable participants for the Melbourne Panel, in accordance with the recruitment specifications agreed to by the Research Reference Group. Table 3 lists the main demographic characteristics of the Melbourne Panel members.

Group A consisted of nine less experienced gamers, and Group B consisted of nine more experienced gamers. Both groups reflected a broad range of ages, family types, gender and cultural backgrounds.

3.2 Melbourne Panel Procedure

The Melbourne Community Assessment Panel was held on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday between the 4th and the 6th of June. Panellists were shown films on the Friday and Saturday in Federation Hall at the Victorian College of the Arts, with group discussions taking place in rooms nearby. The films viewed by the Panel were *Two Men Went to War* and *Tom White*.

The computer games session took place at a computer training facility in the Melbourne CBD. After being shown a number of clips from the first game to help them become familiar with the storyline and its strongest classifiable elements, Panellists were given a short demonstration on how to play the game. They were then given the opportunity to play the game in pairs, having been matched with others of a similar level of computer gaming experience, after which group discussions were held. The process was then repeated for the second game. The two games played were *Tak and the Power of Juju* and *Rogue Ops*. Panellists played *Tak and the Power of Juju* for around 20 minutes, but were given around 30 minutes to play *Rogue Ops* because of its more complex game play.

Synopses of each film and game, as well as copies of the Board's report on each, are given in the Appendices.



Table 3: Key characteristics of Melbourne Panel members

Participants	Age	Gender	Education Level Completed	Location	Family Status	Occupational Group
<i>Group A</i>						
Participant 1	17	M	Secondary school	Oakleigh South	Single, no children	Full-time Student
Participant 2	31	F	University	Surrey Hills	Married/de facto, no children	Business Facilitator
Participant 3	36	F	Secondary school	Clarinda	2 children aged 11 and 1	Home Duties
Participant 4	37	F	Secondary school	Oakleigh	2 children aged 7 and 2	Human Resources Consultant
Participant 5	43	M	Technical/ further education	Highett	3 children aged 16, 14 and 11	Accountant
Participant 6	44	M	Technical/ further education	Carnegie	1 child aged 4	Motor Mechanic
Participant 7	44	M	Primary school	Werribee	2 children aged 5 and 9	Wool Processing Supervisor
Participant 8	46	F	Secondary school	Myrningong	3 children aged 23, 18 and 14	School Integration Aide
Participant 9	56	F	Technical/ further education	Did not answer	2 grandchildren aged 1	Home Duties
<i>Group B</i>						
Participant 1	17	M	Secondary school	Werribee	Single - no children	Full-time Student
Participant 2	17	M	Secondary school	Sandringham	Single - no children	Full-time Student
Participant 3	28	F	University	East Melbourne	Single - no children	Checkout Operator
Participant 4	35	F	University	Hawthorne East	1 child aged 12	Home Duties
Participant 5	35	M	Secondary school	Aspendale Gardens	2 children aged 7 and 4	Communications Technician
Participant 6	37	M	Technical/ further education	Mitcham	Married/de facto, no children	Business Systems Analyst
Participant 7	38	M	Secondary school	Berwick	2 children aged 15 and 13	System Designer
Participant 8	42	F	Secondary school	Copendale Gardens	2 children aged 14 and 10	Home Duties
Participant 9	45	F	Secondary school	Dandenong	2 children aged 9 and 17	Home Duties

3.3 Melbourne Panel's Responses to *Two Men Went to War*

The Board's synopsis of *Two Men Went to War* is as follows:

A comedy-drama based on a true story in which two British Army dentists set out to invade occupied France during World War II.

The Board classified the film PG, with consumer advice: *Low Level Coarse Language* and *Low Level Violence*.

3.3.1 General response

Panelists had mixed responses to *Two Men Went to War*. Some found it moderately enjoyable, describing it as '*light entertainment*' and '*non-confrontational*'.

It's not my type of film. I wouldn't want to watch it, but because it was there it wasn't bad. It didn't kill me. It was quaint, and it's nice not to watch blood and guts all the time.

Other people were more enthusiastic about the film, commenting that the fact that it was based on a true story made it more interesting.

I thought it was well-filmed and well-acted, and it had a good moral view.

Whether you liked it or not, in the end it wasn't violent.

It was entertaining and very amusing – my kind of film. I wouldn't have gone to see it but I really enjoyed it.

It was very uplifting and very humane. There's not many movies like that nowadays.

Other Panel members were unimpressed by the film's slow pace, calling it '*boring*.' Comparisons with the television series *Dad's Army* were made in both group discussions.

I thought it was very slow – I was expecting more action. My in-laws are in their seventies and they could relate to that, but my kids would have been bored out of their brains.

I was hoping for a bit of a love story, but it didn't happen. I thought they were going to have a bit of a kiss and a cuddle, but no.

I kept waiting for something to happen, but it never did.

It was completely inoffensive – it didn't make you feel anything. If I had paid ten dollars to go and see that movie I would have come out and been absolutely furious.

I can see how teenagers might find it quite boring.

It was two hours of Dad's Army.

The Panel believed violence, themes and language to be the major classifiable elements in *Two Men Went to War*. In general terms, these elements were seen to be mild or very mild and justified by context.

3.3.2 Violence

Panel members described the violence in the movie as having a very low impact, and a few people struggled to remember any violent scenes at all without prompting. In assessing the impact of the violence, Panellists noted its relatively mild consequences and the lack of explicit detail, comparing it favourably with the violence depicted in other parts of popular culture.

Hitting the guy on the head with a spade was mild and low impact. You knew he wasn't dead and there wasn't any blood.

The violence was mainly implied, and it was related to the story. Nothing seemed over the top.

It wasn't bloodthirsty like other movies. It still got the message across, but it wasn't as harsh.

There wasn't even any implied death. It was just slapstick.

*Compared to *Itchy and Scratchy*, or even *Road Runner* and *Wily Coyote*, the violence was nothing.*

It's not like a Schwarzenegger movie where everyone's blowing up. This movie is deeper.

One particular scene, in which a German soldier is shot after a series of explosions, was seen to be the highest impact in the movie because the audience is led to believe for a few moments that the soldier is in fact one of the main characters. The scene was particularly troubling for one person.

It was very realistic. I could see it in my mind afterwards.

A small number of Panellists expressed concern about young children being exposed to depictions of violence, however mild.

If they see some of that stuff, like with the hand grenade, they could turn around and try it.

Kids watch it and go to school and practise with plastic grenades and cap guns. You need to be careful with kids copying what they see on television and in movies.

3.3.3 Themes

Most Panellists thought the war theme in *Two Men Went to War* to be relevant to the film's classification, although they generally regarded its impact as quite low.

*It made light of war. It wasn't a *Saving Private Ryan* kind of war.*

Nevertheless, some people felt that the violence and the sense of menace generated by the context of war would need to be explained to some younger people.

There's a need for parents to explain the background to wars and the need for violence.

They'll need a history lesson.

If my daughter read that it was a true story she would say, 'That really happened, Mum!'

True stories do open up some kind of discussion. Watching a movie like that could start bushfires in the house that need to be put out. Some kids could take it out of context.

A few Panellists felt that war themes in a movie automatically make a G classification inappropriate, regardless of tone or treatment. Others observed that most younger people would be exposed to much stronger material at a very young age, and were unconcerned about children watching this particular movie.

My kids watch the Simpsons, and Homer is a lot worse than any of that.

What kids have seen at that stage in their life is a hell of a lot more than we saw at that age.

3.3.4 Language

As with the violence and themes, the impact of the language in *Two Men Went to War* was seen to be very low and justified by context. A number of Panellists regarded the language as so mild as to not merit consideration in any classification decision, and one group did not even discuss the language in the film until they had seen the Board's report. Despite this, one person maintained that she would not want her children to be exposed to the language in the film.

'Bastard', 'arse' – I don't consider that coarse language. You can hear young kids say a lot worse than that. 'Fuck' – that's coarse language.

I have to admit I didn't notice the language.

One Panel member was convinced that he had heard a character in the film say 'fuck.' While other people – and the Board – did not note any such occurrence, this person made his classification decision based on this observation. In response, others argued that the use of the word on only one occasion does not necessarily warrant an M classification.

No other classifiable elements were discussed by the Panel in relation to *Two Men Went to War*.

3.3.5 Suitable audience

Panellists were asked for what audiences *Two Men Went to War* was suitable. It was generally felt that the subject matter and the gentle pace of the film would appeal to audiences above 50 years. However, most people also recognised that very few if any aspects of the film would make it unsuitable for particular age groups, except perhaps very young children. Most Panellists agreed that children older than nine or ten years would be quite comfortable watching the movie, while for younger teenagers it might even serve as a good introduction to the history of the World War Two.

You take it with a grain of salt, and I give kids full credit – they'll understand it

3.3.6 Initial Panel classification assessment

Immediately after watching *Two Men Went to War* but before discussing it, Panellists were asked to record in a questionnaire what they felt to be the most appropriate classification. Most people rated the film PG, with the remaining six Panellists giving it a G or an M classification.

Initial Panel classification assessment for *Two Men Went to War*

	Group A	Group B	Total
G	3	1	4
PG	6	6	12
M	-	2	2

3.3.7 Classification debate

The following comments were made by those Panel members who preferred a G classification for *Two Men Went to War*.

It says in the guidelines that there may be some films in the G category that would have no interest to children, and that film was like that. It was touch and go, but that made me put it into G.

I changed from PG to G because I want more people to see it. It's not about swearing and violence. Those other movies are a waste of money and this movie was nice.

People find Harry Potter more frightening than they would find this stuff.

The following comments were made by those who preferred a PG classification.

Knowing what goes on at the school that my eight year old goes to, I wouldn't want them seeing the war and things blowing up without some kind of explanation.

I gave it PG, simply because it would require some explaining. My daughter would watch worse than that on the six o'clock news.

If a kid watches the violence they will laugh at it but they won't understand the rest of it, so it's not appropriate for kids.

I wouldn't bring it down to G because of the element of war. With the kind of environment we're in today you need guidance.

I thought there were elements that would need some clarification for children – explaining the war and things like that. There would be nothing wrong with taking my daughter but I would have to explain some things.

There was a lot of sneaking around, and they stole the boat. There was a sense of menace.

The following comment was made by a Panellist who initially preferred an M classification.

I picked up a 'fuck' when he didn't get the promotion.

3.3.8 Final Panel classification assessment

After discussing the film, the Panel members who had initially given the movie an M classification changed their ratings to PG. Two other people changed their classifications from PG to G.

Final Panel classification assessment for *Two Men Went to War*

	Group A	Group B	Total
G	4	2	6
PG	5	7	12

3.3.9 Reaction to the Board's report

Panellists generally thought the Board's classification decision to be appropriate.

I'm not surprised – I would expect them to err on the side of caution and they have.

Some people commented that while the decision on *Two Men Went to War* was in line with the classification guidelines, some other films are not.

The last Harry Potter film was much more violent than that, and it had the same classification.

PG is probably correct, but it's probably too high – it's not fair when other movies have stronger scenes but get the same classification.

Although there was general agreement regarding the classification decision, several Panellists expressed concern about some of the reasoning in the Board's report. In particular, these people felt that the assessment of the film's language as 'coarse' was excessive, and that the scenes of violence described in the report were very mild in impact because of the humorous context.

'Arse' and 'turd' and 'piss off' aren't coarse in today's language.

All these 'violent' scenes – they happened, bang, and then they were gone. It wasn't in your face. For that reason I'll stick with a G.

To judge the movie because there's one bump on the head and one person calls the other a bastard – it's not PG. The rest of it is very mild. They assess it because of one bump. With some movies there's a whole lot of violence and blood and everything, and they still give it PG.

3.3.10 Consumer advice

Before reading the Board's report on *Two Men Went to War*, Panellists were asked to write down what they felt to be the most appropriate consumer advice for the film. Common responses included '*War Themes*', '*Low Level Violence*' and '*Low Level/Mild Coarse Language*'.

The Board's consumer advice for this movie is *Low Level Coarse Language* and *Low Level Violence*. Panellists generally believed that the advice regarding violence was appropriate, but some questioned whether any warning at all was necessary for the language in the film.

It happened three times in the whole movie and the worst word was 'turd.'

Panel members observed that the film's PG rating implied that it had at least some classifiable elements, and that parents needed to be given guidance to help them make the right decisions.



'Extremely Low Level Coarse Language' was suggested as a way to communicate the very low impact of the language in the film.

No matter how desensitised we are, people should still be given the choice. You have to tell them.

Several Panellists felt that the consumer advice should take into account the thematic aspects of the film. Because *'Adult Themes'* was felt to be far too strong a phrase to describe their low impact, these people suggested that *'War Themes'* might be a suitable term.



3.4 Melbourne Panel's Responses to *Tom White*

The Board's synopsis of the film is:

Tom White charts the rise and fall of a middle-class businessman. After an emotional breakdown Tom is transformed from an employed family man to a homeless vagrant. During this period of self-discovery Tom meets other people who are also on society's fringes. The old Tom disintegrates as he reaches the nadir of his life before he emerges in a form that approaches enlightenment.

The Board classified the film M and its Consumer Advice was: *Drug Use, Adult Themes, Violence, Strong Coarse Language, and Nudity.*

3.4.1 General response

Panel members thought *Tom White* provided a thought provoking portrayal of how a person's circumstances can change dramatically. They felt this to be a worthy theme and one that is not often portrayed on film.

Hard hitting - makes you face reality.

These things can happen. I wouldn't want to experience it.

A very true reflection for some people in Australia.

It makes you think about people on the streets and how they get there.

Shows you how easy it is to spiral downwards.

Good wake up call to what can happen, and shows what it is like out there. It would be especially good for teenagers to see this.

It showed how easily life can change, how fragile we all are.

Approximately half the Panel enjoyed the film, while the others found it too confronting.

I didn't like it – I don't take to movies with constant swearwords and I didn't like the storyline.

Too depressing for me.

Excellent - I thoroughly enjoyed it.

I thought it was really interesting - a frank honest portrayal of mental health.

Tom White was shot in Melbourne and Panel members recognised some of the locations in the film. They reported that the familiar setting increased the impact of the film for them.

It touches you because you know it.

Recognising the places personalises it.

Sometimes you see that sort of thing in America and you don't really think it's real, but when you see it where you work and have dinner everyday that definitely has an effect.

Australian movies are more realistic. Hollywood would be hard pressed to have an impact on this subject, especially without actors that you can relate to. Having known actors makes it more interesting.

The following sections report on participants' responses to aspects of the film they perceived as relevant to classification. Panellists felt that the following elements affected its classification: drug use, coarse language, violence, adult themes, sexual activity and nudity.

3.4.2 Drug use

The Panel members regarded the impact of the use of both legal and illegal drugs in *Tom White* as strong.

I don't separate them – drinking is a drug, even though it's a socially acceptable one.

All the drug use was really bad.

They generally felt that the film portrayed the use of drugs as normal and acceptable, although they also noted that the film showed the negative consequences of excessive drug use.

Legal drugs

Panellists noted that the male lead and other characters drank alcohol frequently throughout the film, and believed that alcohol was presented as something that was appropriate to consume throughout the day. They also observed that characters commonly consumed alcohol in crisis situations, and thought that this implied that alcohol was a tool for dealing with problems. Participants were concerned about the impact this message might have on younger viewers, although they noted that the story line, which showed that drinking does not solve the kinds of problems faced by the characters, went some way towards alleviating these concerns.


The drinking was so constant.

I think even if an eighteen year old saw that they might think, 'I've got a few problems, I'll go and have a drink'. It was really in your face.

It's a very dangerous path. When under eighteens see that they'll go to Dad's fridge and get a beer.

Some participants reported being particularly struck by a scene in which a female character is drinking something that she refers to as paint stripper from a soft drink can. The impact of this scene was said to be so strong for three reasons: it implied that drinking something like paint stripper was normal; gave implicit approval to disguising the consumption of an intoxicating substance; and suggested that drinking a substance like paint stripper is not harmful.

A few Panellists were also concerned about the impact on younger viewers of the abuse of prescription drugs in the film. The scene the Panellists mentioned in this context involved a conversation between the male lead and a young man who had been providing him with pills. The young man remarks on his intention to obtain more pills from a doctor.



It was presented as a problem fixer and so easy to get, like the pills he just got from the doctor.

Prior to this scene most of participants had assumed that these pills were obtained illegally.

Illegal drugs

Most Panellists thought that the use of illicit drugs was explicit in the film, although some regarded it as implied rather than explicit. Panellists noted the opening scenes of the film, in which they saw someone shooting up and kids inhaling drugs; the scenes in which the young homosexual character provided pills to the male lead; and other scenes in which the homosexual character(s) took drugs.

In a similar way to the portrayal of alcohol consumption, the Panellists thought that the use of illicit drugs was probably a realistic representation of how people living in this milieu behave. However, the explicitness of the representation directly affected views on the film's classification.

It wasn't just implied, there were kids actually inhaling paint, they were chroming.

The film started with drugs and that set the tone.

He smoked marijuana. There was nothing implied about that.

3.4.3 Strong adult themes

There were several themes in *Tom White* which Panellists believed were relevant to the film's classification because they were not suitable for younger viewers, including homelessness and poverty, the breakdown of the family unit, mental illness and stress, alcoholism and drug use and sexuality.

Homelessness and poverty

Panellists tended to group these themes together, seeing them as interrelated. Most felt that these themes were not suitable for children and young teenagers without guidance from a parent or guardian.

Breakdown of the family unit

Some participants noted that most of the characters in the film had weak family connections and that the male lead in effect deserted his family. These people expressed concern that these themes might lead younger viewers to doubt the stability of their own family lives or to become upset at the disintegration of a seemingly normal suburban family.

Some Panellists also noted that the younger characters in the film appeared to benefit from having little contact with their families. These Panellists did not regard this as an appropriate theme for younger viewers.

He was such a free spirit, his dad wasn't around, he didn't go to school, and they portrayed it as kind of a good lifestyle.

Mental illness and stress

Some Panellists believed that the male lead suffered from a mental illness and that this was a major reason for his inability to cope with his life as a family man and an employee. Others thought that

his spiral into homelessness was triggered more by stress. Both mental illness and stress were regarded by participants as adult themes.

For some people in society stress can be the breaking point - what sends them into alcohol and drugs. He was an ordinary person, and the pressures of his job led him to that point.

Alcohol and drug use

Members of the Panel discussed the use of alcohol by many characters, especially the male lead, at length. They viewed some of the characters as alcoholics and others as habitual drug users, and regarded such themes as unsuitable for children and younger teenagers.

Panellists were also concerned that some people, especially teenagers, would accept the use of alcohol and drugs portrayed in *Tom White* as normal or appropriate.

I'm an alcoholic, and what I saw in that film I experienced. I was there, I was on the streets, and I could understand that film. Someone under eighteen watching a film like that, it's quite easy to think, 'I'll go to the pub and have a drink and that'll fix my problem'.

Sexuality

Panellists noted that the film featured homosexual characters, homosexual prostitution, heterosexual sex scenes and masturbation. Most felt that any one of these aspects constituted adult sexual themes, which should affect the film's classification.

3.4.4 Violence

Overall, Panellists regarded the impact of the violence in the film as strong and not suitable for younger audiences.

I thought it was high impact because you could see people's reaction to the violence – there were a lot of close-ups.


There were a lot of powerful episodes in there, and for a younger person to witness, there was just too much of it.

The violent scenes that the Panel reported having a particularly strong impact were: the attack by the dog on the female lead character; the attack by the male lead character on the dog; the arrest by the police of the boy's father; and the attack on two male characters in a dark alley.

These scenes are discussed below.

The dog attack on the female character was generally regarded as the most violent scene in the film, and a number said it had a strong impact on them. Although they were aware they had not actually seen the attack, they 'knew' it had happened because the sound was so realistic, because of the amount of blood that was visible immediately afterwards and because of the reactions of both the dog's owner and the male lead when they saw the injured woman. They also noted seeing the dog standing over the woman's body had increased the impact of this scene.

There were pieces of flesh, and I thought, eww, that looks like a piece of liver and a hole in her flesh.



The guy looked so shocked, and then afterwards he looked so guilty with his hood covering his face.

The dog's footprints in the blood!

Panellists also found Tom White's attack on the dog to be realistic, even though they did not see it explicitly. They reported that the sound of the pipe connecting and the intensity of the male character when he raised the lead pipe was such that they were convinced that the attack had happened.

Some people thought that the police had used too much force in arresting the boy's father. Again, Panellists were aware that they had not seen blows actually connecting but they said that the slow motion shots of the police wielding batons and the number of police involved in the arrest gave an impression of excessive violence. Several Panellists also argued the impact of violence is higher when carried out by authority figures.

It seems worse when the 'good guys' deliver the violence.

The attack on the male lead and the homosexual character after leaving the supermarket had less impact on most Panellists. This was partly because they expected it and were not shocked when it occurred, and also because they felt the purpose of the attack was not to harm the characters but to rob them.

It was minor and predictable. Predictable violence has less impact.

We saw the fist in the stomach and kicking but the attack was to rob, not to harm.

3.4.5 Language

Panel members regarded the language used throughout the film was as an important aspect of its classification. They were especially struck by frequency of the coarse language and the use of the word 'cunt'.

I didn't like the excessive use of language. Though I saw it was in context I just don't like that level of language.

The c word was unnecessary, although I probably only heard it because I was listening for words.

A couple of the fuck-yous were unnecessary. It was all a bit excessive.


I find language like that very offensive – there are other ways to express yourself. I find it crass, and it just became boring. It's very uneducated.

I think violence and language go together, but it suited the movie. It was too much in parts, especially when the policeman swore. They shouldn't show that – policemen should be setting an example.

While the language was generally regarded as coarse and frequent, some Panellists still thought it was justified by the context in which it was used.

The language was necessary in the context of the movie.

The c-word was in passing and he was by himself and you might not pick it up.



3.4.6 Sexual activity

Panellists gave a range of opinions about the impact of the sex scenes in *Tom White*. Some felt that the sexual elements of the film were not strong overall.

I took it as moderate, because there were only a few things I found offensive and that's what you see in society nowadays. It was there but it wasn't in your face, it wasn't people jumping into bed and having orgasms.

In general, most people thought that the sexual activity was represented in a realistic manner, although for some Panellists this increased its impact on the viewer.

Things like masturbation and homosexuality, they're part of real life but you don't often see them depicted in the movies. That's why they had a high impact – they weren't glamourised or stylised, there was no music behind it or anything.

I have no proof but I suspect this is close to reality. Even though it was fiction I have no doubt that they were portraying life, and I accept that. However, I would need to know that sexual content was there before I go and see the movie.

Others felt that one or two scenes were very explicit and had a strong impact.

The scenes that the Panellists found had the strongest impact were: the second sex scene between the male and female characters; scenes where there was implied homosexual activity; and the masturbation scene.

Panellists' opinion on which of these scenes had the strongest impact varied.

The second sex scene between the male and female leads was reported as having a strong impact, but there were different responses to the scene. Some found it sad, while others said it was too explicit. Most agreed that the focus on the male lead's face throughout the scene increased its impact.

I found it embarrassing, I don't want to hear someone else have an orgasm. I don't need to see it in that detail.

You didn't actually see them nude or pashing. I didn't like it, but I didn't find it as offensive as when he climaxed and then cried. It was more graphic - they stretched out the whole scene through the whole orgasm.

The impact was big because you see his reaction. It showed the emotion of it.

Panellists discussed a number of scenes which featured homosexual characters or implied homosexual sexual activity.

The homosexual relationships, regardless of whether they're socially acceptable, still raise the impact.

I thought sex was implied when he got out of bed naked. I thought he had been double dosed with pills and been taken advantage of. There was KY Gel on the floor.

I think you were supposed to think it was possible (homosexual sex), but that it hadn't happened.



The gay sexuality – that’s sick.

There was the rich man in the car paying for sex from a young boy. You know there’s a market for it.

Panellists also had mixed reaction to the scene in which the male lead masturbates.

I am not sure it was necessary.

It showed his loneliness and that he was turned on by the others’ love.

The masturbation had the greatest impact on me.

It wasn’t offensive, but I thought, ‘I don’t really want to see him kneeling there masturbating’.

3.4.7 Nudity

The nudity in the film came as a surprise to many Panellists.

The penis was a surprise. You usually see bums and boobs.

I thought he was going to have shorts on or the usual draped sheet.

Although most of the participants reported seeing the male lead’s penis, they generally thought that the impact of the nudity in the film was relatively low.

The scene in the bed was nudity, not sex. As soon as he realised where his clothes were he put a towel around him, so it wasn’t in your face walk around with nudity.

My first thought was: ‘one for the girls’.

Other instances of nudity in the film had little or no impact on the Panellists.

The nudity in the sex scene between Tom and Christine had a lower impact than the other nudity, because it was so purposeful.

3.4.8 Suitable audience

Overall, Panellists thought that the film was suitable for an older audience. However, several noted that teenagers, who might also learn some valuable lessons from watching the film, could enjoy it.

Suitable for fifteen onwards - it is good for adults and teenagers would enjoy it and they would see what it is really like. It keeps everyone thinking.

3.4.9 Initial Panel classification assessment

Immediately after viewing *Tom White* but before discussing the film, Panellists were asked to record what they thought to be the most appropriate classification in a questionnaire. Most people favoured an MA15+ classification.

Initial Panel classification assessment for *Tom White*

	Group A	Group B	Total
M	-	1	1
MA15+	5	8	13
R18+	4	-	4

Generally speaking, Panel members found it relatively straightforward to make their classification assessments. Most of them intuitively felt that the film should be classified MA15+, and found that the classification guidelines directed them to that assessment.

Justification for M

The one Panellist who initially thought the film should be classified M made the following observations.

The language was not too bad - people use it all the time.

The sex and drug use were implied. I didn't actually see it.

It was not so bad that a fifteen year old who wanted to see it should not be allowed.

Justification for MA15+

Several Panellists observed that the impact of individual classifiable elements like violence might have been low enough to merit an M classification, but that the combination of all the elements in the film made an MA15+ rating more appropriate. Others disagreed, arguing that the impact of any one of the classifiable elements was strong enough to justify an MA15+ classification.

Panellists who rated the film as MA15+ gave the following reasons for their decision:

Wide use of coarse language. At eighteen plus you can handle that kind of thing, but not any younger than that.

The violence of the dog attack.

The drug use was not discreet - it was blatant, especially at the start. There was dope, chroming, pills, alcohol and needles.

There was too much of everything to be M. It was not mild or infrequent.

Sometimes the language was not in context.

This was real life, and I'd be concerned that my daughters would be upset and confused, and might want a parent there to explain to them what happened to the people in the movie. My daughter would probably say, 'Mum, that's Luna Park, is that what happens over there?'

Justification for R18+

The four Panellists who preferred an R18+ classification for *Tom White* found the overall impact of the classifiable elements to be enough to warrant a higher rating than they might have given it if each element was considered individually.

It was the accumulated effect of all of them.

I gave it R, but the overall picture wasn't too bad. It was just altogether.

The alcohol's legal, and the drinking in this movie was vulgar and very excessive.

One person noted that she would have given the film an MA15+ classification had she not felt that the guidelines made an R18+ rating necessary.

3.4.10 Final Panel classification assessment

Following the discussion the Panellists were asked to assess the film's classification once more. Two Panellists changed their classification; one from M to MA15+ and the other from R18+ to MA15+.

The discussion brought home to me the real impact that the movie had – that's why I went up.

They make some good points that kids might learn from some of this. You can say to the kids that this can happen in real life. So in that light this turned my classification back.

Final Panel classification assessment for Tom White

	Group A	Group B	Total
MA15+	6	9	15
R18+	3	-	3

3.4.11 Response to the Board's classification

Panellists did not agree with the Board's M rating for *Tom White*, and were not convinced by the Board's rationale for the decision. They were particularly unimpressed with the comments that the coarse language and drug use in the film were 'infrequent' and 'justified by context'. The description of these elements as 'infrequent' did not match Panellist's experiences of the film, and they felt that even if such elements always appeared in context their impact was nonetheless strong. The Panel's consensus was that the Board had not applied the Guidelines appropriately in making its decision.

It's a strong topic. Tom's got a normal life and then goes to the other side, and for kids under fifteen, there needs to be some guidance on what happened in the film. I don't think they have that perception or the experience to understand it.

I don't think fifteen year olds should be sitting there watching someone chroming. That's not nice. My classification was a progressive thing – the age just went up as I thought about it more, and I went up to the full R.

You actually saw the drug use - what was implied about it?

The chroming character was off having fun with his mates – he wasn't portrayed in a negative way. When Tom handed him the key it was like he was approving of it.

The actual words used are strong; they cannot get any stronger.

They seem to have justified the M by using the message and content of the film whereas we did not rely so much on content but on the elements and the guidelines.

What are the chances of him [the young boy] finding someone like Tom in the real world?

Is a fifteen year old going to pick up on the despair? [Responding to the Board report's assertion that sexual activity is subordinate to the despair portrayed in the sex scenes]

Get your head out of the bloody sand. I still have to stick with the R rating. It is too heavy in my opinion for people under eighteen years.

It's all about the target audience and the mass market, and if I think about that I can see M, but I wouldn't be happy with it.

When you look at the things in the M rating, I watch them all the time and you're not confronted with this sort of language or violence or drug use.

Having considered the Board's decision the Panellists remained strongly of the opinion that the film should not be seen by people under fifteen without an accompanying adult. Several participants were concerned by the possibility that children of any age could legally see the film on their own, and that they might be disturbed by it.

3.4.12 Consumer advice

Prior to reading the Board's report, Panellists were asked to write down what they felt to be appropriate consumer advice for *Tom White*. Most of the classifiable elements were mentioned by the participants in their advice. All participants mentioned 'drug use' and/or 'alcohol', many noted that this was 'frequent' or 'strong'. All but one participant mentioned 'coarse language', most of these noted that the coarse language was 'strong' and/or 'frequent'. Just over two thirds of the Panellists referred to 'sex', including 'low level sex scenes', 'sex', 'high level sex scenes' and 'frequent sex scenes'. Just under two thirds of the participants referred to 'nudity'; and a similar number referred to 'adult themes'. Ten of the participants referred to 'violence'. about a third of these noted that the violence was 'high level' or 'strong'.

Panel members were then given a list of possible consumer advice phrases⁷ and asked to tick those which they deemed appropriate for *Tom White*. The most commonly chosen phrases were: 'Adult Theme' (15) 'Drug Use' (12), 'Nudity' (10), 'Some Scenes May Frighten Young Children' (9), 'Mature Theme' (9), 'Frequent/Infrequent Coarse Language' (8) and 'Mild Sex Scenes' (8).

3.4.13 Responses to Board's consumer advice

Most Panellists believed that the Board's consumer advice was not strong or specific enough.

These warnings are probably not specific enough.

⁷ The list of consumer advice phrases is provided in Appendix B.

There should be sex in there.

The consumer advice doesn't correspond with the classification – it's too mild.

If I saw all those elements on the cover I wouldn't think it's appropriate for a 13 year old, I would have thought that should be an MA.

The nudity is low-level nudity. I really didn't care about it, but it needs flagging.

You have to flag the sex scenes with Tom and the girl and the masturbation scene.

The drug use was frequent, right through the film. Should tell people it is 'frequent'.

The C word is in there and there is not enough warning for this.

A few participants believed that the consumer advice was sufficient to warn people that this was a 'high level' M.

The advice shows that this film is packed with stuff. It shows that it could have anything in it.

Even Panellists who felt that the Board's consumer advice alerted them to the fact that *Tom White* was not suited for a younger audience still believed that the film needed an MA rating. The consumer advice for these people was not sufficient protection for younger viewers, although they thought it would be useful guidance for adults.

3.4.14 Understanding an MA15+ classification

Panel members discussed their understanding of the MA15+ classification. Some were surprised when it was emphasised that an MA15+ classification meant that people under fifteen years of age were legally able to view the movie if accompanied by a parent or adult guardian. These people had assumed that an MA15+ classification meant that people aged under fifteen were restricted from viewing the film, in the same way that an R classification restricts people under eighteen.

Other Panellists understood that an MA15+ rating gives parents and guardians a choice over whether their children can see a film, and several said that the classification was useful in providing guidance on the suitability of a film.

There's guidance with the MA.

There's a distinct difference in the audiences that will see it. My eleven year old has seen some M movies, but there's no way I would allow her to see an MA movie. MA says there is a certain level of maturity that is needed to view it.

Other participants were concerned that in allowing this choice the MA15+ classification does not provide sufficient protection to minors.

Panellists noted that the MA15+ category covers a wide range of films, and that it is sometimes difficult to interpret the rating.

M to R is a big jump and MA has to cover a lot. This film is in the lower range of MA but you could not let an 8 year old wander into it.



It's really hard to make a decision on the little amount of information that you get. I mean, Harry Potter's an M film, like this one.



3.5 Melbourne Panel's Responses to *Tak and the Power of Juju*

The authorised assessor's description of *Tak and the Power of Juju* is as follows:

Tak and the Power of Juju is a tale of good vs evil set in an ancient tribal world where magic (Juju) actually works. A fantastical setting where the perils that the hero faces are light-heartedly amusing and entertaining. Tak, a young shaman's apprentice and unlikely hero, must recover moonstones stolen by an evil Juju man to save the Moon Juju and restore her powers. Tak will have to stretch beyond his training and use his wits, his environment and the power of the Juju gods to overcome the villain, return the five moonstones to the Temple of the Moon and reinstate peace in his mystical world.

The Board accepted the authorised assessor's recommendation, classifying the game G8+ with consumer advice: *Low Level Animated Violence*.

3.5.1 General response

The response from Panel members to *Tak and the Power of Juju* was largely positive. They praised the ease with which they were able to play the game and its cheerful tone.

It was a good fun game.

I felt like I was ten years old again.

I enjoyed it. It was exciting – it caught me. I would've stayed there for hours.

I had so much fun. You're on a journey, and it makes you think about it logically: what will happen if I do this or I do that?

You could get feathers really easily, which encouraged you to keep going. There were good rewards.

It was suitable for everyone – you didn't have to have a high level of skill once you knew all the controls.

The encouragement from the angel thing was really light-hearted. It was comical.

I'll remember all the little catch phrases. They were pretty cool.


A few Panel members in both groups found it difficult to learn the controls quickly, and commented on the frustration this caused. Some people also became disorientated as they played the game.

The basic controls were difficult – like what you needed to do to go into the lift.

The controls were really touchy. You had to move this to do that, and move the environment around as well. That was pretty stressful.

I didn't enjoy it – not at all. I had no competency. I just got so frustrated and didn't know where I was going. I couldn't engage with it.

I got frustrated after about ten minutes because I wasn't learning quickly enough. I don't like Playstation 2 games.



There wasn't enough directional arrows to show you where you're heading. We were just going round and round in circles trying to find that creek.

3.5.2 Violence

Panellists agreed that violence was the only classifiable element in *Tak and the Power of Juju*, and most regarded the impact of the violence as very low. In assessing the violence, Panel members noted its mild consequences, the lack of explicit detail and the light-hearted tone of the game.

There was a little bit of violence with the weapons, but it wasn't gory. It wasn't anywhere near high level violence.

There was no sense of threat at all. Even when he 'died' he just spun around and came back straight away.

It's not like you shouldn't sell it because there's a little bit of violence like that. It's cute and nice and the colours are nice. And you're fighting for a good cause.

A few less experienced gamers argued that even a low level of violence was a concern, because of the inability of some young people to distinguish fantasy from reality. These people raised the possibility of very young children imitating the behaviour in the game.

If the character is going 'Oww!' and vanishes, you need a much more mature outlook to take that. Children are going to mimic whatever they see, and they need a little more guidance I feel. (less exp)

If you hit something on the head and there's a nice sound or they say 'hit me again' it's unrealistic – a young kid might go and plonk a baby on the head. But if it sounds real they won't be as likely to copy that behaviour. (less exp)

More experienced gamers, on the other hand, felt that the highly stylised animation in the game meant that young players would easily be able to discern its unreality. They argued that the cartoon-like appearance of the characters would lessen the impact of the violence.

The purple plants: kids aren't going to see something like that in real life, so it's not really going to spook them. (more exp)

The little creatures were cute and unrecognisable. Say if they were big cats. If they were cats or something kids might see in the household, they might go and whack a cat. (more exp)


Others argued that the educational potential of the game outweighed any possible negative effects of the violence.

There are other things that kids are subjected to that have higher levels of violence, and this game is a problem solving exercise and makes them think. (less exp)

When you used the weapon to jump it was not a just a weapon of destruction, it was a tool as well. (more exp)

3.5.3 Other classifiable elements

A few Panellists asked whether the supernatural elements in *Tak and the Power of Juju* should be considered for classification purposes. It was generally agreed that these aspects were too mild to



influence any classification decision, although some felt they should be mentioned as part of any consumer advice (see the section on consumer advice, below).

3.5.4 Suitable audience

Panellists were asked for what audiences *Tak and the Power of Juju* was suitable. Some believed that the game could be played by people of all ages.

I know my five year old could play it, and the violence wouldn't worry me at all. Five year olds pick up these games very quickly. It wouldn't worry her. The educational games, some of the things that go on in those are a lot worse than that game.

Any age could play that game.

Other people argued that the game was inappropriate for very young children to play because they might copy the violent behaviour they saw, however mild it appeared to be.

Little kids might run around hitting things after playing it.

Panellists also commented that very young people might find the story behind the game confusing, and may have difficulties learning the controls.

There is a low sense of stress – the speed and the themes might be hard for a four year old to grasp.

I think the storyline might be a bit complex for some kids – not that it would stop them from playing it. It would just be a bit confusing to achieve the goal at the end of the game.

Young kids are not coordinated enough.

Some Panellists observed that the content of *Tak and the Power of Juju* was very mild compared to what young children can access readily in today's culture. One such person argued that any negative effect that the game might have on young players would be negligible, because of the much stronger material available elsewhere.

Our kids have been exposed to so much that they can tolerate much more.

In response, others argued that the need for vigilance in limiting what material young people can view is greater *because* of the strong content accessible to children.

Exposure doesn't justify further exposure.

3.5.5 Initial Panel classification assessment

Immediately after playing the game but before discussing it, Panellists were asked to record what they felt to be the most appropriate classification for *Tak and the Power of Juju*. Thirteen people assessed the game at G, while five rated it G8+.

Initial Panel classification assessment for *Tak and the Power of Juju*

	Group A (less exp)	Group B (more exp)	Total
G	7	6	13
G8+	2	3	5

3.5.6 Classification debate

The following comments were made by those who preferred a G classification for *Tak and the Power of Juju*.

The violence was very mild, and the language was light-hearted and encouraging.

If there was any menace it was with the plants and the little critters, but there was no sense of threat. And there were no sexual themes or anything like that – there was nothing negative.

I was thinking of children and thinking that they would be able to play that game, and that they would enjoy playing it.

The purple creatures – they weren't scary-looking. You didn't have to kill them if you didn't want to, and they weren't real plants.

To me it's harmless fun, running around and bashing plants and collecting teeth. There's no need to make it G8+.

The following comments were made by those who preferred a G8+ classification.

When you killed the purple plants they were disappearing – you were destroying them. You were killing something off.

Like it says in the guidelines, some of the material might be upsetting or confusing.

I gave it G8+ not because eight year olds couldn't play it, but because there is whacking things over the head and talking to dead mummies, and children will need to have a little bit more awareness of these things, and maybe some guidance.

You might need to explain the concepts and what's happening in the game. My three year old might go around and smack plants around the house – you'd need to have a talk to her.

3.5.7 Final Panel classification assessment

After discussing the game three people changed their classification assessments from G8+ to G, leaving all but one in each group preferring a G rating.

Final Panel classification assessment for *Tak and the Power of Juju*

	Group A (less exp)	Group B (more exp)	Total
G	8	8	16
G8+	1	1	2

3.5.8 Reaction to the assessor's report

After reading the industry assessor's report on *Tak and the Power of Juju*, Panellists in both groups commented on what they felt to be an overly cautious classification. In particular, they argued that the violence in the game was not as strong as the report suggested.

They got it wrong if they said it's G8+ because of the violence. There was no death and it was low level. It was very mild.

It's very conservative.

They make a point about the body lying motionless and disappearing – there's more of a finality to it they're saying. That's a big deciding factor, but I'm sticking to G.

A few people acknowledged that the presence of violence in the game made a G classification unlikely under the current guidelines, despite their preference for a G rating.

There's violence in it, and it's understandable that they've given it G8+.

3.5.9 Consumer advice

Before reading the assessor's report on *Tak and the Power of Juju*, Panellists were asked to write down what they felt to be the most appropriate consumer advice for the game. Common responses included 'Low/Very Low Level Violence', 'Low/Very low Level Animated Violence' and 'Low Level Sense of Threat/Menace'. Some people also felt that some indication of the game's suitability for children should be included in the consumer advice, suggesting 'Suitable for All Ages' and 'General Audience'.

Panellists were then given a list of possible consumer advice phrases⁸ and asked to tick those which they felt were more appropriate than the phrases they had written down. The most commonly selected phrases were 'Animated Violence' (10 people) and 'Mild Violence' (7).

The industry assessor's recommended consumer advice for *Tak and the Power of Juju* is *Low Level Animated Violence*. Panellists in both groups thought this advice was more appropriate alongside a G classification than G8+. At G8+ level, it was argued, even 'low level' might risk overstating the impact of the violence, but at G level the recommended consumer advice gave a better indication of the actual content of the game. Indeed, some Panel members thought that no consumer advice at all was needed if the game was classified G8+, because parents would assume that a game with this rating would contain some classifiable elements of a mild nature.

If it was G it needs the consumer advice, but if it was G8+ it didn't need any advice.

⁸ The list of consumer advice phrases is given in Appendix B.



A small number of people believed that the supernatural aspects of the storyline and game play should be included in the consumer advice (although not necessarily in the classification decision), because of the need to keep parents as informed as possible. Many of the phrases commonly used to describe these kinds of elements – like ‘Supernatural Themes’ or ‘Horror’ – were felt to be too strong. For these people, ‘Fantasy Themes’ was seen to be the most appropriate phrase because of its more gentle connotations.

I couldn't think of what term would cover what we saw, and I don't think it's there [in the list of consumer advice phrases]. 'Fantasy Theme' might just cover it.



3.6 Melbourne Panel's Responses to *Rogue Ops*

The Board's description of *Rogue Ops* is as follows:

A third-person perspective stealth game in which a woman must avenge the deaths of her husband and daughter at the hands of a terrorist organisation.

The Board classified the game MA15+, with consumer advice: *Medium Level Animated Violence*.

3.6.1 General response

Initial reactions by Panellists in both groups to *Rogue Ops* emphasised its difficult game play. Some people, particularly more experienced gamers, found the challenge of the game stimulating, while others were more negative and thought its high level of difficulty made the game inaccessible.

It was obviously more of an adult's game. (more exp)

You had to have a higher level of skill. (more exp)

I quite liked the fact that it was reasonably complex and challenging. (less exp)

It's not the sort of game you could pick up and finish in half a day. You need to sit down and play it over and over and get better. (less exp)

It was frustrating – you had to go back to square one if you died. (more exp)

It was too complicated and too confusing. There was no direction. (less exp)

Responses to the game's content varied, with some people finding the violence distasteful and others concentrating more on the plausibility of the storyline.

It was bloody and violent. (less exp)

There were realistic tactics from characters – it could even be real life. (more exp)


Panellists believed violence to be the strongest classifiable element in *Rogue Ops*, while the themes and the language in the game were also considered.

3.6.2 Violence

Most of the discussion about *Rogue Ops* centred on the violence in the game. Several issues were raised in relation to violence, including the degree of realism, repetitive violence, the player's perspective and imitability.

Realism

More experienced gamers in particular commented on the degree of realism of the violent scenes in *Rogue Ops*, and observed that both the graphics and the sound effects contributed to the impact on the violence on the player. The animation was regarded as especially realistic in the close combat scenes and in the clips between game levels.



There was a particular scene where the after effects were very real – all this blood around the head. (more exp)

It was a little too graphic. (more exp)

You were killing real people – it's realistic. (more exp)

You have to actually 'do' the movements to break the guy's neck. It's getting very physical, and the sound effects make it so much more real. (more exp)

The sound effects were very realistic – you heard the sound of the neck being broken. (more exp)

You could hear torture in the background. (more exp)

There were crunching sounds from the bodies, and tortured screaming. (more exp)

'Normal' game play, by contrast, was felt to be milder in impact because of the lesser detail of the violence in these parts of game.

Repetition

Panellists remarked that the repetitive violence in the game heightened its impact, and was seen to be more confronting because players are *forced* to repeat the same violent acts repeatedly to achieve their objectives.

It takes extra shots to kill them, and I actually felt the shots through the controller.

She had to shoot and then shoot a couple more times to kill them. That increased the impact – the repetition.

If a person was shot and you just moved onto the next scene rather than shooting him and shooting him and blood pouring out – that would have a lesser impact.

In addition to the frequency of violence in the game, some less experienced gamers also thought prolonged gaming might have an effect on the player and increase the game's impact.

Continued exposure would sear your consciousness a bit. (less exp)

These matters are taken up again in the section on interactivity (below).

Perspective

The animated clips between game levels and the close combat scenes were generally felt to have a higher impact than other parts of the game, primarily because the violence in these scenes was up-close and shown in much more detail. One particular clip, in which a prisoner is shot in the back of the head, was regarded as having a much higher impact than the 'normal' combat within the gameplay.

When you shoot somebody it's not you doing it, it's the gun, but the close combat was very strong. It was not for everybody.

If you hadn't seen the clips you might think, 'Oh, this is alright' – until you get to the higher level stuff.

Some less experienced gamers also made the point that the level of violence experienced by the players depended on their style of play as well as on the game itself.

We ran into a few obstacles, and we only killed one person from a long way away. From our point of view the impact was quite minimal. We still gave it an MA based on the clips though – it could get very violent if you wanted it to. (less exp)

Imitability

Some of the less experienced gamers expressed concerns about the possibility of younger players imitating the violent action in *Rogue Ops*. Although they dismissed the idea that their own behaviour might be influenced by playing the game, these people believed that children and teenagers would be more impressionable in this respect.

I had a chance to sneak up behind someone and break their neck, and I can imagine a teenager sneaking up behind someone in the school ground like that. (less exp)

Shooting is good; I enjoy it. But the point is that kids might acquire some attitudes from a game like that. For example, you might have to use dirty tricks like killing to save other lives. (less exp)

3.6.3 Themes

The group of more experienced gamers discussed the themes in *Rogue Ops* in relation to its classification. For these people, there were a number of themes in the game's narrative that required a certain level of maturity in the player, including torture, calculated killing, revenge and terrorism.

The torture was more than was necessary. (more exp)

There were adult themes like revenge and killing, and it was all so plotted out and exactly planned. (more exp)

It was the pre-meditated murder that made the impact of the violence stronger. (more exp)

3.6.4 Language

Although Panellists did notice some coarse language in *Rogue Ops*, they generally believed that the language had a much lower impact than the violence because of its relative infrequency. Several people remarked on the menacing tone behind much of the language, but the sense of threat created by this tone was regarded as an aspect of the violence in the game, occurring in the narrative clips between levels in which characters were executed or tortured.

There were such sinister voices in the clips – they had a disregard for human life.

The Panel discussed no other classifiable elements in relation to *Rogue Ops*.

3.6.5 Suitable audience

Panellists were asked for what audiences *Rogue Ops* was suitable. Discussion mostly centred on whether the game should be restricted to mature players, with some Panellists believing that the

violence was too strong for people under fifteen years. Others disagreed, arguing that the game's content needed to be stronger to warrant restricting the game to older audiences.

I didn't think it was violent enough or showed enough blood to be restricted to people over fifteen only.

3.6.6 Initial Panel classification assessment

Immediately after playing the game but before discussing it, Panellists were asked to record what they felt to be the most appropriate classification for *Rogue Ops* in a questionnaire. At this stage the Panel was evenly split between M15+ and MA15+.

Initial Panel classification assessment for *Rogue Ops*⁹

	Group A (less exp)	Group B (more exp)	Total
M15+	6	3	9
MA15+	3	6	9

3.6.7 Classification debate

Those Panellists who assessed *Rogue Ops* at M15+ made the following comments.

It was like Mission Impossible to me. Yes it was graphic, but it was probably like anything you'd see in a movie.

The clips were higher impact than playing the game, and after a while I was actually starting to enjoy playing it.

It needed more swearing to be classified MA.

I think the fact that I didn't get shot when I was playing reduced the impact, and I was really trying to consider the experience when classifying the game.

Those who preferred an MA15+ classification made the following comments.

When she kept shooting and the blood kept spurting out – that was strong impact for me.

I gave it MA because of the hand-to-hand combat and the clips where she breaks the neck, as well as the graphics and the sound effects.

I originally gave it M15+, but I changed that to MA15+ because I remembered what we'd seen in the clips and there were parts of it that were over the top.

What annoyed me was the continuous shooting and the spurting of blood.

He shot him in the head and there was blood splattered just everywhere.

The competitiveness for no purpose tipped me towards MA.

⁹ Four Panel members did not submit a questionnaire at the conclusion of the *Rogue Ops* discussion. The preferred classifications for these people have been gleaned from notes and audio recordings taken at both discussion groups.

3.6.8 Final Panel classification assessment

After discussing the game, two people in the group of less experienced gamers changed their classification assessments from M15+ to MA15+, while the preferred classifications for the other group remained unchanged.

Final Panel classification assessment for *Rogue Ops*¹⁰

	Group A (less exp)	Group B (more exp)	Total
M15+	4	3	7
MA15+	5	6	11

3.6.9 Reactions to the Board's report

Panel members generally concurred with the Board's classification of *Rogue Ops*. Some of those who preferred an M15+ classification argued that the game's depictions of violence were not explicit enough to warrant its MA15+ rating, when considered alongside other games classified at that level.

If you shoot him in the head his head doesn't come off – there's only a little bit of blood. It just doesn't deserve an MA.

3.6.10 Consumer advice

Before reading the Board's report on *Rogue Ops*, Panellists were asked to write down what they felt to be the most appropriate consumer advice for the game. Common responses included 'High Level/Strong Violence', 'Low Level/Mild/Infrequent Course Language' and 'Adult Themes'. A few people suggested variations on the violence theme, such as 'Frequent Acts of Violence' and 'Bloodthirsty'.


Panellists were then given a list of possible consumer advice phrases¹¹ and asked to tick any that they thought were more appropriate than the phrases they had written down. The most commonly selected phrases were 'Adult Theme' (12 people), 'Strong Violence' (8), 'Graphic Violence' (5) and 'Mild Coarse Language' (4).

The Board's consumer advice for *Rogue Ops* is *Medium Level Animated Violence*. Although the majority of Panel members had preferred 'high level' or 'strong' to describe the violence when asked to nominate consumer advice, some felt that these words were more apt at an M15+ classification than MA15+ and were satisfied with the Board's phrase. 'Graphic Violence' was also seen to be too strong a term, in that it would refer to *the worst kind of violence*.

Several Panel members appeared to be uncertain about the extent to which consumer advice depends on the classification. For instance, one person believed that 'medium level' sat naturally with an M15+ classification and that any game with 'high level violence' should automatically be given an MA15+ rating. Most people, however, understood that the same content might correspond to different consumer advice if assessed at different classification levels.

¹⁰ Four Panel members did not submit a questionnaire at the conclusion of the *Rogue Ops* discussion. The preferred classifications for these people have been gleaned from notes and audio recordings taken at both discussion groups.

¹¹ The list of consumer advice phrases is given in Appendix B.



Some Panellists also questioned whether it was necessary to include the word 'animated' in the consumer advice for games.

'Animated' would be all computer games, wouldn't it?

These issues are discussed further in a separate report on consumer advice.

3.6.11 Interactivity

During their discussion about *Rogue Ops*, Panellists were asked what effect they thought the interactive nature of computer games has on their impact, when compared to film. Comments on interactivity were also made spontaneously in the earlier discussion about *Tak and the Power of Juju*.

Most less experienced gamers believed that the interactivity inherent in computer games increases the impact of their classifiable elements, with some invoking the idea of the player as the 'perpetrator' of the violence in the game. A small number of more experienced gamers echoed these sentiments.

Interactivity makes a difference – it heightens the impact. You're invited to be involved, and you're controlling what happens in the game, and when the controller vibrates that makes it so much more real. (less exp)

You might think that there's no way that it's real, especially because it's animation, but as soon as you have the controller in your hands and you see the screen react it feels more real all of a sudden. (less exp)

You're responsible for their death. (less exp)

You're responsible for your actions in the game, and that has more of an effect. (less exp).

I think the impact's a lot higher if you're actually controlling the character. (more exp)


Less experienced gamers were also worried about the effects of continuous gaming on the player. For these Panellists, engagement with a violent game like *Rogue Ops* required 'carrying out' violent acts repetitively to build competency. Such repetition, it was argued, has the potential to desensitise players to the 'real' meaning of the violence they are witnessing.

If you became more competent you would get more involved in the violence – it's more captivating. You're the one holding the gun, and it desensitises you. (less exp)

I'm inclined to think that as I get further into the game it's going to escalate and get more complicated, and I suppose you would get desensitised. You would brace yourself for the next level. (less exp)

If you play the game you'd end up justifying the violence. There are things like that in the world, and if you get competent at it they stop being good or bad and you just accept them. (less exp)

I'd go to work and be thinking about that game for eight or ten hours and thinking about when I'd get home and play it. (less exp)



Despite these views, some less experienced gamers did acknowledge that the act of playing (rather than simply viewing) computer games might also *distract* players from the violence on-screen, thereby mitigating its impact.

If the joy of the game comes from the challenge and the killing is a means to an end, then it would minimise the effect of the violence. (less exp)

Meanwhile, more experienced gamers tended to stress the challenge of playing computer games rather than their on-screen content when discussing interactivity. These Panellists maintained that a certain distance was created between the player and any classifiable elements (particularly violence) because of the act of problem solving on the part of the gamer. The challenge of gaming, they said, meant that players tend to concentrate largely on completing their objectives, and do not identify with the game's characters to the same extent as they might if watching a film. Furthermore, more experienced gamers generally did not believe that the player can be said to be the 'perpetrator' of the violence they are controlling because of the additional distance created between the player and the action.

There is reason and motive behind violence in a movie, but generally there isn't in a game. It's the thrill of winning. (more exp)

In a movie there is more emotion than in a game. If someone gets killed in a movie you feel for the character, but in a game you kill and then move onto the next level. (more exp)

You're constantly aware that your fingers are on the buttons. You have control, so there is less impact than in a movie. (more exp)

Notwithstanding this distancing effect, a few more experienced gamers believed that the impact of interactivity becomes greater as games become more 'real.' These people maintained that the more gaming content resembles actual violence – through superior computer animation, for instance – the greater its effect will be.

I think when you're actually controlling it, and the more evolved these computer games become and the better the graphics get, the bigger the impact. The closer they get to real people the higher the impact is going to be. It's all getting much more realistic. (more exp)

Less experienced gamers also believed that the negative consequences of interactivity are greater for games with stronger content.

With a little bit of animated violence there isn't anything there for the viewer, and the interactivity just makes it more interesting. But with high level violence it's a different matter [i.e. the interactivity has a greater effect]. (less exp)

People in both groups expressed the view that certain types of people, especially young people or those with mental illness, are more susceptible to the negative effects of computer games.

They use games such as these in training the military, and if you're exposing young people to the same sort of thing they're going to turn out a certain way. (less exp)

Because it's now a part of life there's no concern with instances of violence – you hear about a shooting and just accept it as the norm. And that's fine if you're playing computer games and you're the sort of person who can step out of that box, but for others it might send them over the edge. (less exp)



Playing a game has a bit of a role playing aspect. People can get their aggressions out, and this can give bad ideas to those who are too young. It can send a message to kill to get what you want. (more exp)

People with mental illness who enjoy this stuff – it gives them a feeling of what it's like to do it, especially if there are sound effects. (more exp)

Responding to these arguments, some more experienced gamers argued that computer games have different effects on different people, making it very difficult to generalise about the effects of interactivity on individual players.

It always depends on the person. (more exp)

