



Keys Young

**Australian Government**  

---

**Office of Film and Literature Classification**

**COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PANELS**

**REPORT**

*Perth*

*Adelaide*

*Bendigo*

Prepared for:

Office of Film and Literature Classification

By:

Keys Young

**2 JUNE 2000**

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**1. INTRODUCTION ..... 1**

**2. METHODOLOGY ..... 2**

2.1. PANEL RECRUITMENT AND SPECIFICATIONS ..... 2

2.2. PANEL PROCEDURE ..... 2

2.2.1 Training and Screening ..... 2

2.2.2 Focus Group Discussion ..... 3

2.2.3 Films Viewed by Panels ..... 4

2.2.4 Panel Recruitment and Composition ..... 4

**3. CLASSIFICATION DECISIONS BY THE PANELS AND BY THE BOARD ..... 5**

3.1 COMPARISON OF ALL CLASSIFICATIONS BY THE PANELS AND THE BOARD ..... 5

3.2 FILMS WHERE ASPECTS OF CLASSIFICATIONS DIFFERED ..... 6

3.2.1 *Tarzan* ..... 6

3.2.2 *Beautiful People* ..... 6

3.2.3 *The General's Daughter* ..... 7

**4. CLASSIFIABLE ELEMENTS ..... 8**

4.1 VIOLENCE ..... 8

4.1.1 Animated Violence ..... 8

4.1.2 Violence and Humour ..... 9

4.1.3 Violence in Context ..... 9

4.1.4 Violence Towards Animals ..... 9

4.2 DRUG USE ..... 9

4.3 ADULT THEMES ..... 10

4.3.1 Adult Themes and Personal Experience ..... 10

4.3.2 Children and Adult Themes ..... 10

4.3.3 The Moral Message ..... 11

4.4 SEX ..... 11

4.5 COARSE LANGUAGE ..... 11

**5. FURTHER COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE BOARD AND THE PANELS 13**

5.1 PANEL TRAINING AND COMPREHENSION ..... 13

5.2 THE PANELS' DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES ..... 13

|           |   |           |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| 5.3       | DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE YOUNGER AND OLDER GROUPS .....                      | 13        |
| 5.4       | CONCLUSION.....   | 14        |
| <b>6.</b> | <b>PERTH COMMUNITY</b>  |           |
|           | <b>ASSESSMENT PANEL.....</b>  | <b>15</b> |
| 6.1       | PERTH PANEL PROCEDURE.....  | 15        |
| 6.2       | PERTH PANEL COMPOSITION .....   | 15        |
| 6.3       | PERTH PANEL'S RESPONSES TO <i>A WALK ON THE MOON</i> .....                  | 17        |
| 6.3.1     | General Response.....   | 17        |
| 6.3.2     | Identification With the Characters.....                                     | 17        |
| 6.3.3     | Adult Themes.....   | 18        |
| 6.3.4     | Initial Panel Classification.....   | 19        |
| 6.3.5     | Classification Discussion .....   | 20        |
| 6.3.6     | Participants' Assessment of the Board's Decision .....                      | 20        |
| 6.4       | PERTH PANEL'S RESPONSES TO <i>WHAT BECOMES OF THE BROKEN-HEARTED?</i> ..... | 21        |
| 6.4.1     | General Response.....   | 21        |
| 6.4.2     | Comparison With <i>Once Were Warriors</i> .....                             | 21        |
| 6.4.3     | Violence .....  | 22        |
| 6.4.4     | Portrayal of Women .....  | 22        |
| 6.4.5     | Hand-Held Weapons .....   | 22        |
| 6.4.6     | Gangs .....   | 22        |
| 6.4.7     | Adult Themes.....   | 23        |
| 6.4.8     | Coarse Language .....   | 23        |
| 6.4.9     | Sex.....  | 23        |
| 6.4.10    | Messages Arising From the Film .....  | 23        |
| 6.4.11    | Initial Panel Classification.....   | 24        |
| 6.4.12    | Classification Discussion .....   | 25        |
| 6.4.13    | Participants' Assessment of the Board's Decision .....                      | 25        |
| 6.5       | PERTH PANEL'S RESPONSES TO <i>TARZAN</i> .....                              | 26        |
| 6.5.1     | General Response.....   | 26        |
| 6.5.2     | Violence .....  | 26        |
| 6.5.3     | Adult Themes.....   | 28        |
| 6.5.4     | Initial Panel Classification.....   | 28        |
| 6.5.5     | Classification Discussion .....   | 29        |
| 6.5.6     | Participants' Assessment of the Board's Decision .....                      | 30        |
| 6.6       | CONCLUSIONS - PERTH PANEL .....   | 31        |
| 6.6.1     | The Process of the Community Assessment Panel .....                         | 31        |
| 6.6.2     | Concerns About Films .....  | 31        |
| 6.6.3     | Comparison With Classification Board Decisions .....                        | 32        |

|           |                                       |           |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>7.</b> | <b>ADELAIDE COMMUNITY</b>             |           |
|           | <b>ASSESSMENT PANEL</b>               | <b>35</b> |
| 7.1       | ADELAIDE PANEL PROCEDURE              | 35        |
| 7.2       | ADELAIDE PANEL                        |           |
|           | COMPOSITION                           | 35        |
| 7.3       | ADELAIDE PANEL'S                      |           |
|           | RESPONSES TO <i>THE IRON GIANT</i>    | 37        |
| 7.3.1     | General Response                      | 37        |
| 7.3.2     | Violence                              | 37        |
| 7.3.3     | Adult Threats to the Boy              | 38        |
| 7.3.4     | The Final Battle                      | 38        |
| 7.3.5     | The Character of the Iron Giant       | 39        |
| 7.3.6     | Animated Movies                       | 39        |
| 7.3.7     | The Atmosphere of the Film            | 39        |
| 7.3.8     | Moral Messages                        | 40        |
| 7.3.9     | Initial Panel Classification          | 40        |
| 7.3.10    | Classification Discussion             | 41        |
| 7.3.11    | Participants' Assessment of the       |           |
|           | Board's Decision                      | 41        |
| 7.4       | ADELAIDE PANEL'S                      |           |
|           | RESPONSES TO <i>THIS IS MY FATHER</i> | 42        |
| 7.4.1     | General Response                      | 42        |
| 7.4.2     | Adult Themes                          | 43        |
| 7.4.3     | Coarse Language                       | 44        |
| 7.4.4     | Sex Scene                             | 44        |
| 7.4.5     | Drug Use                              | 44        |
| 7.4.6     | Initial Panel Classification          | 45        |
| 7.4.7     | Classification Discussion             | 46        |
| 7.4.8     | Participants' Assessment of the       |           |
|           | Board's Decision                      | 46        |
| 7.5       | ADELAIDE PANEL'S RESPONSE             |           |
|           | TO <i>THE GENERAL'S DAUGHTER</i>      | 47        |
| 7.5.1     | Overall Response                      | 47        |
| 7.5.2     | Sexual Violence                       | 47        |
| 7.5.3     | Other Violence                        | 49        |
| 7.5.4     | Humour and Violence                   | 49        |
| 7.5.5     | Comparison with Other Films           | 50        |
| 7.5.6     | Adult Themes                          | 50        |
| 7.5.7     | Coarse Language                       | 50        |
| 7.5.8     | Initial Panel Classification          | 51        |
| 7.5.9     | Classification Discussion             | 51        |
| 7.5.10    | Panel's Assessment of the Board's     |           |
|           | Decision                              | 52        |
| 7.6       | CONCLUSIONS - ADELAIDE                |           |
|           | PANEL                                 | 52        |
| 7.6.1     | The Process Of The Community          |           |
|           | Assessment Panel                      | 52        |
| 7.6.2     | Concerns About Films                  | 53        |

|           |   |           |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| 7.6.3     | COMPARISON WITH CLASSIFICATION BOARD DECISIONS.....         | 54        |
| <b>8.</b> | <b>BENDIGO COMMUNITY</b>                                    |           |
|           | <b>ASSESSMENT PANEL .....</b>                               | <b>56</b> |
| 8.1       | BENDIGO PANEL PROCEDURE .....                               | 56        |
| 8.2       | BENDIGO PANEL COMPOSITION.....                              | 51        |
| 8.3       | BENDIGO PANEL'S RESPONSES TO <i>MY DOG SKIP</i> .....       | 52        |
| 8.3.1     | General Response.....                                       | 52        |
| 8.3.2     | Violence Towards Animals .....                              | 53        |
| 8.3.3     | Adult Themes.....   | 53        |
| 8.3.4     | Messages Arising from the Film .....                        | 54        |
| 8.3.5     | Initial Panel Classification.....                           | 55        |
| 8.3.6     | Classification Shift .....                                  | 56        |
| 8.3.7     | Comparison With Other Movies.....                           | 56        |
| 8.3.8     | Participants' Assessment of the Board's Decision .....      | 56        |
| 8.4       | BENDIGO PANEL'S RESPONSES TO <i>THE THIRD MIRACLE</i> ..... | 56        |
| 8.4.1     | General Response.....                                       | 56        |
| 8.4.2     | Drug Use.....   | 57        |
| 8.4.3     | Violence .....  | 57        |
| 8.4.4     | Adult Themes.....   | 58        |
| 8.4.5     | Initial Panel Classification.....                           | 59        |
| 8.4.6     | Classification Shift .....                                  | 60        |
| 8.4.7     | Participants' Assessment of the Board's Decision .....      | 60        |
| 8.5       | BENDIGO PANEL'S RESPONSES TO <i>BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE</i> .....  | 61        |
| 8.5.1     | General Response.....                                       | 61        |
| 8.5.2     | Violence .....  | 61        |
| 8.5.3     | Adult Themes.....   | 62        |
| 8.5.4     | Drug Use.....   | 63        |
| 8.5.5     | Coarse Language .....                                       | 63        |
| 8.5.6     | Initial Panel Classification.....                           | 63        |
| 8.5.7     | Classification Shifts.....                                  | 64        |
| 8.5.8     | Participants' Assessment of the Board's Decision .....      | 64        |
| 8.6       | CONCLUSIONS - BENDIGO PANEL                                 | 65        |
| 8.6.1     | Concerns About Films .....                                  | 65        |
| 8.6.2     | Comparison With Classification Board Decisions .....        | 66        |
| 8.6.3     | The Process of the Community Assessment Panel .....         | 67        |

**APPENDIX A**

RESPONDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

**APPENDIX B**

AFTER VIEWING FILM QUESTIONNAIRE

**APPENDIX C**

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

**APPENDIX D**

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF  
PANEL MEMBERS

**APPENDIX E**

BOARD REPORTS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The Community Assessment Panels were designed to investigate the degree to which classification decisions of the Classification Board reflect community standards.

The specific research objectives were to:

- Assist Censorship Ministers and members of the Classification Board to understand community attitudes to the classification of films;
- Examine aspects of films that people find most troubling or about which they express concern;
- Explore the extent to which decisions of the Classification Board can be considered to represent community standards.

### METHODOLOGY

The research process was initiated in 1997, when Keys Young conducted three Community Assessment Panels in Sydney, Brisbane and Wagga Wagga. A final report was presented to Ministers in July 1998.

In its second year a further series of Community Assessment Panels was established in Perth, Adelaide and Bendigo. Each Panel viewed and discussed three pre-release films over a period of three days.

Comprised of 20 or more members, each Panel was recruited by a specialist agency, in strict adherence to the specifications agreed upon by the OFLC Research Reference Group and the consultant, Keys Young. The specifications were devised so the Panels would represent a broad cross-section of the Australian community.

Prior to the film screenings, each group of Panellists attended a briefing/training session to ensure that they were familiar with the meaning and application of the Classification Guidelines. Immediately after viewing each film, Panel members completed a questionnaire which sought their initial responses to the film, including

their choice of classification. Divided into two broad age groups, the Panel then discussed the film, concentrating on any aspects related to classification issues. Panellists then recorded their *final* classification choice for the film. After the 'post-discussion' classification, the Classification Board's report for the film was distributed among the Panel; participants were given the opportunity to comment on the Board's decision. Until that time, no-one (including the group facilitators) was aware of the Board's classification for the film.

### CLASSIFICATIONS RECEIVED FROM THE PANELS AND THE BOARD

For eight of the nine films viewed by the Panels, the majority of each Panel gave a film the same classification as that of the Board (*Tarzan* being the exception, where the Panel was evenly split). Two other films, *Beautiful People* and *The General's Daughter*, while classified by the majority of the Panel in accord with the Board's classification, nonetheless prompted considerable differences of opinion amongst the Panellists and between them and the Board.

In relation to *Tarzan* the Panel was evenly split between G and PG (it is important to note that the points of difference with the Panel when classifying *Tarzan* were also reflected in the Board's decision-making). In both the Panel and the Board a minority felt the treatment of themes and violent elements was careful and discreet, warranting a G classification, whereas the majority of each thought PG to be more appropriate. The major difference between the Board and many Panellists was in regard to the likely effect these scenes and elements could be expected to have on very young viewers.

*Beautiful People* received an MA classification from the Panel by a bare majority of one person. Thus 11 Panel participants classified it MA while the rest of the Panel was divided between M (five participants - all from the younger group) and R (four participants - all from the older group). Older participants who classified the film R justified it in light of the cumulative level of violence through the whole film, drug references and by one strong drug scene in particular.

*The General's Daughter* was originally classified R by the Board but the distributor of the film appealed the decision and the Classification Review Board then classified the film MA. The Panel was similarly divided in classifying the film but in their final analysis the majority settled on MA, this being in accord with the Review Board's decision to classify the film MA. *The General's Daughter* was classified MA by 12 participants and R by eight participants (six in the older group and two in the younger group). The Panel recognised *The General's Daughter* as a very difficult film to classify; the theme of sexual violence was acknowledged to be highly controversial, making the film, in the Panel's deliberations, borderline between MA and R.

### CLASSIFIABLE ELEMENTS

#### Violence

Screen violence was one of the chief concerns of the Panels. The majority of Panellists, regardless of age, gender or family status, consistently expressed concerns about what appeared to be an increasing level of screen violence, occasionally relating it to the level of violence in the wider community. Some Panellists appeared to believe that violence in films not only *reflects* the high level of violence present in today's society but also that it might *promote* it, assuming that young people were prone to mimic the violent behaviour they witnessed on screen.

The majority of Panellists appeared to accept that violence can be used as a dramatic device which highlights the dramatic impact of a film but only a few were tolerant of images showing violence in any detail and were critical of aggressive images deemed unnecessary to the storyline. Panellists saw the context, frequency and length of a scene as important elements in classifying violence.

Although there was a great deal of debate about the impact of violence, only three of the films screened for the Panels were seen as containing significant levels of violence: *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?*, *The General's Daughter* and *Beautiful People*. Panellists also discussed the effects of 'animated violence' with regard to *Tarzan* and *The Iron Giant*. While some Panellists

observed that modern animation was so extraordinary that it could be indistinguishable from reality, others continued to differentiate between *real* and *animated* violence and expected that children could make similar distinctions.

Some Panellists commented on the device of countering violence with humour in two of the films screened, *The General's Daughter* and *Beautiful People*. While this was often said to be a positive way of lessening the impact of intense sequences, for some Panellists the use of humour as a disarming device did not have the expected effect, as they failed to pick up on the humour - instead, viewing a film in a very literal way. (That is, in relation to some 'black comedies' they saw only the 'black' and not the comedy.) There were also objections to the mixing of violence and comedy by those who felt this sent a 'mixed message' suggesting violence could be amusing.

When evaluating the films, *Tarzan*, *The Iron Giant* and *My Dog Skip*, some Panellists were particularly concerned about scenes dealing with cruelty to animals, a theme considered to have particular resonance for a child audience. Panel members emphasised that children would not distinguish between harsh treatment of a person versus an animal and thus any depiction of violence towards animals should be classified with caution in the Panel's view.

#### Drug Use

Drug use in the films was vigorously debated by all the Panels. When analysing drug references, there was particular disagreement between the Bendigo Panel and the Board regarding two films, *The Third Miracle* and *Beautiful People*. The lack of specific consumer advice indicating drug use in the Board's classification reports was the main criticism that the Panel expressed in regard to any of the Board's advice.

Minor references were also discussed in regard to two other films, *A Walk on the Moon* and *This is My Father*. In relation to the former, participants considered smoking marijuana an appropriate aspect of the Woodstock Festival portrayed in the film.

Adelaide Panellists discussed drug references as one of the adult themes of *This is My Father* and, while recognising the minor importance of a scene containing a reference to 'joints', three participants still included the drug reference as one of the classifiable elements in their decision.

### Adult Themes

The Panels appreciated that adult themes often formed the dramatic core of film narrative. When asked about possible modification of adult themes to alter the classification of specific films, Panellists tended to resist such dilution on the grounds that the treatment of adult themes was central to the film.

Individual responses regarding adult themes often depended on the salience of the subject matter to the respondents' personal lives. Specific subjects had a greater impact on those who had had direct experience with, for example, suicide, drugs, divorce, death and so on.

Some Panellists took the position that younger people's understanding of adult themes was usually limited, and as a result the more complex adult themes would not influence a young audience, as much of the film would 'go over their heads'. Some Panellists challenged the above arguments by suggesting that children absorbed far more than we might expect and stressed the need to 'protect' them from any unsuitable material.

It was also suggested that protection of children was of less importance in relation to certain films because young people would simply not be interested (and were unlikely to be in the audience).

Since adult themes dealt, by their nature, with the more controversial elements of human life, Panellists observed that this was an area where young people could either learn valuable lessons or be dangerously misguided or damaged. Some Panellists queried whether children should be protected from 'real life' experiences, stating that exposure to certain themes portrayed in films might help children to understand some issues relating to 'growing up'. Other Panellists wanted to protect children from 'real life' experiences,

questioning whether films were an appropriate medium for learning about life.

The moral message behind the narrative was also an important element for Panellists when classifying the films. Panellists constantly explored whether a theme was being promoted or glorified. If there was seen to be a valid moral message for younger people and if scenes were believed to show negative consequences of, for instance, violence or drug use, the Panels judged the content less harshly. In contrast, if the scene was perceived to condone or portray such elements in a positive or even neutral way, Panellists were likely to place a more restrictive classification on the film.

### Sex

Most of the films selected for viewing did not have a strong sexual focus. The two exceptions were *The General's Daughter* and *A Walk on the Moon*. The focus on rape and the elements of sado-masochism led *The General's Daughter* to be characterised by the Adelaide Panel as containing violent themes rather than sexual content. Several female participants enjoyed the sex scenes in *A Walk on the Moon* because the treatment was said to be loving and erotic. Panellists generally did not have significant concerns in relation to these sexual themes although they claimed to have viewed little sex in films and were uncertain about how to interpret the 'level' of sexual activity. A few members of the older group raised objections to the nudity and the sexual frolicking because the context was an adulterous relationship. (Again, this reflected concerns with a film's moral message.)

### Coarse Language

Language was not regarded as an important element in relation to the films watched by the Panels. In general, Panellists considered the levels of coarse language in the selected films to be in context and relevant to the storylines.

The lack of concern among Panellists in regard to coarse language was illustrated by one participant who was extremely surprised by the mention of coarse language in the Board's report on *The*

*Third Miracle: 'Coarse language? That's amazing. There was a 'shit' and a 'fuck' and that was it'.*

In general the Panel seemed to place less importance on language as a classifiable element than did the Board. Swearing was considered inappropriate at the G and PG levels but once into the M classification, it drew very little comment from the Panel. The only exception (*A Walk on the Moon*) was where a young child uses the word 'fuck' seemingly without incurring his parents' disapproval.

## FURTHER COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE BOARD AND THE PANELS

### The Panel's Decision-Making Processes

Clearly, the Panels gave the films they viewed the same classifications (with one exception) as the Board. However, Panellists seemed to use one or a combination of various decision-making processes to arrive at a judgement regarding a classification.

- **Considered use of the guidelines** - Panellists referred to the classification manual frequently during the discussion, making use of the official terminology. They sought to apply the rules to the film they were assessing, even on occasions when they queried the sense of the guidelines.
- **Suitable minimum age** - Panellists also took into consideration the minimum age they thought acceptable for viewing the films. Sometimes they sought to align this with the suggested minimum ages reflected in the classification guidelines and sometimes they made an independent judgement on age. This occasionally resulted in them holding contradictory positions, eg *'this should be an M classification but I think it's suitable for 10-12 year olds'*.
- **Overall response to the film** - Panellists sometimes based their classification decision on an overall impression of the film (eg 'too violent' 'bleak', 'touching') rather than an assessment of specific scenes and then sought to rationalise their decision accordingly. This tended to happen at the

upper classification levels, particularly R classifications.

- **Comparisons with other films** - Often Panels made comparisons between the film being watched and recollections of other film ratings or by checking the examples given in the manual. For example, a Panellist noted that if the film *Once Were Warriors* was an MA, then its sequel *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* would have to be an M due to its relatively lower levels of violence. Also, comparisons were often made between films and television, and this sometimes prompted a specific classification decision.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN YOUNGER AND THE OLDER GROUPS

The Community Assessment Panels fairly consistently showed significant differences between the younger and older groups, with older and younger participants showing a markedly different level of tolerance to classifiable material. However, both age groups responded strongly to violent content.

The older groups were more cautious about sexual content (although sexual violence was considered highly problematic by young and old alike.) Neither age group seemed to be greatly bothered by coarse language.

When compared to younger groups, older groups consistently tended to place higher classifications on the films. Older participants often spoke of needing to 'protect' younger people from material that they, as adults, perceived to be unsuitable for young people. On the other hand, younger participants clearly felt more at ease with some material found to be controversial by older Panellists and less need to be 'protected'.

## CONCLUSION

The objectives of the research required a thorough comparison between the responses of the Board and those of the Panels, and such comparisons have been made throughout the body of the individual Panel reports. All films except one (where the Panel was evenly split,

reflecting the Board's own divisions) were classified alike by Panel and Board. Moreover, the analysis and debate demonstrated in the Panels appeared to replicate, in most cases, the content of the Board's reports.

Thus it can reasonably be concluded that the Classification Board's decisions can be considered to represent community standards.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) commissioned the independent social research and planning consultancy Keys Young Pty Ltd, to undertake qualitative research investigating community standards in relation to film classification. Independent media consultant, Catherine Griff, was a member of the Keys Young study team, co-facilitator of the Panels and co-writer of the reports.

This research has been conducted through the establishment of Community Assessment Panels (CAPs) which served as an extension of the qualitative research into community standards carried out by the OFLC over past years. The proposal for the Panels was put forward by the Commonwealth Attorney-General, the Hon Daryl Williams AM QC MP, and later endorsed by all State and Territory Censorship Ministers at a meeting of the Standing Committee of Attorneys General.

The Classification Board is required by law to make classification decisions in accordance with community standards. Clearly, community standards are something of an intangible and frequently changing phenomenon. The current research is principally designed to investigate the degree to which classification decisions of the Classification Board reflect current community standards. As planned, Keys Young established Community Assessment Panels in two capital cities and in a regional location to view and debate pre-release, classified films. The views and judgements of the Panels were then compared with the decisions of the Classification Board and these matters are the subject of this report.

The specific research objectives are to:

- Assist Censorship Ministers and members of the Classification Board to understand community attitudes to the classification of films;
- Examine aspects of films that people find most troubling or about which they express concern;

- Explore the extent to which decisions of the Classification Board can be considered to represent community standards.

The research process was initiated in 1997, when Keys Young conducted three Community Assessment Panels in Sydney, Brisbane and Wagga Wagga. A final report was presented to Ministers in July 1998.

In its second year, and as a continuation of the process initiated in 1997, a second series of Community Assessment Panels was established. The CAPs were convened as follows:

- Perth 9 to 11 July 1999
- Adelaide 29 to 31 October 1999
- Bendigo 14 to 16 April 2000

Having completed the second year of the program, Keys Young has compiled this overview report as well as individual reports on each of the three CAPs. The individual reports contain extensive quotes and detailed responses of the Panels to each of the films. This overview report includes a description of the methodology; an overall comparison between the responses of the Board and the Panels and the Panels' analysis of the key classifiable elements.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Prior to the initial Community Assessment Panels being launched in 1997, a Research Reference Group was created with the purpose of overseeing the scheme. The Research Reference Group established a clear methodological framework and specifications for the consultant to refine and implement. It was determined that each Panel should represent as broad a cross-section of the Australian community as possible. Considering the overall success of the methodology used in conducting the first series of Panels, Keys Young used the same methodology in the second round of Panels.

### 2.1. PANEL RECRUITMENT AND SPECIFICATIONS

#### Total numbers

20 participants to be split into two separate focus groups of ten each:

- Group A - to include younger Panellists eg 15-34 years old
- Group B - to include older Panellists eg 35 years old plus

#### Focus group experience

Ideally people with no focus group experience were sought but recruits were accepted if they had not participated in a group in the past year.

#### Gender

A 50:50 split between males and females was sought.

#### Age

| <i>Group A</i> | <i>Group B</i> |
|----------------|----------------|
| 15 - 17*       | 35 - 44        |
| 18 - 24        | 45 - 54        |
| 25 - 34        | 55 plus        |

\* In the 15-16 age range one younger person was permitted to bring a friend who also met the

specifications. This was the only affinity relationship allowed.

#### Language

All fluent English speakers but people from non-English speaking backgrounds could be included.

#### Family status

|   |
|---|
| Non-parent - never married                |
| Non-parent - married/defacto              |
| Parent - at least one child < 5 years     |
| Parent - at least one child 6 - 11 years  |
| Parent - at least one child 12 - 17 years |
| Parent - at least one child over 18 years |

#### Geographical

The Panellists were sought from a variety of suburbs in each of the three locations to provide a spread of socio-economic groups.

#### Film viewing patterns

A few additional questions about video/film viewing habits were asked of participants when they were contacted. This was not part of the selection criteria but rather used for information purposes. It was intended that those recruited would include a reasonable cross-section of frequent to infrequent viewers of videos/films. Keys Young monitored this to ensure this was the case. As those recruited showed a spread of viewing patterns, it was not necessary to exclude anyone nor recruit additional Panellists. Panellists were not informed that the research had anything to do with classification matters until the actual Panels were convened.

### 2.2. PANEL PROCEDURE

#### 2.2.1 Training and Screening

The screenings and discussions took place at the Alexander Library Theatre in Perth; the Greater Union Megaplex, in Marion, Adelaide; and Star Cinema at the Eaglehawk Town Hall in Bendigo. It

was essential that, when recruited, participants commit themselves to attending all three film viewing and discussion sessions. It was expected that each session would run an estimated four hours each (about half in film viewing and half in discussion). The first session needed to allow for an additional hour or so for briefing/training in relation to the Classification Guidelines. The sessions were all run over a Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

On arrival participants filled out a questionnaire (see Appendix A) which sought demographic data and confirmed information about film viewing habits and attitudes. Panel members then took part in a training session led by Keys Young to ensure that participants were familiar with the meaning and application of the Classification Guidelines.

The classification training manual closely replicated the official *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Videotapes*, April 1999. One difference between the official Guidelines and the material used for training was that examples of films receiving various classifications were also included in the manual. A further difference was that definitions used in the Classification system were integrated into the text of the training manual. Thus when a word such as 'exploitative' appeared in the Classification Guidelines, it was immediately explained or defined within the text rather than requiring the reader to refer to the appended glossary of terms. Care was taken to give detailed verbal explanations of concepts that had caused some difficulty to participants in the first year's operation of the Community Assessment Panels. Senior OFLC officers were present and on occasion responded to questions raised by Panellists.

The selection of the films seen was determined by the products that had been classified by the Classification Board within the timeframe and had not yet been released. (Unbeknownst to the OFLC, one of the films seen by the Adelaide Panel - *The General's Daughter* - was scheduled for pre-release screening in Adelaide, although subsequent discussions with the Panellists indicated that only one Panellist had recognised this, and none was aware of the classification the film had received. Permission from the distributor

was also required for the films to be watched for research purposes.

The consultants were not informed about the classification the films received from the Board, thus avoiding any conscious or unconscious influence by the consultants on the decision-making of the Panel.

### 2.2.2 Focus Group Discussion

Directly following the screenings, the Panel divided into two groups: one generally consisting of younger members aged 15 to 34 years and one generally consisting of older members aged 35 and over. With the Bendigo Panel, the need to achieve a gender balance of five males and five females in each group required the assignment of a somewhat older male - 39 years old - to the 'younger' group.

After viewing a film, but before any discussion began, participants filled out a questionnaire (see Appendix B) which asked for immediate responses to the film, key themes, areas of concern, a minimum age as an acceptable audience for the film, a classification decision and reasons behind their decision. The film was then discussed in much detail for an average of one and a half hours. The proforma guiding the focus group discussion is reproduced at Appendix C. The questions began with a general exploration of the film, then increasingly concentrated on the elements which determined the classification and consumer advice. Once these matters had been thoroughly discussed, participants were given the opportunity to reconsider their original classification decision in light of the discussion. This 'reclassification' may or may not have been the same as their initial choice. Throughout the discussion participants were encouraged to refer to their training manuals to clarify their understanding of the official Guidelines. After 'reclassifying' the film, the decision and comments of the Classification Board were distributed and discussed. Where the classification was reviewed both the original Board report and the report of the Review Board were provided. As noted, the consultants were unaware of the Board's decisions regarding the films until this time.

From the above description it should be clear that the carefully developed methodology is multi-

layered. The steps can be summarised as follows: recruitment of a cross-section of the community as Panellists; application of a demographic and attitudinal questionnaire; Panel training and orientation on the Guidelines; viewing of selected films; recording of the initial response to each film and a classification; exploring through group discussions relevant issues arising from the film; recording of a final classification decision; reading and discussing the Classification Board's assessment of the film.

## 2.2.3 Films Viewed by Panels

The films seen by the Panels were:

### **Perth Panel**

- *A Walk on the Moon* – a drama set in the 1960s.
- *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* – a contemporary grim drama set in urban New Zealand.
- *Tarzan* – an animated film from Disney Studios.

### **Adelaide Panel**

- *The Iron Giant* – an animated film about a giant robot from outer space.
- *This is My Father* – a drama describing a teacher's search for his father.
- *The General's Daughter* – a contemporary grim drama set in a military base.

### **Bendigo Panel**

- *My Dog Skip* – an American 'coming of age' film portraying the story of a boy and his dog in the post-war period.
- *The Third Miracle* – a drama describing the story of a postulator seeking to establish the sainthood of a Chicago woman.
- *Beautiful People* – contemporary 'black' comedy about a diverse group of people in England and the impact of the Bosnian war on their lives.

## 2.2.4 Panel Recruitment and Composition

Locally-based specialist recruitment companies recruited potential participants for the three Panels in accord with the demographic specifications established by the Research Reference Group. Tables summarising the main demographic characteristics of members of the three Panels can be found in individual Panel reports.

### 3. CLASSIFICATION DECISIONS BY THE PANELS AND BY THE BOARD

This section of the report attempts to draw together the results of the individual Panels to answer the basic issues addressed in the research: to what extent the decisions of the Classification Board can be considered representative of community attitudes and what aspects of films people find most troubling.

#### 3.1 COMPARISON OF ALL CLASSIFICATIONS BY THE PANELS AND THE BOARD

The tables below set out in detail the classification decisions of the Panels for each film in total and then show the decisions of the two groups. They show the Board's classification and the Panels' final decisions *after* the group discussion.

#### PERTH PANEL - (20 Panellists)

##### A WALK ON THE MOON (M)

|           | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|-----------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| <b>M</b>  | 15          | 10            | 5           |
| <b>MA</b> | 5           | –             | 5           |

##### WHAT BECOMES OF THE BROKEN HEARTED? (MA)

|           | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|-----------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| <b>M</b>  | 1           | 1             | -           |
| <b>MA</b> | 16          | 9             | 7           |
| <b>R</b>  | 3           | -             | 3           |

##### TARZAN (PG)

|           | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|-----------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| <b>G</b>  | 10          | 8             | 2           |
| <b>PG</b> | 10          | 2             | 8           |

#### ADELAIDE PANEL - (20 Panellists)

##### THE IRON GIANT (PG)

|           | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|-----------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| <b>G</b>  | 4           | 3             | 1           |
| <b>PG</b> | 16          | 7             | 9           |

##### THIS IS MY FATHER (M)

|           | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|-----------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| <b>G</b>  | 1           | –             | 1           |
| <b>PG</b> | 5           | –             | 5           |
| <b>M</b>  | 13          | 9             | 4           |
| <b>MA</b> | 1           | 1             | –           |

##### THE GENERAL'S DAUGHTER (MA)

|           | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|-----------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| <b>MA</b> | 12          | 8             | 4           |
| <b>R</b>  | 8           | 2             | 6           |

#### BENDIGO PANEL - (20 Panellists)

##### MY DOG SKIP (PG)

|          | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|----------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| <b>G</b> | 4           | 1             | 3           |

|    |    |   |   |
|----|----|---|---|
| PG | 16 | 9 | 7 |
|----|----|---|---|

**THE THIRD MIRACLE (M)**

|    | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|----|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| M  | 18          | 10            | 8           |
| MA | 2           | -             | 2           |

**BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE (MA)**

|    | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|----|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| M  | 5           | 5             | -           |
| MA | 11          | 5             | 6           |
| R  | 4           | -             | 4           |

**3.2 FILMS WHERE ASPECTS OF CLASSIFICATIONS DIFFERED**

As can be seen in the tables, out of the nine films classified by the Panels, there were eight cases where the majority of a Panel gave a film the same classification as that of the Board (*Tarzan* being the exception, where the Panel was evenly split). Two other films, *Beautiful People* and *The General's Daughter*, while classified by the majority of the Panel in accord with the Board's classification, also prompted considerable differences of opinion among the Panellists and between them and the Board. These three more contentious films are discussed in more detail below.

**3.2.1 Tarzan**

*Tarzan* was a case where the Panel was evenly split between G and PG. In this case, it is important to note that the points of difference among the Panellists when classifying *Tarzan* were also reflected in the Board's decision-making. Among both Panellists and Board members, a minority felt the treatment of themes

and violent elements were careful and discreet, warranting a G classification, whereas the majority thought PG to be more appropriate. The major difference between the Board and many Panellists was in regard to the likely effect these scenes and elements could be expected to have on very young viewers.

When classifying this film, there were distinct differences within the Panel and between the groups. While in the younger group, eight participants out of ten classified the film G, in the older group, eight participants out of ten classified *Tarzan* PG. While the older group tended to agree fully with the Board's views, some members of the younger group considered the Board's concerns to be 'over-cautious'. The majority of the older participants saw the Board as being responsible in alerting parents that aspects of *Tarzan* might be upsetting to some young children. In particular, the older group concentrated on an implied hanging scene depicted in the film, which the Board also identified as a 'strong depiction of violence'.

There were two other main differences between the Panel and the Board's report in relation to *Tarzan*. Firstly, both Panel groups, the older one in particular, noted the presence of adult themes, particularly the death of Tarzan's father and issues of belonging and betrayal, which were not addressed in the Board's report. Secondly, the Panel generally seemed somewhat more relaxed about the violent content of *Tarzan* than did the Board. However, they had more concerns about the emotional impact of the themes of family and adoption than was evident in the Board's report.

**3.2.2 Beautiful People**

*Beautiful People* received an MA classification from the Panel by a bare majority of one person. Thus 11 Panel participants classified it MA while the rest of the Panel was divided between M (five participants - all from the younger group) and R (four participants - all from the older group). Older participants who classified the film R justified their decision in light of the cumulative impact of violence through the whole film, drug references and by one strong drug scene in particular.

There were two other main differences between the Panel and the Board's report. First was the lack of reference to drug use under the Board's consumer advice - Panellists expressed the view that drug use was a recurrent theme depicted in some detail in *Beautiful People* and that consumers needed to be alerted to this. Secondly, some Panellists were surprised that the Board concentrated on war issues and themes rather than focusing on the scenes of urban violence. When analysing this film, Panellists tended to concentrate much more on the urban aggression visibly depicted in the film than on the violence in relation to the Bosnian war.

### 3.2.3 *The General's Daughter*

*The General's Daughter* was originally classified by the Board as R but in August 1999, the distributor of the film appealed the decision and the Classification Review Board decided to classify the film MA.

The Panel was similarly divided in classifying the film, but in their final analysis the majority settled on MA, this being in accord with the Review Board's decision to revise the film's classification from R to MA. *The General's Daughter* was classified MA by 12 panellists and R by a minority of eight panellists (six in the older group and two in the younger group). The Panel recognised *The General's Daughter* as a very difficult film to classify; the sexual violence theme was acknowledged to be highly controversial, making the film, in the Panel's deliberations, borderline between MA and R.

Panellists who classified the movie R were mildly critical of the Review Board's position. For instance, some of them expressed concern that classified MA, *The General's Daughter* could be seen by unaccompanied young people aged 15. Nevertheless, the Panellists generally acknowledged that under the Classification Guidelines, the decision of the Review Board was probably correct.

The Panel was most divided in relation to the rape sequences in *The General's Daughter*. Quite a number of older participants did not consider that these scenes could be accommodated in the MA

category. Several participants judged that the sexual violence was exploitative and unduly prolonged. They were particularly offended by the brutality of a sequence depicting a gang rape and also to the frequent scenes of a bound, naked female victim.

## 4. CLASSIFIABLE ELEMENTS

In this section, those aspects of the films about which Panellists expressed varying degrees of concern are discussed in detail.

### 4.1 VIOLENCE

Screen violence was one of the chief concerns of the Panels. The majority of Panellists, regardless of age, gender or family status, consistently expressed concerns about what appeared to be an increasing level of screen violence, sometimes connecting it with the level of violence in the wider community. When analysing screen violence, most of the Panellists, including younger participants with no children, focused primarily on the likely effect of violence on children.

Some Panellists appeared to believe that violence in films not only *reflects* the high level of violence present in today's society but also that it might *promote* it, assuming that young people were prone to mimic the violent behaviour they witnessed on screen. (While some research suggests that exposure to media violence may stimulate children to use aggressive behaviour to achieve goals or resolve conflicts, other studies indicate that it would be inaccurate to imply that the relevant body of research shows a causal link between actual and screen violence.)

The majority of Panellists appeared to accept that violence can be used as a dramatic device which might highlight the dramatic impact of a film, but only a few were tolerant of images showing violence in any detail and were critical of aggressive images deemed unnecessary to the storyline. Panellists saw the context, frequency and length of a scene as important elements in classifying violence. Importantly, the cumulative impact of certain classifiable elements was crucial for some participants when classifying two MA rated films, *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* and *Beautiful People*. The Panellists who maintained that both should be classified R referred to the 'cumulative impact' of repeated violence and they disagreed with the Board that this could be accommodated in at MA.

Although there was a great deal of debate about the impact of violence, only three of the films screened for the Panels were seen as containing significant levels of violence: *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?*, *The General's Daughter* and *Beautiful People*. However, two animated films prompted much debate about the potential for young children to be frightened by animated violence.

#### 4.1.1 Animated Violence

Panellists discussed the effects of animated violence with regard to the films *Tarzan* (Perth) and *The Iron Giant* (Adelaide).

Whereas traditional animation was said to distance the young viewer from reality, Panellists observed that modern animation was so extraordinary that it could become indistinguishable from reality.

While pointing out the sophistication of the animation, some of the participants continued to differentiate between *real* and *animated* violence and expected that children could make similar distinctions. Numerous Panellists stressed that children would readily interpret the animation as fantasy. For example, when commenting on some of the violence in *Tarzan*, one Panellist stated that '*although it had moments that were possibly scary for young kids, I think most would realise that it's not real*'.

It would appear that a Disney label on *Tarzan* and the animation of *The Iron Giant* reassured parents that this was a film specifically geared to children and that they should feel relaxed that the content was suitable for all ages.

By contrast, not all Panellists felt so relaxed about animated films. Numerous Panellists recalled supposedly frightening aspects of *Bambi*, a film they would have watched as children many years ago. Some Panellists recognised changes in animated films, pointing out that they appeared to have become more violent over time, a development which they did not like but perceived as inevitable.

### 4.1.2 Violence and Humour

Some Panellists commented on the device of countering violence with humour in two of the films screened, *The General's Daughter* and *Beautiful People*. This was often said to be a positive way of lessening the impact of intense sequences. For some Panellists the use of humour as a disarming device did not have the expected effect, as they failed to pick up on the humour - instead, viewing a film in a very literal way. (That is, in relation to some 'black comedies' they saw only the 'black' and not the comedy.) There were also objections to the mixing of violence and comedy by those who did not appreciate the 'mixed message' which was interpreted as inappropriately suggesting violence could be amusing.

For instance, a sequence in *Beautiful People* depicting the off-screen amputation of a leg appeared to shock many of the Panellists but nevertheless its impact was said to be reduced as a consequence of the scene's comic aspects.

### 4.1.3 Violence in Context

When discussing violence in the films, the context of the scenes was of major importance for Panellists. While the majority of Panellists were concerned about the effect of violence on children, they generally agreed that violence appropriate to the storyline could be acceptable. For example, Panellists viewing *Beautiful People* discussed images of the Bosnian war which most agreed were treated appropriately in the context of a war setting.

In relation to *The General's Daughter*, the violence was considered to be a reality given it was a story of army intrigue and corruption. Some of the Panel believed that the violence was a powerful and vital component of the storyline. The rape in the army context was viewed as a plausible event despite the atrocity.

### 4.1.4 Violence towards Animals

When evaluating the films, *Tarzan*, *The Iron Giant* and *My Dog Skip*, some Panellists were particularly concerned about scenes dealing with cruelty to animals, a theme considered to have

particular resonance for a child audience. Indeed, in the case of *My Dog Skip*, several members were more responsive to and concerned by the dog than by the human characters.

Some Panellists referred to the film, *Bambi*, which had made a great impact on them as children because they found it 'sad' and 'scary'. A Bendigo Panellist commented that '*they say it is a kids' movie but I was horrified when I watched it, the kids were petrified. It is a violent movie*'. An Adelaide Panellist indicated that a G movie such as *101 Dalmatians* contained more disturbing elements than the PG *The Iron Giant*: '*That movie (Dalmatians) has cruelty against animals. This movie is not worse*'.

The Panel members emphasised that children would not distinguish between harsh treatment of a person versus an animal. Thus any depiction of violence towards animals should be considered with caution in the Panel's view.

## 4.2 DRUG USE

Drug use in the films was vigorously debated by all the Panels. When analysing drug references, there was particular disagreement between the Bendigo Panel and the Board regarding two films, *The Third Miracle* and *Beautiful People*. The lack of specific consumer advice indicating drug use in the Board's classification reports was probably the main criticism that the Panel expressed in regard to any of the Board's advice.

In *The Third Miracle*, one of the controversial scenes debated by the Panel was a distant shot of an apparent heroin injection. Although some participants considered this particular image of minor importance, others saw it as an important classifiable element due to the theme of drug overdose and addiction which recurred in the film.

In *Beautiful People*, Panellists noted their revulsion at the image of two male drug users unconscious in a public toilet. There was criticism of the graphic detail, which showed tourniquets wrapped around the arms with bloody puncture marks. Some Panellists drew comparisons between the drug consumption in the film and

their own local situation, where there are 'too many overdoses'. Personal experience of drug problems clearly influenced some Panellists' views of drug-taking in films.

Drug use was also discussed in regard to two other films, *A Walk on the Moon* and *This is My Father*. In relation to the former, participants considered smoking marijuana an appropriate aspect of the Woodstock Festival portrayed in the film.

Adelaide Panellists discussed drug references as one of the adult themes of *This is My Father* and, while recognising the minor importance of a scene containing a reference to 'joints', three participants still included the drug reference as one of the classifiable elements in their decision.

### 4.3 ADULT THEMES

The Panels appreciated that adult themes often formed the dramatic core of film narrative. When asked about possible modification of adult themes to alter the classification of specific films, Panellists tended to resist such dilution on the grounds that the treatment of adult themes was central to the film.

#### 4.3.1 Adult Themes and Personal Experience

The concept of adult themes encompasses such a broad array of issues that it is not surprising the Panels exhibited a correspondingly wide range of responses. Individual responses often depended on the salience of the subject matter to the respondents' personal lives.

Specific subjects made a great impact on those who had had direct experience with, for example, suicide, drugs, divorce, death and so on. For instance, an Adelaide Panellist was very concerned by the theme of suicide in *This is My Father* because of friends who had committed suicide by the same means as that depicted in the film. Other participants on the same Panel, who held religious beliefs, felt particularly negative about the priest's intimidating questioning during a confession and about the doctrinaire posture and

misuse of power on the part of Church representatives.

This identification with a film or a theme also occurred at a very idiosyncratic and personal level. For example, an adoptive mother expressed concern about the portrayal of the care given to the orphan Tarzan, and a recent divorcee was particularly sensitive to the infidelity of the lead character in *A Walk on the Moon*.

#### 4.3.2 Children and Adult Themes

Panellists tended to take the position that younger people's understanding of adult themes was usually limited; a judgement which entailed some seemingly contradictory attitudes. Panels were inclined to assume that the more complex adult themes would not influence a young audience. Numerous comments suggested that protection of children was of less importance in relation to certain films because young people would simply not be interested (and were unlikely to be in the audience) so much of the film would 'go over their heads'.

Some members of the Bendigo Panel were convinced that *Beautiful People* was 'too boring' for young viewers. A similar argument was advanced in Perth with *A Walk on the Moon*. Some Panellists challenged the above arguments by suggesting that children absorbed far more than we might expect and stressed the need to 'protect' them from any unsuitable material.

Since adult themes dealt, by their nature, with the more controversial elements of human life, Panellists observed that this was an area where young people could either learn valuable lessons or be dangerously misguided or damaged. Some Panellists queried whether children should be protected from 'real life' experiences, stating that exposure to certain themes portrayed in films might help children to understand some issues relating to 'growing up'.

Other Panellists wanted to protect children from 'real life' experiences, questioning whether films were an appropriate medium for learning about life. A Bendigo Panellist stated that when children experience adult issues, *that can be done in*

*person with adult guidance and not through a movie*'.

### 4.3.3 The Moral Message

The moral message behind the narrative was also an important element for Panellists when classifying the films. Panellists constantly explored whether a theme was being promoted or glorified. If there was seen to be a valid moral message for younger people and if scenes were believed to show negative consequences of, for instance, violence or drug use, the Panels judged the content less harshly. In contrast, if the scene was perceived to condone or portray them in a 'positive' or 'neutral' way, Panellists were likely to apply a more restrictive classification.

For example, Perth Panellists tended to react less negatively to the violence in *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* because it was seen to emphasise the ugly reality of gang life; sex in *A Walk on the Moon* was less acceptable because it was featured in an adulterous affair; and drug use in *The Third Miracle* was evaluated less harshly because Panellists perceived that the film attempted to portray drug use in a negative way; *'...the shooting scene looked very negative. It wasn't as if they were saying "Hey guys this is fun". It was a very sordid scene'*.

## 4.4 SEX

Most of the films selected for viewing by the Panels did not have a strong sexual focus. The two exceptions were *The General's Daughter* and *Walk on the Moon*.

The focus on rape and the elements of sado-masochism led *The General's Daughter* to be characterised by the Panel more in relation to violent themes than sexual content. The treatment of sexual violence was of major concern and considered very controversial by the Adelaide Panel. Almost half the members did not agree with the MA classification, especially as the gang rape was seen to be prolonged and the repeated images of the naked woman were regarded as exploitative.

Several of the female Perth participants indicated they enjoyed the sex scenes in *A Walk on the Moon* because the treatment was said to be loving and erotic. Panellists generally did not have significant concerns in relation to these sexual themes although they claimed to have viewed little sex in films and were uncertain about how to interpret the 'level' of sexual activity. A few members of the older group raised objections to the nudity and the sexual frolicking because the context was an adulterous relationship.

In *This is My Father*, Panellists indicated that the gentle tone of a sex scene between the two main characters was appropriate in the context. Only one Perth Panellist criticised a sexual encounter in *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?*, objecting to the vocalisation of orgasm.

Older participants in this Panel expressed the view that sex scenes are generally not easy to watch in the presence of younger people, and particularly in the company of their children. The initial resistance to commenting on screen sex appeared to arise from embarrassment about discussing sexual matters in a group situation. Several people clearly stated that sexual activity was completely inappropriate for any film directed at children.

## 4.5 COARSE LANGUAGE

Language was not regarded as an important element in relation to the films watched by the Panels. In general, Panellists considered the levels of coarse language in the selected films to be in context and relevant to the storylines. Acceptance of swearing in the appropriate context was clear from the Panel in relation to the gang members' use in *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* and by the army staff in *The General's Daughter*. The Panels' attitude was that such characters would use coarse language and it would dilute the reality to soften the language.

In *A Walk on the Moon* some members of the Panel were disturbed by the fact that a young child says 'fuck', especially as it appeared to amuse the parents. This was seen by some of the

Panellists as condoning swearing and serving as a poor role model to young viewers generally.

The lack of concern among Panellists in regard to coarse language was illustrated by one participant who was extremely surprised by the mention of coarse language in the Board's report on *The Third Miracle*: '*Coarse language? That's amazing. There was a 'shit' and a 'fuck' and that was it.*'

In general, the Panels seemed to place less importance on language as a classifiable element than did the Board. Swearing was considered inappropriate at the G and PG levels but once into the M classification, it drew very little comment from the Panels.

## 5. FURTHER COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE BOARD AND THE PANELS

### 5.1 PANEL TRAINING AND COMPREHENSION

The methodology for establishing and conducting the Community Assessment Panels worked effectively. It clearly met the aim of the research, which was to take a group of ordinary members of the community, brief them on the classification system and have them apply Guidelines to pre-release films. Panellists' capacity to understand and to apply the Classification Guidelines was an unknown at the outset. In the event, participants undertook the task with diligence and appeared to understand the principles of the guidelines, even though they had started with only a consumer's or lay person's knowledge of the classification system.

The Panellists were not necessarily regular film viewers and their training was brief; Board members actually train for approximately six weeks before formally classifying films. Despite the great difference in classification experience between the Panels and the Board, their insights on the films were often remarkably similar.

### 5.2 THE PANELS' DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

It was clear that the Panels tended to determine the same classifications as the Board. However, Panellists seemed to use (one or a combination of) various decision-making processes to arrive at a judgement regarding a classification.

- **Considered use of the guidelines** - Panellists referred to the classification manual frequently during the discussions, making use of the official terminology. They sought to apply the rules to the film they were assessing, even on occasions when they queried the sense of the guidelines.

- **Suitable minimum age** - Panellists also took into consideration the minimum age they thought acceptable for viewing the films; a question about the youngest age for which a film would be suitable viewing was asked in the questionnaire that Panellists filled out after viewing each film. Sometimes they sought to align their judgement with the suggested minimum ages reflected in the classification guidelines and sometimes they made an independent judgement. This occasionally resulted in them holding contradictory positions in relation to the suitable age recommended by classifications, eg *'this should be an M classification but I think it's suitable for 10-12 year olds'*.
- **Overall response to the film** - Panellists sometimes based their classification on an overall impression of the film (eg 'too violent', 'bleak', 'touching') rather than an assessment of specific scenes and then sought to rationalise their classification accordingly. This tended in particular to happen where Panellists were considering upper classification levels particularly R classifications.
- **Comparisons with other films** - Often Panels made comparisons between the film being watched and recollections of other film classifications or by checking the examples given in the manual. For example, a Panellist noted that if an earlier film, *Once Were Warriors*, was MA, then its sequel *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* would have to be M due to its relatively lower levels of violence. Also, comparisons were often made between films and television, and this sometimes prompted a specific classification decision.

### 5.3 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN YOUNGER AND THE OLDER GROUPS

As occurred with the first series of Community Assessment Panels, the second series showed a significant difference between the younger and older groups. Older and younger participants

showed markedly different levels of tolerance to classifiable elements.

Both age groups responded strongly to violent content. The older groups were more cautious about sexual content (although sexual violence was considered highly problematic by young and old alike). Neither age group seemed to be greatly bothered by coarse language.

When compared to younger groups, older groups consistently tended to give films higher classifications. Older participants often spoke of needing to 'protect' younger people from material that they, as adults, perceived to be unsuitable for young people.

On the other hand, younger participants clearly felt more at ease with some material found to be controversial by older Panellists. The younger groups often dismissed conservative views, tending to stress the maturity and level of experience and exposure of younger viewers to many of the aspects of the films (be it drugs, sex, language, etc.) considered potentially disturbing.

### **5.4 CONCLUSION**

The objectives of the research required a thorough comparison between the responses of the Board and those of the Panels, and such comparisons have been made throughout the body of the individual Panel reports. All films except one (where the Panel was evenly split, closely reflecting the Board's own divisions) were classified alike by Panel and Board. Moreover, the analysis and debate demonstrated in the Panels appeared to replicate, in most cases, the content of the Board's reports.

The focus in this report has often been on the major points of difference that could reveal particular aspects of community attitudes. This emphasis on the differences between Board and Panels should not detract from the overall fact of similarity between the two perspectives. Senior OFLC observers regularly commented that the Panels' deliberations closely mirrored the Board's dialogue.

Thus it can reasonably be concluded that the Classification Board's decisions can be considered to represent community standards.

## 6. PERTH COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PANEL

table summarises the main characteristics of the Perth Panel members.

Prior to the initial Community Assessment Panels being launched in 1997, a Research Reference Group was created with the purpose of overseeing the scheme. The Research Reference Group established a clear methodological framework and specifications for the consultant to refine and implement. It was determined that the Panel should represent as broad a cross-section of the Australian community as possible. Considering the overall success of the methodology used in conducting the first series of Panels, Keys Young has utilised the same methodology in the second round of Panels.

### 6.1 PERTH PANEL PROCEDURE

The Perth Community Assessment Panel was the first Panel conducted and took place from 9 to 11 July 1999 over a Friday night, Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon. The viewing and discussions took place at the theatrette in the Alexander Library building in Northbridge (Central Business District of Perth), located in the Perth Cultural Centre. The methodology used was as described earlier in Section 2 of the report.

The films viewed by the Perth Panel were:

- *A Walk on the Moon* – a drama set in the 1960s.
- *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* – a contemporary grim drama set in urban New Zealand.
- *Tarzan* – an animated film from Disney Studios.

### 6.2 PERTH PANEL COMPOSITION

A locally based specialist recruitment company followed the requisite demographic profile established by the Research Reference Group in selecting members for the Panel. The following

**TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF PERTH PANEL PARTICIPANTS**

| <b>Participants</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Location</b> | <b>Family Status</b>                      | <b>Occupational Group</b>               |
|---------------------|------------|---------------|-----------------|---|---|
| Participant 1       | 16         | F             | Samson          | Single - no children                      | Student                                 |
| Participant 2       | 17         | F             | Melville        | Single - no children                      | Student                                 |
| Participant 3       | 21         | M             | Caversham       | 2 children aged 3 and 4 years             | Electrical Tradesperson                 |
| Participant 4       | 23         | M             | Nollamara       | De facto - no children                    | Salesman                                |
| Participant 5       | 23         | F             | Gosnells        | 1 child aged 2 years                      | Senior Child Care Worker                |
| Participant 6       | 25         | M             | Gosnells        | 2 children aged 2 years and 6 months      | Administrative Officer                  |
| Participant 7       | 31         | M             | Bayswater       | Single - no children                      | Self-Employed Photographer              |
| Participant 8       | 33         | F             | Yangebup        | 2 children aged 2 and 1 year              | Primary Schoolteacher                   |
| Participant 9       | 34         | M             | Mt. Pleasant    | De facto - no children                    | Photographer                            |
| Participant 10      | 40         | M             | Ballajura       | 3 children aged 8, 10 and 15 years        | Gardener                                |
| Participant 11      | 38         | M             | Caversham       | 3 children aged 3, 5 and 12 years         | Boilermaker/Welder                      |
| Participant 12      | 38         | F             | Beechboro       | 5 children aged 7, 8, 11, 14 and 16 years | Housewife                               |
| Participant 13      | 41         | F             | Bull Creek      | 1 child aged 3 years                      | Dental Nurse                            |
| Participant 14      | 44         | F             | Carlisle        | 1 child aged 15 years                     | Librarian                               |
| Participant 15      | 48         | F             | Bedford         | 2 children aged 12 and 14 years           | Library Officer (Primary School)        |
| Participant 16      | 49         | M             | Greenwood       | 2 children aged 23 and 19 years           | High School Teacher                     |
| Participant 17      | 51         | M             | Dianella        | 2 children aged 19 and 17 years           | Chemical Engineer                       |
| Participant 18      | 57         | F             | North Perth     | 2 children aged 31 and 28 years           | Branch Administrator (Service Industry) |
| Participant 19      | 57         | F             | Osborne Park    | 4 children aged 27, 33, 35 and 38 years   | Paging Operator                         |
| Participant 20      | 60         | M             | Highgate        | Single - no children                      | Retired                                 |

### 6.3 PERTH PANEL'S RESPONSES TO A WALK ON THE MOON

The Board synopsis of the film is as follows:

*Pearl finds life as a wife and a mother somewhat stifling at the end of the 60s. When a salesman/drifter arrives in the holiday camp she visits every year she begins an affair with him, with consequences for the whole family.*

The Board classified the film M and the consumer advice was 'medium level sex scenes, adult themes, medium level coarse language'.

#### 6.3.1 General Response

Some Panel members responded enthusiastically to the film, mainly due to their identification with the characters.

*Excellent. Very emotive, realistic (to a degree), it breaks the stereotypes.*

*I enjoyed it. (It is) well acted and unusually, I had empathy with all the main characters.*

*Enjoyable, a good story, well acted, good characters.*

*I like the fact that the movie shows the working class America which you don't often see.*

The happy ending of the movie made one of the participants change her opinion about the film.

*Originally (I) found it quite dull and predictable (but) because it had a happy ending I liked it..*

Some participants commented that the opening led them to expect a comedy and they were surprised by the dramatic nature of the film. Several of the Panel commented on this inconsistency of tone and clearly did not appreciate the abrupt change of mood.

*I thought it was going to be a comedy when I first started watching it. Bit by bit I realised that it was becoming a drama.*

*It's very strong. You got the mother with the salesman and the daughter with the*

*younger lad. There is a real intensity. I was preparing myself for a laugh.*

Finally, a couple of Panellists believed that there were important messages in the film.

*It says a lot about families. If you keep doing the same over and over again, the same routine, a question may come up, do I want a change?*

*'The film deals with growing up, the girl having her first period, the mother growing up and having fun later in life.*

#### 6.3.2 Identification With the Characters

A number of the Panel members identified with the film's main characters. In particular, several of the female members sympathised with Pearl, the lead female character.

*I completely related to her in every aspect. I felt exactly like that woman when I was her age.*

One Panel member said that he enjoyed certain parts of the film '...due to some common themes which I have recently experienced myself'. Another male participant in the younger group commented that he had empathy with all of the main characters of the film.

When watching a scene set at the Woodstock festival, some participants in the older group felt aspects of their own lives reflected the era in which the film was set.

*I guess it's a movie which you can relate to because I was that age when this was going on.*

*I like the portrayal of the atmosphere of the sixties. It brought back a lot of memories.*

*I felt related to the movie. I was in that age bracket when this was going on.*

A *Walk on the Moon* brought back some unpleasant memories to a woman in the older group.

*I guess it brought back a lot of memories because around that time my marriage broke up and I'm hurt for those kids because my kids were so hurt in the same way. They are in their thirties now but they have never forgotten.*

### 6.3.3 Adult Themes

#### **Adultery**

Panellists in the younger and older groups, identified adultery as the main adult theme of the film. There was far more comment about the morality of adultery and its impact on the family than about the actual portrayal of sexual scenes. A participant in the older group stressed the intensity with which adultery is treated in the film.

*Adultery is the main theme of the whole film. It's treated intensely and certainly, it's not treated in minor detail.*

Some of the Panellists were concerned about what messages the film would convey to younger viewers.

*It makes this film difficult to watch for the younger ones. You have to explain adultery. Anyway, I don't think it will interest them very much.*

*Children would be upset seeing their parents fighting in this way. The break-up of the family, the loss of the mother, that would be upsetting for children.*

*Sometimes I felt that this movie should be watched by a teenager to learn about life. On the other hand, there is too much sex and too much bad language for a teenager or for a child.*

In the older group, there were clear differences in attitude towards the main female character, Pearl, who has an affair with a salesman. While males were taken aback by the seeming ease with which she entered the affair, females in the group were more sympathetic towards her.

*I found disturbing the speed in which she began the relationship with the salesman. It wasn't slow.*

*I was shocked in the way she has no regard for her children. She just forgot about them.*

*I was surprised by the fact that the husband and the daughter forgave her very quickly.*

*That happened because she was so frustrated, she was unhappy.*

*It was a different time. You felt guilty about feeling that it wasn't enough within a marriage. I think things are quite different now.*

*She had to do it impulsively or she wouldn't have done it at all.*

*She invested ten years of her life with them, she was there. Then, she took a week of her life back.*

#### **Violence**

There was a minimal discussion of violent elements in the film. Two participants in the older focus group were concerned about two particular scenes.

*The verbal abuse of his wife when she said that she was having an affair. That's violence.*

*I found it distressing when the girl was slapped in the face.*

#### **Coarse Language**

Most participants felt that the coarse language in the film was appropriate in the context. However, some members of the Panel were disturbed by the fact that a child swears in the film and the response of adults towards the swearing. In particular there was disapproval of the singing of a song with coarse language that the small son had been taught by his parents.

*If I'm watching that and I'm not intervening, I'm condoning it.*

*I was surprised when the little boy said it (fuck) in the song. The parents taught the little boy the song.*

*The little kids swearing... everybody was laughing about it, it gave me a little bit of a shock.*

*I don't think that it was something so common in the sixties, children swearing in that way.*

### **Drug Use**

Neither of the focus groups placed much importance on the relatively incidental depiction of people smoking marijuana at the Woodstock Festival. Participants saw this as an accurate reflection of the sixties era.

*They were smoking pot but I don't think that was an issue, it was expected in that era, everybody had a go.*

*That's really portraying what was happening in Woodstock at that time.*

*I think it happens so quick, it's not really important.*

*I didn't think that scene was so important, it happened so quick. It was very casual, it wasn't made a focus of, it was subtle.*

### **Sex Scenes**

Most of the Panel (particularly the younger members) did not have significant concerns in relation to the sex scenes. Most agreed that these scenes tended to be very mild and justified by the narrative. However some members of the older group raised objections to specific sexual depictions. One of the older participants described a scene of the lovers frolicking at a waterfall, as '*almost pornographic*'. Another woman in this group objected to the explicitness of the same scene.

*I think that if they cut the river scene they may get away with it. Everything else was almost discreet.*

A couple of the older viewers suggested that the naked embrace at the waterfall implied sexual intercourse. The nudity in the waterfall scene was not a problem to the Panel, indeed there was some appreciation of the couple's sheer

enjoyment. The woman diving naked into the water was thought by several participants to be symbolic of her 'taking the plunge' into a life of greater freedom.

A few participants in the older group objected to sex being featured in films at all. They stressed that sex is 'private' and they were clearly discomforted by anything beyond kissing.

One woman dwelt on an early scene of passion between the lovers in his shop/caravan. The controversial issue appeared to be the level of lust and desire evident between the couple.

The older group expressed the view that sex scenes are not easy to handle in the presence of younger people, particularly in the company of their children.

*I would be very uncomfortable watching it with my young daughter. I'm not very comfortable watching sex scenes with children.*

*I don't like going to a movie and being confronted with it all.*

In the young group there was a young father who objected strongly to the teenaged daughter kissing and cavorting with her boyfriend.

One participant suggested that the sex scenes enlivened the film and were the main element of interest.

*Without the sex scenes, it would be a very boring film.*

### **6.3.4 Initial Panel Classification**

Immediately after viewing the film participants nominated, in a questionnaire, the minimum age they thought acceptable to view *A Walk on the Moon* and the classification they would choose.

In the older group, the majority of participants nominated 15 years as a suitable minimum age for viewing the film, whereas the younger group thought the film appropriate for younger ages. For instance, four of the participants nominated 12 years, one nominated 10 years and two 13 and 14 years respectively.

As can be seen in the following table, the great majority of the Panel classified the film M, with a

minority of four giving it an MA classification and one person a PG.

## **A Walk on the Moon (M)**

|    | <b>Total Panel</b> | <b>Younger Group</b> | <b>Older Group</b> |
|----|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| PG | 1                  | 1                    | -                  |
| M  | 15                 | 8                    | 7                  |
| MA | 4                  | 1                    | 3                  |

### **Justification of M**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film M:

*I originally thought PG as a classification but after some coarse language decided on M.*

*I was thinking PG, PG, PG, til' one of the sex scenes.*

*Adult themes (break-up of parents). That may upset younger children; language ('fuck' used a couple of times).*

*Sex scenes, adult themes, coarse language, they use fuck a lot, the children swearing.*

*(It) can prove to be distressing to children from homes where people argue.*

*The sex and language in the film was all justified in the storyline and didn't seem excessive or out of place.*

### **Justification of MA**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film MA:

*Everything concentrated on the sexual side of things, perhaps it is too much of a sex monopoly.*

*I think it's an MA, mainly in the second quarter of the movie when that sex scene is there, the one under the waterfall. I thought it started to intensify a little bit*

*there. I think it may tip the movie over the edge.*

*Sex and adult themes including the issue of adultery - the ease with which she entered the relationship.*

*Adult themes, coarse language. The mother and grandmother slapping the daughter and putting her down.*

*I gave it an MA for the treatment of adultery, it's treated very intensively.*

### **6.3.5 Classification Discussion**

After discussing the film, some of the Panel members changed their views regarding the classification. In brackets is shown the participants' classification *before* the discussion.

#### **A Walk on the Moon (M)**

|    | <b>Total Panel</b> | <b>Younger Group</b> | <b>Older Group</b> |
|----|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| PG | - (1)              | - (1)                | -                  |
| M  | 15 (15)            | 10 (8)               | 5 (7)              |
| MA | 5 (4)              | - (1)                | 5 (3)              |

As can be seen in the table, all the younger participants classified the film M (up from eight before the group discussion). In contrast, the older group was evenly divided on the classification; five nominated M and the remainder nominated MA.

### **6.3.6 Participants' Assessment of the Board's Decision**

When presented with the Board's report, both groups were largely supportive of its comments. There was little debate about the Board's report simply because of the strong concurrence between the views of Board and Panel. Most of the focus group members read the Board's notes while nodding in agreement. The majority of Panellists were comfortable that this film fell clearly within the classification M. Those in the older group who had nominated an MA did so largely because of the sex in the context of an

adulterous relationship, a theme they felt was suitable only for mature teenagers whereas the M majority found the sex scenes to be mild and inoffensive.

In the younger focus group, there was unanimous agreement with the consumer advice being medium level coarse language and medium level sex scenes.

Only one member of this group suggested it might be necessary to include some reference to drug use.

*I'm still thinking that there is a need to mention something about the drug use. In my consumer advice I would note that.*

#### **6.4 PERTH PANEL'S RESPONSES TO WHAT BECOMES OF THE BROKEN-HEARTED?**

The Board's synopsis read as follows:

*Sequel to 'Once were Warriors' (classified MA) with 'Jack the Muss' reviving his menacing portrayal as a disenfranchised loner whose restless life revolves around alcohol and violence. The setting is urban New Zealand with a focus on two competing 'bikie' gangs comprised mainly of Maoris. After his son, Nicky, is murdered Jake is challenged about his violent and drunken lifestyle by two new Maori friends who abhor his wanton 'warrior' tendencies. They instil in him a pride of family and hard work and Jake eventually reconciles with his remaining son, 'Sonny'.*

The Board classified the film MA and the consumer advice read 'medium level violence, medium level sex scene, medium level coarse language'.

##### **6.4.1 General Response**

The majority of the Panel responded positively to the film, describing it as powerful and exciting.

*Very powerful and intense. Good photography for message impact.*

*Great. Hard-hitting, gut-wrenching.*

*It was the best film I have seen for a long time.*

*Great! It was a solid film which kept my interest in the story throughout.*

*It's a movie that makes you go wow!...it's like real life.*

Some of the older viewers were put off by the level of violence.

*I didn't really like the film. I just couldn't get emotionally involved with any of the characters. I felt scared with the violence and the cruelty of the movie, cruel violence which I didn't understand.*

##### **6.4.2 Comparison With Once Were Warriors**

*What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* is a sequel to *Once Were Warriors*, a film which many of the Panel had seen and they immediately sought to make comparisons between the two. The original was seen to be harsher and more controversial.

*Very powerful and 'feel good' scene compared to the first, giving a more positive outlook.*

*Well acted, good production values and the violence towards women was far less gratuitous than the first one.*

*I enjoyed this film. I had previously seen *Once Were Warriors* and could associate with the characters in their way of life.*

*I found the first one a bit disturbing. This one is more enjoyable. The first one leaves you feeling a little bit hopeless, but in this one he shows that he can change and this was the most important feature of the film for me.*

*It's so different. The message is so different, it gives a much greater sense of optimism.*

When assessing the violent content, a couple of participants took into consideration the lack of domestic violence scenes that were so dominant in *Once Were Warriors*.

*I think the violence was realistic but it wasn't disturbing. If you compared it with the first one where you saw his wife, how she was suffering through extended*

*periods of the film, there is nothing in this one upsetting like that.*

### 6.4.3 Violence

There was a consensus that violence was the main element to be assessed in classifying the film.

The majority of Panellists found the violent scenes to be justified by the narrative of the film. In general most members of the Panel stressed the cumulative effect of violence through the whole movie rather than identifying particular scenes. For instance, an older woman emphasised the overall violent content of *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?*

*I find a little bit confusing people analysing specific scenes while for me the film has an overall effect. This film is a very violent one, it's constantly emphasising violence.*

This led to some discussion in the Panel about the level of consumer advice that needs to be provided.

*It is difficult to decide on medium or high violence. Would I be allowed to say frequent violence? Because that's what I would say.*

### 6.4.4 Portrayal of Women

Some of the participants commended the role played by the female characters in the film.

*I think the women in the film were a strong feature because they were really strong, they weren't victims .*

*Even in the part where he beat up his girlfriend, she was very strong. She was standing up and telling him to get out. She showed that you can stand up to people.*

However, one participant pointed out that women were treated differently according to whether they were wives/girlfriends or at the mercy of the gang leaders.

*You have the woman who was claimed by the gang member and she just let that be. You got different messages from the movie, women are also used.*

The violence against women in the film provoked a strong reaction and was often regarded as the most repugnant form of aggression.

One participant commented that the violence in the film concerned men of equal strength, rather than violence against women.

*From my perspective something that I find very upsetting is seeing a powerful guy beating the hell out of a weaker woman (reference to Once Were Warriors). But the violence in this film, two guys hammering each other, it doesn't really bother me at all.*

However, a participant in the older group recalled a particular scene of the film where Jake attacks his girlfriend.

*Have we all forgotten his girlfriend? She had the crap beaten out of her. That scared me.*

### 6.4.5 Hand-Held Weapons

Panellists discussed the impact of violence which featured hand-held weapons. The older group in particular was generally disturbed by the use of this type of weapon. The frequent fight scenes using wrenches, iron bars and chairs were considered to be the strongest and most graphic acts of violence.

*When we talk about the violence of the film, I think that the highest dominating factor is the use of hand-held weapons, baseball bats, spanners.*

*They are much more aggressive and violent. Not many of us have seen a gun, but these are everyday objects, you can think of anybody getting angry and hitting you with one of those.*

### 6.4.6 Gangs

Some members of the Panel appreciated the film's negative portrayal of gangs because it was seen to emphasise the negative and ugly realities of gang life.

*The film does not glorify the gang style of living and their violent lifestyle.*

*They show the fake loyalty between gang members. They weren't loyal to each other, there was just talk, they were all criminals.*

One member of the Panel held the view that Maori content was irrelevant because the gangs could have existed in any culture.

*You could replace Maoris with any other minority sector, with any other race, creed, colour or religion you choose. It can be in the USA with the bikie gangs or the triads in Hong Kong.*

### 6.4.7 Adult Themes

The older group identified the issue of alcohol abuse as a controversial adult theme in the film.

*The biggest adult theme in the film has got to be alcohol abuse. That permeates into all the other themes.*

*There is an alcohol problem there with the Maoris and they showed it.*

Not everybody felt that alcohol abuse was emphasised above safe use of alcohol.

*I think they are trying to get the message across that you can have alcohol in a very comfortable manner, enjoy it, sing along in a pub or in a family party .*

Another participant identified the treatment of revenge as a potentially dangerous theme for young viewers.

*I didn't like the idea of revenge. Young people adopting this attitude "we are gonna kill this guy because he killed our brother", that's not a good thing.*

### 6.4.8 Coarse Language

The majority of the Panellists considered the use of coarse language to be in context and relevant to the storyline of the film. There was little complaint about the language used in the film.

*Honestly, I probably like the language. There was a lot of swearing but had it been a lot less swearing, I would have thought that the whole thing was not real.*

*If you have seen the first one you expect the same for the second one, it's not a big shock like "Oh my God, they're swearing".*

*It's not language over the top. It's what you expect from a movie of this genre.*

*They use it, I don't know, perhaps because they are in that lower socio-economic gang-type environment.*

### 6.4.9 Sex

Only one woman in the older group criticised a sexual scene in the film. She objected to the vocalisation of orgasms.

*I thought that the sex scene was over the top, the groans. I took that into consideration when I classified the movie.*

### 6.4.10 Messages Arising from the Film

The Panel sought to discern an underlying meaning in the film, especially to justify the violence. There was considerable discussion in both focus groups about the overall messages arising from *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?*.

#### **Maori Culture**

Many of the Panel thought there were things to be learnt about Maori life.

*It shows a lot of the Maori culture, the music, tattoos, mateship....*

*It's educational to know what's happening in another country.*

*(The film)...tries to show the two sides of the Maori existence. The gangs, the violence and the alcohol and the other side of Maori life, a more positive one.*

#### **Positive Messages**

*This is a sort of film that young people should see. They can see what gangs are about. It was obvious that the director depicted gangs very badly. At the end, bad people don't win.*

*I thought there was a message in the movie, probably subtle, but I think some people believe things can be solved by violence. But besides violence, that character Jake was in the process of realising that he was there for the love of his son.*

One Panellist, thinking about her own son, saw the film as containing positive messages for the young.

*He'll be going to school and there may be a guy with a knife or doing drugs. I think he can realise how it can get out of hand and he should remove himself from characters like Jake.*

### Negative Messages

One of the older participants was less likely to appreciate the film's morality and found no message in *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?*

*I don't see a message on it, I looked for a message but what's the message? What they are trying to tell me? I don't expect a message from a documentary, there you draw your own conclusions but from an artistic movie I believe the producers or the director make the movie to tell us something. That's how I relate to an artistic movie.*

There were different views about what behaviours this type of film might be modelling for the young. Regardless of the film makers' intention, some comments suggested that the fighting and drama would be attractive and possibly copied by a young audience while others thought the opposite.

*If you are depressed maybe you think that's the way to go, join a gang, it's exciting.*

*It may make them think "Oh my God I don't want to be like that".*

### 6.4.11 Initial Panel Classification

Immediately after viewing the film but before the group discussion, participants nominated by

questionnaire an acceptable minimum age for the film and classified the film.

The majority of the Panel considered that the youngest age for which the film would be suitable was 15 years. However, two Panel members, one from each of the groups, nominated 18 years and two others indicated 16 years and 17 years, respectively.

As can be seen below, immediately after viewing the film but before the discussion, a majority of Panel members classified the film MA, with four giving the film an R and two an M.

### What Becomes of the Broken Hearted? (MA)

|    | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|----|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| M  | 2           | 2             | -           |
| MA | 14          | 6             | 8           |
| R  | 4           | 2             | 2           |

### Justification of M

One of the two Panel members who classified the film M, stressed the value of the film as educational for young adolescents.

*(I) wouldn't put it higher because of the impact to teenagers on joining gangs. They should be the ones to see it.*

### Justification of MA

The following comments were made by those who classified the film MA:

*The violence and alcohol abuse were the two main reasons for my decision. The violence was reasonably graphic although there wasn't excessive carnage or blood letting.*

*The violence wasn't as graphic as I've seen in other R movies. The adult themes worries me more than the violence because the alcohol abuse is the element that encourages the violence.*

*To me it was the violence that set the seal, mainly the hand-held weapons, the baseball bats, the spanner, the personalised violence.*

**Justification of R**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film R:

*Violence which was cruel, not related necessarily to anger, frustration. I felt very scared in these parts of the film's depiction of violence for no human reason.*

*I do not think that the movie would contribute to solving any problems of the Maori people of New Zealand.*

*The main reason for my classification is the violence of the film. I didn't find any positive character at all.*

**6.4.12 Classification Discussion**

After discussing the film, four of the Panel members changed their views regarding the classification of *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* (in brackets is shown the participants' classification before the discussion). Two of them changed their classification from R to MA, one changed from M to MA and the other participant re-classified the film from an MA to an R. Thus the discussion appeared to have the effect of 'converging' Panellists' classifications around MA.

**What Becomes Of The Broken Hearted? (MA)**

|    | <b>Total Panel</b> | <b>Younger Group</b> | <b>Older Group</b> |
|----|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| M  | 1 (2)              | 1 (2)                | -                  |
| MA | 16 (14)            | 9 (6)                | 7 (8)              |
| R  | 3 (4)              | - (2)                | 3 (2)              |

**6.4.13 Participants' Assessment of the Board's Decision**

The majority of the Panel agreed with the Board's MA classification and also concurred with most of the report. In particular, it was agreed that the 'cumulative impact' of the violence warranted an MA.

In context of the earlier film *Once Were Warriors* which received an MA and was seen generally as much more disturbingly violent, most Panellists felt that a classification higher than MA was not warranted for *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?*.

For three of the participants, what was seen as unremitting violence prompted them to stay with an R rating.

When presented with the Board's report, there was some discussion about the Board's consumer advice, which read *medium level violence, medium level sex scene and medium level coarse language.*

**Medium Level Violence**

*Medium level violence? Even when you read it (the Board's comments on some scenes) you can see it's high level violence.*

*I thought it was medium level violence but after reading the Board's decision, I actually think it's high level. It reminds me the scenes, the wounds, the blood...*

One of the participants in the older group agreed with the consumer advice given by the Board.

*As far as the classification guidelines go there is so much room for heaps of more violence. I think it's medium level violence when you consider what could be shown in an R-rated film.*

**Medium Level Coarse Language**

While there were no particular objections to the language, most seemed to regard it as 'high level' coarse language.

*I think it should have a high level of coarse language. Even now that you can swear more and more viciously, there was a lot of swearing.*

*With a medium level coarse language you think maybe it's more of a 'shit' word I reckon, but in this movie you hear 'fuck, fuck, fuck' every five seconds.*

*It's not so much the word, it's how often it's used.*

Another participant wondered how it was possible to differentiate between medium and high levels of coarse language. The divisions in terms of language were said to be quite vague and more dependent on frequency of use.

*What kind of swearing is medium? I think that frequent is a much better word if we were allowed to use it.*

### 6.5 PERTH PANEL'S RESPONSES TO TARZAN

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

*Kala, a female gorilla, finds a human baby after he has been orphaned in the African jungle and she brings him up as her own baby. The young Tarzan grows up in the jungle determined to be as strong and fast as the other gorillas. He is very happy and does not realise he is human until an expedition arrives from England and he is bewitched by the beautiful Jane. His attraction to these visitors unwittingly puts his gorilla family at risk of entrapment by the evil Clayton.*

The Board classified the film PG and its consumer advice was 'low level violence'.

In June 1999, the distributor of *Tarzan* appealed the Board's decision. The Review Board upheld the Classification Board's PG decision, but altered the consumer advice to read 'some scenes may scare very young children'.

#### 6.5.1 General Response

In general, *Tarzan* generated positive comments from both the younger and the older focus groups. Members of the Panel described the film as a 'good family movie' and as a 'very enjoyable film

*with wonderful animation'. A few remarks of caution were made regarding some scenes being 'frightening for the very young' but overall the comments were positive and they consistently described the film as a 'very good kids film'.*

The following quotes are from the younger focus group:

*Brilliant; it's an emotional and visual rollercoaster. The special effects are great.*

*In recent months I have been to a few animation movies such as this one and I would have to say that this was the most interesting.*

*Very enjoyable, recommend seeing. I will be taking my kids to see Tarzan.*

*I thoroughly enjoyed the film. It was very entertaining to watch and I would recommend it to anyone.*

The following quotes are from the older focus group:

*Excellent. I enjoyed it. The visual effects were fantastic, the vibrant colours, the music, all the voices and characters were very well done. I would feel confident that all ages could watch this movie without supervision.*

*The animation is excellent. Great close ups and plenty of action. An enjoyable movie suitable for most people. Quite heart warming in parts.*

*I feel a child over the age of 6-7 years would enjoy this film (especially boys) but some scenes would be too scary for younger children.*

*A film about multiculturalism, acceptance of differences, adoption issues. An enjoyable children's film which would hold interest of both boys and girls.*

#### 6.5.2 Violence

The majority of the participants expressed the view that violence was not a primary nor contentious element in the film and it was always appropriate to the context. Panellists in both

groups discussed some of the film's aggressive content and its possible effect on younger children and was generally agreed that violent depictions in *Tarzan* were very well handled.

*In this film, they do put clues with the violence, they give little clues that probably everything will be OK and I think a child will pick up on those .*

### **Animated Violence**

Participants from both groups discussed the issue of violence in the context of *Tarzan* being an animated film. While pointing out the sophistication of the animation which looked 'almost real', some of the participants clearly differentiated between 'real' and 'animated' violence and expected that children would make similar distinctions.

One of the women in the older group said that '*although it had moments that were possibly scary for young kids, I think most would realise that it's not real*'. Another participant in the same group, introduced a new term to describe *Tarzan*'s depictions of violence; '*low animated violence*'.

In the younger group, two female participants expressed the view that the animation of the film might contribute to a lower classification. As one of them said, the film has '*...a small amount of violence but it is animated...I wouldn't rate it higher because it is animated*'.

There were several remarks about the impact of the animation in exaggerating the images. This was noted in relation to the close-ups of the head ape and some of the evil character Clayton, which looked fearsome.

In addition to animation, the fact that *Tarzan* is a well-known story and that it is a film produced by Disney studios, appeared to have shaped the opinions of some participants. One male participant considered *Tarzan* to be '*well presented and with characters well defined as Disney films always are*'. A female participant in the younger group, suggested that '*Disney movies are always appealing as they carry a strong message and manage to appeal to a wide audience*'.

The Disney label on *Tarzan* seemed to reassure parents that this was a film specifically geared to children and that they should feel relaxed that the content was suitable for all ages.

Nevertheless, some members of the focus groups recognised some changes in Disney movies over time which they may not like but saw as inevitable.

*I was comparing Tarzan with The Jungle Book. They are so different. After many years of animated movies Disney is becoming more realistic, harsher in portraying reality.*

*Children are getting more sophisticated and savvy and Disney appeals to that market, they are producing what children want.*

There was general agreement that children's appetite for drama and action in films meant that Disney had to keep pace with the demands of a young audience.

### **The Hanging Scene**

The 'hanging scene' was identified by several participants as potentially disturbing for children.

*That scene with Clayton, maybe kids want to ask their parents, what happened there?*

In this particular scene, the evil character Clayton is held by vines wrapped around his neck and he drops, implicitly hanged (off-screen) with a shadow indicating the action.

One of the older woman on the Panel found the hanging '*frightening for the very young*' and expressing her disapproval, suggested that '*...they could have done it in some other way, I thought it wasn't necessary, the implication was too strong*'.

Some of the older members considered the hanging out of character for a kid's Disney film. In this genre, it was expected that the bad guy would have simply fallen out of the tree, '*splat on the ground*' with no further detail.

By contrast, another participant considered it '*clever*', because it was '*so subtle that it wouldn't*

*be disturbing*'. Others said it was so subtle they in fact had not even realised there was an implied hanging.

*It was so subtle that I didn't pick up on the shadow.*

### 6.5.3 Adult Themes

The Panel as a whole identified some elements which they considered to be 'adult themes'. While acknowledging that 'dangerous' issues were handled well, some members were concerned about the responses of children to the underlying messages of the film. The themes of belonging and betrayal were raised in both groups.

*I picked up in this movie not traumatic, but some serious issues for a child. One is the issue of betrayal and the other is the issue of belonging. For a child, what is that? Where does he belong? For a child this is a very serious question because a child hasn't faced such a serious question before.*

Another theme discussed by the Panel was the death of Tarzan's human parents and then his 'ape' father. One participant wondered how far parents can go in protecting children from 'real life' issues and said there was no point in hiding the depiction of death.

*My father actually died in my house recently. My little daughter was really scared and I had to explain to her what happened. How much do you protect a child? They have to learn sooner or later about real life things, they have to know about it.*

In this area, there were some differences in the Panel's views about shielding children. Some participants stated that children 'need to know and deal with real life issues', stressing the capability of most children to make their own decisions about what they should view.

*You can also be guided by a child. My son just turned ten and two years ago he wouldn't watch "The X Files" He said "I know it's going to scare me, I'm not going to watch it", whereas now he wants to watch "Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>" and all the rest of*

*them. He knows what he can cope with and even though I believed he could cope with "The X Files", he was guided by his own feelings.*

On the other hand, other members of the Panel stressed the need to protect children from certain 'real life issues', stressing the role of parental guidance.

*It has to do a lot with the parents of the child, how they explain it. My sister used to watch Freddy Krueger movies and my mum was sure my sister knew this was all pretend, it wasn't real.*

*You need the (consumer) advice. Then you decide if your kids are going to be able to cope with whatever is being thrown at them.*

*The movie rather than offering answers it just poses questions, that's why I think guidance is necessary for this movie.*

### 6.5.4 Initial Panel Classification

Immediately after viewing the film but before the group discussion, participants nominated in a questionnaire a minimum age suitable to view *Tarzan* and their decision on a classification.

In the younger group, four participants thought *Tarzan* suitable for people of any age. The rest of the younger group, suggested children from three to five years of age as a suitable audience.

In the older group there were also four participants that considered *Tarzan* suitable for all ages, the rest of the group suggested it was suitable for older children, ranging from five to seven years of age.

#### Tarzan (PG)

|    | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|----|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| G  | 10          | 8             | 2           |
| PG | 10          | 2             | 8           |

It can be seen that prior to the discussion the Panel was evenly divided between a G and a PG

classification (ten each). While the majority of the participants in the younger group gave *Tarzan* a G classification (eight out of ten participants), exactly the inverse occurred in the older group. In this group, eight of the participants gave the film a PG classification and two a G classification.

### **Justification of G by the Participants**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film G:

*There is nothing in the film which could cause undue distress to any member of the audience.*

*Good clean fun. A few 'spooky' spots but nothing over the top to warrant a PG.*

*A small amount of violence but it is animated and no shocking/disturbing images are shown.*

*Low menace in the violence and very little of other elements.*

*I didn't doubt for a second giving it a G because all the issues that could be disturbing were handled very well. If I compare this movie with the old Lassie films, I was upset for days watching them!*

*With the hanging scene, I thought this is a PG but it didn't happen, it was so subtle that I decided a G.*

*That scene with the pirates trying to capture all the monkeys was very dark. I think that if any of the gorillas had actually got hurt, it would be a PG, but it didn't happen.*

*I gave it a G because I'm comparing Tarzan with a lot of G movies I've seen. The violence on the film is low, it's not overdone and I don't think any of the scenes will cause any emotional damage.*

Another participant who gave *Tarzan* a G, thought about his own childhood when classifying the movie.

*When I was ten I was already watching horror films and I don't think that there was any film that really upset me.*

### **Justification of PG by the Participants**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film PG:

*The themes of belonging and family could have a confusing effect on children with the combination of Tarzan's rejection by a father figure.*

*Soft violence, frightening for the very young...(children) wouldn't like the hanging scene.*

*The sadness of the father dying, the sadness of that scene, if they hadn't killed him off, I would give the movie a G.*

*There was an element of violence, although not very graphic, no blood letting. Violently expressive faces. (It) could be frightening to some younger viewers.*

*Although there are some scenes that appear to be violent they are not threatening. In my opinion, I would recommend the film to those with children to watch together.*

*I gave the movie a PG. I would like to watch this movie with young kids and sit next to them. Some images are scary, you can see their (characters') eyes and it sticks in kids' minds.*

*I think it is a PG. I have a ten year old and he is very sentimental. I think he would be upset by the story. I would like to be there while he watches it.*

*I have a niece, she's so sensitive, she's scared of everything and she gets very, very upset. But other children may be totally impervious.*

### **6.5.5 Classification Discussion**

After discussing and debating aspects of the film, only two participants changed their views regarding the classification of *Tarzan* (in the table below, in brackets is shown the participants' classification *before* the discussion). As can be seen, the changes resulted in no difference to the

overall classification given by the Panel because the changes ‘cancelled out’ each other. In the younger group one female participant classified *Tarzan* as PG having previously classified the film G. Another participant in the same group changed her classification to G from PG.

**Tarzan (PG)**

|    | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|----|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| G  | 10 (10)     | 8 (8)         | 2 (2)       |
| PG | 10 (10)     | 2 (2)         | 8 (8)       |

Thus the final classification resulted in an even division between G and PG. Importantly, it needs to be remembered that both classifications were recorded before decision of both Boards was revealed to the Panel.

**6.5.6 Participants’ Assessment of the Board’s Decision**

After the Panel had made their final post-discussion classifications, participants read and discussed the Classification Board and Review Board reports on *Tarzan*.

A participant in the younger group considered some of the Boards’ comments as ‘over-cautious’. While disagreeing with a PG classification he said:

*I don’t know, the child that would be disturbed by some of the themes in the movie would be disturbed by sitting in a dark cinema as well. I think everything is handled in a very appropriate way.*

When supporting a G classification, another member of the younger group introduced the issue of parental responsibility regarding their own children.

*If parents are sending a three year old to the movies by themselves they shouldn’t be the ones going “oh, they didn’t rate it PG”. They should be more responsible for their own children, responsibility rests with the parents, not with the Board.*

Other two participants in the younger group compared *Tarzan* with other films classified G.

*When I walked out after the movie I thought of a PG but when I compared this movie with other G movies like ‘Toy Story’ I decided that I can’t give it a PG.*

*I can’t justify a PG here because some of other movies that have been classified G.*

*I said G because I compared this movie with a lot of movies I’ve seen with my child like 101 Dalmatians. That one has a little bit of violence and my daughter didn’t have any problems with it, so I feel comfortable with this one.*

In the course of evaluating the Boards’ comments on violent depictions, at least one of the scenes identified by both Boards as depicting strong violence was seen in a more benign manner by Panel members. In this scene, a female gorilla saves a baby from the attack of a leopard. While both Boards considered the scene to be ‘frightening’ the majority of both focus groups disagreed considering that the comical elements of the scene counteracted its violence.

*Well, the baby is laughing all the way through, giggling. It wasn’t really threatening to the baby and I think that’s the key to that scene. I disagree with the Board.*

There was a similar disagreement with the Boards’ views on another scene, where Jane is chased by a group of angry monkeys. While for the Classification Board this particular scene ‘could be confusing or upsetting’ as a consequence of Jane’s initial terror, Panel members felt that the humour of the scene changed the whole tone.

However, while some members of the Panel were not persuaded by the Boards’ reasoning, the majority were able to understand the Boards’ ‘logical’ decision on the film. Also, it is important to note that the Panel’s differences when classifying *Tarzan* were also reflected in the Classification Board’s decision, with a minority of the classifiers supporting a G classification.

Thus, a number of Panel members who gave *Tarzan* a G classification, found the PG

classification given by both Boards quite understandable.

*It's fair enough a PG classification, I can understand that, you have to put yourself in the kid's shoes and there are going to be kids sensitive to it and kids that don't care.*

*I gave it a G but I can see why the Board gave it a PG.*

*I gave it a G but I'm very comfortable with the PG.*

*Yes, it can be a PG, I'm not violently opposed to it because I can understand their position.*

The reason the Boards' classification appeared reasonable to the Panellists was undoubtedly because the aspects of *Tarzan* used to support the Boards' PG classification were ones independently noted by the Panellists. The major difference between the Boards and many Panellists was in regard to the likely effect these scenes and elements could be expected to have on very young viewers. The Panel saw the Review Board as being responsibly cautious in alerting parents in the consumer advice that aspects of *Tarzan* might be upsetting to some young children.

It is possible that the fact that *Tarzan* was animated and a Disney film led some panellists to take a more benign view of aspects of the film that they might have otherwise taken. Certainly their comments on the animation suggested this. Nonetheless, there were some strong 'hold-outs' who felt the Boards' classification reflected an unduly cautious position.

## 6.6 CONCLUSIONS - PERTH PANEL

### 6.6.1 The Process of the Community Assessment Panel

The methodology for establishing and conducting the Perth Community Assessment Panel worked effectively and reflected the intent of the research, which was to gather a group of ordinary members

of the community and after briefly training them in the classification system, have them apply it to three pre-release films which have been classified by the Board.

During the discussions, members of the Panel referred frequently to the classification manuals, making regular use of the official terminology.

The Panel's classifications were similar to those of the Board and Panel members generally found the Board's rulings to be clear and justifiable. When the viewpoints of the Panel and Board differed, Panellists generally understood the Board's position and were often in agreement with the Board's opinions. A useful aspect of the methodology was to assess the effects of peer pressure on the individual's post-discussion classification. This was of particular importance in the Perth Panel where one member was initially reluctant to reveal that his initial classification of a film was significantly at variance with most of the group's classifications. After participants listened and responded to each other's views, some changed their classification, especially in the case of *A Walk on the Moon*. The lengthy discussions also allowed Panellists to consider certain aspects of the film which some acknowledged they had initially overlooked or had not recalled.

### 6.6.2 Concerns about Films

The Perth Panellists shared common concerns about film content, although there were occasions when some members attached more significance to particular issues.

Some opinions and classifications did not reflect simply an evaluation of the film in isolation but in the context of their life experience and other films. People often referred to the classification of other films to establish benchmarks. For instance, *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* was evaluated in the context of its predecessor, *Once Were Warriors*, and *Tarzan* was compared with other Disney films.

The personal experiences of some participants also played an important part in their evaluation of the films. Panellists tended to identify with the storyline or particular characters of the film, adding another important dimension to the classification. The personal situation of some participants may be reflected in particular

storylines and this can cause a specific personal reaction to certain scenes, characters or films in general. These personal responses could influence the classification decision in unpredictable ways. A negative response could lead to a wish for greater restriction of a film, while a positive response tended to equate with a more open classification.

The moral message behind the narrative was also an important element for Panellists when classifying the films. The happy endings of *A Walk on the Moon* and *Tarzan*, the positive change of character experienced by the male lead in *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* and the negative depiction of gang life in the same film, influenced the Panel views, possibly lowering the classifications they placed on the film. If there was seen to be a valid moral message for younger people, the Panel seemed more inclined to feel that a young audience should see the film. The influence of a 'moral radar' was apparent through much of the discussion. For instance, in the Perth films the sex was less acceptable because it was featured in an adulterous affair; the violence was more acceptable because gang life was shown negatively.

Overall the three films did not contain a great deal of material which could be said to actually trouble the Panel. However, there was a consistency in the elements or themes that were areas of concern for the Perth Panel. Violence and alcohol abuse dominated the debate in *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?*, adultery was the chief topic in *A Walk on the Moon* and adult themes and 'animated' violence were the main concerns of Panellists when discussing *Tarzan*.

In the preliminary questionnaire, fourteen out of twenty participants claimed to be concerned or very concerned about violent film content. While there was some discussion about the effect of violence on children, the majority of the Panel focussed on their own responses and agreed that violence in context with the storyline *can* be acceptable. In regard to *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?*, many participants who abhorred violence, accepted it as being in context in a film about gang battles.

Sex was not an element that received great attention from the groups, despite the sexual

content of *A Walk on the Moon*. Older Panellists tended to be more concerned than the younger ones about sex in films but it was quite difficult to elicit any discussion of the topic despite much prompting by the facilitator in the older group. The mature aged participants appeared to find difficulty in expressing their views about sex in films. Hesitant comments suggested that they were more likely to accept lighthearted 'fooling around', whereas scenes which were intensely passionate made them uncomfortable, as did the notion of watching sex scenes in the presence of young people.

The use of coarse language was noted by the Panel in relation to *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* and *A Walk on the Moon*. While the use of coarse language was seen to be in context with the storyline in both instances, some Panellists were critical of the word 'fuck' being said by a child in *A Walk on the Moon* (however playfully, and in only one scene), especially as it appeared to be condoned by the parents.

Children's capacity to understand and relate to adult films was often raised by the Panel. In both groups, there were clear differences between participants who thought that children should confront 'real life' issues raised by the films and those who believed that children should not be exposed to controversial material. There were fundamentally different attitudes about how much children should be protected and whether it was appropriate for children to learn about life's harsh realities through film. These differences did not appear to relate to gender or age but were more a feature of individual differences and possibly the person's family background. Often, when deciding on classifications, Panellists referred to their own children in order to measure a child's capacity to understand the issues.

### 6.6.3 Comparison with Classification Board Decisions

The majority of the Panel gave *A Walk on the Moon* and *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* the same classification as the Board. A few Panel members opted for both lower and higher classifications than the Board. In the case of *Tarzan*, participants were equally divided in their classification, (rated PG by the Board) but rated G by half of the Panellists and PG by the other half.

This division was reflected in the Board's decision-making where a minority felt the treatment of themes and violent elements careful and discreet, warranting a G classification where the majority thought PG to be more appropriate.

In this final section a summary of the Panel's positions in relation to each of the films is compared with the Board's position, concentrating on any point of difference. It can be assumed that if differences are not indicated, then the Panel and Board were in agreement.

### ***A Walk on the Moon (rated M)***

A majority of the Panel, 15 out of 20 participants, rated the film M while the other five nominated MA. All the participants classifying the film MA belonged to the older group.

Numerous comments suggested that suitability for children was of less importance because young people would simply not have any interest in the film and so much of it would 'go over their heads'.

Panellists focussed on similar issues as the Board but placed a greater emphasis on adultery and its effect on the family. Panellists considered that the theme of adultery was an adult theme that could have a strong impact on younger children, especially those with separated or divorced parents. The sexual experimentation by the young daughter was not of concern to the majority of Panellists (with the exception of one young father objecting to the girl kissing of her boyfriend).

The two sex scenes between the mother and her lover provoked little comment or concern from the younger group. By contrast some of the older Panellists appeared to be uncomfortable talking about or viewing any sex scenes. The scene of the couple embracing naked in the waterfall was seen as too explicit by a few of the mature aged participants. The scene of the couple in his caravan was seen by most of the older participants as stronger in impact than the waterfall scene and was regarded as more controversial than suggested by the Board's report.

Members of both groups agreed with the Board's consumer advice of 'medium level coarse

language'. However, some participants objected strongly to 'fuck' being said by a child.

The sixties era depicted in the film appeared to make the relatively incidental visuals of drug use acceptable to both groups. Participants considered smoking marijuana appropriate to the historical context of the Woodstock Festival. Only one participant thought that drug use should be mentioned in the consumer advice and thus disagreed with the Board's on this issue.

### ***What Becomes of the Broken Hearted? (rated MA)***

A large majority of the Panel (16 out of 20 participants) classified the film MA, while three rated it R and one M.

The Panel agreed with much of the Board's assessment of the film and with the Board's conclusion that the violence in *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* is not gratuitous and is always in context.

The Board and the Panel had somewhat differing views on consumer advice for this film. While the Board suggested consumer advice of 'medium level violence', some participants considered the level of violence to be high. When judging the violent content, they particularly concentrated on scenes featuring hand-held weapons. Scenes of close-up fighting with clubs, spanners and fists disturbed the Panel far more than scenes with guns.

Several members of the Panel felt the level of coarse language in the film to be high, while the Board classified it as 'medium level'. While agreeing it was in context with the storyline, some Panellists felt that the frequency and aggression of the swearing warranted consumer advice of high level coarse language. In short, a number felt that the repetitiveness (frequency) of the swearing raised it to a high level.

The Board's report comments that the hero's treatment of women features prominently but does not expand on this issue. Violence towards women in the film was given much greater attention by the Panel who were often disturbed by the portrayal of women in several scenes,

including women abused by gang members and their role as 'victims'.

The cumulative impact of certain classifiable elements was important to participants when classifying the films. In the case of *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?*, the Panellists who maintained it should be R-rated referred to the 'cumulative impact' of repeated violence and they disagreed with the Board that this amounted to an MA.

Objections were also based on a view that the film was bleak and had no moral code of value. By contrast, the majority of the Panel saw some positive messages in the hero's change of behaviour as suggested in the Board's report.

### **Tarzan (rated PG)**

The Panel was equally divided in classifying the film. Half of the participants rated the film G while the other half rated it PG. A similar mix of responses was reflected in the Classification Board's report, but ended with a majority in favour of PG.

When classifying this film, there were distinct differences between the groups. While in the younger group, eight participants out of ten classified the film G, in the older group, eight participants out of ten classified *Tarzan* PG.

While the older group tended to agree fully with the Boards' views, some members of the younger group considered the Boards' concerns to be 'over-cautious'.

In agreement with the Review Board, the older group asserted that some of the low level violence may upset children so there was a need to warn parents. In particular, the older group concentrated on the hanging scene, which the Classification Board also identified as a '*strong depiction of violence*'. Another of the scenes identified by the Board as depicting '*strong violence*' was seen in a more benign manner by Panel members. The female gorilla saving a baby from a leopard attack, was described by the Board as '*frightening*', whereas the Panel considered the comical elements of the scene counteracted its threat.

When evaluating the film, both groups, but the older one in particular, also discussed the presence of adult themes, particularly the death of Tarzan's father and issues of belonging and betrayal, which were not explicitly addressed in the Boards' reports. In general the Panel seemed somewhat more relaxed about the violent content of *Tarzan* than did either Board. However, they had more concerns about the emotional impact of the themes of family and adoption than was evident in the Board reports.

When evaluating the violence, the majority of participants were influenced by the fact that *Tarzan* is an animated film made by Disney and clearly intended for children. Numerous Panellists stressed that although the animation looked 'real', kids would readily identify it as fantasy. An issue about the animation that the Panel raised was its potential to make images hugely exaggerated and therefore more frightening.

## 7. ADELAIDE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PANEL

### 7.1 ADELAIDE PANEL PROCEDURE

The Adelaide Community Assessment Panel was the second Panel conducted and took place from 29 to 31 October 1999 over a Friday night, Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon. The viewing and discussions took place at the Greater Union Megaplex Marion in Oaklands Park. The methodology used was as described earlier in Section 2 of this report.

The films viewed by the Adelaide Panel were:

- *The Iron Giant* - an animated film about a giant robot from outer space.
- *This is My Father* - a drama describing a teacher's search for his father.
- *The General's Daughter* - a contemporary grim drama set in a military base.

The selection of the films viewed was determined by the product that had been classified by the Classification Board within the timeframe and had not yet been released. (Unbeknownst to the OFLC, one of the films - *The General's Daughter* - was scheduled for pre-release screening in Adelaide although subsequent discussions with the Panellists indicated that none of them had recognised this and were not, therefore, aware of the classification the film had received.)

### 7.2 ADELAIDE PANEL COMPOSITION

A locally based specialist recruitment company recruited potential participants for the Panel in accord with the demographic specifications established by the Research Reference Group. The following table summarises the main characteristics of the Adelaide Panel members.

**TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF ADELAIDE PANEL PARTICIPANTS**

| <b>Participants</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Location</b>  | <b>Family Status</b>  | <b>Occupational Group</b>              |
|---------------------|------------|---------------|------------------|---|--|
| Participant 1       | 16         | M             | Morphett Vale    | Single - no children  | Student                                |
| Participant 2       | 17         | F             | Reynella         | Single - no children  | Student                                |
| Participant 3       | 20         | M             | Aldgate          | Single - no children  | Apprentice Plumber                     |
| Participant 4       | 20         | F             | Kilburn          | Never married - 1 child aged 4 years                          | Volunteer Worker                       |
| Participant 5       | 29         | F             | Flagstaff Hill   | Married - 2 children aged 2 and 4 years                       | Chef                                   |
| Participant 6       | 29         | M             | Hallett Cove     | Married - 1 child aged 1 year                                 | Police Officer                         |
| Participant 7       | 31         | M             | Seaford          | Married - 3 children aged 3, 9 and 16 years                   | Part-time Student-<br>Household Duties |
| Participant 8       | 33         | M             | Warradale        | Married - 3 children aged 2, 4 and 6 years                    | Manager                                |
| Participant 9       | 34         | M             | Brampton         | Single - no children  | Gardener                               |
| Participant 10      | 34         | F             | Clarence Gardens | De facto - 2 children aged 7 and 8 years                      | Childcare Worker                       |
| Participant 11      | 35         | F             | McLaren Vale     | De facto - 3 children aged 18 months, 4 and 5 years           | Household Duties                       |
| Participant 12      | 38         | M             | Modbury North    | Married - 2 children aged 6 and 10 years                      | Technical Officer                      |
| Participant 13      | 40         | M             | Torrensville     | Married - 6 children aged 5 months, 3, 8, 11, 13 and 16 years | Operations Coordinator                 |
| Participant 14      | 44         | F             | Seaview Downs    | Married - 2 children aged 3 and 7 years                       | Shop Assistant                         |
| Participant 15      | 47         | F             | Bridgewater      | Separated - 3 children aged 15, 18 and 21 years               | Household Duties                       |
| Participant 16      | 50         | F             | Brooklyn Park    | Divorced - 2 children aged 17 and 19 years                    | Financial Consultant                   |
| Participant 17      | 51         | M             | Eden Hills       | De facto - 1 child aged 15 years                              | Investigation Officer (Gov. Dept.)     |
| Participant 18      | 52         | F             | Peterhead        | Widowed - no children   | Customer Services Officer              |
| Participant 19      | 58         | M             | Morphett Vale    | De facto - 1 child aged 33 years                              | Maintenance Fitter                     |
| Participant 20      | 62         | F             | Klemzig          | Married - 2 children aged 32 and 35 years                     | Retired                                |

## 7.3 ADELAIDE PANEL'S RESPONSES TO THE IRON GIANT

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

*A young boy named Hogarth befriends a giant robot from outer space. He enlists the help of a scrapyards dealer named Dean to keep the robot safe from government intervention.*

The Board classified the film PG and the consumer advice was 'medium level violence'.

On 10 September 1999, the distributor of the film applied for a review of the decision by the Classification Board to assign the classification PG. The Classification Review Board decided to confirm the decision but it varied the consumer advice to 'some scenes may scare very young children'.

### 7.3.1 General Response

In general, *The Iron Giant* generated positive comments from both the younger and the older focus groups. Members of the Panel described the film as an 'enjoyable children's movie', 'moving and emotional'. A few remarks of caution were made regarding some scenes being 'scary for younger kids' but overall the comments were positive and they consistently described the film as 'entertaining' with a 'nice story'. The following comments were from the younger focus group:

*It was moving and emotional. It was also fun and comical. It comes across with a moral message: violence is not acceptable.*

*Entertaining. Good story line...*

*I enjoyed the movie, it was quite exciting in some parts. I think this movie would be good for kids.*

*I thought the movie had a good storyline with friendship and morals although I think the giant might be a bit scary and death hard to explain to younger kids.*

*An enjoyable children's movie.*

*Ok. Good plot and animation but for me it was boring.*

The following comments were from the older focus group:

*I liked it. It has humour although a few scenes were scary.*

*I enjoyed the movie. Sensitive, caring.*

*Entertaining. A bit of comedy, good music and soundtrack. A nice story with a subtle moral aimed at children.*

*I enjoyed the storyline. It was a kind of old time animation.*

*When it started I thought "Oh no! animated" but then I got into it and I enjoyed the movie.*

Some members of the Panel indicated that the film's nature makes *The Iron Giant* a film that would appeal more to boys.

*I think boys would enjoy this movie more than girls. (older group)*

*A very good film for boys. (younger group)*

*More of a boy's film. I thought it was a bit scary for younger children. (younger group)*

*Definitely a boy's film. (older group)*

*I didn't really liked it, probably because I have granddaughters and they wouldn't like it. (older group)*

### 7.3.2 Violence

There was a general agreement that violence was the chief element to be considered when classifying *The Iron Giant*. Violence tended to be used broadly to cover aggressive content.

Panelists in both groups discussed some of the film's aggressive scenes and the possible impact on younger children.

*It's not a heavy violence, it's kind of mild violence but strong enough to stay in kids' memory. (older group)*

*Scary. There were some things that need a little bit of attention, not a good example for young kids. I know it's animated but things like climbing on the roof of the house, running away from home...guns, I think perhaps in America is a little bit different because there are guns in every house... (older group)*

*Parents are sometimes quite oblivious of how much kids are picking up even if they don't understand. The emotional impact of some scenes can be huge. (younger group)*

When evaluating the violent element in *The Iron Giant*, younger participants often referred to other animated films as a guide to their assessment.

*There's nothing in the movie that can upset my son, it's nothing that he doesn't see on TV... Tom and Jerry hitting each other with a hammer is more realistic. (younger group)*

*Nothing different that they don't get from TV, Transformers or other stuff. (younger group)*

*What's the classification of Power Rangers? That has a lot of violence. If you look at the stuff on Saturday mornings, that's much more violent than this movie. (younger group)*

*101 Dalmatians is a G. That movie has cruelty against animals, this movie is not worse. (younger group)*

### 7.3.3 Adult Threats to the Boy

The younger Panellists considered that the threats by the government agent, Kent, towards Hogarth constituted the strongest element of the film. The most controversial scene was said to be that in which Kent interrogates Hogarth and threatens to remove him from his mother if the boy does not cooperate by disclosing the robot's location.

*When the kid is dragged into that room. That's kidnapping, that's scary. (younger group)*

*That scene with Kent... that was too extreme for a kid, that was too rough. (younger group)*

*I think the aggressiveness of Kent is the worst part of the movie... this person in an authoritative position threatens to take him away from his mother. (younger group)*

*The intensity which Kent threatens the kid. (younger group)*

*I was concerned about weapons but now I'm more concerned about the threats to the kid. (younger group)*

*The violence when he grabs the kid by the throat. I don't like violence but my kids watch it but as a parent I get worried. (older group)*

A younger man indicated that his concern for the threat to the boy arose from a personal experience he had had. Others agreed with him that children would be more fearful of threats from a man than from a creature of fantasy.

*A friend of mine came close to losing his boy and his boy knows that ...even in this fictional movie to have that type of violence being brought up is scary, it can be upsetting for him. (younger group)*

*A kid would be scared if someone in a power position is threatening him. I think kids absorb this sort of stuff more than what people think. (younger group)*

To some members of the younger group, Hogarth's living in a single parent household made the threats more unacceptable.

*The issue of the mother being a sole parent and then the kid got threatened "if you don't tell me I'm gonna take you away from your mother". (younger group)*

*A lot of kids from single parent families would find that scary. (younger group)*

### 7.3.4 The Final Battle

The scene of a lengthy battle between the army and the robot was considered by the older Panellists to be the most troublesome in the film.

*The army and the evilness of them [attempting] to destroy the robot. (older group)*

*The shooting, all the violence in the final battle. (older group)*

*The shooting of the giant by the army is a violent part but anyway, your child won't turn into Martin Bryant and pick up a gun. (younger group)*

Younger participants mentioned that Hogarth's successful handling of the dangerous situations counteracted the violence to some degree.

*...but the kid tricked him, he escaped, that was good. (younger group)*

*What defuses some of the scary parts is the kid. He solved the situations so well. (younger group)*

### 7.3.5 The Character of the Iron Giant

Some members of the younger group indicated that as the film unfolded, their first impression was of a frightening giant who could endanger children, but that this altered as the film unfolded.

*My first impression was that the movie was a little bit frightening for young kids. That was my first impression but I finally enjoyed it. The giant was friendly; it was quite sweet.*

*I thought at the beginning that little kids may get scared of the big giant but it was just the initial impression, big, scary looking. It ends with a good friendship story between the boy and the giant.*

*The adults in the film had a misunderstanding of the robot, they judged the giant by his size...the boy judged him for his actions, not for how big or scary he was. (younger group)*

Panellists indicated that the sudden changes of the robot's mood might be potentially frightening to younger children. An example was the scene where Hogarth brandishes a toy gun at the robot provoking a defensive, combative reflex in the robot. This unpredictability was a concern regarding its impact on young children.

*That would scare younger kids when the kid was shooting a plastic gun at the robot and all the sudden the robot gets angry. (younger group)*

*You never could get the trust of the robot, when you thought it was friendly all of a sudden it became violent again. He could snap at any time. (younger group)*

*The turn of character of the robot would scare kids a little bit. When he got angry his eyes turned red. (older group)*

*With Transformers the kids generally know the capabilities of the robot but in this movie they didn't know what the robot was going to do next. (younger group)*

### 7.3.6 Animated Movies

Participants in the younger group discussed the animation in *The Iron Giant* in terms of its effect on children. They expected that children would differentiate between 'reality' and the fantasy of the animation.

*I thought the robot losing his arm wouldn't have any impact on children, that's not real. They may be scared with things related to humans, but the robot is not real.*

*Because it is a cartoon they wouldn't think too much. Cartoons always have happy endings so children wait to the end to see how it gets resolved.*

Some participants regarded animated films as being exclusively directed at children.

*I think being a cartoon appeals to kids no matter what, regardless what the contents are. (younger group)*

*My kid watches cartoons no matter what's about. (younger group)*

### 7.3.7 The Atmosphere of the Film

A few younger Panellists commented on the overall menacing style of some of the film's elements. For instance, the powerful sound effects of the film and the darkness of particular scenes were identified.

*The sound these days is much more powerful. Sometimes, that scares kids much more than the actual film.*

*The darkness...there were a lot of scenes at nighttime in the bush when the robot was hiding.*

The opening depiction of a wild storm at sea and the initial scenes of the robot were regarded as intentionally monumental in scale and potentially frightening.

### 7.3.8 Moral Messages

Panellists were impressed by the underlying messages in the narrative of *The Iron Giant* regarding such things as tolerance, friendship and individuality as forming important components of the film's moral message.

*I think it teaches tolerance. The robot is so different to him [Hogarth] but you have to respect differences, everybody is different and you have to respect them. (younger group)*

*The robot learned to appreciate life and that may have helped his decision at the end to protect those lives and putting himself at risk. (younger group)*

*The message is you are who you choose to be ... you don't have to always listen to people telling you what to do. It is teaching them to be individuals but also respect for authority. (older group)*

*The friendship between the robot and the boy was established very early. The importance of friendship is one of the main messages of the film. (older group)*

The robot's strong reaction to the death of an animal and the boy's subsequent lecture about guns was considered to be a valuable lesson for a young audience.

*When the deer was shot, there is a strong message in the film, a moral message. (older group)*

An older man stressed that some of the themes raised in the film were important and children should not be shielded from confronting them.

*They dealt with death several times, the death of the robot, the deer, with the discussion of the soul...it's good to see these themes in a children's film. They need to start thinking about these things. (older group)*

Participants of the younger group debated the extent to which children would identify the moral messages in *The Iron Giant*.

*I think kids wouldn't pick up the layers. (younger group)*

*Kids won't get the messages, it depends how old they are. (younger group)*

*They get the main messages... the robot was protecting his little buddy when he was attacked. That's very simple they may not get all the details but they'll get the main messages. (younger group)*

### 7.3.9 Initial Panel Classification

Immediately after viewing the film but before the group discussion, participants nominated in a questionnaire a minimum age suitable to view *The Iron Giant* and their decision on a classification.

In the younger group, six participants thought the film suitable for children aged between four and five years old. The rest of the younger group suggested older children as a suitable audience; for instance, one participant nominated six years, one nominated seven years and two nominated eight years.

In the older group there were also six participants who considered *The Iron Giant* suitable for children aged between four and five years old. The rest of the older group nominated three (one participant), eight (two participants) and 12 years old (one participant) as a suitable audience.

As can be seen in the following table, the majority of the Panel classified the film PG, with a substantial minority allocating a G classification.

**The Iron Giant (PG)**

|    | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|----|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| G  | 6           | 2             | 4           |
| PG | 14          | 8             | 6           |

**Justification of G by the Panel**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film G:

*Close to PG but I do not consider the elements would affect young kids.*

*Definitively a G. A lot of things would go straight over the kid's head. It has a little bit of adventure, that's it.*

*It's more of a good will movie rather than a violent one. I gave it a G.*

*Violence but only mild.*

*There was no sex, coarse language, etc. The violence was minor.*

**Justification of PG by the Panel**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film PG:

*Rather loud and very dark for very young children.*

*The movie did contain some violence with a military involvement which could be classed as adult themes.*

*Although animated, the violence was too explicit for a G.*

*PG. There is enough there to upset some children.*

*The violence was not implied, I think the violence was quite explicit so by the guidelines I gave it a PG.*

*I went for a PG classification because when you have a G classification it means that everybody can watch it.*

*PG for the violence but there was a moral message to counteract the violence.*

*I gave it a PG because I would like to be there with my kid through the violent parts.*

**7.3.10 Classification Discussion**

After debating aspects of the film, four participants changed their views regarding the classification of *The Iron Giant* (in the table below in brackets is shown the participants' classification *before* the discussion). In the younger group, one participant classified *The Iron Giant* as G, having previously classified the film PG, while three participants from the older group changed their classification to PG from G.

**The Iron Giant (PG)**

|    | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|----|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| G  | 4 (6)       | 3 (2)         | 1 (4)       |
| PG | 16 (14)     | 7 (8)         | 9 (6)       |

**7.3.11 Participants' Assessment of the Board's Decision**

After the Panel had made their final post-discussion classifications, participants read and discussed the Classification Board and Review Board reports on *The Iron Giant*.

A participant in the older group indicated his surprise with the numerous classifiable elements identified by the Boards.

*They definitely saw more in this movie than I did.*

Another participant in the older group disagreed with the PG classification.

*There is not much emphasis on the violence. The level of violence was acceptable. It's not as much of an issue as they are raising here.*

A couple of participants in the older group supported the Review Board's variation of the

consumer advice from ‘medium level violence’ to ‘some scenes may scare very young children’.

*I was surprised by the “medium level” violence because it’s pretty low. I agree with the new consumer advice.*

In supporting a PG classification, a member of the younger group agreed with the Classification Board’s decision to single out the scene when the investigator interrogates Hogarth and threatens to take him away from his mother, as confusing or upsetting without adult guidance.

*The Board’s idea of ongoing threat to the child is expressed extremely clear. They didn’t consider that threat as implied. It was direct, direct violence.*

Another participant in the younger group who classified the movie as G found the positive attitude of Hogarth when facing danger to be an element which softens the impact of the violence.

*The kid didn’t seem to be very disturbed about it. He confronted everything head on. If the kid would have been worried about the whole situation that would have been different.*

### 7.4 ADELAIDE PANEL’S RESPONSES TO THIS IS MY FATHER

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

*An American history teacher travels to Ireland to discover his roots and learns of the doomed love affair between his father and mother.*

The Board classified the film M and the consumer advice was ‘adult themes, low level coarse language, low level sex scene’.

#### 7.4.1 General Response

The Panel stated, on the whole, that they enjoyed the film. The majority of responses from both groups referred to the romance and the emotional intensity of the film.

*I thought the film was very emotive. I liked the way the film got very involved and descriptive about their lives, both past and present. (younger group)*

*Excellent. An emotional tear jerker with a realistic storyline. (younger group)*

*I loved it. I would go and see it again. Very moving. I cried. (older group)*

*A lovely film. I enjoyed it. It has some humour and sadness. (older group).*

*I enjoyed it. A very powerful film. (older group)*

*I thought it was a very nice, sweet movie without being too soppy. (younger group)*

A couple of the older males said they enjoyed the film but thought a female audience would appreciate it more.

*This is more of a movie for the ladies, the romance and that.*

*I liked it but I think my wife would enjoy this movie more than I did.*

A common theme raised by both groups suggested that the film flashbacks switching from the past to the present were particularly effective.

*The flashbacks are very well handled... they didn’t tell the whole story based on that time because I think it would have been too much to take. You need the little breaks in present time to think back over it. (younger group)*

In the younger group, some participants considered the resolution of the film to be happy, whereas others in the same group were disappointed by the ‘sad’ ending of the film.

*I liked the movie. It’s a true love story but it didn’t have a happy ending and I like happy endings.*

*It was a happy ending. It wasn’t the happy ending he was after but he found him, he found his father.*

*It was a happy ending... early in the movie he was listening to the class and he didn’t want to hear about their families but in the end he was telling them about his family.*

## 7.4.2 Adult Themes

There was a general agreement that the majority of adult themes present in the film were very well handled and justified by the storyline. Participants from both groups indicated that the 'controversial' scenes were relevant to the storyline. As one of the younger woman stated:

*Although suicide and sex were subjects of the movie, they weren't over-done. They didn't have too much emphasis. It was tastefully done and they were part of the storyline.*

Panellists identified suicide, religious practice, and alcoholism to be the main classifiable elements of the film.

### **The Suicide Scene**

The suicide of Keiran was felt to be one of the most controversial elements of *This is My Father*. The scene portrays Keiran hanging from a tree in a long shot followed by closer shots of men taking his body down.

*... the hanging scene. Because of the realism of the film I would be concerned to bring a child who is too young to watch a film like this one. (younger group)*

*It's not as much the physical aspect of the suicide as the emotional side, the reason why he did it. (older group)*

*Younger kids may ask questions about the hanging. (younger group)*

*I thought the hanging scene was strong. I knew it was going to happen. (older group)*

*The suicide is one of the main adult themes of the movie. (older group)*

*The suicide is the strongest element of the film. (younger group)*

One younger man was particularly troubled by this scene as a result of a personal experience. Some of the younger participants felt strongly that suicide was always an unsuitable theme for young people no matter how it was handled in a film.

*It's a big issue for me because I've got two friends that hung themselves so I can relate to that a bit more.*

### **The Confessional Scene and the Role of the Priest**

The Panel expressed concern about a particular scene where Keiran is interrogated by a priest in a confessional. In the scene, the priest asked Keiran questions about homosexuality and masturbation (*'What do you think about when you touch yourself? Do you think about men?'*) which some participants viewed as voyeurism.

The depiction of religion itself was considered to be a controversial adult theme by many of the Panellists. Several older Catholic participants were disturbed by the portrayal of the Church which they largely felt was quite accurate.

*The scene in the confessional box was very strong. I'm a Catholic myself and I understand. I grew up with that. (older group)*

*The effect that these priests had in so many people's lives... it caused his death in my eyes because the pressure he felt to conform above everything else. (older group)*

*The religious aspect. All these mad people yelling "you're gonna burn in hell". A young person, maybe going to a Catholic school may be upset. (older group)*

The younger group was also quite shocked by the priest. A couple of the males suggested that the priest was masturbating during the confession and in any case found his obvious excitement to be distasteful.

*The priest questioning... he was quite devious. (younger group)*

*'The priest's role. There is enough there to raise some questions about who I see the movie with'. (younger group).*

*The first thing the priest asked was if it was about a boy. Naturally you'd think it's about a girl. But the first reference was*

*about a boy. I wasn't happy with that'.  
(younger group)*

*A lot of priests behaved like that but the sexual reference was too much. To refer to boys rather than girls. (younger group)*

### **Alcoholism**

Some participants in the older group identified the alcoholism of Fiona's mother as an element to be taken into consideration when classifying the movie. For instance, an older woman in the group stated that:

*I thought the mother drinking was a little bit too much. She was an alcoholic and she used emotional blackmail on her daughter. That's an adult theme.*

In the younger group, one participant raised the same issue but it was not further discussed by the rest of the group nor considered by the participants as a whole when classifying the movie.

*I didn't like the alcohol abuse of her mother. I found that a little bit disturbing.*

### **7.4.3 Coarse Language**

The language used in the film was not regarded as an important issue. Nevertheless, Panellists identified the use of the word 'fuck' as a classifiable element of the film. The use of the expletive by the son to his mother was considered to be inoffensive and part of the storyline.

*That's the world today I think, but you have to consider it when you classify the movie. (older group)*

*He used the f-word He had an argument with his mother and he slammed the door and he used the f-word to her. (older group)*

*There wasn't a lot of coarse language. "Fuck" I think, when he abused his mum. (younger group)*

*He used coarse language. He said 'fuck you, mum. (younger group)*

*... the swearing happened during an angry time. I don't think it was quite bad. (older group)*

A younger man identified the use of the word 'bastard' as an element that contributed to his classification of the film.

*... the use of the word bastard... I think that the context of it made it very emotive.*

### **7.4.4 Sex Scene**

Most Panellists felt that the tone of the sex scene between the two main characters, Keiran and Fiona, was appropriate in the narrative context. In general the sex scene received little attention by either group.

*I don't think it was offensive at all. (younger group)*

*... it was part of the story, it was tasteful. (older group)*

*The sex wasn't pornographic. It just showed the love and the bond between them. It showed how close they were. (younger group)*

The only element of the sex scene that prompted some minor concern from the younger group was the depiction of the heroine with blood on her hands and dress, implying that she has had sex for the first time. Some found it unnecessary while others said stressing her virginity was important.

*The bleeding may intrigue kids. I didn't expect the bleeding.*

*Why do you have to show the blood? Just saying "it hurts" would show that she was a virgin.*

*It was a necessary part. It was a statement saying that he was her first love.*

### **7.4.5 Drug Use**

Participants in the older group discussed drug references as one of the adult themes of the film and while recognising the minor importance of a scene containing a reference to 'joints', three

participants included the drug reference as one of the classifiable elements in their decision.

*In the classification, that would be an adult theme.*

*The joints... it was a passing comment but it should be considered.*

*I don't want to condone it but I don't want to condemn it either. I find it acceptable in the context of the movie. It's not a child's movie.*

A younger woman noted in her questionnaire that the drug reference was an element that contributed to her classification but she did not raise the issue and this theme was not discussed in her group.

#### 7.4.6 Initial Panel Classification

Immediately after viewing the film, participants nominated in a questionnaire the minimum age they thought acceptable to view *This is My Father* and the classification they would choose.

Nine Panellists nominated 15 years as a suitable minimum age. The rest of Panellists nominated younger ages, ranging from 5 to 13 years.

As can be seen in the following table, the majority of the Panel classified the film M. However, the majority of participants in the older group nominated a lower classification, with five participants classifying the movie PG and one allocating a G classification.

#### ***This Is My Father (M)***

|    | <b>Total Panel</b> | <b>Younger Group</b> | <b>Older Group</b> |
|----|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| G  | 1                  | -                    | 1                  |
| PG | 6                  | 1                    | 5                  |
| M  | 11                 | 7                    | 4                  |
| MA | 2                  | 2                    | -                  |

#### ***Justification of G by the Panellist***

The participant who classified the film G offered the following justification:

*It has very little coarse language or violence that would influence today's audience. It's nothing there you can't see on television. There is more violence and drinking and fighting in television.*

#### ***Justification of PG by the Panellists***

Those who classified the film PG made the following comments:

*The only part I didn't like in the movie was the one with the priest. I think it was awful. If they could change the priest's words that would make a difference.*

*I think my son can handle everything in this movie. The suicide is the only thing that troubles me a little bit. The drug issue is nothing. A warning about the adult themes for the church theme and the suicide scene would do it.*

*I didn't take it too seriously at all.*

*My initial reaction was based on the sex scene, the suicide and the adult themes. Also the influence of the religion and the drinking. I'm not sure. I gave it a PG but I'd understand if someone gave it an M.*

#### ***Justification of M by the Panellists***

Those who classified the film M made the following comments:

*Adult themes are the main element, mainly the suicide and the religious theme. The kid was perceived as evil. They showed the black side of religion, all the hypocrisy.*

*PG is too light. I gave it an M.*

*The 'fuck' word puts the movie in the M category.*

*The sex scene is pretty graphic but not enough to push it to an MA.*

*The sex scene was discreet and well handled. The coarse language too... it was a "fuck you, mom" there and the*

*issue of suicide. But it was all discreet without too much detail.*

*I gave the movie an M because it wasn't anything violent. They didn't show anything in detail. An MA is too much. You'd be able to show things with more detail.*

*Initially I gave it a PG but looking at the classification guide I decided it cannot be a PG for different reasons. I gave it an M for the suicide part. I'd understand someone giving it an MA. Not everyone would understand the lead up to the suicide.*

*I had initially an MA but I changed it to M. The Catholic Church has changed a lot these days.*

**Justification of MA by the Panellists**

Those who classified the film MA made the following comments:

*I think it's an MA for the suicide scene. I didn't like the suicide. When it comes to suicide there is always an answer. That's the lesson to be picked in the movie but sometimes young people cannot identify it but if you are there you can explain that. I feel strongly about suicide.*

*The suicide scene... they could have him going away without showing the rope around the tree...showing how people kill themselves. It's very intense.*

**7.4.7 Classification Discussion**

After discussing the film, some of the Panel members changed their views regarding the classification. In brackets is shown the participants' classification *before* the discussion.

***This is My Father (M)***

|   | <b>Total Panel</b> | <b>Younger Group</b> | <b>Older Group</b> |
|---|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| G | 1 (1)              | –                    | 1 (1)              |

|    |         |       |       |
|----|---------|-------|-------|
| PG | 5 (6)   | – (1) | 5 (5) |
| M  | 13 (11) | 9 (7) | 4 (4) |
| MA | 1 (2)   | 1 (2) | –     |

As can be seen in the table, the classification discussion did not change the decisions of any participant in the older group. In the younger group, two participants changed their classification one from a PG and one from an MA to an M.

**7.4.8 Participants' Assessment of the Board's Decision**

When presented with the Board's report, both groups in general were largely supportive of its comments. Those in the older and the younger group, who gave the film a lower or higher classification, could understand the reasons behind the Board's assessment. Some Panellists indicated that while they personally classified the film in a particular way, they understood that, when applying the classification guidelines, the film fell clearly within the M classification.

*Going with the guidelines, I understand why they gave the movie an M.*

*I understand the M classification. I think it's borderline with a PG.*

*I may think that's an MA but that's how I feel about the movie. According to the guidelines it's not a question, it's an M.*

*It's an M. My personal opinion is something different.*

Some participants in the older group disagreed with the M classification, a rating higher than their nominated PG.

*I watched The Simpsons the other night and there was more violence than in this movie.*

*You're knocking a lot of people out by making this movie an M. It deserves to be seen by a lot of people.*

## 7.5 ADELAIDE PANEL'S RESPONSE TO THE GENERAL'S DAUGHTER

The Board's synopsis read as follows:

*Captain Elizabeth Campbell, the daughter of a prominent army general is found murdered on an army base. Her body is found naked and staked to the ground in spreadeagle fashion. The ensuing investigation uncovers a tangled web of deception, spawned from a terrible incident that occurred some years before.*

The Board originally classified the film R and the consumer advice read 'medium level violence, adult themes.

In August 1999, the distributor of the film appealed the decision. The Classification Review Board decided to classify the film MA with the consumer advice 'adult theme, some sexual violence'.

### 7.5.1 Overall Response

The majority of the Panel responded positively to the film, describing it as powerful and exciting.

*An excellent movie with a compelling story. It has great actors. (older group)*

*It gives you insights into things that happen in the army and the cover-ups. It has a good story and it was hard to pick the killer until the end. (younger group)*

*I thought the film was intriguing. It kept you guessing as to who the murderer could be. (younger group)*

*I thoroughly enjoyed it. It had humour, suspense, a bit of violence and intrigue. (older group)*

*Captivating. It kept you thinking and wondering the whole way through. (younger group)*

*I thought it was very powerful and thought provoking. (younger group).*

*It was quite compelling. I reckon the story was very good. (older group)*

An older woman considered *The General's Daughter* as a movie to be shared with her family.

*This is a movie which the whole family can go and see. I don't enjoy killings but my husband and my two sons do. I can watch it with them.*

Some participants in both groups were critical of the film. One woman in the older group was disappointed by the lack of impact.

*I didn't like it at all. I didn't cry, I didn't feel sorry for that woman. I wasn't moved at all. It didn't have that impact for me. It could have been a very emotional story but it didn't work for me... It offended me. I think they made it too light.*

One of the younger women disagreed by clearly identifying with the plight of the rape victim.

*After the rape scene I thought poor woman, how would it be to go through something like that? (younger group)*

An older man considered *The General's Daughter* a 'junk' movie with a lack of intellectual value.

*It didn't do a lot for me. I've seen better. They never examined the issue of females in the military and that to me was the moral basis of the story...this was a junk movie to me for a low grade mass audience. It's not aimed to treat the issue in any serious way and it has a couple of good actors to dress up the movie.*

### 7.5.2 Sexual Violence

#### Rape

Panellists identified the theme of rape as the main classifiable element of *The General's Daughter*. There are two scenarios featuring the daughter's rape, which the Panel discussed in detail, although often rape was treated as a single topic. The gang-rape of the heroine by army cadets is shown in flashbacks. Elizabeth's re-enactment of the rape, staged in order to taunt her father for suppressing the atrocity, culminated in her (off-screen) death.

Although there was general agreement that the rape and its re-enactment were shocking and confronting, the majority of participants found the sequences to be powerful and vital components of the storyline.

*Every time they showed something it was relevant. They were showing us something new. The plot goes along with the investigation. They discovered something, we discovered something too.* (younger group)

*The rape scene was very scary but I think they didn't overdo it. I think it's very well done in this movie.* (older group)

*It gives the feeling of what she was going through.* (older group)

*I think it had to go as far as it did to get us emotionally involved so we could work out why she was acting the way she was.* (younger group)

*It wouldn't be a movie at all without those scenes.* (younger group)

*I think they were part of the story. It didn't really bother me.* (younger group)

*In every film you find things that disturb you but sometimes you need to be disturbed in a movie.* (older group)

When evaluating the sexual violence in *The General's Daughter*, a young woman made a comparison with the film *The Accused*.

*I don't think it was a full rape scene. If you've seen Jodie Foster's movie it was stronger there. There were more guys and they were screaming and they were patting each other on the back. Here, the investigation was more in-depth than the rape.*

A woman in the older group considered that the rape was not treated in the depth and with the seriousness it deserved.

*It offended me because I think they made it too light. Of course I didn't want to see everything but they could have been made the incident more severe. The discussion of the rape was like if the cat got run over. That's the guts of the story and they made it so shallow.*

A male participant in the younger group insisted that the rape was treated in an exploitative

manner. He was particularly critical of the repeated references to the dead woman's body.

*They felt they had to show the visual for impact. It doesn't need to be so graphic, it felt exploitative. You need to engage people but you don't need the intensity of some visuals...I think society sleeps better at night not knowing certain things.*

### **Gang Rape**

Panellists emphasised the high emotional impact of the gang-rape and stressed the powerlessness of the general's daughter to defend herself. The humiliation and trauma entailed in being tied down was said to make her attack particularly terrifying.

*It's a lot more emotional in a gang rape. You don't see that in a lot of movies.* (younger group)

*Rape is rape but this one was worse. She was tied up and she couldn't put up a fight. She was at their mercy.* (younger group)

*The rape scene is a tricky one. She is left totally vulnerable. She can't defend herself, there is nothing she can do. She is left totally powerless, totally submissive.* (older group)

*Gang rape is much worse, more dramatic, more traumatic than a rape.* (older group)

*They hated her because she was smarter than them. They wanted to humiliate her using their power.* (younger group)

### **Possibility of 'Copycat' Rape**

The issue of 'copycat' crime was raised in both the groups. A younger male suggested some people imitated behaviour seen in films and he believed there was a risk that young people would copy aspects of the sexual violence in this film.

*I'm sure there are people that are gonna do that. How do these people get their ideas initially? Our imagination doesn't create these thoughts'.*

This view was not supported by the rest of the younger group.

*A movie like this one is not going to make you rape someone. You have to have a problem already.*

The older group also debated the likelihood of young people imitating elements of the film. In general, the majority were dubious about such copycat behaviour.

*There has been a lot of research between the link of rape and pornography...it hasn't been proved. Anyway, you can copy something better from the paper.*

*These people would do something anyway. They are inclined, it's in their heads.*

*It has a moral message. They are trying to say it's not a good thing. A sound mind will see that. A movie doesn't turn anybody on that way.*

### **Sado-Masochism**

Elizabeth's practice of sado-masochism, revealed by bondage equipment and a videotape found in her home, was not considered problematic by most of the Panel. Nevertheless, there was a general agreement that this scene was definitely a classifiable element of the film.

The Panel seemed to accept that the daughter's sadomasochistic practice could be accounted for by the trauma she had suffered and a need to have sexual power over men.

*That was full on payback. She was doing that to punish men. In the video you can see that she was the dominant one. She was always on top.*

Nevertheless, a couple of the male participants were concerned that a sexually abused woman was portrayed as resorting to 'kinky sex' and one older man thought that the videotape demonstrated inappropriate pleasure.

*But they were enjoying that. They were having a good time. Payback to me is a gun to their heads!*

### **7.5.3 Other Violence**

#### ***Propeller Scene***

While rape was by far the main topic of discussion in terms of violence (sexual) in *The General's Daughter*, Panellists also referred to a fight scene in which a man is killed by a boat propeller. Panellists were not overly concerned by this scene although it was considered when classifying the movie. A couple of younger women described the scene as graphic but it was the older group who expressed more concern. The consensus appeared to be that this level of violence was commonplace in contemporary action films.

*I saw that in heaps of movies. Nothing new. (younger group)*

*You see that in other movies, you get used to it. (older group)*

*... people going through an aeroplane propeller, I've seen that. You see a lot of people getting blown up in all sorts of movies. Now it is a common occurrence. (younger group)*

*The guy dying in the propeller scene...he was a bad guy anyway. It was like acceptable, who cares when someone like that dies? (younger group)*

#### ***Suicide***

A few Panellists discussed the off-screen suicide of one of the characters. The younger participants gave more attention to this issue even though they were largely unconcerned by its treatment in the film.

*The suicide didn't disturb me. You didn't see the lead up to it. (younger group)*

*You needed to know more about the guy who committed suicide. (younger group)*

*If they had shown his family grieving, that would be different, that would have been stronger. (younger group)*

### **7.5.4 Humour and Violence**

The younger group raised the device of countering violence with humour. In general, it

was considered a positive attribute, being a 'break' from the highly intense tone of the movie.

*I liked the comedy part. There wasn't just drama, drama, drama in terms of the rape and the investigation.*

*It tones down the whole impact of the movie.*

*With the use of humour you're still seeing the violence but it's more enjoyable.*

*I don't think the comedy was there for a laugh. I think it was there to break up the movie.*

### 7.5.5 Comparison with Other Films

When discussing the overall treatment of violence in *The General's Daughter*, some Panellists made comparisons with previous films they have seen. The majority of Panellists found the violence in the film to be appropriate and in no way gratuitous when compared with other films.

*The violence in the movie, it's not like Seven. (younger group)*

*Do you know that movie with Jack Nicholson in it? [A Few Good Men] I don't like army movies but I enjoyed this one, it was different. (younger group)*

*The violence... I've seen worse in James Bond movies. (younger group)*

*In Saving Private Ryan... I was thinking of the first scene. It's much worse. (younger group)*

*I saw Clockwork Orange when I was fifteen and I didn't have the guts to walk out after the first ten minutes. Something that I should have done. But this movie is very well done and I don't think they over-did it. (older group)*

*I'd rather my son didn't see Something About Mary than see this movie. I found things in that movie particularly offensive. (older group)*

### 7.5.6 Adult Themes

### Cover-Up in the Army

Some Panellists determined that the film had a powerful message about the military and its culture. The suggestion of the military being above the law was identified as a classifiable element by some of the Panellists.

*The military... they can disassociate from society and do their own thing. (older group)*

*They want to change things for women in the army. Women may be afraid that if they join the army they're gonna get raped by Tom, Dick and Harry. (older group)*

*I found interesting all the cover-ups in the army. That's the way it is. (younger group)*

### Rejection by the Father

Panellists identified the rejection of the daughter by her father as one of the main adult themes. One participant in the younger group considered the fraught father/daughter relationship to be the main theme of the film.

*'The movie has moral messages. The father caring more for his career than for his daughter'. (younger group)*

Some panellists took into consideration this issue when classifying the film.

*'...the father was more worried by his career than for the welfare of his daughter. That's a strong adult theme for me'. (younger group)*

### 7.5.7 Coarse Language

Although it was regarded as a minor element, Panellists did refer to the coarse language in the film. The majority of the Panel thought the language was in context and did not find it offensive.

*There is some swearing in the movie. I think it was in context because I can't remember it! (older group)*

*There is a little bit of coarse language at the end with the General and Travolta. The f-word is used there. (older group)*

*At the beginning they said something about fucking with everybody's minds. (younger group)*

## 7.5.8 Initial Panel Classification

Immediately after viewing the film but before the group discussion, participants nominated in the questionnaire an acceptable minimum age for the film and classified the film.

The majority of the Panel (12 participants) considered that the youngest audience for the film would be 15 years. However, two Panel members, one from each of the groups, nominated 16 years and six others 18 years.

As can be seen below, immediately after viewing the film but before the discussion, a majority of Panel members classified the film MA, with seven giving the film an R. There were clear differences by age. While the majority of the younger group classified the movie as MA, the older group was equally divided between an MA and an R classification.

### ***The General's Daughter (MA)***

|    | <b>Total Panel</b> | <b>Younger Group</b> | <b>Older Group</b> |
|----|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| MA | 13                 | 8                    | 5                  |
| R  | 7                  | 2                    | 5                  |

### ***Justification of MA***

Those who classified the film MA made the following comments:

*The violence at the start makes it an M but with the rape scene I gave it an MA.*

*The most controversial scenes are very discreet. They use different camera angles to reduce the impact.*

*The bondage film with the chains and stuff is something to explain for someone younger.*

*It's not in-depth enough to be offensive. I don't like to see people being raped but I didn't think it was very violent at all.*

*There was a bit of violence in the beginning, the suicide scene, the kinky sex.*

*MA on the grounds of violence, the military attitude and no kids under 15 should watch it.*

### ***Justification of R***

Those who classified the film R made the following comments:

*R because of the violence and the f-word'.*

*I gave it an R because of the kinky sex, the gang rape and the language.*

*The main reason is the length and the details of the rape scenes.*

*I haven't seen an R film before but I have seen Basic Instinct and this is at the same level. The violence is quite graphic and shocking.*

*R for the treatment of the woman.*

## 7.5.9 Classification Discussion

After discussing the film, only one, older woman changed her views regarding the classification of *The General's Daughter* (in brackets is shown the participants' classification *before* the discussion). She classified the film R whereas previously she nominated MA.

### ***The General's Daughter (MA)***

|    | <b>Total Panel</b> | <b>Younger Group</b> | <b>Older Group</b> |
|----|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| MA | 12 (13)            | 8 (8)                | 4 (5)              |
| R  | 8 (7)              | 2 (2)                | 6 (5)              |

## 7.5.10 Panel's Assessment of the Board's Decision

After the Panel had made their final classification decision they read and discussed the Classification Board and Review Board reports on *The General's Daughter*.

The majority of the Panel agreed with the Review Board's MA classification and also concurred with most of the report.

Nevertheless, Panellists who classified the movie R were mildly critical of the Review Board's position. For instance, two participants in the older group expressed concern that being classified MA, *The General's Daughter* can be seen by young people aged 15.

*It does horrify me. I'm old enough to watch what I want but if we allow them to watch this type of movie over a period of time, it's cumulative. They may think they can get away with everything they watch in the movies.*

*I'm worried that 15 or 16 years olds are going to be watching this movie.*

A younger man who consistently criticised the rape scenes in the film, indicated his doubts about the real message of the film.

*I don't think it has a very strong anti-rape message. It doesn't need to show what it shows, I prefer a more subtle approach.*

Nevertheless, the same Panellist acknowledged that under the Classification Guidelines, the decision of the Review Board seemed to be correct.

*I knew it was going to be an MA. From what I've been reading in the last few days I understand their decision. But if I'd have a choice, I'd give it an R. That would be my personal decision.*

## 7.6 CONCLUSIONS - ADELAIDE PANEL

### 7.6.1 The Process Of The Community Assessment Panel

The Adelaide Panel was very supportive of the need for the Guidelines and for consumer advice.

The Panellists referred to the classification manual frequently during the discussion, made use of the official terminology and definitions and sought to apply the 'rules' fairly. The methodology for establishing and conducting the Adelaide Community Assessment Panel worked effectively and reflected the intent of the research. Participants asked numerous questions during the training and appeared to have no difficulties in applying the classification system to the three pre-release films that had been classified by the Board. However, a number of participants sometimes exhibited degree of ambivalence - where they initially wanted to give a film a particular classification but felt that a proper application of the Guidelines would result in a different classification. On certain occasions, suitable ages nominated by Panellists were not consistent with their classification of the film. For instance, while sometimes some Panellists classified a film as MA, they indicated that the minimum age to watch the film should be eighteen. These Panellists did not appear to fully absorb the differences between recommendations and legal restrictions in the classification system.

Panel members generally found the Board's rulings to be clear and justifiable. When the viewpoints of the Panel and Board differed, Panellists generally understood the Board's position and understood the application of the Classification Guidelines. In a few instances, individual participants continued to challenge aspects of the Board's reasoning. A useful aspect of the methodology was to assess the effects of peer pressure on the individual's post-discussion classification. The lengthy discussions also allowed Panellists to consider certain aspects of the film which some acknowledged they had initially overlooked or had not recalled. In the Adelaide Panel, the pre- and post-discussion classification decision showed little variation. This suggested that the Panel considered the films to fit well within their nominated classification.

Significantly different responses were offered by the two groups, which have been differentiated according to age. The older group appeared to be more concerned by violence but did not respond strongly to the depiction of suicide.

## 7.6.2 Concerns about Films

Adelaide Panellists shared common concerns about film content, although there were occasions when some members attached more significance to particular issues. Generally, all films screened received positive comments from the Panellists.

Opinions and classifications reflected not only an evaluation of the film, but related closely to the participants' life experiences and other films they had seen. People often referred to the classification of other films to establish benchmarks. For instance, some Panellists evaluated *The Iron Giant* in the context of other animated movies such as *Power Rangers* and *101 Dalmatians*. *The General's Daughter* was compared with *The Accused* (for the sexual violence), *A Few Good Men* (for its treatment of the army), *Saving Private Ryan*, *A Clockwork Orange* and *Seven* (for their levels of violence) and *There's Something About Mary* (in terms of sexual references and coarse language).

The personal experiences of participants played an important part in their evaluation of the films. When the personal situation of some participants was reflected in particular storylines or characters, this prompted a strong reaction. For instance, a younger man was very concerned by the theme of suicide in *This is My Father* because he had lost two friends who had committed suicide by the same means as depicted in the film. Catholic participants in the older group felt particularly negative about the priest's intimidating questioning during confession and about the doctrinaire posture of the Church. Personal responses could influence the classification decision in unpredictable ways. A negative response could lead to a wish for greater restriction of a film, while a positive response tended to equate with a more open classification.

Screen violence was the chief concern for the Panel. In the preliminary questionnaire, 13 out of 20 participants claimed to be 'concerned' or 'very concerned' about violent film content. The majority of participants agreed that violence could be acceptable, if in context with the storyline. In regard to *The General's Daughter*, many participants who abhorred sexual violence accepted it as being a pivotal element of the drama.

There was a consistency in the themes of major concern for the Adelaide Panel in the selected films. A man's persistent threats to a child dominated debate in *The Iron Giant*; the issue of suicide was the main topic for the younger group, while the church was of key interest to the older group in *This is My Father*; and the main controversy in *The General's Daughter* was that of rape.

Panellists appeared to be disturbed by the abuse of power. Such abuses were a common thread in the films under consideration. For instance, there were threats to a child from a government agent, a priest's menacing interrogation of an unfortunate man, and the gang rape of a defenceless woman by army colleagues. The concerns of the Panel appeared to escalate when violence was employed by the powerful (a government agent, the army, a priest,) against the powerless (a child, a bound woman, a man in love).

Screen sex appeared to be of relatively minor concern to Panellists, especially in comparison with violence. In the preliminary questionnaire, nine out of 20 Panellists recorded that they were 'concerned' or 'very concerned' by sexual content in films. Sex was far from the focus of discussion for the Adelaide Panel. A couple of sex scenes were considered to be controversial and unsuitable for children, but inoffensive to the majority of participants. Reference to sadomasochism in *The General's Daughter* and the virgin bleeding after intercourse in *This is My Father* were raised for discussion but they did not appear to be problematic for the groups.

The use of coarse language was noted by the Panel in relation to *This is my Father* and *The General's Daughter*. The use of coarse language was seen to be in context with the storyline in both instances and was not a significant focus of the discussion. In the preliminary questionnaire, only a minority of Panellists (eight out of 20) claimed to be concerned or very concerned about coarse language.

Children's capacity to understand underlying messages was often debated by the Panel. In both groups, there were differences between participants who thought that children understand more than parents think, and those who

considered that most of the time subtle messages went 'over the heads' of a young audience.

### 7.6.3 Comparison with Classification Board Decisions

The Panel's classifications, reflecting decisions by majorities, were identical to those allocated by the Board or, in one case, by the Classification Review Board.

In this final section, a summary of the Panel's position in relation to each of the films is compared with the Boards' positions, concentrating on any point of difference. It can be assumed that if differences are not indicated, then the Panel and Board (or Review Board) were in agreement.

#### ***The Iron Giant (rated PG)***

A majority of the Panel, 16 out of 20 participants, rated the film PG while the other four nominated G.

Most Panellists concurred with the Board's decision to classify the film PG and with the Review Board for confirming the PG rating. A range of elements contributed a dark tone especially to the early sequences of the film. The frightening impact of the opening storm, the initial appearance of the robot, the dark colours and loud soundtrack were said to contribute to the overall sense of danger.

Some Panellists reacted most vehemently to a scene where the government agent threatens to remove the boy from his mother. For some Panellists, this threat was more unacceptable as a consequence of Hogarth coming from a single parent household. Most Panellists thought the tone of this scene was strong enough to warrant the PG classification and they agreed with the Classification Board's description of the scene as '*confusing or upsetting without adult guidance*'.

The main difference between the Boards and the Panellists focussed on the final scene, where the army attacks the robot. While both Boards considered the scene to be potentially '*confusing or upsetting to young children without adult*

*guidance*' the majority of Panellists did not place great significance on this sequence. The older participants were more likely to criticise the violent impact of the final battle.

#### ***This is My Father (rated M)***

The majority of the Panel (13 out of 20 participants) classified the film M. Five Panellists gave the film a PG classification, one gave it a G and one rated it MA.

The Panel agreed with much of the Board's assessment of the film. However, a few Panellists, mainly in the older group, felt that the film's adult themes and sex scene did not warrant an M classification. These participants found the Board's classification too restrictive because they did not perceive any elements to be harmful for a younger audience.

Distinct age differences became evident in the discussion. The younger group was far more concerned by the suicide, while the older group tended to focus on the depiction of the church.

#### ***The General's Daughter (rated MA)***

The Panel was fairly divided in classifying the film but in the final analysis the majority agreed with the Review Board's decision to change the classification of the film from R to MA. *The General's Daughter* was classified MA by 12 participants and R by eight. The Panel recognised *The General's Daughter* as a very difficult film to classify. The sexual violence theme was acknowledged to be highly controversial, making the film borderline between MA and R.

This film again provoked distinct differences between the groups. While in the younger group, eight participants out of ten classified the film MA, in the older group, six participants out of ten classified *The General's Daughter* R.

While the younger group tended to agree with the reclassification of the film, some members of the older group expressed concerns about the possibility of 15 year old teenagers watching the film.

The Panel was most divided on the rape sequences in *The General's Daughter*. A significant number of older participants did not consider that the treatment of Elizabeth's rape could be accommodated in the MA category. Several participants judged that the sexual violence was exploitative and unduly prolonged. They were particularly offended by the brutality of the gang rape and also to the frequent revelations of the bound naked female victim.

## **8. BENDIGO COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PANEL**

### **8.1 BENDIGO PANEL PROCEDURE**

The Bendigo Community Assessment Panel was the third Panel conducted and took place from 14 to 16 April 2000 over a Friday night, Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon. The viewing and discussions took place at the Star Cinema in the Eaglehawk Town Hall. The methodology used was as described earlier in Section 2 of this report.

The films viewed by the Bendigo Panel were:

- *My Dog Skip* - an American 'coming of age' film portraying the story of a boy and his dog in the post-war period.
- *The Third Miracle* - a drama describing the story of a postulator seeking to establish the sainthood of a Chicago woman.
- *Beautiful People* - contemporary 'black' comedy about a diverse group of people in England and the impact of the Bosnian war on their lives.

### **8.2 BENDIGO PANEL COMPOSITION**

A locally-based specialist recruitment company recruited potential participants for the Panel in accord with the demographic specifications established by the Research Reference Group. The following table (Table 3) summarises the main demographic characteristics of the Bendigo Panel members.

**TABLE 3: SUMMARY OF KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF BENDIGO PANEL PARTICIPANTS**

| <b>Participants</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Location</b>  | <b>Family Status</b>                        | <b>Occupational Group</b>              |
|---------------------|------------|---------------|------------------|---|--|
| Participant 1       | 15         | Male          | Querry Hill      | Single - no children                        | Student                                |
| Participant 2       | 16         | Male          | Strathfield Saye | Single - no children                        | Student                                |
| Participant 3       | 16         | Female        | Strathfield Saye | Single - no children                        | Student                                |
| Participant 4       | 20         | Female        | Strathdale       | Married - no children                       | Sales Assistant                        |
| Participant 5       | 21         | Female        | Long Gully       | De facto - no children                      | Office Administrator                   |
| Participant 6       | 22         | Male          | Strathfield Saye | De facto - no children                      | Computer Programmer                    |
| Participant 7       | 28         | Female        | Strathfield Saye | Married - 1 child aged 1                    | Household Duties                       |
| Participant 8       | 30         | Female        | Central          | Married - 4 children aged 11, 9, 6 and 4    | Household Duties                       |
| Participant 9       | 32         | Female        | Central          | De facto - 1 child aged 9                   | Ambulance Paramedic                    |
| Participant 10      | 34         | Female        | Central          | Married - 2 children aged 6, 4              | Sales Person                           |
| Participant 11      | 35         | Female        | Eppalock         | Married - 3 children aged 12, 10, 5         | Household Duties                       |
| Participant 12      | 37         | Male          | Strathfield Saye | Married - 3 children aged 9, 8, 6           | Senior Service Officer (office duties) |
| Participant 13      | 39         | Male          | Strathfield Saye | Married - 2 children aged 11, 9             | Computer Programmer                    |
| Participant 14      | 41         | Female        | Axe Creek        | Married - 3 children aged 10, 7, 4          | Household Duties                       |
| Participant 15      | 48         | Male          | Axe Creek        | De facto - 3 children aged 18, 15, 5        | Concretor                              |
| Participant 16      | 50         | Male          | Strathfield Saye | Married - 4 children aged 29, 24, 18, 14    | Retired                                |
| Participant 17      | 52         | Male          | Eaglehawk        | Married - 3 children aged 21, 13, 18 months | Training Officer                       |
| Participant 18      | 55         | Male          | Golden Square    | Married - 2 children aged 21, 17            | Shop Manager                           |
| Participant 19      | 56         | Male          | Eaglehawk        | Married - 3 children aged 33, 32, 28        | Postal Manager                         |
| Participant 20      | 56         | Female        | Strathfield Saye | Married - 3 children aged 33, 31, 26        | Teacher                                |

## 8.3 BENDIGO PANEL'S RESPONSES TO MY DOG SKIP

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

*The story of a young boy (Willy) and his dog*

The Board classified the film PG and the consumer advice was 'low level violence'.

### 8.3.1 General Response

In general, *My Dog Skip* generated more positive comments from the older group, where the majority of participants indicated they liked the film. Members of the older group described the film as 'very emotional' and 'sad', identifying the film as suitable for the whole family and stressing its educational value. While some found the film to have a slow start, the story of *My Dog Skip* captured their interest. The following quotes are from the older group:

*An enjoyable film. A family film with adventure elements.*

*I thought it was a rather nice story. It took me a while to get into it but once I did I found it very touching, especially the end.*

*I really enjoyed the film but I must confess that I cried through most of it.*

*I thought that it was a great movie. It's a real life movie and very true to life. I found it very educational for kids.*

Many of the older participants responded to the dog exactly as they would to a human character and even identified with him. Indeed some appeared to be more emotional about the tribulations of the dog than of the trials confronting the human characters in the film.

*I thoroughly enjoyed it, it is something that I can relate to. I had pet dogs in my childhood.*

*I'm an animal lover, I like dogs and I could relate with his story. I draw parallels with my own life.*

*Anything with animals really gets me. When I thought the dog was going to die...that really got me!*

A few remarks of caution were made by one of the females in this group early in the discussion, identifying some of the scenes as 'probably a bit too strong for a very young audience'.

Participants in the younger group responded less enthusiastically, offering mixed responses to *My Dog Skip*, with the majority indicating that, after a very slow start, they found it difficult to maintain their interest in the film.

*It was a kind of slow movie, it didn't really do it for me.*

*I didn't really like it that much. I don't like this type of movie.*

*When I saw the title I thought "Oh no". It was a turn off. If the movie doesn't have any stars and it is called 'My Dog Skip' you wouldn't watch it in the movies.*

*I didn't like it. It was made for a younger audience.*

*I liked it very much. It covered a lot of issues, friendship, belonging, loyalty, growing up. In addition, it was an interesting and seemingly authentic look at small town life in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century [sic].*

*I liked it. A nice warm movie. Lots of tears.*

An important issue raised in both groups and which appeared to make Panellists perceive the film in a different way, was the information that *My Dog Skip* was based on a true story. For some of the Panellists, this played a part in their classification and evaluation of the film.

*When I saw the title I thought, "It's a G movie" but then I thought, "Hang on, it's a real story". Well, that makes a difference and I started to think differently, I thought it could have a higher classification. (younger group)*

*You don't see many movies based on a true story that are G rated. (younger group)*

*I guess with a true story you find it more personal. (younger group)*

*When I saw it is based on a true story I don't know why it made me think differently about the movie, maybe I thought it was going to be a bit better. (younger group)*

*I think you tend to look at the movie in a different light. If it is just fiction rather than based on a true story you treat it differently. (older group)*

*I found it more touching because it was based on a true story. (older group)*

### 8.3.2 Violence Towards Animals

There was a general agreement across the Panel that violence was the most important element to be considered when classifying *My Dog Skip*. Two main images were widely discussed by the Panellists: a scene portraying the shooting of a deer by hunters and a sequence where Skip the dog is hit with a shovel. It is significant that both scenes deal with cruelty to animals, a theme considered to have particular resonance for a child audience.

#### **The Shooting of the Deer**

In this scene, Willy and his father are in the forest when they hear a gunshot. A deer appears in slow motion and falls to the ground. Willy is seen to touch a small bloody wound on the deer's side and then to examine the blood on his fingers. Finally, Willy and his father walk away and a shot is heard as the hunters finish off the animal. Participants generally identified this scene as one of the strongest elements in the film.

*One of the strongest elements for me was the shooting of the deer. I thought the part where they show the kid touching the blood with his hands and feeling it was quite strong. (younger group)*

*I'm not sure if it was needed, perhaps it was a little bit too much. You could tell that it was very serious because the deer wasn't moving. (younger group)*

*Once I saw the shooting of the deer I changed my mind regarding the classification. I think it can be quite*

*upsetting for kids to see the deer being shot. (older group)*

*I thought that the shooting of the deer in the forest was one of the main themes of the movie. (older group)*

Some Panellists questioned how the shooting of a deer would impact on children living in a city.

*I think it will be difficult for kids to relate to this movie. How many times do you see a deer getting shot in the forest? We are living in a city...I know they are supposed to know but I don't think they will understand. (younger group)*

*I'm not sure if all kids will understand that. I grew up on a farm and it was a reality seeing animals die, being hit by a car or shot and that was part of life. (younger group)*

*The shooting of the deer can affect kids in a different way. I think it makes a difference if you live out in the bush or you live in town. Kids in the city don't see a dead sheep or a kangaroo caught up in a fence. That happens every day in the bush. (older group)*

#### **The Dog in Danger**

In one sequence, the dog, Skip, is accidentally locked into a cemetery vault and damages a cache of illegal alcohol stored there. When 'moonshiners' return to the vault and see the bottles smashed, one of them picks up a shovel and (off screen) hits Skip. The dog is heard to yelp and Willy rushes to the tomb, finding Skip's inert body. Finally, the dog is taken to the vet and survives.

*I hate seeing cruelty against animals. I thought it was quite strong when the dog got hit with the shovel. (younger group)*

*They didn't show it actually happen but you could imagine it in your mind. (younger group)*

One participant in the older group responded strongly to the vet scene where the dog's blood is visible on the operating table.

*Did someone notice that when the dog was on the vet's table, on the overhead shot, there was blood next to his mouth?*

The same image was also identified by one participant in the younger group who described it as a graphic and unnecessary detail.

A further pivotal scene depicting the dog in danger was one in which the boy is losing at sport and hits his pet when it runs onto the baseball field. This was expected to be particularly disturbing to younger viewers given the substantial combination of rejection and aggression towards the hero dog.

*The scene when he hit the dog in the baseball field, that could be upsetting for younger kids. You don't see him actually hitting the dog but you hear when the dog yelped. (younger group)*

### 8.3.3 Adult Themes

While adult themes occupied less of the discussion than the cruelty towards animals, adult themes were raised at the end of the discussions in terms of classification decisions.

#### **Racial Issues**

One of the main adult themes identified by Panellists was the segregation of the black community. The majority of Panellists said that the theme was treated subtly and it was in context with the film's historical period.

*There were some racial problems but they could have been portrayed a lot worse. They were in Mississippi at that time and that is what was happening there. (older group)*

*I took the black-white segregation part as showing what that time was like. It was well treated, it didn't need to go any further. (younger group)*

#### **War**

A younger participant identified the theme of desertion in war as an issue to be considered when classifying the film.

*...the theme of desertion...I think that seeing a coward, the whole issue of fear to go to war, that would be strong for a kid.*

There was some discussion of the disintegration of Willy's soldier friend, who turned to drink on his return as a deserter.

*It was a bit sad when he comes back from the war and he was drunk and he didn't want to talk to the kid. I think this has a meaning, I think it is the issue of rejection there.*

One participant in the older group commented on a particular scene where Willy and his friends, having just viewed a war film, then played out soldier training games at home. (Actually, they were attempting to train Skip to perform as an army dog as was portrayed in the film they had just seen.)

*The one thing that stood out to me was when they went to the movies and they saw the violence on the screen. They went home and acted it out in the backyard. It annoyed me. It's like saying if you see something just go home and do it. I just don't condone that. (older group)*

Another Panellist immediately challenged this view, pointing out that all kids play soldiers, cowboys and Indians etc, and this doesn't result in kids becoming violent in real life.

### 8.3.4 Messages Arising from the Film

The Panel sought an underlying meaning in the film to validate some of the film's stronger scenes and its treatment of adult themes. Some Panellists perceived the film as containing lessons about life and as truthfully portraying the process of growing up.

*All the episodes were relevant, it showed how he was growing up.*

*It's a movie about growing up, it's about death. I suppose there are lessons to be learned from this type of movie. (younger group)*

For one of the younger participants, *My Dog Skip* was about companionship and friendship.

*I think the main message of the movie was about companionship. Faithfulness of the child to the dog, the child learning lessons when his dog was hurt. I think the movie has a very strong element of companionship and friendship.*

Another younger participant identified the theme of rejection arising throughout the film. At different points rejection touched the boy, the soldier, the parents and the dog.

Participants in the older group also saw moral messages in the film.

*One of the main themes of the movie is the old man teaching the kid. He wanted to protect him, he didn't want the kid to be hurt.*

*I think the movie also shows that during war for some people it's not about fearing death but it's about the killing of other people.*

Some Panellists queried whether children should be protected from 'real life' experiences, stating that the movie shows important issues of growing up in a subtle way.

*Kids can learn from this movie. They can learn that awful things can happen. It can teach them what people are really like.* (younger group)

*The movie shows real issues. I think kids have to face some things, it's part of growing up.* (older group)

On the other hand, a number of younger Panellists tended to stress the need to protect children from 'real life' experiences. They seemed to question whether film was an appropriate medium for learning about life.

*I think that if they are going to experience all these issues, that can be done in person with adult guidance and not through a movie.* (younger group)

*A real life experience is... real. If the same thing happens in a movie it's fiction even if, like this one, it's based on a real story. Maybe they changed it for dramatic purposes.* (younger group)

*What are they going to learn from watching a deer lying on the ground with blood pouring out of it? That men can be awful?* (younger group)

### 8.3.5 Initial Panel Classification

Immediately after viewing the film, but before the group discussion, participants nominated in the questionnaire a minimum age suitable to view *My Dog Skip* and their classification decision .

In the younger group, three participants thought the film suitable for children aged ten years old. The rest of the younger group suggested younger children as a suitable audience: five participants judged it suitable for children aged between six and eight years old and two nominated any age as being acceptable.

When assessing the film's suitability for younger audiences, the younger participants emphasised the target audience which they considered the film was intended for. This issue was regularly raised throughout the CAPs - if children were not expected to be interested in the film, it was considered to have far less of an impact and thus classification was of less concern.

*I think it is important if the kids are going to be paying attention to the movie or not. If the film is pitched at older kids and families, younger kids won't be interested as much and it won't affect them because they won't be engaged.*

*I don't think it is aimed at kids. At first I was trying to find out if it was aimed at children but now I think it's aiming at older kids. I would say it can be seen by nine or ten year olds.*

*The fact that Willy was nine years old made me think that it was aimed at kids of that age.*

*I think it's suitable for nine or ten year old kids. The kid was also this age. I think they have in mind families and older kids when they made the movie.*

The older group was inclined to nominate even younger ages as a suitable audience for the film. For instance, six participants considered *My Dog Skip* suitable for children aged between four and

six years old. The rest of the older group nominated between six and eight years (two participants), ten years (one participant) and all ages (one participant) as a suitable audience.

As can be seen in the following table, the majority of the Panel classified the film PG, with a minority (three participants in the older group) giving it a G classification.

### **My Dog Skip (PG)**

|    | <b>Total Panel</b> | <b>Younger Group</b> | <b>Older Group</b> |
|----|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| G  | 3                  | -                    | 3                  |
| PG | 17                 | 10                   | 7                  |

### **Justification of G by the Panel**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film G:

*It lacked violence as such. The child's view of life is around his family and his dog.*

*Low violence. There are no scenes shown where injury occurs. No coarse language.*

*It has all the hallmarks of a good story. Suspense, humour, emotion, without any harmful effects.*

### **Justification of PG by the Panel**

In nominating PG, there was considerable reference to the adult themes.

The following comments were made by those who classified the film PG:

*I think some parts should have parents explaining and reassuring.*

*A few scary moments. The younger children may need some parental reassurance during these scenes.*

*I feel the children could have questions about the segregation of white and black people. Also some of the violence included in the film.*

*Adult themes, mainly dealing with death. Some low level violence.*

*Violent action. The shooting of the deer in the forest.*

*Adult themes. War, race, but mostly the theme of death.*

### **8.3.6 Classification Shift**

After the discussion, one participant changed his/her views regarding the classification of *My Dog Skip*. (In the table below in brackets is shown the participants' classification *before* the discussion.) In the younger group, one participant classified the film as G, having previously classified the film PG.

### **My Dog Skip (PG)**

|    | <b>Total Panel</b> | <b>Younger Group</b> | <b>Older Group</b> |
|----|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| G  | 4 (3)              | 1 (-)                | 3 (3)              |
| PG | 16 (17)            | 9 (10)               | 7 (7)              |

### **8.3.7 Comparison with Other Movies**

When justifying their classification decisions, a number of participants in the younger group compared *My Dog Skip* with other films they had seen which featured animals. In particular, several younger Panellists recalled that *Bambi* had made a great impact on them as children because it was 'sad and scary'.

*I rated it G because I look at movies like Bug's Life which is G. It has a lot of adult themes and it's a movie which parents don't have to watch with their kids. (younger group)*

*I thought about The Lion King. It's PG because when the father lion dies that can be upsetting to some kids. (younger group)*

*What about Bambi? They say it's a kid's movie but I was horrified when I watched it, the kids were petrified. It is a violent movie. (younger group)*

*Look at Bambi. I don't think it is a movie that kids can watch by themselves. I think that in this one, you need parental guidance. (younger group)*

### 8.3.8 Participants' Assessment of the Board's Decision

After the Panel had made its initial and post-discussion classification, Panellists read and discussed the Classification Board's report.

The majority of participants generally agreed with the Board's classification of the film. The report indicated that the film contains some depictions of violence that could be confusing or upsetting to children and identified the two strongest scenes which were those also emphasised by the majority of participants: the shooting of the deer and the hitting of the dog with a shovel.

*We were absolutely close. (older group)*

*We raised similar issues. (younger group)*

*As a parent, I'm quite happy with the Board's decision. I'm happy to see this movie rated PG. (older group)*

One younger male thought that the scene where the dog is hit by Willy should have been included in the Board's final report. Another participant in the younger group questioned the report not mentioning adult themes.

*I'm very surprised that there is not mention of adult themes, the segregation, the desertion, they didn't put anything about that.*

Others agreed that the war and its impact on Willy's older friend and former hero warranted a mention under adult themes.

## 8.4 BENDIGO PANEL'S RESPONSES TO THE THIRD MIRACLE

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

*Frank Shore (Ed Harris) is a postulator for the Catholic Church who is sent by Bishop Cahill to investigate reported miracles at St. Stanislaus in Chicago and to see whether a laywoman who worked there (Helen O'Regan) should be*

*considered as a candidate for sainthood. Wracked by doubts of his own concerning his faith, he falls for Roxanne, Helen's bitter daughter.*

The Board classified the film M and the consumer advice was 'adult themes, low level violence and low level coarse language'.

### 8.4.1 General Response

The Panel had quite mixed responses to *The Third Miracle*, with several of them finding it 'boring' and 'unappealing', while others commented more positively. Generally, older participants were more positive about the film.

*Powerful. I myself found it very moving.*

*A thought-provoking movie, appealing more to mature viewers. Some content was not very suitable for very young viewers.*

*Extremely powerful.*

Some participants praised the treatment of religious issues in the film.

*A powerful movie. Very heavy on religious significance and faith. I think it would appeal to a certain audience only. Good viewing. (older group)*

*Very enlightening. It shows the real side of religion from the inside. (older group)*

*I found this movie to be quite absorbing, the conflict within the priest, the politics within the church, issues of scepticism and faith. (younger group)*

*I enjoyed the film. It was an impressive role by Ed Harris with his Catholic priest. I also enjoyed the photography from the war scenes.*

A couple of Panellists drew parallels between the issue of sainthood portrayed in the movie and a similar process happening in Australia.

*People that have been following the Mary Mackillop saga over the last few years would have a better idea of what the movie was about. (older group)*

*It is a relevant topic in Australia now because we have our own saint going through the process. (younger group)*

For some Panellists, *The Third Miracle* was completely unappealing.

*I thought it was a complete waste of time. Religious movies really are not my type of movie. (younger group).*

*Quite boring. This topic doesn't really interest me. (older group)*

*It's the worst movie that I've seen in a long time. Religious movies are not my scene. (younger group)*

### 8.4.2 Drug Use

One of the controversial scenes debated by the Panel was a distance shot of an apparent heroin injection. Mixed views were expressed; while some participants considered the scene of minor importance, others saw it as an important element when classifying the film.

*I didn't have any problems with it. it was artily done, it wasn't graphic or anything like that. (younger group)*

*They could have taken out the shooting up in the alley. They didn't need to show it, they could have implied that it happened. (older group)*

A couple of participants in the younger group drew comparisons between drug consumption in Chicago and Australia.

*I'm sure you see that on the back streets of Chicago but I didn't relate it to Australia.*

*I actually related it to Bendigo very much because we have too many overdoses here.*

A number of participants in the older group considered that the film attempted to portray drug use in a negative way.

*The shooting scene looked very negative. It wasn't as if they were saying "Hey guys this is fun". It was a very sordid scene.*

*It shows the bad side of drug use. When the girl is in hospital for her drug addiction problem you can see that her appearance is getting better. The next day when she shoots up again, there she is, worse than before.*

A few Panellists referred to a hospital sequence where a mother makes the decision to take her daughter off life support after an overdose. In general, these Panellists saw the scene as carrying a strong anti-drug message, since it showed the fatal consequences of drug abuse.

*It shows the results of taking drugs. It is an important element of implied violence. (older group)*

An older participant stressed the strong emotional tone of the film, particularly evident in the hospital setting.

*The emotional conflict was right through the movie. Everybody had their emotional conflict. I think that the part where the drug addict girl ended up with an overdose was quite powerful. (older group)*

### 8.4.3 Violence

The Panel made little mention of violence in the film. However, a few mentioned a particular image of a dead male on the floor with a bloodied face.

*I don't really see why they had to show the guy with all his face cut in such graphic detail. I think it was gratuitous, they didn't need to have him on with his face blown off. (older group)*

*The bit when they found the guy with all his face destroyed was a bit too strong. (younger group)*

A number of Panellists referred to a war sequence where soldiers were running for cover during an air raid but in general, it was considered a minor issue.

*The war scenes were part of the movie. Scenes like that and some worse situations are depicted every day on television. (older group)*

## 8.4.4 Adult Themes

The Panel as a whole identified several elements which they considered to be adult themes. Some Panellists described particular elements of the film as 'very powerful', entailing considerable emotional impact.

### Religious Issues

Panellists identified the treatment of religion as one of the most important adult themes in the film. A couple of younger participants indicated that the portrayal of the priest questioning his own faith might upset some viewers with strong religious beliefs.

*I think that a person going to Church wouldn't be very pleased with the way the priest is shown in the movie.*

*I think their treatment of the priest was a little bit flippant.*

An older participant also expressed concern about the potential effect of this adult theme on children.

*Some children are very impressionable and they are brought up very Catholic. They have faith in priests and suddenly they see a priest in a movie who has a lot of problems with his religion. Is he fit to be a priest? That can upset some children. Their faith means a lot to them and suddenly all these problems are thrown up to them. I think that can be troubling for younger children.*

Some of the younger participants thought that the priest's struggle with his faith was a powerful element of the film which kept their interest going.

*I think the struggle to recover his faith made the story much more interesting. It set the tone of the movie.*

A few Panellists felt that some references to the suicide of a priest were part of the adult themes of *The Third Miracle*.

*The suicide of the priest. It's not shown but I think it is an adult theme. (younger group)*

### Prostitution

Panellists raised the issue of prostitution as an adult theme in *The Third Miracle*, but there was general agreement that it was only implied, and therefore was not regarded as a troubling issue.

*With the prostitution, nothing was really shown, only the girl getting into the truck. (younger group)*

*It was implied. I didn't find anything troubling about that. (younger group)*

*The drug use was a more important issue than the prostitution. The shooting up was graphic and the prostitution was implied. (older group)*

*It wasn't troubling to me because I knew this wasn't going to be a kids' movie. (younger group)*

### Religion and Sex

The priest's relationship with Roxanne, the daughter of the woman being considered for sainthood, was debated by both groups. In general, it was agreed that its treatment was appropriate and considered the theme to be an important part of the storyline.

*He was fighting against temptation. It was part of the story, it was one of the main issues of the movie. (younger group)*

*I think it had an impact. It was relevant to the story, it was testing the priest's faith. (younger group)*

*The context between the priest and Roxanne could have been blown up a lot worse. (older group)*

*They did well, very well. They stopped everything at the right moment. (older group)*

One younger female found the relationship between the priest and the woman out of context.

*I would change the relationship between the priest and the daughter. I think it didn't fit the rest of the movie. It didn't make any sense to me. (younger group)*

Participants in the younger group also discussed a sequence where obscene and blasphemous pictures were found in a priest's library.

*There was another thing that we haven't mentioned yet, when they were going through the dead priest's library. They found some of the priest's drawings and they were really shocking.*

*They had to do with the devil. I thought they were very graphic.*

*One of them shows Jesus on the cross and the devil is underneath him. It was pretty strong.*

*We can compare it with the Life of Brian. That was very blasphemous towards religion.*

## **Masturbation**

Some members of the Panel, especially the younger participants, discussed an image in the opening scene where a young Slovakian appears to be masturbating in a mixed dormitory.

*The guy in the bed... Gee, in the Catholic Church those are the things you are punished for. You could tell he was doing... something. (younger group)*

*It was right at the start. I thought it was going to be an R-rated movie. (younger group)*

*The masturbation... it was a touch of realism. (younger group)*

A few members of the older group also mentioned the scene, but the supposed masturbation was so brief and subtle that the majority did not observe it.

*Where was it? I missed that altogether. (older group)*

## **Child Abuse**

A sequence which suggested child abuse, where a woman is attending a young female who has what might be cigarette burn marks on her arm, was identified as another of the adult themes.

Nevertheless, Panellists said that its subtle treatment meant that the sequence was not disturbing.

*They were very careful with the child abuse theme. They didn't actually show anything disturbing. (younger group)*

*It was tastefully done, it wasn't too graphic. (younger group)*

*It wasn't too strong, it was part of the story. It was implied. (older group)*

## **Coarse Language**

The majority of the Panellists felt that the coarse language in the film was appropriate to the context. Participants in both the older and younger groups considered that coarse language was used infrequently during the film and this topic did not appear to be a primary focus of concern.

*Priests are human, they swear. (younger group)*

*He was swearing for a good reason. He was upset. (younger group)*

*I don't think that his swearing was disrespectful. It was in the right context. (younger group)*

### **8.4.5 Initial Panel Classification**

Immediately after viewing the film, participants nominated the minimum age they thought acceptable to view *The Third Miracle* and the classification they would choose.

The majority of the Panel (thirteen participants) nominated 15 years as a suitable minimum age. Five participants nominated younger ages, ranging from 11 to 14 years, while two nominated older ages (one 16 and the other 18 years).

As can be seen in the following table, all except two Panellists classified the film M. In the older group, one participant classified the film as MA and the other as R.

#### ***The Third Miracle* (M)**

|  | Total | Younger | Older |
|--|-------|---------|-------|
|  |       |         |       |

|    | Panel | Group | Group |
|----|-------|-------|-------|
| M  | 18    | 10    | 8     |
| MA | 1     | -     | 1     |
| R  | 1     | -     | 1     |

Some of the Panellists indicated that they had fluctuated between an M and an MA classification, but after checking the classification guidelines, they settled for an M.

*I thought to classify it MA but it wasn't graphic enough, a lot of powerful issues are only implied. I decided for an M. (younger group)*

*I thought of an MA but according to the guidelines it's an M. (older group)*

*I agonised between M and MA but I decided to classify it M. (older group)*

Some participants in the younger group indicated that they considered a PG classification at some point, but the overall dark tone of the film and its numerous adult themes made the film unsuitable for a young audience.

*It's too dark to be a PG. It wouldn't be possible.*

*The darkness of the movie. The movie makes you feel depressed all through. It's not suitable for younger kids.*

*For sure it's not a PG - it's too dark, even the blood is black! I knew it couldn't be a PG, then I had to decide between an M or an MA.*

**Justification of M by the Panellists**

Those who classified the film M made the following comments:

*I gave it an M. If they had gone for a longer time with the child abuse theme or the drug use it would have been an MA. But it was short enough, just a few seconds long.*

*Mainly adult themes. The drinking, the pimps and prostitutes, the violence.*

*The adult themes. A child would not be able to understand it.*

*Very strong adult themes. A lot of emotional conflict.*

**Justification of MA by a Panellist**

*I classified it MA for all its implied violence. A lot of issues are too strong for a young audience.*

**Justification of R by a Panellist**

*At first I thought of MA but I actually rated R because I believe that anybody under the age of 18 may not fully understand some issues. It is very powerful for a young mind to absorb such in-depth material, we are talking about war, drugs, prostitution. It could be damaging for some children.*

**8.4.6 Classification Shift**

After discussing the film, one participant in the older group changed their classification, from R to MA. The majority of the Panel (18 participants) classified *The Third Miracle* as M. The following table shows in brackets participants' classifications before the discussion.

**The Third Miracle (M)**

|    | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|----|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| M  | 18 (18)     | 10 (10)       | 8 (8)       |
| MA | 2 (1)       | -             | 2 (1)       |
| R  | - (1)       | -             | - (1)       |

**8.4.7 Participants' Assessment of the Board's Decision**

When presented with the Board's report, the Panel generally agreed with the classification decision. The majority of elements identified by the Board was also covered by the Panel. Many Panellists agreed that the decision 'reflects what

we were talking about'. Two participants in the older group who classified the film MA disagreed with the Board's classification.

*I think the drug scene was in the prime spot, it was in the front. With that scene I think the movie is MA.*

*I'm not uncomfortable with the decision. I'd like to see the movie rated MA rather than M but I'm not uncomfortable with what they've written. I guess it's more of a personal issue.*

Participants in the younger group pointed out some of the issues identified during their debate, but not discussed in the Board's report, for instance the masturbation scene and the theme of prostitution.

*They don't mention the prostitution in their comments. It should be listed. That guy with a tattoo on his chest was supposed to be a pimp and the girl that jumped in the truck, that was a clear scene. I'd put that more in the synopsis than either of the themes they have listed here.*

Older members tended to stress the same issues identified by the Board but they placed more emphasis on the alcohol dependence of the priest than was shown in the Board's report.

One older participant was surprised by the mention of coarse language in the report, feeling that it was at such a low level as not to require advice.

*Coarse language? That's amazing. There was a 'shit' and a 'fuck' and that was it.*

There was a stronger reaction from the Panel to the drug use than was evident in the Board's report. A few participants felt drug use should have been in the consumer advice.

### **8.5 BENDIGO PANEL'S RESPONSES TO BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE**

The Board's synopsis read as follows:

*The film follows the lives of a diverse group of people living in England and the effects the Bosnian war has on them*

*when they are touched personally by the horror of it.*

The Board classified the film MA and the consumer advice read 'adult themes'.

#### **8.5.1 General Response**

*Beautiful People* received mixed responses from the Panellists. In general, Panellists described the film as *graphic*, *depressing* and *disturbing*. Panellists praising the film generally stressed the realistic depiction of the Bosnian war and the intensity of the plot. On the other hand, several Panellists criticised the film, stating that it had a confusing and disjointed storyline. Some participants did not understand the film at all and only a few saw and appreciated the humour. A common criticism was the apparent switch of mood so that our audience was not clear about where they stood and what type of film this was.

The following quotes are from the younger group:

*Interesting. A little controversial. It deals with a number of political issues.*

*Depressing type of film. Too many line changes.*

*Confusing storyline, switched from one group to another.*

*I liked the film. It has an interesting story line. It was an interesting movie.*

*I didn't particularly like it. There were times when it got confusing and hard to understand.*

On the whole, the older group found very little that was of interest or value about this film.

The following quotes are from the older group:

*I didn't see anything interesting in the movie. I didn't see the purpose.*

*I thought it was crap. I didn't learn anything, I thought it was rubbish. It was bits and pieces. I couldn't see anything enjoyable at all.*

*Good representation of organised chaos. Disturbing.*

*Absorbing, at times extremely violent in depictions of war and ethnic differences. It gives room for thought.*

*Interesting, disturbing, graphic. Not a film I would like to see again but nevertheless it was a story that should be told.*

### 8.5.2 Violence

Panellists debated a number of violent themes present in *Beautiful People*. The younger group indicated that most of the violence fitted the narrative and the older participants saw the film as full of violence and almost totally bleak. Older participants tended to see *Beautiful People* as a film with no redeeming features and therefore they assessed its violence quite harshly.

*Violence, that's the main theme of the movie. Everything was futile, no matter what they did. The thread of violence is right through the whole movie. (older group)*

### Humour and Violence

The younger group discussed the device of countering violence with humour. In general, the humour was considered a positive feature, softening the impact of some violent scenes.

*I think it's a good idea because at one moment he's there in the pub and the next moment he is there in Bosnia and all these shocking things are happening. They use some humour to give you a break.*

*A lot of scenes are easy to watch because it had funny moments. They made it light hearted in comparison with what they could have made.*

The particular contribution of violent imagery with humour which was referred to most often was the leg amputation in Bosnia. Although the operation was off screen, many of the Panellists were horrified by the scene. Several commented that the impact was reduced by the comic aspects.

In contrast, the older group (with one or two exceptions) did not see or pick up on the humorous elements of the film. For example, a

number of older Panellists noted that the violence was continuous in the film, beginning in the opening scenes where a Bosnian and a Serb encounter each other on a bus and begin a 'punch up' that sees them ejected from the bus but continuing the altercation over many city blocks. When asked about the intensity or impact of these scenes, some said they set the tone for the non-stop violence of the film, whereas one or two others suggested that the scenes had a slapstick quality to them and were not threatening at all.

Similarly, one person queried why the film had been titled *Beautiful People* when the characters were 'anything but'. Again another Panellist suggested that this was 'tongue in cheek' and intended as a comment on the characters.

### The Robbery Attack

When evaluating the violent images in *Beautiful People*, many Panellists believed that the strongest scene was that of a black man being punched and kicked by a gang to obtain drug money. The cruelty and length of the attack was of key importance in making classification decisions.

*The bashing of the boy in the street was bad. (younger group)*

*At first, I thought they hit him just to get the money to buy drugs, but then they went back and kicked him in the stomach. (younger group)*

*It was violence but I thought it included racial violence. They incited one of the blokes to kick the guy too. It hit me strongly. (older group)*

*It was the viciousness of the attack which disturbed me the most. (younger group)*

Some younger members compared the impact of this scene with other American movies, where fighting was seen as 'unrealistic'.

*I think you feel this type of fight much more than in some American movies. You know that this can happen, you know the others are more kind of a fiction.*

*In those movies the fight goes over three hours and nobody gets hurt while in this one you can see him hurt.*

*You can feel for the victim.*

### 8.5.3 Adult Themes

#### War

Panellists debated a number of sequences which depicted the devastating effects of the Bosnian war. The majority of them agreed that the theme was treated discreetly and tended to assess the scenes in the context of a war setting. However, both younger and older participants tended to focus more on the street scenes in London rather than on the sequences of the Bosnian war.

*What they show in the movie is all those things that you expect to happen in a war, people get killed, soldiers die. It would be different if some of the scenes would happen in a different place like on the street. (younger group)*

*The context is very important. If we see people consuming drugs in a public toilet we think it's bad. We see the same thing happening in a hospital and we think that it's not too bad. (younger group)*

Younger participants compared the war scenes of *Beautiful People* with those of other war movies such as *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line*.

*In those movies you see blood spilled everywhere and the actual shooting. In this movie you don't see bombs going off and there is not much blood.*

A younger participant found the depiction of the war scenes more powerful than in other films.

*Here you see all the refugees dying. It's more disturbing that way because it's not soldiers that are dying. It's the innocent parties that get killed.*

In a first aid tent on the battlefield, a backyard amputation of a man's leg is to take place using crude carpentry saws.

Although the amputation was off screen, some of the younger participants found the sound effects disturbing, leading them to an unwelcome picturing of the sawn limb.

*The noise of the saw, that made me cringe a little bit, but the rest was OK.*

*The only thing that made me feel uneasy was the sound in the background.*

A member of the younger group commented that she found the scene strong but not too graphic because there was no blood or actual image of the medical process.

*A lot of people including myself would be more squeamish if they had blood all over.*

A bloody stump of a leg is carried out of the tent and dumped in a pile of body parts. This scene, while fairly brief, also drew a reaction from some Panellists, who found the scene fairly grisly. Again, some Panellists suggested that far more violent war and disaster scenes were shown nightly on television news.

#### Rape

A pregnant Bosnian rape victim inspired particular sympathy among the younger members. A few Panellists considered the theme of rape in war as one important element in classifying the film.

*I thought the references to rape were important, when they want to give the baby away. (younger group)*

*It was strong... when they want to get rid of the baby. (younger group)*

### 8.5.4 Drug Use

The depiction of drug use was seen as particularly controversial in this film and the topic occupied much debate.

One of the most critical elements in this film was felt to be the scenes associated with the use of illegal drugs by two of the film's characters.

Panellists noted their strong distress and revulsion at the image of two male drug users unconscious in a public toilet. There was criticism

of the detail, which showed tourniquets wrapped around the arms with bloody puncture marks. Participants in both groups considered this scene to be quite graphic and disturbing.

*They didn't show them doing it but they showed the needles, the scars. It was quite graphic.* (younger group)

The Panel also clearly distinguished between the context of drug use in a war zone and its use on urban streets. While the street use was regarded as more problematic, there were several objections to the humorous view of heroin use in the war hospital.

Participants in the younger group disagreed about the significance of a sequence where a male is to be witness to an amputation of a person's leg without anaesthesia. The male onlooker administers his own heroin to the victim to help in his ordeal. Some of the participants interpreted the scene as condoning drug use while others saw it as a humane gesture, both comic and appropriate in the context.

*The guy was made a hero because he smuggled heroin into the hospital. I thought it was strange.* (younger group)

*It doesn't promote it but it doesn't tell you don't do it either.* (younger group)

*It shows that there is a legitimate use for drugs not just for recreation but for medication.* (younger group)

*Being a mother, drugs scare me. That bit when they make the heroin like it is a good thing, it really worries me.* (older group)

*That scene shows that drugs can be acceptable in that arena whereas obviously they are illegal in other places.* (older group)

## 8.5.5 Coarse Language

The language used in *Beautiful People* was a minor issue for the Panel. Most expressed a view that the strong language was appropriate to the film's storyline.

*There was a lot of coarse language but it was used in a funny way.* (younger group)

*It didn't bother me at all. It wasn't meant to be threatening.* (younger group)

## 8.5.6 Initial Panel Classification

Immediately after viewing the film but before the group discussion, participants nominated an acceptable minimum age for the film and classified the film.

The majority of the Panel (14 participants) considered that the youngest age for the film would be 15 years. However, two participants nominated 14 years and four said 18 years.

As can be seen below, immediately after viewing, a majority of Panel members (12 participants) classified *Beautiful People* as MA, with five classifying the film as M and three as R.

### *Beautiful People* (MA)

|    | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|----|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| M  | 5           | 4             | 1           |
| MA | 12          | 6             | 6           |
| R  | 3           | -             | 3           |

### Justification of M

Those who classified the film M made the following comments:

*It has violence, coarse language, adult themes and drug use but it is not enough to be MA.*

*I think the adult themes and the violence are low level.*

*M for the violence, the coarse language and the adult themes.*

### Justification of MA

Those who classified the film MA made the following comments:

*The drug scene in the hospital during the amputation can be taken as heroin being a good thing.*

*It was a borderline division between MA and R because of the intensity of the movie.*

*I thought about R but you can't compare this movie with Romper Stomper and I decided for an MA rating.*

*The high levels of violence, the coarse language and the adult themes. Also the references to ethnic cleansing.*

*I considered R rating but then considered that mid-teens, with adult help, could gain from the experience of this movie.*

### Justification of R

*The violence, the adult themes, the drug use.*

*It has strong violence, drug scenes and racial violence. The scene in the makeshift hospital with the amputation is very strong.*

*I wouldn't want to expose anybody under 18 to the film because you wouldn't know how they are going to react. They are in their formative years.*

### 8.5.7 Classification Shifts

After discussing the film, 11 Panellists classified *Beautiful People* MA. In the younger group, one member changed classification from M to MA and in the older group one member shifted from MA to R and another member shifted from M to MA. In short, all those shifts after the discussion were from a lower to a higher classification. (In brackets in the following table is the participants' classification *before* the discussion.)

#### *Beautiful People* (MA)

|    | Total Panel | Younger Group | Older Group |
|----|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| M  | 5 (5)       | 5 (4)         | - (1)       |
| MA | 11 (12)     | 5 (6)         | 6 (6)       |
| R  | 4 (3)       | -             | 4 (3)       |

### 8.5.8 Participants' Assessment of the Board's Decision

While the majority of the Panel agreed with the Board's classification, there were differences of opinion about the Board report and the consumer advice. Some Panellists were surprised that the Board concentrated on war issues rather than focusing on the urban issues such as the bashing of the black man and the drug use. While Panellists found the drug use an important issue when classifying the film, the Board did not consider it warranted separate consumer advice. The Panel disagreed.

The younger participants who classified the film M were sympathetic with the Board's views.

*I'm still happy with an MA rating. I don't particularly object to it. It was a difficult one for me. I have doubts between M and MA.*

Both older and younger participants objected to the lack of reference to drug use in the consumer advice, especially as it constituted a recurring theme, depicted in some detail.

*I'm a bit disappointed. Why don't they have any drug references? (younger group)*

*The scene in the toilet when you can see the needle marks was strong enough for me to warrant a drug reference advice. (younger group)*

Some members of the older group who classified *Beautiful People* as R considered that the amount of violence through the film justified their higher classification. Older participants discussed how the Board focused on the violence in relation to the Bosnian war while the group was more concerned by the violence depicted on the streets of London.

Some older participants found that as a consequence of the film being 'so boring and dreary', the classification task was more difficult for them.

Because the film struck the older group as bleak, portraying very unlikeable characters living in a

hostile urban environment, many in that group all but dismissed the film. One of the consequences was that a few in this group determined their classification only on the basis that the film contained certain references or elements, and were reluctant to apply the criteria relating to the strength or intensity of the elements.

Thus, for one participant, the film warranted an R classification because of the drug user scene and the general bleakness of the film - not wanting anyone under 18 to view the film. (When the group was asked to look at the final classification they give this film in the context of classifications given to other films, one woman who had given *Beautiful People* an MA, felt that an M would be warranted given that *Once Were Warriors* had attracted an MA.)

It appears that the urban aggression was more applicable to the lives of the Panellists, hence they were particularly sensitive to this, whereas the Bosnian war theme felt very remote to them. Indeed, the issue of war trauma and the suffering of the journalist/cameraman was not raised at all by the Panel, although it appeared in the Board's report.

## 8.6 CONCLUSIONS - BENDIGO PANEL

### 8.6.1 Concerns about Films

The Bendigo Panel members shared similar concerns about film content, although there were occasions when some Panellists attached more significance to some issues than others. During the discussions, Panellists not only referred to the films' content, but also they often drew comparisons with other media outlets, principally television.

Bendigo Panellists were very sensitive to scenes depicting drug use, which was one of the main themes discussed by the Panel. Some Panellists thought that sequences depicting drug use in *The Third Miracle* and *Beautiful People* could be harmful and dangerous to vulnerable young viewers. The lack of consumer advice indicating drug use in the Board's classification reports for both films was one of the main differences between Panellists and the Board. A number of them were surprised at this and disagreed with

the Board's view to treat those elements, generically, as 'adult themes'.

While some of the Panellists were sensitive to (and rejected) any depiction of drug use, others considered the perceived 'moral' message that the sequence was trying to deliver. If the scene was perceived as showing negative aspects of drug use, the Panel was generally more inclined to judge the sequence less harshly. On the other hand, if the scene was perceived to condone or to portray illicit drug use in a 'light' way, Panellists were more negative in their reactions. One younger mother drew comparisons between the drug consumption in one of the films and the situation in Bendigo, where there are 'too many overdoses', suggesting that drug problems in the local area could have influenced some of the Panellists' views of the drug scenes portrayed in the films.

When discussing the films, the context of the scenes was of major importance for Panellists. Themes and places portrayed in the films to which they could relate appeared to influence them in a more substantial way than depictions of unfamiliar situations. For instance, themes such as war violence elicited less discussion than street violence and drug use in a hospital environment was seen as less traumatic than drug use on the street. These differences were marked in the last film viewed, *Beautiful People*, where some Panellists expressed surprise at the Board's focus on war themes and failure to mention the strong sequences occurring on the streets of London.

The knowledge that a film was based on a true story appeared to make a number of Panellists perceive the film in a different light, indicating that real stories are more 'touching' and 'personal'. This perception appeared to play a part in their evaluation of *My Dog Skip*, a film based on a real story.

Violence was also of concern for the Bendigo Panel. Violence was mainly discussed in regard to *My Dog Skip*, focusing on its effect on younger viewers, and in relation to *Beautiful People*. The majority of Panellists appeared to accept that violence can be used as a dramatic device which might highlight the emotional impact of a film but only a few were tolerant of images showing violence in any detail and those deemed

unnecessary for the storyline. Panellists saw the context, frequency and length of a scene as important elements in classifying violent sequences.

As commented earlier, the Panel was inclined to be more concerned about violence that they could relate to, such as street violence, rather than what they judged to be an unlikely event in their lives, such as the violence of war. A number of Panellists were quite concerned about a particular sequence in *Beautiful People* where a young black man is being punched and kicked by a gang to obtain drug money. Some, though not all, Panellists noted the viciousness and length of the attack, which disturbed them. Noticeably, this scene was not mentioned in the Board's classification report.

Violence in a 'proper' context, such as in scenes portraying the Bosnian war in *Beautiful People*, was generally accepted. Moreover, a number of Panellists perceived it as stylised violence and compared it favourably with more graphic war sequences from other films, such as *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line*. Some Panellists in the younger group also indicated that the humour in the film counterbalanced some intense scenes.

Sex was scarcely dealt with in the three films viewed by the Bendigo Panel. There was reference to a scene in the second film, *The Third Miracle*, relating to a relationship between a priest and a woman, although it was generally agreed that the scene was discreetly handled. The scene which suggested a man masturbating under the bedclothes was also identified by some viewers but both sexual references were considered to be of minor importance and were treated as adult themes.

Similarly, coarse language, while acknowledged as a classifiable element, elicited little debate and it was not identified by the Panellists as a strong concern in any of the films.

Children's capacity to understand and relate to films was often raised by Panel members. Some members assumed that material would 'go over their heads' while others indicated that children absorb more material than is often assumed. Initially, some Panellists assumed that the impact on children of some scenes was not an issue,

since it was unlikely that young people would be interested in that particular type of film.

A number of Panellists thought that exposure to certain themes portrayed in films might help children to understand some issues relating to 'growing up', while others stressed the need to protect them from material which they might not comprehend. For instance, *My Dog Skip*, a film praised by many older participants as a family film with 'educational value', was the only film where some of the older participants (three) gave the film a lower classification than the younger participants.

In judging the suitability of various films for family viewing, a number of Panellists (particularly older members) were more accepting of certain adult themes and images if they felt that the appropriate 'moral message' was being communicated or that the film characters triumph or overcome their deficiencies in the end. (An example was the 'druggies' in *Beautiful People* viewed in a final scene reading story books to a young refugee from the Bosnian war.)

When analysing films considered to be 'boring' and which failed to capture their attention, a few Panellists appeared to disengage themselves from the classification process. When this happened, they tended to be less inclined to work at building up the evidence supporting their selected classification and were more likely to say 'It was the whole movie' or point to a single scene or reference to validate their classification.

### 8.6.2 Comparison With Classification Board Decisions

The majority of the Bendigo Panel gave each of the three films they viewed the same classification as the Board. The older participants tended to put more restrictive classifications on the films than did the younger group.

In this final section a summary of the Panel's positions in relation to each of the films is compared with the Board's position, concentrating on any points of difference. It can be assumed that if differences are not indicated then the Panel agreed with the Board's report.

#### *My Dog Skip* (rated PG)

A majority of the Panel (16 out of 20 participants) classified the film PG while the other four nominated G. This is the only film where some of the older participants gave the film a lower classification than the younger participants. From those classifying *My Dog Skip* as G, three were from the older group and one from the younger group.

The Panel agreed with the Board's assessment of the film. Panellists focused on two main scenes which were also emphasised by the Board: the shooting of a deer and the hitting of the dog with a shovel.

Only a few participants suggested that there was a need to acknowledge some additional adult themes (the segregation of blacks, army desertion) and a particular scene where Willy hits the dog, references not identified in the Board's report.

### ***The Third Miracle* (rated M)**

A majority of the Panel (18) classified the film M, with the remaining 2 nominating MA. Both of the latter participants were in the older group. To them, the overall dark tone of the film and drug references warranted a higher classification than the one given by the Board.

In general, the majority of the Panel agreed with the Board's rationale for its classification. The majority of elements covered by the Panel were also included in the Board's report, such as the priest questioning his faith, references to suicide and child abuse, and how the priest deals with temptation. The main difference between the Panel and the Board related to references to drug use. While in the Board's report drug use has been included as an adult theme, some Panellists felt that 'drug use' should have been explicit in the consumer advice.

### ***Beautiful People* (rated MA)**

*Beautiful People* revealed more differences between Panellists and the Board than either of the other two films. A slight majority (11) classified the film MA while a substantial minority either nominated M (5) or R (4) classifications.

The younger group was evenly split between M (5) and MA (5). On the other hand, the older group was split between an MA classification (6) and R (4). Older participants justified their higher classification in light of the cumulative level of violence through the whole film and by one strong drug scene in particular.

As occurred with *The Third Miracle*, the lack of reference to drug use under consumer advice was the main disagreement between Panellists and the Board. Panellists expressed the view that drug use was a recurrent theme depicted in some detail in *Beautiful People* and that consumers needed to be alerted to this.

Also, a particular scene where a black man is robbed to obtain drug money and which was found disturbing by some Panellists as a consequence of its perceived cruelty and length, is not mentioned in the Board's report. In the film, Panellists tended to concentrate more on the urban aggression visibly depicted in the film than on the violence in relation to the Bosnian war. For instance, the issue of war trauma and the suffering of a journalist/cameraman who returns from the war with what is termed 'The Bosnian Syndrome' (believing he needs to have his leg amputated like the other war victims), was not raised at all by the Panel.

### **8.6.3 The Process of the Community Assessment Panel**

The Bendigo Panel strongly supported the need for classification guidelines and for consumer advice. The Panellists referred to the classification manual frequently during the discussion, made use of the official terminology and definitions and generally sought to apply the 'rules' fairly.

The methodology for establishing and conducting the Bendigo Community Assessment Panel worked effectively and reflected the intent of the research. In general, Panellists appeared to have no difficulties in applying the classification system to the three pre-release films that had been classified by the Board.

A useful aspect of the methodology was to assess the effects of peer pressure on the individual's post-discussion classification. The lengthy discussions also allowed Panellists to consider certain aspects of the film which some

acknowledged they had initially overlooked or had not recalled. In the Bendigo Panel, the pre- and post-discussion classification decision showed little variation. This indicates that the Panel considered the films to fit well within their originally nominated classification.

Panel members generally found the Board's rulings to be clear and justifiable. When the viewpoints of the Panel and Board differed, Panellists generally understood the Board's position and understood the application of the classification guidelines. In a few instances, individual participants continued to challenge aspects of the Board's reasoning, principally in

regard to the last film viewed, *Beautiful People*. In this film, some Panellists from both the older and the younger focus groups disagreed with the lack of indication of drug references as consumer advice in the Board's final decision. The majority of the Bendigo Panellists agreed with the Board's classifications of the three films. The major difference occurred with *Beautiful People* where, while the majority of the Panellists classified the film MA (11), as did the Board, a substantial number of them classified it as M (5) and R (4).

### APPENDIX A

#### RESPONDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

**COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PANEL  
QUESTIONNAIRE (A)**

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Gender    Male                          Female   

4. Age        \_\_\_\_\_

5. Currently, what is your main activity?

- A full time student
- A part time student
- Unemployed
- Employed full time
- Employed part time
- Household duties
- Retired
- Other (please provide details)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6(a) If you are currently employed (or retired) describe your usual occupation. Please describe in some detail.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6(b) If you are married or living in a married situation, what is your partner's usual occupation, if any? Again, please describe in some detail.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. What type of educational institution are you currently attending or have attended in the past (tick all that apply)

- Secondary school**
- Government
- Catholic
- Other non-Government
- Tertiary institution**

- Technical or further educational institution  
(including TAFE Colleges)
- University or other higher educational institution
- Other educational institution**

8. What was the highest educational level you have completed?

---

OPTIONAL - Could you indicate what your weekly gross household income is? \$ \_\_\_\_\_

9. What is your current marital status?

- Never married
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated, but not divorced
- Married
- Defacto

10. Do you have any children?

- Yes
- No

11a. If you have children could you say how many children and what ages and gender they are?

11b. Could you put a tick in the last column to show which children, if any, currently live in your household full time or (regularly )part time?

| No. of Children | Gender<br>(M or F) | Age | Live in same household |
|-----------------|--------------------|-----|------------------------|
| □               | □                  | □   | □                      |
| □               | □                  | □   | □                      |
| □               | □                  | □   | □                      |
| □               | □                  | □   | □                      |



12. Do you speak a language other than English at home? If yes, which language/s?

No

Yes

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13. What, if any, is your religious denomination?

\_\_\_\_\_

14. Would you say you attend a place of worship ...

Never

Occasionally

Fairly regularly

Very regularly

15. What would you describe as your favourite recreational activity or activities?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

16a. In the past month have you viewed any videos?

Yes

No

16b. **If no**, can you recall how long ago it was when you last watched a video? \_\_\_\_\_

16c. Can you tell me the title of the video you last saw? \_\_\_\_\_

16d. Would you say, on average, that you would watch a video ...

Weekly or more often

Fortnightly

Monthly

Every 2-3 months

Less often

Never

17a. In the past month have you gone to a cinema?

Yes

No

17b. **If no**, can you recall how long ago it was when you last went to a cinema? \_\_\_\_\_

17c. Can you tell me the title of the film you saw when you last went to the cinema?

\_\_\_\_\_

17d. Would you say that, on average, you go to the cinema ...

Weekly or more often

Fortnightly

Monthly

Every 2-3 months

Less often

Never

18(a) Thinking now about the last year or so, have you seen anything on video or at the cinema that you disapproved of?

Yes

No

18(b) If yes, what was that film and what did you disapprove of?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

19. Have you seen anything in the last year or so at the cinema or on video that you particularly enjoyed? What was it?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

20. Please write down all the classification categories you can remember that are used for cinema films and rental videos.

---



---



---

21. Do you think that film and video classification is necessary for:

- Children only
- Adolescents and children only
- Everyone
- Nobody

22. And why do you feel that way?

---



---



---

23. If you are concerned about the content of film and video material for yourself or for anyone else, please indicate below how concerned you are about each of the following issues or elements. Please write any other issues(s) or elements you may be concerned about in the space provided, and indicate your level of concern.

|                                 | Very<br>concerned        | Not very<br>Concerned    | Not at all<br>concerned  | Not at all<br>concerned  |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Sex                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Violence                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Language                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other _____<br>(please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

24. Are there any particular kinds or types of films/videos that you especially like? What are they?

---

---

---

---

***THANK YOU FOR FILLING IN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE***

**APPENDIX B**  
**AFTER VIEWING FILM QUESTIONNAIRE**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

**AFTER VIEWING FILM  
QUESTIONNAIRE (B)**

1. What did you think of the film? Please include a few words of explanation as to why you feel this way.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. In your opinion, what is the youngest age for which this film would be suitable viewing?

\_\_\_\_\_

3(a) What classification do you think you, personally, would place this film into?

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| G  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| PG   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| M  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| MA   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| R  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It should be banned/<br>refused classification | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3(b) And what is the main element (eg violence, sex, coarse language, adult themes etc) in the film that contributed to your decision?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3(c) Are there other elements which also contributed to your decision? If so, what are they?

---

---

**PLEASE STOP HERE UNTIL AFTER THE DISCUSSION**

4. Now that you and the group have discussed the film in some detail can you say what classification you would now place the film into? This might be the same classification you originally made or it might be another - either way just express your personal view:

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| G  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| PG   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| M  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| MA   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| R  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It should be banned/<br>refused classification | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**APPENDIX C**

**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE**

Focus Group Discussion Guide

□ **FIRST HAVE PEOPLE FILL IN 'AFTER VIEWING' QUESTIONNAIRE B**

**Introduction:** *First, go around group and have people introduce themselves, tell a bit about themselves. We will now have a general discussion about what you thought about the film you just saw, your reactions and such. Remember this is about your opinions - there are no right or wrong answers. Each one of us might have a different opinion and they are all valid. Just try to let one person at a time speak so we can all hear and we hope and expect all of you to be part of the discussion.*

1. First, let's just hear your general views on the film. Did you enjoy it or not? What did you like or dislike about it?
2. What did you think the strongest elements, themes or issues in the film were? Would you say there was anything *troubling* about the film? What do you think you'll take away or remember about this film? Was there anything in the film you regarded as controversial for either adults or children?
3. What aspects or elements of the film do you think should be taken into consideration when classifying this film?
4. How important is the context in which these specific elements arose - is it the issue/element per se, or how the issue/element is presented in this particular film that contributes to your opinion?
5. Let's look now at the classification you gave this film. We will just go around the group and have people say what classification they gave the film and then we will talk about *why* you gave it this classification.
6. In deciding what classification/s you feel the film should get, what was the basis of your thinking? What elements led you to decide this way? In particular, what ages do you feel the film is or is not suitable for?

7. In what ways would the film maker have had to change the film in order for it to be classified at a lower category? a higher category?
8. (UNLESS  CLASSIFICATION) Let's look now at the sort of consumer advice you feel should be shown with the classification symbol on advertisements, video jackets etc. What consumer advice should be provided in relation to *this* film that would alert consumers as to what to expect in relation to the elements of violence, sex, coarse language and so on?
- NOW HAVE PEOPLE RECLASSIFY FILM ON QUESTIONNAIRE B**
- THEN DISTRIBUTE BOARD'S CLASSIFICATION/CONSUMER ADVICE**
9. What do you think about the decision made on this film by the Classification Board? Why is that? What do you agree/disagree with?
10. What do you think about the consumer advice that the Board decided should apply to the film? Why is that? Would this consumer advice help you to decide whether you (for yourself or others) wanted to see this film?

### **Final round up and closure.**

### **OPTIONAL - IF TIME**

- (A) How do you go about choosing films for yourself/your children? If you have children, do they ever self select or are you always involved? How are you involved? If hiring on their behalf - how do you make decisions? How aware were you of the classification system (before joining this group)? Do you generally agree with the classification decisions?
- (B) Are the classifications and consumer advice 'visible'? Where do you find this information and do you make use of it? Is this information readily available to you when you are going through the decision making process?
- (C) What, in general, are the key issues of concern for you in terms of the content of films, and why are these of concern to you?
- (D) Can you think of any examples when you were surprised by the classification given a film?

**APPENDIX D**

**DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PANEL MEMBERS**

**TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF PERTH PANEL PARTICIPANTS**

| <b>Participants</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Location</b> | <b>Family Status</b>                      | <b>Occupational Group</b>               |
|---------------------|------------|---------------|-----------------|---|---|
| Participant 1       | 16         | F             | Samson          | Single - no children                      | Student                                 |
| Participant 2       | 17         | F             | Melville        | Single - no children                      | Student                                 |
| Participant 3       | 21         | M             | Caversham       | 2 children aged 3 and 4 years             | Electrical Tradesperson                 |
| Participant 4       | 23         | M             | Nollamara       | De facto - no children                    | Salesman                                |
| Participant 5       | 23         | F             | Gosnells        | 1 child aged 2 years                      | Senior Child Care Worker                |
| Participant 6       | 25         | M             | Gosnells        | 2 children aged 2 years and 6 months      | Administrative Officer                  |
| Participant 7       | 31         | M             | Bayswater       | Single - no children                      | Self-Employed Photographer              |
| Participant 8       | 33         | F             | Yangebup        | 2 children aged 2 and 1 year              | Primary Schoolteacher                   |
| Participant 9       | 34         | M             | Mt. Pleasant    | De facto - no children                    | Photographer                            |
| Participant 10      | 40         | M             | Ballajura       | 3 children aged 8, 10 and 15 years        | Gardener                                |
| Participant 11      | 38         | M             | Caversham       | 3 children aged 3, 5 and 12 years         | Boilermaker/Welder                      |
| Participant 12      | 38         | F             | Beechboro       | 5 children aged 7, 8, 11, 14 and 16 years | Housewife                               |
| Participant 13      | 41         | F             | Bull Creek      | 1 child aged 3 years                      | Dental Nurse                            |
| Participant 14      | 44         | F             | Carlisle        | 1 child aged 15 years                     | Librarian                               |
| Participant 15      | 48         | F             | Bedford         | 2 children aged 12 and 14 years           | Library Officer (Primary School)        |
| Participant 16      | 49         | M             | Greenwood       | 2 children aged 23 and 19 years           | High School Teacher                     |
| Participant 17      | 51         | M             | Dianella        | 2 children aged 19 and 17 years           | Chemical Engineer                       |
| Participant 18      | 57         | F             | North Perth     | 2 children aged 31 and 28 years           | Branch Administrator (Service Industry) |
| Participant 19      | 57         | F             | Osborne Park    | 4 children aged 27, 33, 35 and 38 years   | Paging Operator                         |
| Participant 20      | 60         | M             | Highgate        | Single - no children                      | Retired                                 |

**TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF ADELAIDE PANEL PARTICIPANTS**

| <b>Participants</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Location</b>  | <b>Family Status</b>  | <b>Occupational Group</b>              |
|---------------------|------------|---------------|------------------|---|--|
| Participant 1       | 16         | M             | Morphett Vale    | Single - no children  | Student                                |
| Participant 2       | 17         | F             | Reynella         | Single - no children  | Student                                |
| Participant 3       | 20         | M             | Aldgate          | Single - no children  | Apprentice Plumber                     |
| Participant 4       | 20         | F             | Kilburn          | Never married - 1 child aged 4 years                          | Volunteer Worker                       |
| Participant 5       | 29         | F             | Flagstaff Hill   | Married - 2 children aged 2 and 4 years                       | Chef                                   |
| Participant 6       | 29         | M             | Hallett Cove     | Married - 1 child aged 1 year                                 | Police Officer                         |
| Participant 7       | 31         | M             | Seaford          | Married - 3 children aged 3, 9 and 16 years                   | Part-time Student-<br>Household Duties |
| Participant 8       | 33         | M             | Warradale        | Married - 3 children aged 2, 4 and 6 years                    | Manager                                |
| Participant 9       | 34         | M             | Brampton         | Single - no children  | Gardener                               |
| Participant 10      | 34         | F             | Clarence Gardens | De facto - 2 children aged 7 and 8 years                      | Childcare Worker                       |
| Participant 11      | 35         | F             | McLaren Vale     | De facto - 3 children aged 18 months, 4 and 5 years           | Household Duties                       |
| Participant 12      | 38         | M             | Modbury North    | Married - 2 children aged 6 and 10 years                      | Technical Officer                      |
| Participant 13      | 40         | M             | Torrensville     | Married - 6 children aged 5 months, 3, 8, 11, 13 and 16 years | Operations Coordinator                 |
| Participant 14      | 44         | F             | Seaview Downs    | Married - 2 children aged 3 and 7 years                       | Shop Assistant                         |
| Participant 15      | 47         | F             | Bridgewater      | Separated - 3 children aged 15, 18 and 21 years               | Household Duties                       |
| Participant 16      | 50         | F             | Brooklyn Park    | Divorced - 2 children aged 17 and 19 years                    | Financial Consultant                   |
| Participant 17      | 51         | M             | Eden Hills       | De facto - 1 child aged 15 years                              | Investigation Officer (Gov. Dept.)     |
| Participant 18      | 52         | F             | Peterhead        | Widowed - no children   | Customer Services Officer              |
| Participant 19      | 58         | M             | Morphett Vale    | De facto - 1 child aged 33 years                              | Maintenance Fitter                     |

|                |    |   |         |   |         |
|----------------|----|---|---------|---|---------|
| Participant 20 | 62 | F | Klemzig | Married - 2 children aged 32 and 35 years | Retired |
|----------------|----|---|---------|---|---------|

**TABLE 3: SUMMARY OF KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF BENDIGO PANEL PARTICIPANTS**

| <b>Participants</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Location</b>  | <b>Family Status</b>                        | <b>Occupational Group</b>              |
|---------------------|------------|---------------|------------------|---|--|
| Participant 1       | 15         | Male          | Querry Hill      | Single - no children                        | Student                                |
| Participant 2       | 16         | Male          | Strathfield Saye | Single - no children                        | Student                                |
| Participant 3       | 16         | Female        | Strathfield Saye | Single - no children                        | Student                                |
| Participant 4       | 20         | Female        | Strathdale       | Married - no children                       | Sales Assistant                        |
| Participant 5       | 21         | Female        | Long Gully       | De facto - no children                      | Office Administrator                   |
| Participant 6       | 22         | Male          | Strathfield Saye | De facto - no children                      | Computer Programmer                    |
| Participant 7       | 28         | Female        | Strathfield Saye | Married - 1 child aged 1                    | Household Duties                       |
| Participant 8       | 30         | Female        | Central          | Married - 4 children aged 11, 9, 6 and 4    | Household Duties                       |
| Participant 9       | 32         | Female        | Central          | De facto - 1 child aged 9                   | Ambulance Paramedic                    |
| Participant 10      | 34         | Female        | Central          | Married - 2 children aged 6, 4              | Sales Person                           |
| Participant 11      | 35         | Female        | Eppalock         | Married - 3 children aged 12, 10, 5         | Household Duties                       |
| Participant 12      | 37         | Male          | Strathfield Saye | Married - 3 children aged 9, 8, 6           | Senior Service Officer (office duties) |
| Participant 13      | 39         | Male          | Strathfield Saye | Married - 2 children aged 11, 9             | Computer Programmer                    |
| Participant 14      | 41         | Female        | Axe Creek        | Married - 3 children aged 10, 7, 4          | Household Duties                       |
| Participant 15      | 48         | Male          | Axe Creek        | De facto - 3 children aged 18, 15, 5        | Concretor                              |
| Participant 16      | 50         | Male          | Strathfield Saye | Married - 4 children aged 29, 24, 18, 14    | Retired                                |
| Participant 17      | 52         | Male          | Eaglehawk        | Married - 3 children aged 21, 13, 18 months | Training Officer                       |
| Participant 18      | 55         | Male          | Golden Square    | Married - 2 children aged 21, 17            | Shop Manager                           |

## Keys Young

|                |    |        |                     |   |                |
|----------------|----|--------|---------------------|---|----------------|
| Participant 19 | 56 | Male   | Eaglehawk           | Married - 3 children<br>aged 33, 32, 28 | Postal Manager |
| Participant 20 | 56 | Female | Strathfield<br>Saye | Married - 3 children<br>aged 33, 31, 26 | Teacher        |

**APPENDIX E**

**BOARD  
REPORTS**

**TITLE:** *A Walk on the Moon*

**CLASSIFICATION:** M

**CONSUMER ADVICE:** Medium Level Sex Scenes, Adult Themes, Medium Level Coarse Language

**SYNOPSIS:** Pearl finds life as a wife and a mother somewhat stifling at the end of the 1960s. When a salesman/drifter arrives in the holiday camp she visits every year she begins an affair with him, with consequences for the whole family.

**REASONS FOR THE DECISION:**

In the Board's view this well-made film warrants an M classification for sex scenes, adult themes and use of coarse language.

The film successfully conjures up the era. The title commemorates man's first walk on the moon, but also hints at Pearl's emotional journey which takes place at the same time. The camping ground at which Pearl and her family are staying is near to Woodstock, the other big event of the era, when the famous concert takes place. It is a time of change, and Pearl finds herself unable to resist when a handsome stranger offers her a chance to change too. The film is a drama, with the story of lust and family tensions played out against a 1960s soundtrack and a wistful sense of lost opportunities. In this context, stronger elements which contribute to the M classification include:

**SEX SCENES:**

34 mins; Pearl goes to the salesman's bus at night; in dim lit visuals they kiss, he slides his hand under her blouse and then down her pants, she lifts her feet into the air and he removes her pants, sound effects of his zipper, head and shoulders of he atop her and gently implied thrusting intercourse, before he moves below screen in briefly implied cunnilingus; scene remains dim lit

40 mins; Pearl and the salesman are shown in a range of stylised poses as they embrace and kiss outdoors at a waterfall/lagoon; they swim; in mid-range side on visual they are shown naked between some rocks in an embrace (no obvious thrusting); above waist embrace including breast nudity, and passionate kissing under the waterfall is depicted

In the Board's view these visuals discreetly imply sexual activity, with side visuals of a full length nude embrace containing little or no detail.

**ADULT THEMES:**

Pearl's experiences have consequences for all the family. Her teenage daughter, Alison is also discovering her sexuality for the first time, while her husband is shattered by Pearl's infidelity. In this context there are several scenes which have impact that recommend the film to mature audiences:

60 mins; Alison sees her mother at Woodstock with the salesman; her husband returns and finds Pearl has been away; he angrily forces her to confess she has 'been screwing someone'; they argue, both weep; he leaves but returns and disrupts the sleeping household by grabbing his young son and daughter and trying to take them away from Pearl; he tells her she can 'stay and be a whore';

71 mins; affected by all this Alison runs and meets her boyfriend and tells him she wants to 'go all the way' with him (have sex); he refuses, but she later lies about this to her mother

73 mins; Alison returns home and bitterly argues with her mother about her mother's behaviour; they slap each other, weep, but ultimately make up and their relationship is strengthened by honesty.

These issues are dealt with in a way which is strongly justified by the narrative. They have some impact but are ultimately resolved in a positive way, emphasising honesty and respect, and warrant but do not exceed the M classification.

### **LANGUAGE:**

There is infrequent use of 'fuck' language but it is sometimes used in clusters, with some impact, and is used aggressively. On this basis a 'medium level coarse language' consumer advice is warranted, in the Board's view.

These elements contribute to a film which has resonance and which mixes drama with humour in a way that recommends the film to a mature audience, and cannot be recommended for those under 15 years of age.

Some incidental and non-advocatory drug use and nudity could be accommodated at a lower level, in the Board's view, and do not require coding or advice at the M level in this treatment.

**TITLE:** *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?*  
**CLASSIFICATION:** MA  
**CONSUMER ADVICE:** Medium Level Violence, Medium Level Sex Scene,  
Medium Level Coarse Language

**SYNOPSIS:** Sequel to “Once Were Warriors” (classified MA #94/2940) with “Jake the Muss” reviving his menacing portrayal as a disenfranchised loner whose restless life revolves around alcohol and violence. The setting is urban New Zealand with a focus on two competing “bikie” gangs comprised mainly of Maori’s. After his son, Nicky, is murdered Jake is challenged about his violent and drunken lifestyle by two new Maori friends who abhor his wanton “warrior” tendencies. They instil in him a pride of family and hard work and Jake eventually reconciles with his remaining son, “Sonny”.

**REASONS FOR THE DECISION:**

In the Board’s view this film warrants an MA classification for violence, a sex scene and coarse language which require a mature perspective.

The film has a number of violent scenes and there is a pervading pall of malevolence as the main protagonists circle each other. Jake’s resolution of his violent ways is a central feature of the film and his treatment of women also features prominently. At 33mins a drunken Jake is shown groping and rough-housing his girlfriend to the point where she fears for her safety and flees the house. Jake is enraged and smashes the furniture, however, he later apologises for his drunken aggressive behaviour saying, “I thought it was normal”. The films violence is justified within the story line and a lot of it consists of threats and implied beatings, however, there is a cumulative impact which warrants the MA classification.

**VIOLENCE:**

Generally depictions of violence do not have a high impact and are otherwise infrequent, not prolonged or gratuitous. Strongest depictions include;

4mins. Jake viciously attacks a man by throwing numerous rapid fire punches and kicks. He follows this up by smashing a chair over the victim’s head and slams him into a poker machine which shatters. The scene is very brutal and serves to remind the audience of Jake’s powder keg personality.

7mins. Medium distance visuals of a fight between two rival bikie gangs. Various punches are thrown and heavy blows exchanged with batons etc. The visuals are restrained given the night setting and the distance. Nicky (Jake’s son), acting as lookout, is shot in a slow motion sequence which shows him flying backwards upon impact followed by a close-up of heavy blood vomiting from his mouth as he lies wide eyed and dying on the ground.

86mins. Sonny and Tania confront “Grunt”, the leader of the bikie gang whom they suspect had ordered Nicky’s murder. Grunt pleads for his life upon being confronted at gunpoint however the gun misfires and he rushes towards Sonny. Tania shoots “Ape” in the arm and there is a brief

visual of his bloodied sleeve. She chases him and shoots him in the back as he flees. He falls over and is shown in a post action visual arching his back with slight blood detail around his stomach.

97mins. There is a prolonged fight scene at the bikie clubhouse in which Jake and Sonny are beaten to the ground with heavy punches and kicks. A melee ensues and heavy blows are exchanged leading to numerous people sustaining bloody facial injuries. Strongest scenes within the fight include: A man hit across the head with a wrench, people beaten with baton, a chain wrapped around a man's neck and an iron bar is smashed into a man's knees.

### **SEX SCENE:**

Sexual activity is implied. Depictions of nudity in a sexual context contain some detail but are not exploitative.

67mins. The scene opens with panning visuals up a woman's naked buttocks and torso. She is lying atop a male, half covered by sheets. The pair engage in implied thrusting intercourse and there are blurred head and shoulders visuals of implied thrusting accompanied by orgasmic groans.

### **COARSE LANGUAGE:**

Frequent and contextually justified use of "fuck" occurs throughout the film. An isolated use of the stronger "motherfucker" also occurs. The coarse language is often used in an aggressive tone however the very strong and aggressive coarse language is not gratuitous.

**TITLE:** *Tarzan*  
**CLASSIFICATION:** PG  
**CONSUMER ADVICE:** Low Level Violence

**SYNOPSIS:** Kala, a female gorilla, finds a human baby after he has been orphaned in the African jungle and she brings him up as her own baby. The young Tarzan grows up in the jungle determined to be as strong and fast as the other gorillas. He is very happy and does not realise he is human until an expedition arrives from England and he is bewitched by the beautiful Jane. His attraction to these visitors unwittingly puts his gorilla family at risk of entrapment by the evil Clayton.

**REASONS FOR THE DECISION:**

In the Board's Majority view this film warrants PG classification for depictions of violence, which could be confusing or upsetting to children without adult guidance.

The Board notes that this finished print runs three minutes shorter in length than the unfinished bid print and the revised unfinished bid print. However, there appears to be no discernible difference in the classifiable elements.

This film is an animated version of the classic Tarzan story concerning a human boy raised by gorillas. Apart from an early scene where Kala battles a leopard as she rescues the baby Tarzan, the first part of the film has a light-hearted tone as Tarzan romps in the jungle with his friends – a cheeky young gorilla and an amusing elephant. Their adventures are highlighted by song and animation of magnificent scenery, happy throngs of animals and beautiful birds and butterflies.

This initial treatment could be accommodated in the G classification, however as the tone of elements of the film darken with Tarzan's slaying of the leopard and the arrival of the expedition from England with the evil hunter Clayton; some scenes of violence go beyond having "a light tone or, a very low sense of threat or menace" as required for this lower classification.

**VIOLENCE:**

Violence is discreetly implied or stylised within the animated treatment of the film. It is mild in impact and not shown in detail. However, there is a cumulative effect of threat and menace as the film progresses, which combined with some stronger depictions of violence, warrant PG classification.

Strongest depictions occur at:

- 4 mins. Kala, the female gorilla, enters a tree house to find a shotgun on the floor with bloody paw prints leading to a glimpse of the legs of dead bodies obscured by fallen furniture implying that they have been killed by a wild animal. The gorilla rescues a crying baby taking it as a substitute for her lost baby. A leopard hiding in the rafters attacks the pair. Pouncing and

snarling in a frightening sequence with the baby falling into a net, the leopard grabs repeatedly for the baby, who is ultimately saved by the gorilla.

26 mins. A protracted battle ensues between the leopard and Tarzan after it has attacked Kerchak, the male leader of the gorilla family. Tarzan wields a spear and the leopard slashes at Tarzan who has bloody scratch marks on his chest. As the battle continues they both eventually fall into a pit with Tarzan emerging holding the leopard across his shoulder. He then holds the dead leopard aloft in triumph before laying the limp body at Kerchak's feet. The Board notes that this stylised fight scene appears to have been reduced in detail from the first print, however the impact of this once powerful animal's death goes beyond having "a light tone".

35 mins. Jane is surrounded by a mass of angry monkeys and she flees with them chasing at her heels. Tarzan comes to her rescue, picking her up and flying through the treetops. The monkeys still follow, snapping viciously at her feet until they steal her boot. Jane falls dangling from a rope with the monkeys still frantic to get at her. Trees crash down around Jane and the monkeys in a frightening scene until Tarzan again saves her. The scene is somewhat lightened in the end by the comic touch of a mother and baby monkey parachuting past in Jane's umbrella clutching her drawing of the baby monkey. However, Jane's initial terror and flight from the monkeys could be confusing or upsetting to children.

69 mins. Tarzan boards the English ship to be confronted by men with cages. He leaps up the funnel, but crashes to the deck where the men hold him until Clayton hits him in the stomach with his rifle barrel. Clayton tells him "We don't want you around when we put your furry friends in cages". The Board notes that the impact of the belting with the gun and Tarzan's reaction appear to have been reduced, however the effect of Tarzan being held whilst hit with the rifle and the reference to the threatened caging of his gorilla family go beyond having "a light tone".

72 mins. Clayton's men explode a red flare in the sky panicking the gorillas, nets are thrown over some of them, one is held by a whip around the neck and some are thrown in cages. Panic ensues and Tarzan, Jane and the monkeys finally chase the men away and release the gorillas. Clayton fires a huge shotgun at Tarzan who is implicitly injured. Clayton then fires at Kerchak who drops to the ground. Tarzan and Clayton continue to battle and Tarzan turns Clayton's gun on him as he swings at Tarzan with a machete. Clayton is held by vines wrapped around his neck and he drops, implicitly hanged (off-screen). There is a brief glimpse of him hanging in the vines which is depicted in shadow blending in with the blue tone. The Board notes that some action and sound effects of the use of the machete swinging at Tarzan appear to have been reduced, however the impact of the whole scene goes beyond having "a light tone and low sense of threat or menace".

77 mins. Tarzan goes to the dying Kerchak who asks him to take care of his family. Kerchak finally calls Tarzan "my son" before his eyes close in death and his hand falls limp to the ground. Tarzan holds the huge Kerchak in his arms and lays him gently down. The dark, stormy setting and the fatal injury to the great leader of the gorilla family heighten the tone of this final scene.

The emotional impact of the film is heightened not only by Kerchak's death, but also by an earlier scene where Tarzan's gorilla mother finally takes him to the tree house where she found him. He finds a photo of himself with his mother and father and realises that Kala is not his real mother. Kala tells him she just wants him to be happy and walks away from him. She sits quietly sobbing at the thought of losing her beloved son, whom she has fought Kerchak to keep as their child, but he comes to her and hugs her telling Kala "You will always be my mother".

The film is resolved in a positive manner with Kerchak handing over the leadership of the gorillas to Tarzan and Jane choosing to stay in the jungle with him.

The Board's Majority felt that all elements are discreet and mild in impact and would not be harmful or disturbing to children, although the above elements could be confusing or upsetting without adult guidance.

In the Board's minority view the violence within the film is considered to be very discreetly implied and does not go beyond a very low sense of threat or menace. The treatments of themes during the film are given careful and discreet treatment with potentially disturbing themes given such brief and careful treatment that they can be accommodated within the G classification. The action is considered upbeat, optimistic and fast paced with potentially stronger disturbing themes left undeveloped in the minority's view. In conclusion the minority felt most themes would be likely to escape the attention of younger audiences with the light and optimistic tone of the film overall outweighing such interpretation.

In the Board's Majority view, this film is appropriately located in PG classification, as the material will not be harmful or disturbing to children, but does warrant parental guidance as the violence has more than a light tone and a sense of threat and menace.

## Classification Review Board Report

**Title:** TARZAN

**Classification:** PG

**Consumer advice:** Some scenes may scare very young children

## DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION

### Decision

The Classification Review Board decided to confirm the decision of the Classification Board to classify the film *Tarzan* PG, but to vary the consumer advice line to “Some Scenes May Scare Very Young Children”.

### The plot

This animated feature traces the story of Tarzan's adoption as a baby and raising to adulthood in the jungle by a band of gorillas, his first encounters with humans, the subsequent tragedies, and of his romance with Jane.

### The scenes and themes

The Review Board considered the themes and scenes cited by the Classification Board as warranting a PG classification.

The Classification Board cited scenes at 4 mins (“leopard attacks baby and gorilla”), 26 mins (“leopard attacks Tarzan”), 35 mins (“Jane and the monkeys”), 69 mins (“Tarzan and the cages”), 72 mins (“Clayton's men attack Tarzan”), 77 mins (“Kerchak dies”) as containing “stronger depictions of violence”.

The Review Board unanimously found that the scenes at 26 mins and 35 mins did not have a light tone and did not have a low sense of threat or menace, as would be required if the film were to be classified G.

A majority of the Review Board found the scenes at 4mins and 72 mins also had neither a light tone, nor a low sense of threat or menace.

A majority of the Review Board did not consider the scenes at 69mins, and at 77 mins to be such as would confuse or disturb children under the age of 15 years.

### Reasons for the Decision

The Review Board based its decision to confirm the Classification Board's decision to classify the film *Tarzan* PG on the content and impact of the film as set out above.

The Review Board found the images of the leopard's fearsome face and his ongoing pursuit of, and slashing at the helpless baby Tarzan (4-6mins), and the leopard's attack and pursuit of the grown-up Tarzan at 26-29 mins created a strong sense of menace that would be upsetting to very young children (under the age of 7 years) .

The Review Board considered that a strong sense of threat and menace was created in the scene at 35-36 mins where Jane is pursued first by the gorillas and then continually attacked and pursued by the monkeys (with very fierce faces), and finally falls screaming. This sense of menace was increased by the dark colours used in the animation technique. The Review Board felt that the

attempt at humour (monkey descending with umbrella following the chase scene) did not lighten the tone of the pursuit.

The impact and sense of menace were increased in the scene at 72 mins by the initial use of red tones moving to very dark tones at the end of the scene at 76mins; by threatening with guns, by slashing out with a knife; and by an emphasis on frightening faces.

The Review Board found that these scenes would be particularly scary for very young children (those under the age of 7 years), and would be upsetting without adult guidance. The Review Board therefore concluded that the film was appropriately classified PG.

The Review Board concluded that the film contained elements which made the film unsuitable to be viewed by children under the age of 15 years without supervision, and therefore confirmed the decision of the Classification Board to classify the film PG.

The Review Board's decision to assign the consumer advice line "Some Scenes May Scare Very Young Children" is made having regard to its findings above. The Review Board took the view that this description would help parents of young children to avoid potentially scary and upsetting material, while not discouraging older children from a film with many positive elements.

### **Summary**

The Review Board's decision is to confirm the decision of the Classification Board to classify the film *Tarzan* PG. The Review Board has decided to vary the consumer advice to "Some Scenes May Scare Very Young Children".

|                                |                       |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b><u>TITLE:</u></b>           | <i>The Iron Giant</i> |
| <b><u>CLASSIFICATION:</u></b>  | PG                    |
| <b><u>CONSUMER ADVICE:</u></b> | Medium Level Violence |

**SYNOPSIS:**

A young boy named Hogarth befriends a giant robot from outer space. He enlists the help of a scrapyard dealer named Dean to keep the robot safe from government intervention.

**REASONS FOR THE DECISION:**

In the Board's view this animated film warrants a PG classification for stylised animated depictions of violence which have a mild impact but might be confusing or upsetting to children without adult violence.

**VIOLENCE**

Elements of note at PG level include:

- Kent, a government official, is sent to investigate rumours about the existence of the robot. Hogarth is keeping the robot a secret because he knows people will be frightened of him – just as Hogarth was initially – and that they will not understand that the robot is actually very friendly and caring. During an interrogation session, Kent threatens to remove Hogarth from his mother is Hogarth does not co-operate by telling Kent where the robot is hidden (he says he will prove that Hogarth's mother is irresponsible). Kent chloroforms Hogarth who is next shown sleeping in bed. Hogarth outsmarts Kent by sneaking out in the middle of the night to enlist Dean's help in disguising the robot from the army forces that are due to arrive that morning.
- There is a relatively lengthy final battle scene between the army and the robot that has conceptual impact but is well resolved. Increasing the impact is the ongoing threat to Hogarth's welfare, both from Kent who advises the army general that Hogarth is dead when he is really alive and being held protectively by the robot during the cross fire at the robot; and also in terms of the robot firing at Hogarth when Hogarth innocently and playfully brandishes a toy gun at the robot eliciting a defensive reflex in the robot. The battle builds to the extent that Earth is threatened by Kent's defiant order to launch a guided missile at the robot.
- Earlier post action visuals of a deer which has been implicitly shot by hunters upsets the robot and leads him to a mini lecture from Hogarth about guns, 'it's bad to kill – it's not bad to die'. This is significant later when the robot becomes defensive and shoots back at the army firing heavy artillery at him, Hogarth is able to calm the robot down by telling him that he does not have to have a gun.
- We learn that the robot has the capacity to auto generate when damaged. This is significant because at the end of the film the robot heroically a missile high in the air. There is a huge explosion and a monument is built in his honour. Then we see the various parts of the robot, strewn in Iceland, rally together implicitly to reform the robot.

Overall the tone of the film is quite light and PG is appropriate.

## Classification Review Board Report

**Title:** THE IRON GIANT  
**Classification:** PG  
**Consumer advice:** Some scenes may scare very young children

The Classification Review Board decided to confirm the decision of the Classification Board to classify the film *The Iron Giant* PG, but to vary the consumer advice line to “Some scenes may scare very young children”.

### The plot

In this animated feature, a young boy Hogarth encounters, befriends and, with the help of Dean, the scrap yard dealer, attempts to protect “the iron giant”, an extraterrestrial visitor, from being captured and destroyed.

### The scenes and themes

The Review Board considered the themes and scenes cited by the Classification Board as warranting a PG classification.

The Classification Board cited scenes at 24 mins (the robot is damaged but autogenerates); at 50 mins (the deer is shot and leads to a lecture from Hogarth to the robot about “being a gun”); at 54 mins (Hogarth is interrogated by the government investigator, and threatened with being taken from his mother); at 1hr05 to 1hr14mins (the concluding battle scene between the army and the robot); as scenes which could be confusing or upsetting to a child without adult guidance.

The Review Board unanimously found the scene at 54mins to be confusing or upsetting to children without adult guidance, and that the film was therefore appropriately classified PG. The Review Board was divided in its findings on whether the frequency, tone and impact of the violence in the film were such as to provide additional grounds which warranted a PG classification.

### Reasons for the Decision

The Review Board based its decision to confirm the Classification Board's decision to classify the film *The Iron Giant* PG, on the content and impact of the film as set out above.

The Review Board unanimously found the scene at 54 mins in which the investigator interrogates Hogarth as to the whereabouts of the robot and threatens to take Hogarth away from his mother if he doesn't tell, to have a high sense of threat and menace for young children. The scene implies, for a watching child, that the investigator has the power to carry out his threat. The Review Board concluded that this scene would be confusing or upsetting without adult guidance.

Some Review Board members found the concluding battle sequence (approximately 11 mins in length) in which the army pursues and shoots at the robot, planes bomb and hit the robot, the robot fires at the army, and the robot is finally hit and apparently destroyed by a missile, to contain violence that is not very discreetly implied, does not have a very low sense of threat or menace, and is not infrequent. Further, some of the Review Board considered that the above sequence, and the

early scenes in the film (11-13mins) in which the robot is first encountered by Hogarth, and in which Hogarth is initially terrified of the robot, are such as would be confusing or upsetting to young children without adult guidance.

Other members of the Review Board took the view that these scenes and sequences could be accommodated within the G classification, because of the stylised nature of the violence, and the generally light tone of the film.

The Review Board concluded that the film was appropriately classified PG.

The Review Board concluded that the film contained elements which made it unsuitable to be viewed by very young children under the age of 15 years without supervision, and therefore confirmed the decision of the Classification Board to classify the film PG.

The Review Board's decision to assign the consumer advice line "Some scenes may scare very young children" is made having regard to its findings as set out above. The Review Board took the view that this description would help parents of young children to avoid potentially scary and upsetting material, while not discouraging older children from a film with many positive elements.

**TITLE:** *This is My Father*

**CLASSIFICATION:** M

**CONSUMER ADVICE:** Adult themes. Low Level Coarse Language, Low Level Sex Scene

**SYNOPSIS:**

An American history teacher travels to Ireland to discover his roots and learns of the doomed love affair between his father and mother.

**REASONS FOR THE DECISION:**

In the Board's view this film warrants an M classification for adult themes, coarse language and a sex scene.

**ADULT THEMES**

Keiran, a boy from the poor house, woos Fiona, a girl from a well to do family. A love blossoms between them but Fiona's mother wants it to end. Fiona becomes pregnant and there is a scandal. Keiran is lectured by the priest in the confessional who asks him, 'What do you think about when you touch yourself? Do you think about men?' Because of her young age (seventeen) the priest describes Fiona as a girl saying, 'What do you imagine doing with this child.' And seems disappointed when all Keiran says is kissing. When Fiona's mother learns of her pregnancy she threatens to send her away. Keiran leaves a note for Fiona but because it rains the note is ruined and Fiona does not receive it. Believing everything to be lost and fearing imprisonment Keiran hangs himself with post action visuals of him hanging from a tree in long shot and closer shots of men taking his body down. Fiona is later shown weeping over the body. In some ways this is a modern retelling of the *Romeo and Juliet* story. The theme of the tragedy and suicide are treated discreetly and, in the Board's view, can be accommodated at the M level.

**COARSE LANGUAGE**

An isolated naturalistic use of 'fuck' contributes to this film's M classification.

**SEX SCENE**

At 83 minutes Keiran and Fiona implicitly have sex for the first time. They are shown fumbling in the hay. He climbs on top of her still clothed. In the head and shoulders shot he is shown thrusting several times before implicitly climaxing. She gasps implying that she has been penetrated for the first time. She is later shown with blood on her hands and dress. In the Board's opinion this discreet scene can be accommodated at the M level.

These elements warrant but do not exceed the M classification.

|                                |                               |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b><u>TITLE:</u></b>           | <i>The General's Daughter</i> |
| <b><u>CLASSIFICATION:</u></b>  | R                             |
| <b><u>CONSUMER ADVICE:</u></b> | Medium Level Violence         |

**SYNOPSIS:**

Captain Elizabeth Campbell, the daughter of a prominent army general is found murdered on an army base. Her body is found naked and staked to the ground in spreadeagle fashion. The ensuing investigation uncovers a tangled web of deception, spawned from a terrible incident that occurred some years before.

**REASONS FOR THE DECISION:**

In the Board's view this film warrants an R classification for violence and adult themes which require an adult perspective.

The film follows a murder investigation of a particularly heinous crime. The nature of the crime is horrific enough; however the tone is strengthened by the constant emphasis on psychological warfare and the post traumatic effects of trauma. The murder victim, who worked as a military psychologist had earlier stated, "We fuck with peoples' minds". As the investigation draws to a head, the audience is left to ponder the question, "What's worse than rape?" Given the intensity of the theme and the visuals of sexual violence it is felt that some of the material may be offensive to some sections of the adult community.

**VIOLENCE**

Strong depictions of realistic violence are shown. Depictions with a high degree of impact are not gratuitous or exploitative. Sexual violence is implied and is not detailed.

20 mins. The murder victim, Captain Elizabeth Campbell, is discovered and the investigating team, headed by Paul Brenner – a hybrid cop/soldier, arrive at the crime scene. Elizabeth is initially shown in a medium distance, full length visual, naked and staked to the ground in spreadeagle fashion. A soldier explains, "We found her...she was tortured, raped and murdered". There are various camera angles showing, amongst other things, close ups of bruising of the victim's face, tight rope burns on the victims arms, close ups of the victim's hands tightly bound, close ups of her panties and cord around her neck. Breast and pubic areas are evident in long shot.

77 mins. Told in flashback the audience is narrated through Elizabeth's rape. Her psychiatrist speaks aloud and the narrative is buttressed by graphic visuals. Elizabeth is shown being set upon by a group of her fellow soldiers. They appear sub-human, dressed in camouflage gear and having painted faces. She is knocked down and there are close ups of stakes being driven into the ground and her limbs being tied to them. The narrator explains, "They did it all night long...took turns...she was treated for venereal diseases and pregnancy". The scene has a chaotic strobe like effect and there are alternative camera angles capturing the horror. Visuals include scenes of panic on her face, twisting of her hands, struggling, soldiers yahooping and fuelling each other along, overhead visuals of soldiers thrusting atop her. A strong post action visual follows as she is found the next day still staked out. She is wide eyed with shock and has a very battered and bruised face. The scene is both visually and conceptually strong. At the lower MA classification the guidelines allow for "*visual suggestions of sexual violence are permitted only if they are not frequent, prolonged, gratuitous or exploitative*". In the opinion of the Board these scenes exceed the MA criteria for frequency and intensity.

Other scenes of violence, including a fight to the death culminating in a man being implicitly shredded by an outdoor motor and a post action visual of a bloody Colonel in his home showing a graphic blood bullet wound in his head etc, could probably be accommodated in the lower MA classification.

### **ADULT THEMES**

The film deals with adult themes with a very high degree of intensity but the treatment is not exploitative. The violence and adult themes are inexorably linked.

Elizabeth is portrayed as an attractive, highly intelligent officer with a prestigious career ahead of her. As the investigation into her murder unfolds the audience becomes aware that this was all a façade concealing darker truths. The first inkling arrives at 35 mins as Paul Brenner searches her home. Upstairs he finds her house immaculately presented leading him to comment, “This was one squared away soldier”. In the cellar, however, he finds a secret dungeon containing extensive bondage and S&M paraphernalia including a table with vibrators, butt-plugs, candles, chains and whips. A home made video taps is found in the room and it shows Elizabeth in latex gear acting as dominatrix whilst she abuses a trussed up male. She roughly grabs his head, whips him, kicks him and sits astride him in implied intercourse. Having been made aware of Elizabeth’s dark side the audience is given an explanation of her behaviour via fallout from her initial rape.

At 92 mins a battered Elizabeth is shown in hospital and her Father’s behaviour highlights her despair. He tells her, “Don’t ever think of this again...it never happened...none of this happened”. Her subsequent promiscuity was common knowledge amongst the staff and she later explains, “I was conducting an experiment in psychological warfare...subject Daddy”. The rape and its outcomes continues as a theme of the film.

At 96mins (via flashback) Elizabeth is shown naked on the ground staked out in the original manner in which she was first raped. She had apparently decided that this was to be her salvation, her therapy to make her Father realise his wrongs. Her Father arrives and is shocked at what he sees. He orders her to stop. She says, “It happened”... He replies, “I don’t give a damn what happened seven years ago”. As he walks away she pleads, “Daddy please”. Shortly thereafter, “Kent” an obsessed lover, (She tormented me...became my obsession”), approaches and Elizabeth angrily threatens to tell his wife and calls him repulsive, “You were just a fuck”. She spits in his face whereupon he begins to choke her until she dies.

In the Board’s opinion the theme of rape and its outcomes, which in the film include involvement in S&M and re-enactment of the rape as a form of therapy, combined with the repeat visuals of a graphic scene of sexual violence exceed the lower MA classification and warrant, but do not exceed, the R classification.

**CLASSIFICATION REVIEW BOARD REPORT****TITLE:** THE GENERAL'S DAUGHTER**Classification:** MA**Consumer advice:** Adult themes, Some sexual violence

The Classification Review Board decided to set aside the decision of the Classification Board to classify the film *The General's Daughter* R 18+ with the consumer advice "Medium Level Violence, Adult Themes", and to classify the film MA15+ with the consumer advice "Adult Themes, Some Sexual Violence".

**The plot**

Army investigator Paul Brenner sets out to solve the bizarre murder of Lt Elisabeth Campbell, daughter of a prominent General. Paul uncovers the story of the pack rape of Elisabeth during an Army exercise seven years earlier. The official attempts to suppress this incident and to deny its reality have severe consequences for all concerned.

**The themes and scenes**

The Review Board considered the themes and scenes cited by the Classification Board as, in its opinion, taking the film into the R18+ category.

The Classification Board found that the film's violence and theme of rape and its outcomes were of sufficient strength to require an adult perspective. The scenes of violence included that at 77 mins in which Elisabeth's rape seven years earlier is shown as a flashback, with the rape and its effects narrated by the psychiatrist who treated Elisabeth afterwards.

The consequences of the denial and suppression of the rape are shown to include Elisabeth's promiscuity and resort to sadomasochism. Further, in a futile attempt to show her father the consequences of his suppression of the incident (for the good of the army), Elisabeth has herself staked out naked in the manner in which she had been raped (96mins), and arranges for her father to see her. She is subsequently strangled by a rejected "lover".

The Review Board found the depiction of the rape was via visual suggestions which were not frequent, prolonged, gratuitous or exploitative.

Further, the Review Board found that the theme and scenes related to the consequences of the rape were such as required a mature perspective, but not necessarily an adult one.

The Review Board therefore found that the film could be accommodated in the MA15+ category.

**Other elements**

The Review Board agreed with the Classification Board that other depictions, which included a fight to the death, resulting in a man being pushed into the propeller of a boat, and the postaction visuals of a Colonel who had been shot in the head, could be accommodated in the MA15+ category.

### **Reasons for the Decision**

The Review Board based its decision to classify the film *The General's Daughter* MA15+ on the content of the film as set out above.

The Review Board found the depiction of the rape of Elisabeth by her fellow army cadets during an exercise to be conveyed by “visual suggestions of sexual violence”. The gang rape was not seen in closeup, nor as sequential action, but rather as a series of separate shots, with the perpetrators seen only as silhouettes against the night sky. The depictions were not frequent, prolonged, gratuitous or exploitative.

The violence depictions in this sequence, eg, the shots of Elisabeth's shocked and battered face, while of high impact, were considered to be not frequent, prolonged or gratuitous.

The Review Board found the themes of the consequences of rape and suppressed rape to be powerful, but nevertheless to be one which could be understood and appreciated by those with a mature perspective.

The film clearly emphasised and condemned the horror of rape, and the perpetrators were seen as weak and cowardly. The ongoing suffering of those who have been raped was clearly conveyed. The psychological disturbance caused by the suppression of the rape supported the theme of the horror of rape, and while not all aspects of this subtheme might be understood by those between 15 and 17 years, its treatment was not, in the opinion of the Review Board, harmful to them. The Review Board therefore took the view that the film was appropriately classified MA15+.

The Review Board also concluded that the combination of scenes referred to

above is “likely to disturb, harm or offend those under 15 years” so as to warrant imposing the restriction that “children under 15 years will not be admitted to cinemas unless accompanied by a parent or guardian (and that) video material will be restricted to persons 15 years and over”, in accordance with the guidelines for the classification of films and videos.

The Review Board's direction that the consumer advice be varied to “Adult Themes, Some Sexual Violence” is made having regard to the content as described above.

### **Summary**

The Review Board's decision is to set aside the decision of the Classification Board, and to classify the film *The General's Daughter* MA15+ with the consumer advice “Adult Themes, Some Sexual Violence”.

**TITLE:** *My Dog Skip*  
**CLASSIFICATION:** PG  
**CONSUMER ADVICE:** Low Level Violence

**SYNOPSIS:**

The story of a young boy and his dog.

**REASONS FOR THE DECISION:**

In the Board's view this film can be accommodated in a PG classification. It contains depictions of violence that could be confusing or upsetting to children without adult guidance. The depictions are discreetly implied, mild in impact and not shown in detail.

At 59 mins. Willy and his father are in the forest when they hear a gunshot. His father says "Hunters! Get down!" and then calls their position to them. As they approach a deer appears and in slow motion, walks in front of them and falls to the ground. Willy approaches and we have a view over his shoulder of his hand on the deer's side. He lifts his hand and we see a small bloody wound and a small amount of blood on his finger. He and his father walk away and we hear a shot as the hunters finish off the animal.

79 mins. Skip has run away and makes his way to the cemetery where he is accidentally locked into the vault. The moonshiners return, open the vault and see their bottles have been smashed. One of them curses the dog and picks up the shovel. We then have a visual perspective from Will's point of view several yards away from the tomb. The shovel is raised and implicitly hits Skip. We don't see Skip but we hear a yelp. We then see Willy rush to the tomb and again from his perspective, look down at Skip's inert body. He is taken to the vet and survives.

Although the Board considers this material would not be harmful or disturbing to children, parents may wish to preview it, watch with their children or be available during or after the viewing to discuss the content.

**Title:** *The Third Miracle*

**Classification:** M 15+

**Consumer Advice:** Adult themes, Low level violence, Low level coarse language

### **SYNOPSIS:**

Frank Shore (Ed Harris) is a postulator for the Catholic Church who is sent by Bishop Cahill to investigate reported miracles at St. Stanislaus' in Chicago and to see whether a laywoman who worked there (Helen O'Regan) should be considered as a candidate for sainthood. Wracked by doubts of his own concerning his faith, he falls for Roxanne, Helen's bitter daughter.

### **REASONS FOR THE DECISION:**

In the Board's majority opinion this film warrants an "M" classification for depictions of adult themes, low level violence and coarse language that are not recommended for viewers under 15 years of age. In the Board's minority opinion the treatment of adult themes is not sufficiently low in impact to be accommodated in "M" and therefore the film warrants restriction for those under 15 years of age.

#### **Adult Themes**

The treatment of adult themes is discreet and the impact is not high. There are a number of themes within this film which are of note:

1. A priest questioning his own faith and the Catholic church hierarchy - this theme is dealt with consistently through the film both through his verbal expressions of self doubt and during the discussions about the beatification of Helen O'Regan.
2. The alcohol dependency of the priest which was brought on by his doubts about his faith is illustrated through depictions of him pouring shots or spirits or drinking from a bottle.
3. How the priest deals with the temptation posed by the daughter of the woman being considered for sainthood - this is dealt with discreetly through a one minute sequence at 57mins during which they briefly kiss and embrace each other.
4. Verbal references to the suicide of a man previously considered for sainthood and both verbal and visual references (the latter depicted in flashback) about how his death affected his entire community, who believed that he performed miracles (approx 22mins)
5. Very brief indirect visual reference (in flashback) to the possible childhood abuse during which a woman is attending to a young female who has what may be small burn marks on her arm (approx 74mins)
6. A mother making the decision to take her teenage daughter off life support (approx 94mins)
7. Poverty and the despondency of people living in slum areas, including a distance shot of possibly heroin injection. In the Board's majority view this depiction can be accommodated under "adult themes" rather than "drug use" because it is a depiction used within the context of setting up the mise en scene of the film. (approx 33mins)

## **VIOLENCE**

Generally, depictions of violence do not contain a lot of detail and are not prolonged. Depictions of violence that contain detail are infrequent, do not have a high impact and are not gratuitous. However there are a number of depictions of note:

1. The opening sequence of the film is told in flashback to Slovakia during an Allied air raid. A young Helen runs down the street but instead of fleeing to the shelter she kneels before a statue of the Virgin Mary and prays for a miracle. A German soldier, his leg amputated at the knee and wrapped in a bloody bandage, watches from the back of a truck as the bombs fall and his fellow soldiers run for cover.
2. Approx 66mins - Frank is called to a crime scene and the body of a young male is seen on the floor with a bloodied face and his head lying in a pool of blood.

## **Coarse Language**

Coarse language is used infrequently throughout this film and it is not detailed or gratuitous. There are seven instances of "fuck" language, four of which are used at approx 41mins during a fight between Frank and Maria and another at approx 34mins in an altercation between Frank and another male whom he believes can tell him where Maria is.

**Title:** *Beautiful People*

**Classification:** MA 15 +

**Consumer Advice:** Adult Themes

**SYNOPSIS:**

Film follows the lives of a diverse group of people living in England and the effects the Bosnian war has on them when they are touched personally by the horror of it.

**REASONS FOR THE DECISION:**

In the Board's unanimous view this film warrants MA classification due to the depiction of adult themes that require a mature perspective. The film trails the lives of people whose lives have been personally touched by the Bosnian war. Although not a documentary the film portrayed a gritty side to the Bosnian war not often seen.

**Adult themes:**

The treatment of adult themes with a high degree of intensity are given discreet treatment. The film touches on the realities of the Bosnian war and the devastating effects that it leaves on the lives of people involved.

A heroin addict is seen to be inadvertently air lifted to Bosnia during a drug induced haze. On arrival (on an aid parcel) the male is dazed and confused as bombs and missiles explode around him. Many people are shown looking for aid from the package until the bombings quickly and silently leave victims stopped in their tracks. The stark reality shows the victims moments earlier fossacking for packages and then falling to the side silently without special effects blowing them skyward. The male manages to scramble to the safety of a UN envoy where he sees bodies strewn across the road discarded like dolls. Moments later a utility drives erratically across the screen with the legs and feet of bodies visibly protruding from the back. The shot shows the cost on human life with the bodies stacked as if inconsequential.

As the male flees from another frightening situation he steps on a land mine and is ordered to stand still. In the moments the male is left to stand alone on the mine, time appears to stand still as the enormity of that one step sinks in. The rest of the survivors look around at him sending a message of empathy and relief that they are not the potential victim of a mine. A trained army officer manages to put a pressure stopper over the device so the male can step off. They both jump for their lives and the device explodes, both unhurt.

Upon getting to a first aid tent filled with victims nursing bloody injuries. The male is to be witness to an amputation of another's leg. He is horrified as the operation is to take place without anesthesia. Bloody carpentry saws are laid out in readiness and the crudeness of the situation sinks in as the poor male awaits the horrendous ordeal in agony. The male quickly pulls from his pocket a hit of heroin and implicitly administers this to the victim, whose eyes roll back in his head as the procedure is completed. A bloody leg stump is carried out the back by a nurse and discarded atop a heap of other

amputated limbs to make up a makeshift dumping ground of bloody body parts. Another male a cameraman / journalist stares on in obvious shock and disbelief, he is then shot in the leg by a sniper and is carried to safety.

The shot male has trouble recovering from the experience of seeing the decaying heap of body parts when he returns to life in England and suffers what is termed as 'Bosnia Syndrome'. This manifests itself in the form of the male believing he needs to have his leg amputated like the other war victims. He is seen acting quite mad as he begs hospital staff to perform the operation. His wife and child are clearly frustrated as their attempts to reassure him that his leg is okay go unnoticed. His wife finds a live hand grenade amongst his belongings and appears shocked and dismayed, this kicks her into action to find a cure for his behavioural problems. Finally he is cured after seeing a hypnotist.

The heroin addict finds his true path as he takes care of a blinded Bosnian boy from the war. The boy 'whose parents have been casualties of war', is seen frequently with bloodied bandaged eyes.

Worth mentioning, however not requiring separate consumer advice at the MA level, are the drug references. Two males are seen in a public toilet unconscious. The pair have tourniquets still wrapped around their arms which show bloody puncture marks. One holds the syringe loosely in his hand as if he had just had a hit. They are quickly revived by a friend who is on the run from a group of angry football revellers.

In summary, the Board is of the view this film is appropriately located within the MA classification as the classifiable elements contain detail and as such, restriction to those under 15 years is deemed necessary.