



Australian Government  
Attorney-General's Department

# Classification ratings

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Stakeholder and practitioner consultation

Classification Branch

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## **Executive summary**

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## Background to the research

### Background

- Media convergence has transformed the way media content is distributed and consumed.
- Policy and regulatory frameworks are potentially ill-suited to the emerging convergent media environment.
- The Australian Law Reform Commission was therefore commissioned to undertake a review of the Australian National Classification Scheme.

The ALRC final report recommended that the classification process and guidelines (including classification symbols and content advice) should be reviewed periodically through a comprehensive program of research, including the collection of both qualitative and (ideally nationally representative) quantitative data, in order to ensure that they reflect prevailing community standards and preferences.

In response to this recommendation the Classification Branch of the Attorney General's Department has commenced a program of research. To date, the following projects have been undertaken:

- A review of research and grey (unpublished) literature relating to views, knowledge and use of media classification systems in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions.
- A study focussing on members of the Australian public to investigate views, knowledge and use of media classification, in particular the National Classification Scheme. This study also included the views of stakeholders from government and regulatory agencies, industry and consumer advocacy groups, as well as classification practitioners (ie members of the Classification Board, Review Board and staff assessors)<sup>1</sup>.

The latter project is the subject of this and another report produced concurrently. This report relates to the views of **stakeholders and classification practitioners**. The other report produced in relation to this study concerns the views of the general public. That report is titled *Classification Ratings: Research with the General Public*.

### Study objectives

Using quantitative and qualitative research methods, the study assessed the following amongst the general public aged 18+:

- awareness and understanding of current classification ratings
- use of current classification ratings, with a particular focus on the impact of a convergent media environment
- perceptions of current classification ratings, with a particular focus on unprompted suggestions for improvement
- responses to alternative classification ratings

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<sup>1</sup> Staff assessors view and assess film and game content and produce classification recommendations for the consideration of the Classification Board.

- perceptions of the current National Classification Scheme, including the process and regulation of classification and the current and ongoing role of the scheme.

The views of classification practitioners (ie Classification Board Members, Review Board Members and Classification Branch Staff Assessors) and stakeholders were also sought.

As noted above, this report relates to the views of **stakeholders and practitioners**.

## Methodology

### Stakeholders

In-depth interviews were undertaken with 24 Classification Scheme Stakeholders belonging to the following groups: Government and Regulation, Industry and Advocacy. In-depth interviews ran for between 30 and 45 minutes. Of the 24 interviews, 22 were conducted over the telephone and two were conducted face-to-face.

### Practitioners

Quantitative data was collected from Classification Board Members, Review Board Members, and Classification Branch Staff Assessors via a short online survey. This survey was programmed in SurveyMonkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com>) and distributed via a link included in an email. Note that throughout this report the term 'Practitioners' refers collectively to Classification Board Members, Review Board Members, and Classification Branch Staff Assessors.

## Key findings and conclusions

**Conclusion one: stakeholders are supportive of the continued existence of a classification scheme but believe it needs to adapt to changes in the media environment.**

Stakeholders from industry, advocacy groups and government continue to see a role for classification in the 2014 media and entertainment landscape. However, there was general agreement that the current scheme needs to be updated to ensure the continued relevance, utility and usefulness of classification.

It was suggested that as the ability of government to police media purchasing/access becomes more limited, the classification system will need to move toward making recommendations rather than restrictions.

Stakeholders suggested that classification information is often used to *guide* (rather than direct) decisions about media consumption (including children's media). Thus movement toward an advisory model would to some extent reflect current usage patterns.

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**Conclusion Two: stakeholders view the role of classification as primarily the protection of children, and secondarily the empowerment of adult consumers.**

Stakeholders agreed that the primary role for film and computer game classification is to protect the viewer/player, especially children and young people, from discomfort or harm. Even stakeholders who envisaged a radically altered classification scheme agreed that the protection of children should be central to any system developed for the classification of media, including films and computer games.

There was, however, disagreement amongst stakeholders about whether classification should aim to protect children through a combination of recommendations and restrictions or through recommendations only. It was suggested that age restrictions, especially those under 18+, were difficult to police, but also that specific age indicators in ratings advice aided parents in decision making.

Media decision-making for adult consumption was thought to be influenced by plot information or reviews more frequently than by ratings.

The role that classification plays in prohibiting media is not top-of-mind for most stakeholders.

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### **Conclusion Three: consumer advice will become increasingly important in a convergent media environment.**

Stakeholders consistently expressed a strong desire for the inclusion of more detailed consumer advice on packaging and advertising material. There was a general perception that the ability of government to restrict access to media has become more limited, that the role of parents in controlling the media consumption of minors will need to increase, and that more detailed consumer advice will be needed to aid parents in decision making.

Some stakeholders also suggested that parents may already rely on consumer advice more than classification categories, as they did not want their children exposed to particular types of material (most often sex, language, or violence).

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### **Conclusion Four: the independence of the Classification Board (and Classification Review Board) from government is viewed as a key strength of the current process for film and computer game classification in Australia.**

When stakeholders were asked to list the key strengths of the current process for classification in Australia, the independence of the Classification Board (and Review Board) from government was frequently mentioned.

Other key strengths listed by stakeholders included:

- the utilisation of community members for classification decisions
- fair understanding of classification information by the general public
- provision for decisions to be reviewed.

However, some stakeholders questioned the representativeness of the Classification Board, suggesting that its decisions were either too conservative or too liberal.

A small number of stakeholders felt that rather than being representative of the general public, the Classification Board should be made up of various 'experts'. It was suggested that utilising a panel of experts would lead to more informed and consistent classification decisions.

The prevailing view, however, was that in-depth, consistent training of practitioners was the most appropriate method for ensuring a requisite level of objectivity in decision-making.

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**Conclusion Five: the cost and time involved in having media classified and the slow pace of legislative change are viewed as key weaknesses of the current process for film and computer game classification in Australia.**

In line with findings from the ALRC review of classifications, stakeholders (especially stakeholders from industry) were adamant that the discord between the existing legislative and regulatory environment and the current media and entertainment landscape is impeding the utility of the National Classification Scheme. Stakeholders further suggested that this lack of alignment is placing an unnecessary financial burden on the film and computer game industries. In particular, it was suggested that applying for a classification is too costly and, sometimes, prohibitively expensive, that media content should not have to be classified more than once when available across multiple media platforms, and that there should be no costs associated with classification for law enforcement.

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**Conclusion Six: stakeholders are most supportive of a classification system in which primary responsibility lies with industry and secondary responsibility lies with the Commonwealth Government.**

Lending further support to the conclusions drawn from the ALRC review of classification, several stakeholders envisioned a system in which industry is responsible for the regulation of almost all classification decisions (at least up to MA 15+), the Classification Board is responsible for high-level classification decisions and reviews and the Classification Branch is responsible for system oversight, training and compliance.

Most of these stakeholders nevertheless felt that it was important for classification to continue be linked to government, and that an industry-led, self-regulatory scheme may be subject to conflicts of interest. Most were also sceptical of the idea of a (third party) not for profit organisation being responsible for classification.

Many stakeholders believed that a first step toward deregulation would be to rethink the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) on censorship, which requires that significant classification



policy matters and amendments to the National Classification Code and Guidelines must be agreed by all State and Territory Ministers with responsibility for classification matters.

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#### **Conclusion Seven: confusion about mid and high level classifications is common**

Stakeholders asserted that both the public and industry were confused about the difference between M and MA 15+ and R 18+ and X 18+. In particular, stakeholders questioned the logic of having two similarly named categories with the same age reference point as is the case for M and MA 15+.

Stakeholders generally agreed on the necessity of a category between PG and MA 15+, but suggested that the utility of the M category could be improved through a change of name and/or inclusion of an age reference point below 15.

An alternative suggestion for addressing the confusion included combining the M and MA 15+ categories (to form one category) and the R 18+ and X 18+ categories (to form another category).

In relation to the two 18+ categories, it was suggested that the Australian public could be adequately warned about media content, sexual or otherwise, via clear, visible consumer advice rather than having two such categories.

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#### **Conclusion Eight: inconsistencies between film and television classification categories confuse the Australian public.**

In line with submissions made to the ALRC review of classification, stakeholders from government and regulation suggested that inconsistencies between television and film classification categories can be confusing for the Australian public, with particular note being made of the different definition of MA for television ('Mature Audiences') and for film ('Mature Accompanied').

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#### **Conclusion Nine: stakeholders and practitioners view the current classification ratings favourably but see room for improvement.**

Many stakeholders were in favour of minor alterations, rather than a complete overhaul of all classification categories. Support for the current categories tended to be driven by the perception of high awareness and at least adequate understanding of the categories amongst the Australian public, especially parents. Some also expressed a preference for increased community education as a means of addressing areas of confusion, rather than changes to the ratings themselves, or to the inclusion of more specific consumer advice.

However, others made suggestions including reducing the number of categories (ie combining M and MA 15+ and R 18+ and X 18+), rethinking the name and scope of the M and MA 15+ categories and increasing the number of categories at the lower end of the spectrum (ie addition of a specific category or categories distinguishing content for children from content for young adults).

Several of those consulted emphasised the need to consider the impact on industry prior to the implementation of any changes to current classification ratings. For example, there was concern that classification category names could inadvertently affect the 'positioning' of a film or computer game (eg names such as 'Teen' if applied to a romantic comedy may put off potential viewers).

The majority of surveyed practitioners (10 of 17) indicated that they were 'Satisfied' with the existing categories as a set, and when asked about individual ratings, 50% or more were 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied' with each rating, with satisfaction varied across categories (highest for the R 18+ and X 18+ categories and lowest for M 15+). Practitioners responded moderately positively to alternative classification ratings (especially Option 1: G, PG 8+, Y 13+, M 15+, R 18+, X 18+, Prohibited) but the response was not positive enough to warrant a major overhaul.

These results support the conclusion that the current categories are in need of improvement but may not need be abandoned altogether.

# 1

This chapter outlines the research context, objectives and methodology

## 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Current arrangements for media classification in Australia

### The National Classification Scheme

The National Classification Scheme is a cooperative arrangement between the Australian Government and the state and territory governments where the Classification Board classifies films, computer games and certain publications.

The Scheme commenced in 1996 following recommendations made by the Australian Law Reform Commission about censorship procedure (see 1991 Report No. 55). The Commonwealth, states and territories entered into the Intergovernmental Agreement on Censorship to underpin the scheme.

The *Commonwealth Classification Act 1995* established both the Classification Board and Classification Review Board and sets out the procedures to be followed in making decisions (Commonwealth of Australia 2014).

The respective roles of the Boards and the Classification Branch of the Attorney General's Department are outlined in the Table 1 below.

**Table 1: parties involved in Classification**

Classification Board	Classification Branch	Classification Review Board
independent statutory body (separate from government)	Part of the Attorney General's Department	independent statutory body (separate from government and the Classification Board)
makes classification decisions about films, computer games and publications under the Classification Act and the Broadcasting Services Act for internet content	manages the application process for both Boards  handles complaints  responsible for monitoring compliance and providing education programs	makes decisions about applications for review; these replace the original Classification Board decisions

Source: Commonwealth of Australia (2014)

### Governance

The National Classification Scheme is overseen by ministers from the Commonwealth, states and territories. The Minister with responsibility for classification matters is usually the Attorney-General for each state or territory. Ministers with responsibility for classification matters are not involved in Classification Board decisions.

Commonwealth classification policy and operation is the responsibility of the Attorney-General's Department.

Under the National Classification Scheme, the states and territories are responsible for enforcing classification decisions. Each state and territory government has classification enforcement legislation to complement the Commonwealth Classification Act. Enforcement legislation sets out how films, publications and computer games can be sold, hired, exhibited, advertised and demonstrated. Some states and territories have reserved censorship powers and varying classification requirements which are outlined in their legislation (Commonwealth of Australia 2014).

### Ratings categories

The *National Classification Code* sets out the different classification categories and detailed criteria for classification decisions made by the Classification Board and Classification Review Board.

According to the Code (2013):

Classification decisions are to give effect, as far as possible, to the following principles:

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

The Classification Board uses six *classifiable elements* to assess impact when making a classification decision. These are:

- Themes
- Violence
- Sex
- Language
- Drug use
- Nudity (Commonwealth of Australia 2014)

### Film and computer games

Classifications for films and computer games are either **advisory** or **restricted**. A further level of restriction applies to adult films. The hierarchy of classification categories is set out in Table 2 below. A more detailed version of the table is provided in Appendix C.

**Table 2- ratings categories for film and computer games**

Rating	Description
Advisory categories: there are no legal restrictions on viewing/playing these films/computer games	
G—General	The content is very mild in impact. The G classification is suitable for everyone.
PG—Parental Guidance	The content is mild in impact. However, it is not recommended for viewing or playing by persons under 15 without guidance from parents or guardians.
M—Mature	The content is moderate in impact. Films and computer games classified M (Mature) contain content of a moderate impact and are recommended for teenagers aged 15 years and over. However, children under 15 may legally access this material.
Restricted categories: there are legal restrictions on viewing / playing these films/ computer games.	
MA 15+—Mature Accompanied	The content is strong in impact. MA 15+ classified material contains strong content and is legally restricted to persons 15 years and over.
R 18+—Restricted	The content is high in impact. R 18+ material is restricted to adults.
Restricted categories for adult films	
X 18+—Restricted	X 18+ films are restricted to adults. X18+ films are only available for sale or hire in the ACT and the NT.
RC—Refused Classification	Refused Classification (RC) is a classification category. Material that is Refused Classification is commonly referred to as being 'banned'.

**Source: Commonwealth of Australia (2014)**

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## Publications

Most publications including magazines do not need classification and may be legally bought and read by children. Only 'submittable publications' (publications which may be Refused Classification or restricted to adults) require classification. These publications usually contain sexualised nudity or sexually explicit content (Commonwealth of Australia 2014).

## Classification of television and online content

As television and online content are outside the remit of the National Classification Scheme in its current form, only a brief description of these classification arrangements is given here. The key features of these classification arrangements are as follows.

### Television

As provided for under the Broadcasting Services Act (1992), (the Act) television content is largely regulated by broadcasters, under a system of industry-developed codes of practice (ACMA 2014).

The Act mandates time-zone restrictions for commercial television broadcasting licensees and community television broadcasting licensees. These require, for example, that films classified as Mature (M) may be broadcast only between the hours of 8:30 pm on a day and 5:00 am on the following day, or between the hours of noon and 3:00 pm on any day that is a school day (Australian Law Reform Commission 2012 p50). The Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (2010) applies similar time zone restrictions to programs made for television (Free TV Australia 2010).

The classification categories for commercial television are as follows:

- Childrens (C) and Preschool (P) classification
- General (G) classification
- Parental Guidance Recommended (PG) classification
- Mature (M) classification
- Mature Audience (MA) classification
- Adult Violence (AV) classification (Free TV Australia 2010)

### Online content

Online content is regulated through the Online Content Scheme under Schedule 5 and 7 of the Act. The complaints-based Scheme applies to content accessed through the internet, mobile phones and convergent devices, and applies to content delivered through emerging content services such as subscription-based internet portals, chat rooms, live audio-visual streaming, and link services.

Where content is hosted in Australia and is found by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) to be prohibited, the ACMA has the authority to direct the relevant content service provider to remove the content from their service. Where content is not hosted in Australia and is prohibited, the ACMA will notify the content to the suppliers of approved filters, so that access to the content using such filters is blocked.

In addition, regardless of where it is hosted, if the ACMA considers the content to be of a sufficiently serious nature, it must notify an Australian police force (Australian Government Department of Communications, 2014).

## 1.2 Media convergence and the report of the ALRC

Media convergence – a phenomenon enabled by (a) the digitisation of media content, (b) the increasingly widespread availability of high-speed broadband connections and (c) the proliferation of internet-enabled devices including ‘Smartphones’ and mobile tablets – has fundamentally transformed the way media content is distributed and consumed. Most notably, Australian media consumers – including children and young people – can now access a vast array of local and international media (including media from broadcasters, news organisations, social media sites, iTunes, YouTube, and so on) online via an ever increasing number of internet-enabled devices and screens. The choice of devices for accessing the internet combined with 3G/4G and wireless broadband networks also gives consumers further flexibility in *how* (eg via a Smartphone or mobile tablet) and *where* (eg at a café or on public transport) they access media.

Recent developments in media distribution and consumption enabled through convergence pose both opportunities and challenges for Australian governments and for the Australian business community. While key industry sectors have been prompt in responding to convergence opportunities – for example, through the introduction of new multi-platform and interactive services – selected policy and regulatory frameworks, many of which were designed for traditional platforms and industry sectors, remain potentially ill-suited to the emerging convergent media environment. With this in mind, the then Attorney-General, Robert McClelland MP, tasked the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) to undertake a review of censorship and classification. The resulting Final Report – Classification – Content Regulation and Convergent Media (ALRC Report 118, 2012) – was provided to the then Attorney-General, Nicola Roxon MP, on 28 February 2012. The report makes a total of 57 recommendations.

With regard to classification categories and criteria, the ALRC report proposed that the Classification Board be retained as an independent statutory body responsible for making selected classification and reviewing decisions, including decisions about films scheduled for cinema release and computer games likely to be classified MA 15+ or above. The report also recommended that classification categories should be harmonised across platform type (eg cinema, television, online and so on) and that the underlying criteria should be combined so that the same categories and criteria are applied in the classification of all media, irrespective of its form and the platform by which it is delivered or accessed. **Further to this, it was suggested that the classification process and guidelines (including classification symbols and content advice) should be reviewed periodically through a comprehensive program of research, including the collection of both qualitative and (ideally nationally representative) quantitative data, in order to ensure that they reflect prevailing community standards and preferences.**



### 1.3 Research program

In response to the latter recommendation, the Classification Branch has commenced a program of research.

It is intended that the research program, in investigating the knowledge, views and behaviours of the general public in relation to media classification, will ensure measures taken to reconcile the current classification system with an increasingly convergent media environment are reflective of the general public's standards and values and maximise the utility of the system for both the general public and industry.

While the focus of the research is primarily the views of the general public, the expertise of other parties on key issues of relevance to the evolution of the classification system is also being considered. The research thus includes consultation with industry, consumer advocacy and government and regulation agencies (referred to henceforth as 'stakeholders'). In addition, the unique perspective of Classification 'practitioners' (ie members of the Classification Board, Classification Review Board and Classification Branch staff assessors) has been sought.

#### Literature review

As a precursor to the research a comprehensive review of relevant literature and 'grey' data from Australia and overseas was conducted. The review set out to synthesise recent research on the public's knowledge, perceptions and use of media classification in Australia and comparable jurisdictions, and summarised approaches taken in comparable jurisdictions to media classification. This review was intended to inform the planning of the research program to be undertaken and assist in formulating research questions for the first project.

The literature review concluded that:

- There is broad backing for and confidence in classification systems, both in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions.
- There is a high awareness of the National Classification Scheme and categories/ markings amongst the Australian public; however, quantitative research undertaken in this area is dated.
- Understanding of classification ratings amongst the Australian public (and amongst the public in comparable jurisdictions) is mixed, with significant variation observed across categories.
- Understanding of mid-level (ie M and MA 15+) classifications amongst the Australian public is problematic
- (Self-reported) use of classification and rating information amongst the general public (especially parents) is relatively high across jurisdictions.

In order for a classification system to be successful, it is essential that classification ratings are recognised, understood and used correctly by members of the general public, especially parents and other primary caregivers. The conclusions outlined above suggest that this may not be reliably occurring. In addition, the Australian public's awareness and use of current classification ratings (and accompanying advice) has not been quantitatively examined by the Branch since 2007; as such

the influence of media convergence on use and perceptions of classification has not been the subject of a dedicated investigation.

Following on from the findings of the literature review, the Classification Branch undertook a quantitative and qualitative study with members of the general public to investigate:

- awareness and understanding of current classification ratings
- use of current classification ratings, with a particular focus on the impact of a convergent media environment
- perceptions of current classification ratings, with a particular focus on unprompted suggestions for improvement
- responses to alternative classification ratings
- perceptions of the current National Classification Scheme, including the process and regulation of classification and the current and ongoing role of the scheme.

## 1.4 Methodology

The study included the following components:

- an online survey with 1030 members of the general public
- 7 focus groups with members of the general public
- an online survey with 16 practitioners
- in-depth interviews, either face to face or by telephone, with 24 stakeholders.

This report contains the findings of **interviews with the 24 stakeholders and the online survey with practitioners**. Findings from research with members of the general public are presented in a separate report, titled *Classification ratings: research with the general public*, produced concurrently with this report. The methodology for consultation with stakeholders is discussed in detail below.

### Stakeholder interviews

In-depth interviews were undertaken with 24 Classification Scheme Stakeholders from the areas of Government and Regulation, Industry, and Advocacy in February 2014.

In-depth interviews ran for between 30 and 45 minutes. Of the 24 interviews, 22 were conducted over the telephone and two were conducted face-to-face.

The Discussion Guide used for stakeholder interviews is included at **Appendix A**.

### Online survey with practitioners

Quantitative data was collected from Classification Board Members, Review Board Members, and Classification Branch Staff Assessors<sup>2</sup> via a short online survey. This survey was programmed in SurveyMonkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com>) and distributed via a link included in an email.

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<sup>2</sup> Staff assessors view and assess film and game content and produce classification recommendations for the consideration Classification Board.

Note that a key limitation of SurveyMonkey is that there is no foolproof method for ensuring that the survey has been completed by the same respondent multiple times, or 'forwarded' to people who were not sent the original survey link. IP addresses were examined as part of the data cleaning procedure in an effort to ensure that the survey had not been completed multiple times for a single respondent.

The questionnaire was in field between 23 April and 2 May 2014. The final questionnaire for practitioners is attached in **Appendix B**.

## 1.5 Presentation of findings

### Quantitative data

Unless directly stated, percentages presented in the report are based on the total number of valid responses made to the question being reported on. Therefore, in most cases the base consists of the total number of respondents who had a view and for whom the question was relevant. 'Don't know' and 'Unsure', and 'Not Applicable' responses have been included when this aids in the interpretation of results.

For the purposes of this report, quantitative research refers to the data collected via the online survey with practitioners.

### Qualitative data

Findings from the in-depth interviews are presented in a qualitative manner. This approach does not allow for the exact number of participants holding a particular view on individual issues to be measured. As such, general themes and reactions, rather than exact proportions, are reported for all qualitative data.

For the purposes of this report, *qualitative research* refers to the data collected during in-depth interviews. When data has been collected through a single data-collection method, the approach is directly stated.

While the most common findings are generally reported, opinions held by a minority of participants have been included when they are considered to be important and to have wide-ranging implications/ applications. Quotes have been provided throughout the report to support the main results or findings under discussion.

# 2

This chapter outlines stakeholder views on the purpose, process, and regulation of classification

## **2. Perceptions of the Australian National Classification Scheme**

## 2.1 Role of classification

Despite significant variation in demographic and attitudinal profile, stakeholders were, on the whole, supportive of the existence of a classification system.

When asked about the purpose of classification, stakeholders almost universally reported one or both of the following roles: the protection of children and the empowerment of adult consumers. Each of these roles is discussed in turn, below.

*I think that the purpose is to allow people an opportunity to understand the content of what it is that they are about to watch, or allow their children to watch. To help [consumers] make informed decisions about their own viewing or the viewing of underage or young people.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

*[The purpose is to] inform the consumer and the parents or guardians of children about the content of the product that they are about to watch or purchase.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

Only a limited number of interview participants mentioned, unprompted, the role that classification plays in prohibiting material, suggesting that this role is not top-of-mind, even amongst engaged stakeholders. Stakeholders who mentioned this role were generally either involved in enforcement practices or worked in an industry directly affected by enforcement.

*[Classification provides] information for people so they can decide what they want to watch and what they want their kids to watch. The system also makes sure that people aren't watching what they shouldn't watch. The RC classification keeps material out of the market.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

*Some classifications in Australia are very politically motivated... Classification is a means of regulating material.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

### Protection of children

The role of classification in protecting children from disturbing (and potentially harmful) material was mentioned by more stakeholders than any other role. In addition, most stakeholders – even those highly critical of the current classification process – felt that the protection of children should be central to any system developed for the classification of media, including films and computer games.

*[The purpose of classification is] to limit harm, particularly to protect children from harm.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

*The categories are used by parents and guardians to evaluate whether content is suitable for their children or for children they have guardianship over.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

There was, however, disagreement amongst stakeholders about whether classification should aim to protect children through a combination of recommendations and restrictions or through recommendations only. Stakeholders who were supportive of the latter approach questioned the ability of a regulator, whether it be part of government or otherwise, to prevent children and adolescents from accessing desired media; several suggesting that attempts to restrict material would simply make content more desirable.

*The internet is a way for material to be accessed. Sometimes banning things has the effect of increasing demand. Classification should be more advisory, the ability to prohibit things is more limited.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

Stakeholders who were supportive of limiting the remit of classification to recommendations further suggested that the benefits associated with restricting access could not justify the costs that were associated with policing the restrictions. Some of these stakeholders believed that bringing restrictions into alignment with other areas of public policy (ie restricting access to adults aged 18 years and over) would be an improvement on the current system. Stakeholders suggested that, under a system in which restrictions at point-of-sale were scaled back, parents would need to play a greater role in restricting media, and community education would be required to enable this.

*Why are [age categories] needed? How will it be enforced and restricted? How do consumers prove their age if it is enforced? 12 year olds do not carry ID cards. I prefer education and awareness-raising.*

Stakeholder – Industry

### Empowerment of adult consumers

Upon prompting, most stakeholders mentioned the role that classification plays in allowing adults to make informed decisions about the media that they consume.

*[The purpose is to] alert people to what they are going to see or play, alert them to the level of content and subject matter.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

*Classification allows audience members to make informed choices about what they are going to encounter... It gives the audience an informed position to judge the risks and benefits of what they are about to expose themselves to.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

Stakeholders who mentioned this role, however, often went on to suggest that, in their view, only a minority of adults refer to classification information when deciding whether to watch a movie or play a computer game. Adult media consumption decision-making was instead thought to be driven by a film or computer game's plot or by reviews.

*I think that most adults who are looking for content will make up their own mind irrespective of the classification or content advice.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

## 2.2 Process of classification

Most stakeholders broadly support the existence of a classification system but believed there were problems associated with current classification practices. The level and nature of concerns expressed by stakeholders ranged from minor suggestions for improvement to a complete overhaul of the system. The nature of stakeholders' concerns tended to vary according to their knowledge of the classification process and their background – for example, representatives from industry were keen for reform that would reduce the costs associated with classification, while representatives from child-advocacy groups were supportive of reform that would reduce potential for harm to children and adolescents. Specific concerns (and suggestions for improvement) are outlined in detail, below.

*Having a clear framework is a strength, having boundaries for material that shouldn't be on the market and clear ratings are strengths. Having age-labels is also helpful.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

*Overall, the scheme is a good idea but the process is problematic... Slow process, inconsistency of decisions, long timeframes, prohibitive cost of classification...*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

### Strengths of the process

Several stakeholders considered the independence of the Classification Board and the Classification Review Board from government and industry a particular strength of the classification process. Despite this broad support for independence, most of these stakeholders nevertheless felt that it was important for classification to be linked to government, with several interview participants stating that this link ensures that Board Members are held accountable by the Australian Parliament for their decisions. Interview participants, including some from industry, also suggested that an industry-led, self-regulatory scheme may not work as media companies would most likely put profit ahead of public interest.

*Independence from industry and arm's length from government. The independence is crucial.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

*It [classification] needs to be done independently. The independence [of the Board] is the most important thing.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

Other key strengths of the current classification process noted by stakeholders included:

- The utilisation of community members (ie via the Classification Board and Review Board) for classification decisions.  
*Involving members of the public in the classification process and turnover of members.*  
Stakeholder – Advocacy
- Overall sound understanding of classification information by the general public.  
*It [the current system] provides information to parents and people about what they feel is appropriate for them and their kids to watch and it does this well. It is well understood by the public.*  
Stakeholder – Industry
- A mechanism for reviewing decisions.  
*Quite a robust system is my impression from stakeholders. It has two separate Boards, one that makes decisions and one that reviews decisions. It is a robust system.*  
Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

### Weaknesses of the process

Stakeholders also pointed out a number of perceived weaknesses in the current system. The most commonly mentioned are outlined below.

#### Slow pace

Stakeholders were in general agreement that the failure of legislative change to keep pace with technology was a major weakness in the existing National Classification Scheme. Most notably, stakeholders, especially those from industry, were adamant that a timely update of legislation was required so that the process of classification could (a) deal with significant increases in the volume of media available and (b) ensure that media content did not have to be classified more than once when available across multiple media platforms (eg DVD, digital download, Blu-Ray, television and so on). This is consistent with industry submissions made as part of the ALRC review of classification.

*The media environment is very fluid but the regulatory process is often much slower.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

*It [the classification system] does not keep up with technology and the technological advancements of the day. Changes to legislation are time-consuming and slow.*

Stakeholder – Industry

A number of stakeholders also acknowledged that discordance between the pace of legislative change and technological advancements was not a problem unique to classification, with other areas of public policy also affected. It was also recognised that the development of a workable classification scheme within a convergent media environment poses significant challenges.



Many stakeholders advocated deregulation, albeit to varying degrees. For example, while some simply questioned the necessity of having the Act, the Code and the Guidelines, or the involvement of state/territory governments, others advocated complete self-regulation by the media industry.

*The process... manual, fee-driven, bureaucratic approach. We are seeking a more consistent way for product and content to be classified across different platforms and channels. It [Classification] should be a more deregulated environment.*

Stakeholder – Industry

### Representativeness of the Classification Board and consistency in decision-making

The representativeness of the Classification Board was commonly questioned by advocacy stakeholders, with some stakeholders suggesting that the Classification Board was too conservative and others suggesting that it was too liberal. The extent to which stakeholders supported either of these positions tended to be driven by social agenda and political alignment. Most notably, representatives from child advocacy groups were adamant that the Board's decisions often failed to give due consideration to the negative impact that exposure to violent media (especially video games) may have on children and young people.

*It is difficult to get a truly representative Board. The recruitment process may attract a certain type of person.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

*Transparency is important. And who is on the Board? The people sitting on the Board making the decisions need to be known and there needs to be turnover so we know that there is that breadth of people on the Board, so there are different views... there needs to be community input.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

Stakeholders in government and regulation generally held a more moderate view, with most acknowledging that while the (at least partially) subjective nature of classification decision-making could potentially result in inconsistent decisions or errors, these problems could be found in many other areas of public policy (eg application of the law). It was also noted that while moving toward a more objective method for classification may lead to a reduction in errors/ inconsistent decisions, it would be difficult for such a system to take context into account. As such, in-depth, consistent training of practitioners was suggested as the most appropriate method for ensuring a requisite level of objectivity in decision-making.

*Having human beings involved is a weakness. Trying to apply a fairly clear standard in such a subjective manner can have unintentional consequences.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

*There is a perception that Board Members are older. It [The Classification Board] needs to include people that understand the medium better.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

A small number of stakeholders, mostly from industry and child advocacy groups, felt that rather than being representative of the general public, the Classification Board should be made up of various 'experts'. It was suggested that utilising a panel of experts would lead to more informed and consistent classification decisions. There was, however, little agreement about what *type* of experts should be included, with child advocates, for example, suggesting that the Classification Board should consist of developmental psychologists and teachers while representatives from industry suggested that it should consist of media experts (eg computer game developers).

*Get more people who are at the 'coal face' working with children: teachers, psychologists, paediatricians that work with children on a daily basis should be involved in classification decisions.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

### Unsatisfactory alignment with community standards

Some of those who were critical of the Classification Board's decisions suggested that this problem was due to a lack of understanding of current community standards. Stakeholders who held this view generally acknowledged that comprehensive research with the general public and clear communication of research findings to Classification Board members would go some way to addressing this issue. It was further suggested that research findings should be communicated to relevant policy-makers, so that timely changes can be made to relevant legislation.

*I guess in terms of improvement there should be better articulation and education to the community on what the categories are and what is involved with each of the categories and by conducting research such as this to ensure that the categories are aligned with community standards.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

*It has to be a living process... The difficulty, I guess, for government is that it's not an easy job. It's a very difficult thing to do, what is acceptable and not acceptable changes over time as attitudes change.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

### Cost

Stakeholders across the board suggested that applying for a classification is too costly and, sometimes, prohibitively expensive. Industry stakeholders were especially critical of costs incurred when having a slightly altered piece of media classified multiple times (ie for release on DVD, digital download, Blu-Ray, television and so on). Most industry stakeholders believed that the development of a more cost-effective classification system should be a priority for the Australian Government. This view was broadly supported by Government stakeholders; one stakeholder stating that,

*'it [the Classification System] should be efficient and cost-effective for industry and efficient and cost-effective for all Australians'.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

*It should be a more cost-effective system. [There is a need to] eliminate the cost of travel and screening for the Classification Review Board.*

Stakeholder – Industry

*It provides information to parents and people about what they feel is appropriate for them and their kids to watch... It does it pretty well... It should be a more cost-effective system.*

Stakeholder – Industry

Government stakeholders involved in state-level regulation made the more specific suggestion that there should be no costs associated with classification for law enforcement.<sup>3</sup> These stakeholders reported that offenders sometimes did not receive the full penalty for possessing illegal material because not all material can be classified due to the costs involved.

*Classification for law enforcement should be free. The cost is currently prohibitive for enforcement agencies. For example, a Local Area Commander may seize 1000 DVDs that are potentially unclassified or RC. For prosecution, DVDs need to be classified but it is too expensive to get all the material classified*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

## 2.3 Regulation of classification

### Strong support for deregulation

Despite significant disagreement about the preferred regulatory arrangement, stakeholders were broadly supportive of deregulation. Most commonly, stakeholders suggested that a first step toward deregulation would be to rethink the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) on censorship, which requires that significant classification policy matters and amendments to the National Classification Code and Guidelines must be agreed by all State and Territory Ministers with responsibility for classification matters.

*State involvement is unnecessary; it adds a level of complexity to the classification process that is not needed.*

Stakeholder – Industry

However, one stakeholder noted that transfer of enforcement powers to the Commonwealth would be prohibitively expensive.

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<sup>3</sup> States and territories are currently entitled to 100 free classifications per annum.

### Strong support for government involvement in regulation

Despite diverse views about preferred regulatory arrangements, all stakeholders acknowledged that there was, and would continue to be, a role for government in the regulation of film and computer game classification. Views on an appropriate government role varied from complete ownership of processes to a significantly reduced role, with major responsibility for classification transferred to industry. Those who supported the latter approach tended to envision a system in which industry is responsible for determining the classification of most content, with government ensuring compliance through audits and/ or complaint management. The utility of this approach is discussed further in the section entitled 'Support for co-regulation by government and industry', below. Those who support continued government involvement believe it would counter the influence of commercial and/ or political agendas on classification decisions.

*Government. It's a government job, it imposes restrictions on the community, I don't think anyone but government can do that. If anyone but government was responsible you would have a lack of accountability there.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

*I'm happy for it [Classification] to stay with AG's. I don't want it to be influenced by religious groups or by parents groups. The laws should not be reactive and keeping with the Attorney-General allows it to have a link to a broader legal and regulatory process.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

### Strong support for co-regulation by government and industry

There was considerable support for an arrangement in which industry plays a primary role in regulation (and process) and government plays a supportive role in regulation (and process). Several stakeholders explicitly suggested that a system similar to that adopted in the Television Industry could be applied to other types of media, especially computer games and DVDs.

*In reality, not everything can be classified. You need to have a pragmatic approach... Efficient use of resources and focusing on what the government thinks will have a higher impact and acknowledge that some material will not be able to be classified.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

*I support the ALRC report that suggests that primary responsibility should be with industry with oversight of the Commonwealth government in terms of classifications, markings and providing high-level guidance on what they all mean...I support a Commonwealth-only scheme for all the reasons outlined in the ALRC report: provides clarity and consistency across Australia, allows simplification for industry and for Australians.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

Variation in the desired ratio of industry and government involvement in classification tended to vary according to the level of trust in industry to make objective classification decisions.

Stakeholders possessing higher trust (generally from industry) suggested minimal government involvement and stakeholders with lower trust (generally from advocacy) were supportive of a more significant role for government. Those who were more supportive of industry involvement tended to be particularly mindful of increases in the volume and accessibility of media.

*We can have an Industry Code that mandates what industry is required to do... It could be embedded in the Classification Act... Rather than tweaking the Act, it would be better to get rid of the Classification Act and start again with a view to industry self-regulation.*

Stakeholder – Industry

Stakeholders suggested that increased industry involvement in film and computer game classification would (a) help to ensure that the system is able to deal with increases in the volume of available media and (b) allow for the utilisation of specialist assessors with expertise in both the process of classification *and* the relevant media form (eg computer games).

*The whole system needs review... Current system is struggling to keep up with technology. The self-regulatory model may be an option that is better able to deal with the volume of material available.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

*Industry, because industry is best placed to know our content. It is how it works for TV, subscription TV, free-to-air TV and online... Industry assessed with appropriate controls and governance around making sure industry does the right thing.*

Stakeholder – Industry

It should be noted that stakeholders representing the theatrical industry were less supportive of increased industry involvement in classification but were highly supportive of the maintenance of the Classification Board.

*There is value in an independent body that classifies and responds to complaints. Consistency would be a problem if individual studios are responsible for classification... It comes down to individual tolerance...*

Stakeholder – Industry

### **Moderate support for industry self-regulation**

While almost all stakeholders acknowledged that media convergence has necessitated an increased role for industry in film and computer game classification, few stakeholders were supportive of sole industry self-regulation. Interview participants representing government/ regulation and advocacy repeatedly questioned whether it was possible for a self-regulatory system to put the public interest (ie protection of children and empowerment of adult consumers) ahead of profits.

*It should absolutely be something organised by government. Media industry is very concerned with profit and less concerned with public welfare... There is a need to balance profit with public interest. The history of media self-regulation is a story of failure.*

## Stakeholder – Advocacy

Lack of compliance with the current scheme by industry was cited as evidence that self-regulation was not a viable option. Stakeholders also questioned how compliance would be operationalised in a system solely managed by industry.

**Moderate support for involvement of a not-for-profit organisation in regulation**

When asked about whether classification could be solely or jointly managed by a not-for-profit organisation, most stakeholders – even those working for organisations which could potentially play this role – were sceptical of both these arrangements. This scepticism was primarily driven by concern that an existing organisation would not be capable of making objective classification decisions. Stakeholders also questioned how the classification process would be operationalised in this environment, with interview participants especially confused about how a not-for-profit organisation would relate to government and how enforcement would be managed.

*Non-government or agencies come along with their own agendas, there would be a lack of transparency.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

*Who are the stakeholders? How is it structured? What are the relationships involved?*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

There was more support amongst stakeholders for the development of a new not-for-profit organisation that would function in a manner similar to the British Board of Film Classification, with several interview participants suggesting that increased independence of the classification function from government would result in more impartial decision-making. These stakeholders did, however, caution that extensive research and consultation – especially on how the organisation would relate to government – would be required prior to serious consideration of this option.

# 3

This chapter outlines: stakeholder views on awareness, understanding and use of classification categories and markings amongst the general public

## **3. Views on the general public and classification**

### 3.1 Stakeholder familiarity with views of the general public

Many of the stakeholders interviewed represent, are in regular contact with, or are familiar with relevant research concerning the views of the Australian public on media classification. Therefore, they were asked for their perceptions regarding the knowledge, views and behaviour of the public in relation to classification.

However, as stakeholders themselves acknowledged, their comments regarding the general public were based on anecdotal evidence, rather than systematic research findings.

### 3.2 Perceived awareness of classification ratings

Stakeholders mostly perceived the public's awareness of the current classification ratings to be high. It was suggested that the more commonly used lower-level classifications are more top of mind than upper-level classifications.

Regular community information campaigns were suggested as a way of ensuring public awareness levels are maintained.

Stakeholders stressed that current levels of awareness should be taken into consideration prior to the implementation of any substantive changes to the current categories or markings: given that current awareness levels are high, there would need to be a strong case for any changes.

*Categories are correct. Audiences are used to the way things are presented.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

*I think they are really clear, I think perhaps just more awareness around it, I mean I know there are ads run about it [classification] every now and then, but I think possibly more...*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

### 3.3 Perceived understanding of classification ratings

Stakeholders believed the general public had a reasonable understanding of the ratings overall, however they considered that the level of comprehension was higher for some categories than others.

*I don't think the system is broken regarding classification ratings, they generally work, people understand them, they are well recognised.*

Stakeholder – Industry

Most commonly stakeholders suggested that the public (and industry) were confused about the difference between M and MA 15+ and R 18+ and X 18+.

*People might not understand the difference between M and MA 15+ rating... There could be confusion.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation



*R 18+, X 18+, and RC, there is confusion about what should be in each and it is contestable about what should be in each... R 18+ and X 18+ are both restricted to adults so why are they not treated the same.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

Stakeholders from government and regulation further suggested that inconsistencies between television and film classification categories can cause confusion, with particular note being made of the different definition of MA for television ('Mature Audiences') and for film ('Mature Accompanied'). Consistent with submissions to the ALRC review of classification, interview participants suggested that this confusion could be remedied through consistent ratings being applied across all media, including television and film.

*Relationship between TV and film classification is confusing... MA means something different in TV.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

### 3.4 Use of classification by the general public

Stakeholders suggested that classification information is used most often by parents and least often by young adults, especially males. In line with this assertion, they reported that the most used categories are at the lower end of the spectrum of categories, with particular mention made of the G and PG categories.

*Parents use classification a lot to work out what their children can see.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

When prompted to discuss the ways in which parents use classification information, stakeholders most often reported that *some* parents use classification information to *guide* (rather than direct) decisions about their children's media consumption. It was also suggested that parents sometimes use classification information to start a discussion with teenagers about a film or computer game, even if the classification recommendation/ restriction does not determine the final decision regarding consumption. Some stakeholders also suggested that parents may use consumer advice more often than classification categories, as they did not want their children exposed to particular types of material (most often sex, language, or violence).

*Parents use it as a guideline as to whether they can trust the film with their children.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

*I think they [parents] use it for what it was designed for, I think it actually works really well, I think a lot of parents ignore it anyway, but there are lots that don't, so I think it serves and does its job. It can't dictate to people what they can and can't watch, but it is there as an assistance tool or as a guide and there will always be those that ignore it.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

Stakeholders suggested that the usefulness of individual categories depended largely on how well they were understood.

*G and PG are the most useful from a family perspective... R 18+ is useful, it's very clear what it is... M is the least useful, it's the least clear.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

One stakeholder suggested that there exists a relationship between use of classification information and level of education:

*I know this may sound terrible, but the more educated in the community are more likely to use the classification system to inform their viewing and decisions about games. I think those that, I feel horrible for saying this, are less educated and who need it the most are probably the least likely to use it. They wouldn't take that much notice of it.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

# 4

This chapter outlines stakeholder and practitioner views on the current classification categories and markings. Suggestions for improvement are also considered.

## **4. Perception of current classification ratings**

## 4.1 Stakeholder perceptions of the current classification ratings

Stakeholders' concerns tended to relate to the process and regulation of classification, rather than to the individual ratings. That being said, stakeholders made a number of comments relating to individual ratings, which are discussed below.

### Problems with M ratings

Stakeholders consistently made mention of problems with the 'M categories' when they were asked to comment on individual ratings. Most commonly these stakeholders said that the difference between the M and MA 15+ categories is unclear or that they could not understand the logic of having two similarly named categories with the same age reference point.

*There is confusion about the difference between M and MA 15+. People do not understand what a legally restricted category is.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

When questioned on whether one or both of the 'M categories' should be altered or removed, stakeholders generally agreed on the necessity of a category between PG and MA 15+, but suggested that the utility of the M category could be improved through a change of name and/or inclusion of an age reference point below 15.

*M is not unnecessary, it serves a purpose but it's a less important purpose. If it went from PG to MA 15+ it would be too much of a jump.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

*Age category on M may provide some clarity.*

Stakeholder – Industry

It should, however, be noted that two stakeholders explicitly suggested that the age indicator included in the MA rating (ie 15+) should be lowered:

*No problem with [restricting] the access. MA 15+ could be brought down a bit, maybe to 13 or 14. There should be some kind of restriction...*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

*Most people don't know the difference between M and MA 15+... MA 15+ should be 13 or 14. Fifteen year olds are already watching what they want to watch.*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

### Problems with restricted categories

When asked to comment on individual ratings, stakeholders also commonly reported on the R 18+ and/or X 18+ categories, with a number of interview participants suggesting that, as with M and MA 15+, the difference between these categories is unclear. Specific mention was made of confusion about whether or not, and under what circumstances, 'actual sex' could be included in material classified as R 18+.

*A lot of people don't realise that X is not a mythical thing... Mystery for most people starts around the M mark. You could combine the two [R 18+ and X 18+].*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

Stakeholders also questioned the necessity of having two restrictive categories, especially given that this approach is rarely taken in other jurisdictions and X 18+ content is currently only legally available in the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. Stakeholders who were supportive of having a single restrictive category universally suggested that the Australian public could be adequately warned about media content, sexual or otherwise, via clear, visible consumer advice.

*At the other [upper] end, there's no point in having an R 18+ and X 18+ category – they are both restrictive so why are they separate?*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

Finally, several stakeholders, including those with experience in developmental and child psychology, suggested that age-based indicators have limited utility for parents as cognitive and emotional development does not progress in a uniform fashion. It was further suggested that specific age indicators (especially legally restrictive indicators other than 18+) were less useful in a convergent media environment, as in practice it is becoming increasingly impossible to exhaustively police the media purchasing/consumption habits of minors. Stakeholders critical of specific age reference points tended to envisage a classification system in which parents play a more active role in controlling purchasing/consumption. These stakeholders also tended to argue that in this changed environment consumer advice was going to become increasingly important and therefore efforts should be made to make the advice as comprehensive and useful as possible.

*I don't think the age is terribly helpful, because everyone's experiences are quite different... The 15 notion seems a bit arbitrary to me.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

Conversely, some stakeholders spoke positively of the inclusion of specific age indicators in category titles and markings. These stakeholders felt that the specificity of the age indicators (including those adopted in comparable jurisdictions) provided parents with unambiguous guidance, leading to more confident decision-making. As mentioned above, there was even some limited support amongst stakeholders for increasing the number of age indicators included in the current categories, especially towards the lower end of the spectrum.

## Suggested improvements

### Awareness-raising and education

Stakeholders – even those highly-critical of the current classification ratings – generally agreed that it may be possible and preferable to improve public awareness, understanding and use of classification information through community information and education campaigns. Stakeholders most supportive of this view directly stated that the problems with the current ratings were not significant enough to warrant the expense associated with making changes. Specific suggestions for campaigns included (a) general awareness-raising of the classification system and categories/ markings and (b) targeted campaigns for minority groups, including Culturally and Linguistically Diverse community members.

*I don't think the system is broken regarding classification ratings, they generally work, people understand them, they are well recognised... I think the system works really well.*

Stakeholder – Industry

*Is it broken and does it need fixing? I prefer education and awareness, not making changes when they are not necessary.*

Stakeholder – Industry

*I think they [classification ratings] are really clear, I think perhaps just more awareness around it, I mean I know there are ads run about it every now and then, but I think possibly more...*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

### Simplification of the classification hierarchy

Regardless of whether they were advocating for the general public, government, media developers, or media distributors, stakeholders generally felt that any changes to the current classification ratings should aim to make the system easier for the public to navigate. Consistent with findings outlined above, specific suggestions for improvement included reducing the number of categories (ie combining M and MA 15+ and R 18+ and X 18+), rethinking the name and scope of the M and MA 15+ categories and increasing the number of categories at the lower end of the spectrum (ie addition of a specific category or categories distinguishing content for children from content for young adults).

*The number of classification ratings could possibly be detrimental because, you know, it might confuse parents. I think if it was simplified and we combine M and MA and R and X, I think that simplified system would be quite clear and it would make it a lot easier for parents to make their decisions, rather than 'Oooh, it's an M, what's the difference?'*

Stakeholder – Advocacy

It should, however, be noted that stakeholders representing media developers and distributors further suggested that the impact on industry should be considered prior to the implementation of any changes to current classification ratings. These stakeholders noted that the classification system – including ratings – should be easy to understand and navigate both from the perspective

of the general public *and* industry. Industry stakeholders expressed particular concern about the *process* of change, with several stressing that media developers and distributors would need to be alerted via timely and detailed communication.

*People [media makers] want clarity. A good, simple framework that audiences understand and can work with. Nobody wants surprises when they are working on something for two years. You don't want to start your project thinking it's going to get one classification and find out at the end that things have changed.*

Stakeholder – Government and Regulation

### Position-neutral classification categories

Stakeholders representing industry stressed that the potential impact on a film or computer game's positioning should be considered in the development and introduction of any new classification ratings. By way of example, one stakeholder made reference to a possible scenario in which a 'romantic comedy' film with a primary target audience of adults is awarded a 'Teen' rating, potentially confusing consumers and leading to lower product sales. It should, however, be noted that directive category titles have been adopted successfully in other jurisdictions – for example, the American Entertainment Software Rating Board's classification scale includes a 'Teen' category.

*A category such as 'Youth' or 'Teen' can be in conflict with the positioning of a film. A romantic comedy might be rated 'Teen' but its target audience is not teens but adults.*

Stakeholder – Industry

### Need for extensive consultation prior to change

The most pervasive issue to emerge from the research with stakeholders was a desire for extensive consultation throughout the consideration and implementation of any changes to the classification ratings, including category title and symbol/markings. This point was made especially strongly by stakeholders from industry, several noting that government (or whomever is responsible for regulation) may not fully understand the impact that potential changes will have on their business. Child advocates and stakeholders with experience in child psychology also stressed the importance of considering developmental stages when altering the categories.

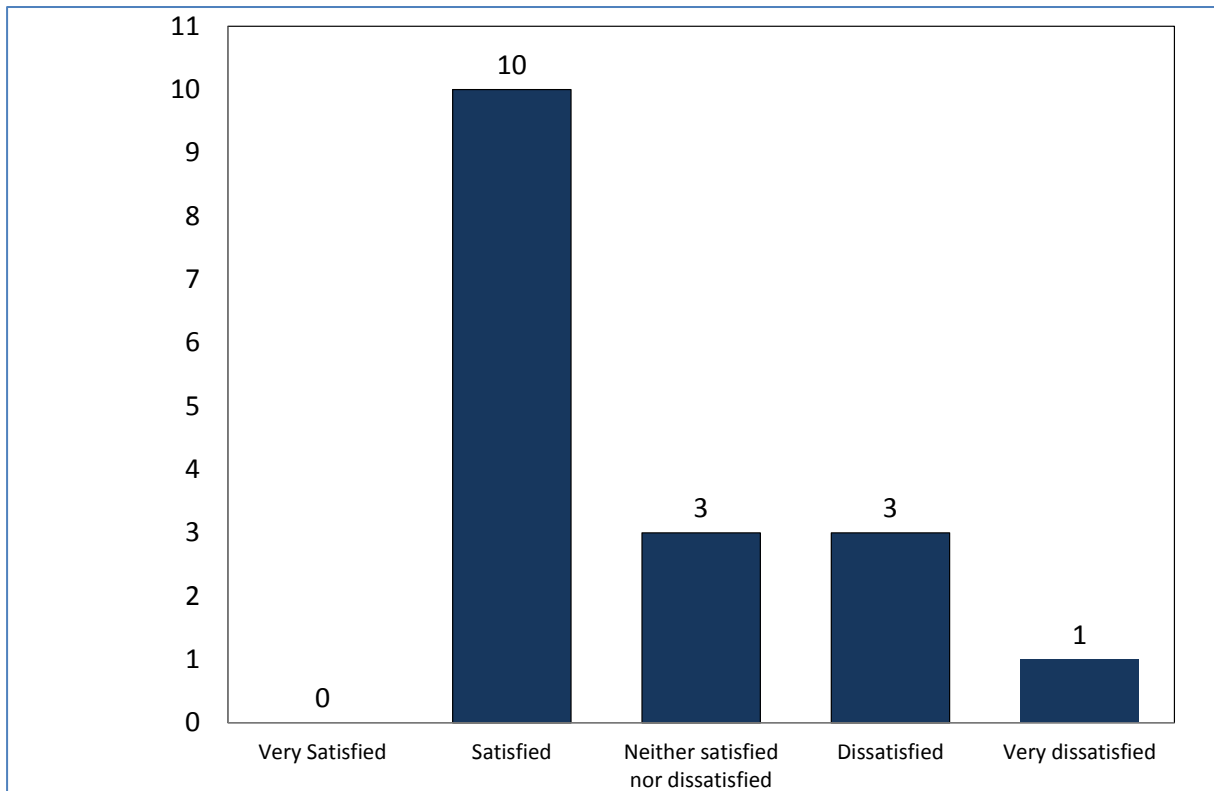
*Consult with industry so they are on board. Industry does not like surprises.*

Stakeholder – Industry

## 4.2 Practitioner perceptions of the current ratings

### Satisfaction with the overall hierarchy

Practitioner views on the existing classification categories were mixed. The majority of surveyed practitioners (10 of 17) indicated that they were 'Satisfied' with these categories. However, close to a quarter (4 of 17) were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied and three were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (see Figure 1, below).

**Figure 1: Satisfaction with classification hierarchy – Practitioners**

Base: n=17

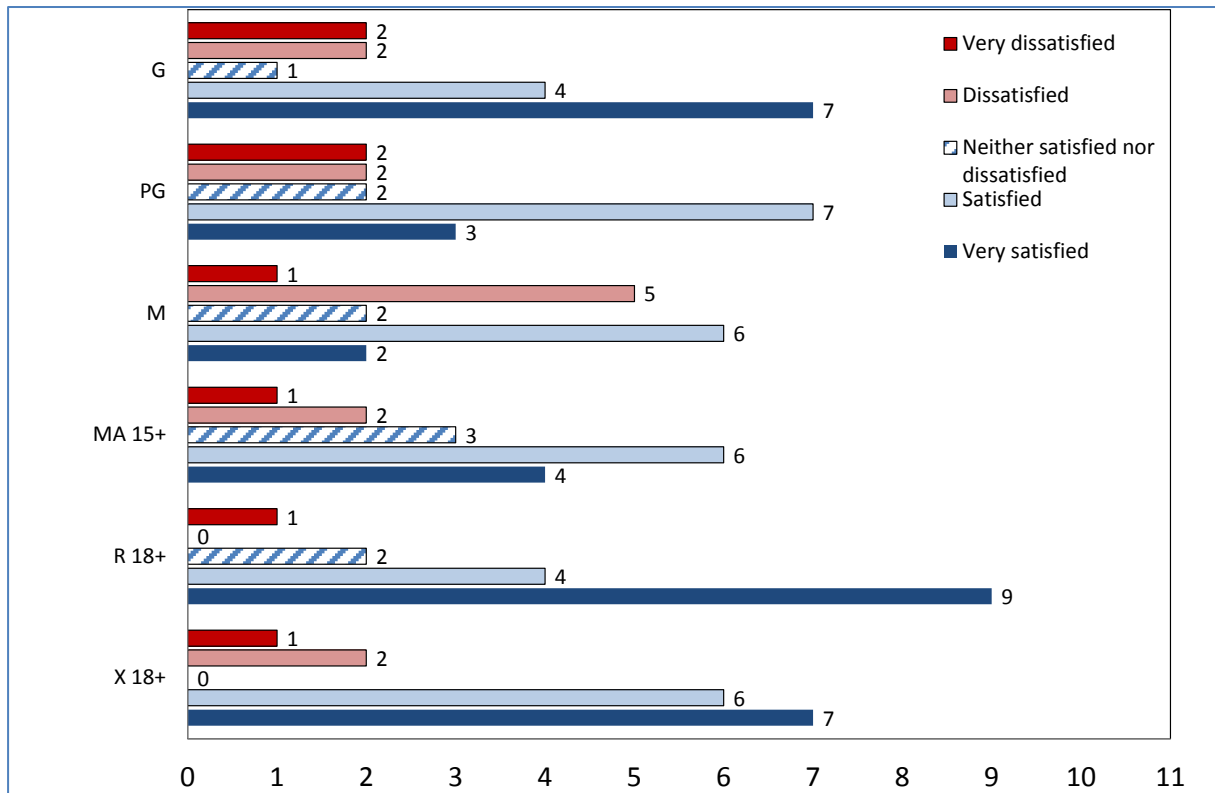
Q. Based on your current or recent experience classifying and/ or assessing films and computer games, how satisfied are you with the existing classification categories?

### Satisfaction with individual categories

Practitioners were also asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with each classification category (see Figure 2, overleaf). Overall, for each category at least half of the respondents were either 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied'. However, there was some variation between categories: satisfaction was highest for the R 18 + category (of 16 respondents, nine were 'Very satisfied' and three were 'Satisfied') and X 18+ category (six 'Satisfied' and seven 'Very Satisfied'). Satisfaction was lowest for the M category (five 'Dissatisfied' and one 'Very dissatisfied').



**Figure 2: Satisfaction with individual classification categories – Practitioners**



Base: n=16

Q. And how satisfied are you with each of the classification categories shown below? G, PG, M, M 15+, R 18+, X 18+.

### Key issues and suggested improvements

Practitioners who indicated that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the existing classification categories provided the reasons for their dissatisfaction (and suggestions for improvement):

*Whilst they accommodate the impact of the material appropriately within the given categories, the categories used in Australia are not geared towards consumer needs to make an informed decision. Unlike other countries, regions, there is no age appropriateness for the material – by that I mean our categories of G and PG and even M, are commonly mistakenly interpreted by consumers to indicate that the material is appropriate for young people, when this is not the case. It is more than a matter of public education, this will not work, the categories should indicate age appropriateness.*

Practitioner

*Suggest G, PG, PG13, M, 15+, 16+, 18+, X18+. PG 13+ for films targeted at young teens containing moderate impact material. 16+ considers publications and what is suitable for children and restricted sale issues. Content in X 18+ needs refinement - especially with regard to issues of harm vs taste.*

Practitioner

*Problems with enforcement of restricted categories, mainly MA 15+, and confusion between classification markings and their meanings and definitions.*

Practitioner

# 5

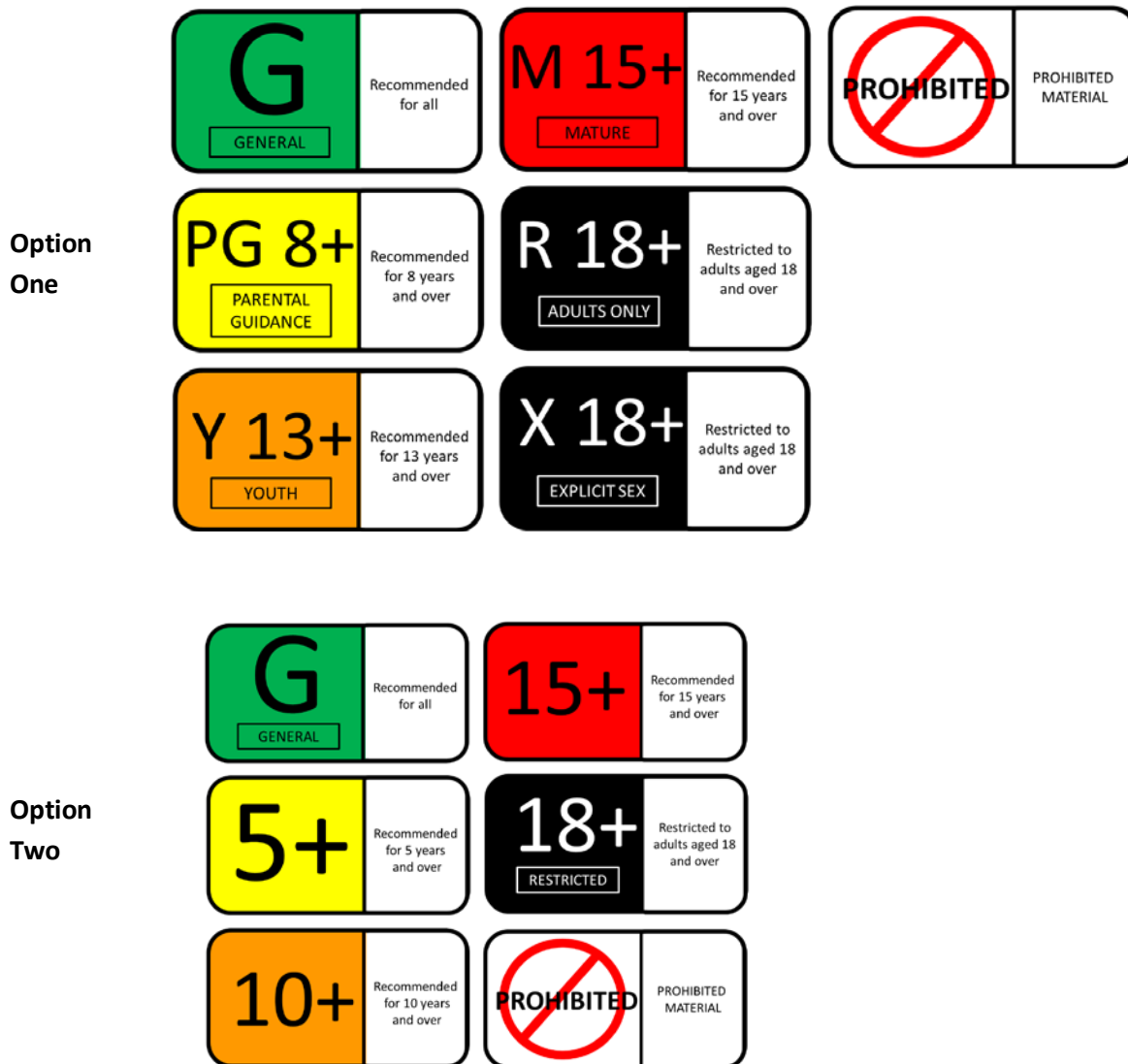
This chapter outlines practitioner views on alternative classification categories and markings.

## **5. Practitioner perception of alternative classification ratings**

## 5.1 Practitioner response to alternative classification hierarchies

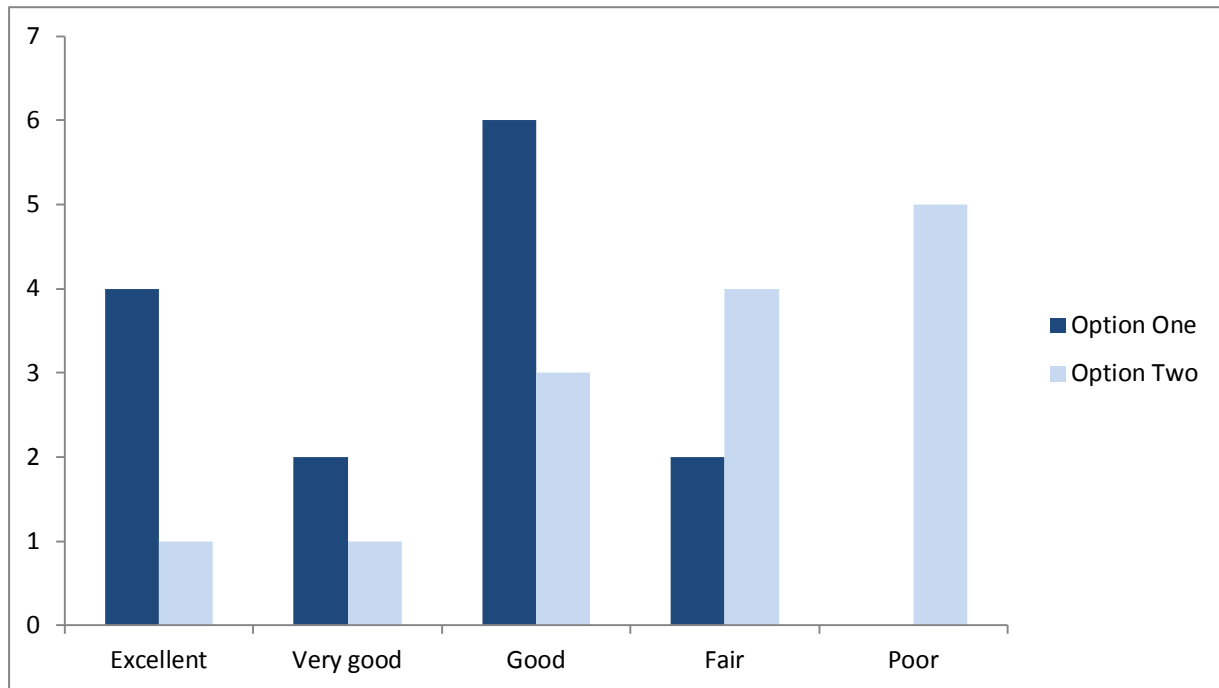
Practitioners were asked their opinion on two alternative classification ratings:

Figure 3: alternative classification ratings shown to practitioners



Practitioners expressed a clear preference for Option One, with six respondents rating this option as 'Good', two rating this option as 'Very good', and four rating this option as 'Excellent', giving a total of 12 out of 14 positive responses. In comparison, Option Two received only five responses across these categories (see Figure 4 overleaf).

**Figure 4: Practitioner opinions of alternative classification ratings (Option One: G, PG 8+, Y 13+, M 15+, R 18+, X 18+, Prohibited; Option Two: G, 5+, 10+, 15+, 18+, Prohibited)**



Base: n=14. Q. Please rate the overall quality of this alternative set of categories and markings.

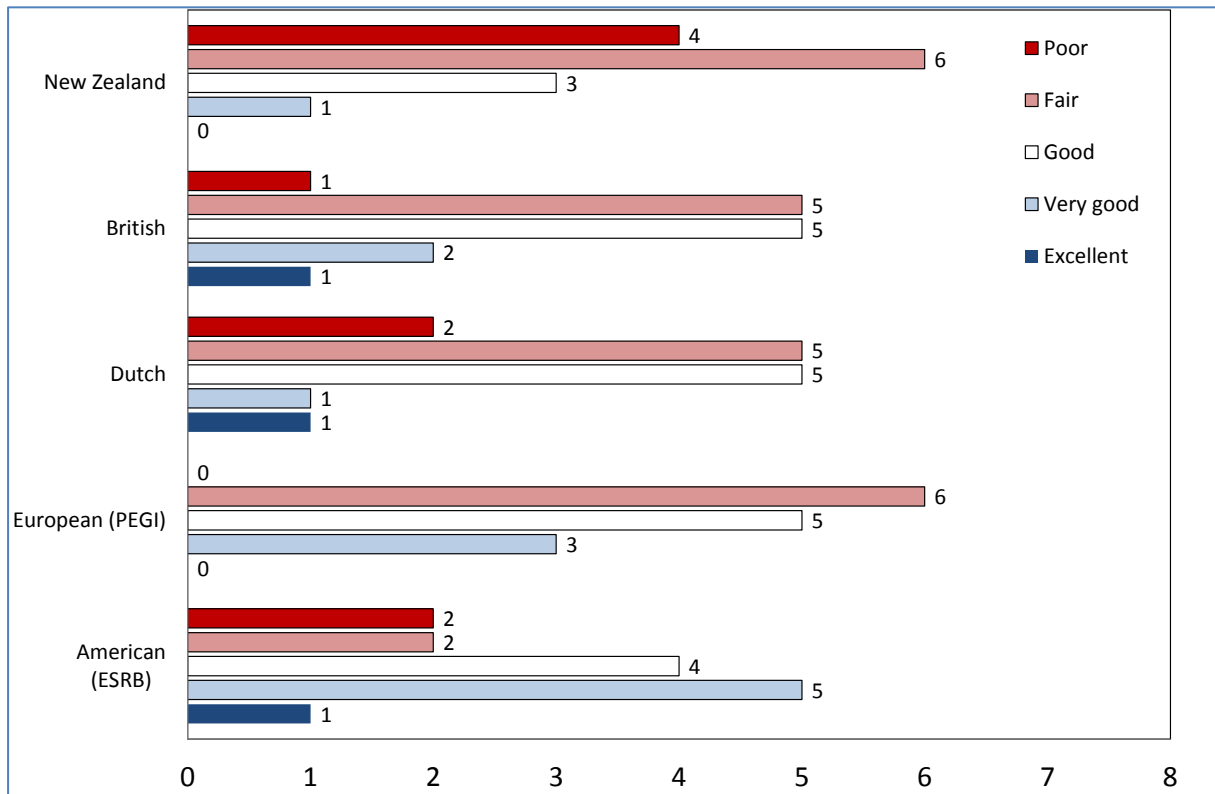
## 5.2 Practitioner response to hierarchies from other jurisdictions

Practitioners were asked to assess classification hierarchies in comparable jurisdictions.

The North American ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board) hierarchy received the highest rating, with four respondents rating this hierarchy as 'Good', five respondents rating it as 'Very good', and one respondent rating it as 'Excellent', giving a total of 10 out of 14 positive responses (see Figure 5, overleaf)<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> A description of the classification hierarchies applied in each of these jurisdictions is given in the Practitioner questionnaire, included at Appendix B. The relevant questions are A6, A8, A10, A12 and A14.

**Figure 5: Quality of classification hierarchies applied in other jurisdictions**



Base: n=14

Q. Please rate the overall quality of the [New Zealand; British; Dutch; European PEGI; American ESRB] classification categories for films and/ or computer games?

# 6

This chapter outlines the overall conclusions and recommendations

## **6. Key findings and conclusions**

## 6.1 Key findings and conclusions

**Conclusion one: stakeholders are supportive of the continued existence of a classification scheme but believe it needs to adapt to changes in the media environment.**

Stakeholders from industry, advocacy groups and government continue to see a role for classification in the 2014 media and entertainment landscape. However, there was general agreement that the current scheme needs to be updated to ensure the continued relevance, utility and usefulness of classification.

It was suggested that as the ability of government to police media purchasing/access becomes more limited, the classification system will need to move toward making recommendations rather than restrictions.

Stakeholders suggested that classification information is often used to *guide* (rather than direct) decisions about media consumption (including children's media). Thus movement toward an advisory model would to some extent reflect current usage patterns.

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**Conclusion Two: stakeholders view the role of classification as primarily the protection of children, and secondarily the empowerment of adult consumers.**

Stakeholders agreed that the primary role for film and computer game classification is to protect the viewer/player, especially children and young people, from discomfort or harm. Even stakeholders who envisaged a radically altered classification scheme agreed that the protection of children should be central to any system developed for the classification of media, including films and computer games.

There was, however, disagreement amongst stakeholders about whether classification should aim to protect children through a combination of recommendations and restrictions or through recommendations only. It was suggested that age restrictions, especially those under 18+, were difficult to police, but also that specific age indicators in ratings advice aided parents in decision making.

Media decision-making for adult consumption was thought to be influenced by plot information or reviews more frequently than by ratings.

The role that classification plays in prohibiting media is not top-of-mind for most stakeholders.

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**Conclusion Three: consumer advice will become increasingly important in a convergent media environment.**

Stakeholders consistently expressed a strong desire for the inclusion of more detailed consumer advice on packaging and advertising material. There was a general perception that the ability of government to restrict access to media has become more limited, that the role of parents in



controlling the media consumption of minors will need to increase, and that more detailed consumer advice will be needed to aid parents in decision making.

Some stakeholders also suggested that parents may already rely on consumer advice more than classification categories, as they did not want their children exposed to particular types of material (most often sex, language, or violence).

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**Conclusion Four: the independence of the Classification Board (and Classification Review Board) from government is viewed as a key strength of the current process for film and computer game classification in Australia.**

When stakeholders were asked to list the key strengths of the current process for classification in Australia, the independence of the Classification Board (and Review Board) from government was frequently mentioned.

Other key strengths listed by stakeholders included:

- the utilisation of community members for classification decisions
- fair understanding of classification information by the general public
- provision for decisions to be reviewed.

However, some stakeholders questioned the representativeness of the Classification Board, suggesting that its decisions were either too conservative or too liberal.

A small number of stakeholders felt that rather than being representative of the general public, the Classification Board should be made up of various ‘experts’. It was suggested that utilising a panel of experts would lead to more informed and consistent classification decisions.

The prevailing view, however, was that in-depth, consistent training of practitioners was the most appropriate method for ensuring a requisite level of objectivity in decision-making.

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**Conclusion Five: the cost and time involved in having media classified and the slow pace of legislative change are viewed as key weaknesses of the current process for film and computer game classification in Australia.**

In line with findings from the ALRC review of classifications, stakeholders (especially stakeholders from industry) were adamant that the discord between the existing legislative and regulatory environment and the current media and entertainment landscape is impeding the utility of the National Classification Scheme. Stakeholders further suggested that this lack of alignment is placing an unnecessary financial burden on the film and computer game industries. In particular, it was suggested that applying for a classification is too costly and, sometimes, prohibitively expensive, that media content should not have to be classified more than once when available across multiple

media platforms, and that there should be no costs associated with classification for law enforcement.

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**Conclusion Six: stakeholders are most supportive of a classification system in which primary responsibility lies with industry and secondary responsibility lies with the Commonwealth Government.**

Lending further support to the conclusions drawn from the ALRC review of classification, several stakeholders envisioned a system in which industry is responsible for the regulation of almost all classification decisions (at least up to MA 15+), the Classification Board is responsible for high-level classification decisions and reviews and the Classification Branch is responsible for system oversight, training and compliance.

Most of these stakeholders nevertheless felt that it was important for classification to continue be linked to government, and that an industry-led, self-regulatory scheme may be subject to conflicts of interest. Most were also sceptical of the idea of a (third party) not for profit organisation being responsible for classification.

Many stakeholders believed that a first step toward deregulation would be to rethink the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) on censorship, which requires that significant classification policy matters and amendments to the National Classification Code and Guidelines must be agreed by all State and Territory Ministers with responsibility for classification matters.

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**Conclusion Seven: confusion about mid and high level classifications is common**

Stakeholders asserted that both the public and industry were confused about the difference between M and MA 15+ and R 18+ and X 18+. In particular, stakeholders questioned the logic of having two similarly named categories with the same age reference point as is the case for M and MA 15+.

Stakeholders generally agreed on the necessity of a category between PG and MA 15+, but suggested that the utility of the M category could be improved through a change of name and/or inclusion of an age reference point below 15.

An alternative suggestion for addressing the confusion included combining the M and MA 15+ categories (to form one category) and the R 18+ and X 18+ categories (to form another category).

In relation to the two 18+ categories, it was suggested that the Australian public could be adequately warned about media content, sexual or otherwise, via clear, visible consumer advice rather than having two such categories.

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**Conclusion Eight: inconsistencies between film and television classification categories confuse the Australian public.**

In line with submissions made to the ALRC review of classification, stakeholders from government and regulation suggested that inconsistencies between television and film classification categories can be confusing for the Australian public, with particular note being made of the different definition of MA for television ('Mature Audiences') and for film ('Mature Accompanied').

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**Conclusion Nine: stakeholders and practitioners view the current classification ratings favourably but see room for improvement.**

Many stakeholders were in favour of minor alterations, rather than a complete overhaul of all classification categories. Support for the current categories tended to be driven by the perception of high awareness and at least adequate understanding of the categories amongst the Australian public, especially parents. Some also expressed a preference for increased community education as a means of addressing areas of confusion, rather than changes to the ratings themselves, or to the inclusion of more specific consumer advice.

However, others made suggestions including reducing the number of categories (ie combining M and MA 15+ and R 18+ and X 18+), rethinking the name and scope of the M and MA 15+ categories and increasing the number of categories at the lower end of the spectrum (ie addition of a specific category or categories distinguishing content for children from content for young adults).

Several of those consulted emphasised the need to consider the impact on industry prior to the implementation of any changes to current classification ratings. For example, there was concern that classification category names could inadvertently affect the 'positioning' of a film or computer game (eg names such as 'Teen' if applied to a romantic comedy may put off potential viewers).

The majority of surveyed practitioners (10 of 17) indicated that they were 'Satisfied' with the existing categories as a set, and when asked about individual ratings, 50% or more were 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied' with each rating, with satisfaction varied across categories (highest for the R 18+ and X 18+ categories and lowest for M 15+). Practitioners responded moderately positively to alternative classification ratings (especially Option 1: G, PG 8+, Y 13+, M 15+, R 18+, X 18+, Prohibited) but the response was not positive enough to warrant a major overhaul.

These results support the conclusion that the current categories are in need of improvement but may not need to be abandoned altogether.

## Appendix A: Stakeholder Discussion Guide

Classification Branch, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department  
Developmental research and initial market testing – Classification categories  
and markings

Discussion Guide for Stakeholders – 3 Feb 2014

### *Explanatory notes*

- This issues guide provides an idea of the range and coverage of issues that will come out of the research project.
- It is a guide for discussion, and will not be used as a script—phrasing, wording, and order will be adapted as appropriate for the target audience.
- This guide does not represent a complete list of the questions that will be asked or covered in each discussion group or interview. The coverage and flow of issues will be guided by the researchers and informed by the participants. All questions are fully open-ended.
- Some questions are similar because they are trying to get at an issue from a number of angles and to validate responses/ views.
- Reported issues/ data will be probed for evidence/ examples wherever relevant.

### *Introduction (5 minutes)*

- Introduction of self and Department:
  - This research is being undertaken by the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney- General's Department.
  - The Attorney-General's Department serves the public by maintaining and improving Australia's system of law and justice.
- Background and purpose:
  - It is essential that the ratings and symbols used to classify films and computer games are recognised, understood, and correctly used by members of the general public, especially parents and other primary caregivers. It is also important that the ratings and symbols have the support of industry and other stakeholders.
  - It is possible that changes will be made to the ratings and symbols used to classify films (including cinema and DVD) and computer games in Australia. This research is being conducted to explore stakeholder attitudes toward current and potential future classification ratings and symbols.
- Confidentiality and anonymity.

- Length of interview – no more than one hour.

***Overall impressions of the National Classification Scheme (15 minutes)***

**We're going to start with a discussion of your overall impressions of the Australian film and computer game classification process.**

- What do you think is the purpose of film and computer game classification? And can you think of any other purposes?
- Taking into account everything you know about the process of film and computer game classification in Australia, what do you think are the key strengths of the process? And what about the weaknesses?

*[If necessary, read description of classification system in Australia]*

- Having heard this description, what do you now think are the key strengths of the classification process in Australia? And what about the weaknesses?
- What do you think the Australian government could do to improve the process of film and computer game classification Australia? And is there anything else the Australian government could do?

*[Continue probing till participant has no further suggestions]*

- Who do you think should be responsible for the classification of films and computer games in Australia? Why do you say that?
- I am now going to read out a list of potential arrangements for the classification of films and computer games in Australia. For each one, please tell me what you think would be the key strengths and weaknesses of the arrangement.

*[Rotate order of potential arrangements]*

- Classification process and enforcement solely managed by Commonwealth government;
- Classification process and enforcement jointly managed by Commonwealth and State governments
- Classification process and enforcement solely managed by industry;
- Classification process and enforcement jointly managed by industry and government; and
- Classification process and enforcement jointly managed by a not-for-profit organisation and by government.

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**Attitudes toward current classification categories and markings (10 minutes)**

**Okay, now we're going to discuss the current classification categories and markings.**

- Based on your experience, what do you think the general public use classification information for? And do you think the public use classification information for anything else?
- Thinking about the different segments of the community, who do you think would use classification information *most* often? And who do you think would use classification *least* often? Why?

*[Ensure participant is looking at the image showing the current classification categories and markings]*

- Please tell me all the ways in which you think the current Australian classification ratings and symbols could be improved. Anything else?

*[Ensure that the participant considers both the ratings and symbols and continue probing till participant has no further suggestions]*

- Do you think the Australian classification categories and symbols should include an age indicator? Why? Why not?
  - What do you think the age indicators should be? Why do you say that?
- Thinking about the classification ratings, which rating do you think is the most useful? And which do you think is the least useful? Why?
- Thinking again about the classification ratings, are there any ratings that you think are unnecessary? Why?

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**Specific stakeholder questions (15 minutes)**

- There are two types of categories in the current set of classifications – advisory and legally restrictive. What do you think about access to certain types of media being restricted?
  - Unlike in selected comparable jurisdictions, the Australian classification system includes two classifications which place a legal restriction on people under the age of 18. These are expressed by the symbols R18+ and X18+, the latter applying to films that contain only sexually explicit content and which are not screened in cinemas. Do you think these two classifications should be combined? Why? Why not?
  - If changes are made to the categories and symbols used to classify films and computer games, what do you think will be the impact on the Adult Retail and Entertainment Industry in Australia?
- 

- There are two types of categories in the current set of classifications – advisory and legally restrictive. What do you think about access to certain types of media being restricted?
  - If changes are made to the categories and symbols used to classify films and computer games, what do you think will be the impact on Home Entertainment Distributers?
  - What can the government do to minimise any negative impact on Home Entertainment Distributers?
- 

- There are two types of categories in the current set of classifications – advisory and legally restrictive. What do you think about access to certain types of media being restricted?
  - If changes are made to the categories and symbols used to classify films and computer games, what do you think will be the impact on computer game developers, distributers, and retailers?
  - What can the government do to minimise any negative impact on computer game developers, distributers, and retailers?
- 

- There are two types of categories in the current set of classifications – advisory and legally restrictive. What do you think about access to certain types of media being restricted?
- From a psychological perspective, what changes could the government make to the classification scheme in order that it better protects children and young people? Anything else?

- 
- Thinking about the current classification categories and symbols, what could be done to make the categories and symbols more useful for parents? Why?

- 
- What aspects of the classification system do you think are most useful for parents? And least useful? Why?
  - Taking into account everything you know about the National Classification Scheme, what changes could the government make to the classification scheme in order that it better protects children and young people? Anything else?
  - Thinking about the current classification categories and symbols, what could be done to make the categories and symbols more useful for parents? Why?

- 
- There are two types of categories in the current set of classifications – advisory and legally restrictive. What do you think about access to certain types of media being restricted?
  - Unlike in selected comparable jurisdictions, the Australian classification system includes two classifications which place a legal restriction on people under the age of 18. These are expressed by the symbols R18+ and X18+, the latter applying to films that contain only sexually explicit content and which are not screened in cinemas. Do you think these two classifications should be combined? Why? Why not?
  - If changes are made to the categories and symbols used to classify films and computer games, what do you think will be the impact on the Adult Retail and Entertainment Industry?

- 
- There are two types of categories in the current set of classifications – advisory and legally restrictive. What do you think about access to certain types of media being restricted?
  - If changes are made to the categories and symbols used to classify films and computer games, what do you think will be the impact on computer game developers, distributors, and retailers?
  - What can the government do to minimise any negative impact on computer game developers, distributors, and retailers?
  - To what extent do you think it is important for the categories and symbols used to classify films to be aligned with those used for computer games? Why do you say that?

- 
- There are two types of categories in the current set of classifications – advisory and legally restrictive. What do you think about access to certain types of media being restricted?



- 
- Based on your experience, do you think that children and young people use the classification system? What do they use it for? Why do you think they don't use the classification system?
  - Australian media consumers are now able to access a vast array of local and international media (including media from broadcasters, news organisations, social media sites, iTunes, YouTube, and so on) online via an ever increasing number of internet-enabled devices and screens. In your opinion, what is the role, if any, of film and computer game classification in this convergent media environment?
- 

- There are two types of categories in the current set of classifications – advisory and legally restrictive. What do you think about access to certain types of media being restricted?
  - From a psychological perspective, what changes could the government make to the classification scheme in order that it better protects children and young people? Anything else?
  - Thinking about the current classification categories and symbols, what could be done to make the categories and symbols more useful for parents? Why?
- 

- There are two types of categories in the current set of classifications – advisory and legally restrictive. What do you think about access to certain types of media being restricted?
  - What role do you think the Classification Branch should play in prohibiting illegal media?
- 

- There are two types of categories in the current set of classifications – advisory and legally restrictive. What do you think about access to certain types of media being restricted?
  - If changes are made to the categories and symbols used to classify films and computer games, what do you think will be the impact on Australian film, television, documentary and digital media makers?
  - What can the government do to minimise any negative impact on Australian film, television, documentary and digital media makers?
- 

- Thinking about the current BBFC categories and symbols, what do you think the key strengths and weaknesses of these categories and symbols? Why?
- Are there any lessons that the Classification Branch and Board could learn from the British classification experience? Anything else?
- Based on your experience, to what extent do you think the British public understand, use, and support the BBFC classification system? Why do you think that is?

- 
- Media consumers are now able to access a vast array of local and international media (including media from broadcasters, news organisations, social media sites, iTunes, YouTube, and so on) online via an ever increasing number of internet-enabled devices and screens. In your opinion, what is the role, if any, of film and computer game classification in this convergent media environment?
- 

- There are two types of categories in the current set of classifications – advisory and legally restrictive. What do you think about access to certain types of media being restricted?
  - If changes are made to the categories and symbols used to classify films and computer games, what do you think will be the impact on Australian film, television, documentary and digital media makers and distributors?
  - What can the government do to minimise any negative impact on Australian film, television, documentary and digital media makers and distributors?
- 

- What aspects of the classification system do you think are most useful for parents? And least useful? Why?
  - Taking into account everything you know about the National Classification Scheme, what changes could the government make to the classification scheme in order that it better protects children and young people? Anything else?
  - Thinking about the current classification categories and symbols, what could be done to make the categories and symbols more useful for parents? Why?
  - Based on your experience, do you think that children and young people use the classification system? What do they use it for? Why do you think they don't use the classification system?
- 

- What aspects of the classification system do you think are most useful for parents? And least useful? Why?
  - Taking into account everything you know about the National Classification Scheme, what changes could the government make to the classification scheme in order that it better protects children and young people? Anything else?
  - Thinking about the current classification categories and symbols, what could be done to make the categories and symbols more useful for parents? Why?
- 

- There are two types of categories in the current set of classifications – advisory and legally restrictive. What do you think about access to certain types of media being restricted?

- Unlike in selected comparable jurisdictions, the Australian classification system includes two classifications which place a legal restriction on people under the age of 18. These are expressed by the symbols R18+ and X18+, the latter applying to films that contain only sexually explicit content and which are not screened in cinemas. Do you think these two classifications should be combined? Why? Why not?
  - Taking into account everything you know about the National Classification Scheme, what changes could the government make to the classification scheme in order that it better protects children and young people? Anything else?
- 
- Australian media consumers are now able to access a vast array of local and international media (including media from broadcasters, news organisations, social media sites, iTunes, YouTube, and so on) online via an ever increasing number of internet-enabled devices and screens. In your opinion, what is the role, if any, of film and computer game classification in this convergent media environment?
  - Thinking about the current classification categories and symbols, what could be done to make the categories and symbols more useful for parents? Why?
  - To what extent do you think it is important for the categories and symbols used to classify films and computer games to be aligned with those used for television programs? Why do you say that?

## Appendix B: Practitioner Questionnaire

### Section A: Classification Categories and Markings

Select from the dropdown	Question	Available answers	Select from the dropdown	Logic If applicable
Rating Scale	<b>QA1:</b> Based on your current or recent experience classifying and/or assessing films and computer games, how satisfied are you with the existing classification categories?	*Very dissatisfied *Dissatisfied *Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied *Satisfied *Very satisfied	Yes	
Single Textboxes	<b>QA2:</b> Why are you dissatisfied with the existing classification categories?		Yes	ASK IF A1=1 or 2; Else go to A3
Matrix of Choices (Only one Answer per Row)	<b>QA3:</b> And how satisfied are you with each of the classification categories shown below? G, PG, M, M 15+, R 18+, X 18+	*Very dissatisfied *Dissatisfied *Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied *Satisfied *Very satisfied	Yes	
Single Textboxes	<b>QA4:</b> Please list all the ways in which you think the current classification categories and markings could be improved.		Yes	
Single Textboxes	<b>QA5:</b> The Australian public are confused about the meaning of mid-level classifications. The public		Yes	

Select from the dropdown	Question	Available answers	Select from the dropdown	Logic If applicable
	<p>are especially unclear on the difference between the M and MA 15+ classification categories.</p> <p>What could the Australian Government do to improve understanding of mid-level classifications amongst the general public?</p>			
Multiple Choice (Only One answer)	<p><b>QA6:</b> Please rate the overall quality of the New Zealand classification categories for films and computer games.</p> <p><b>G (General):</b> Suitable for General Audiences</p> <p><b>PG (Parental Guidance):</b> Parental Guidance Recommended for Younger Viewers</p> <p><b>M (Mature):</b> Suitable for Mature Audiences 16 years and over</p> <p><b>R 13 (Restricted 13):</b> Restricted to persons 13 years and over</p> <p><b>RP 13:</b> Restricted to persons 13 years and over unless accompanied by a parent or guardian</p> <p><b>R 15 (Restricted 15):</b> Restricted to persons 15 years and over</p> <p><b>R 16 (Restricted 16):</b> Restricted to persons 15</p>	<p>*Poor</p> <p>*Fair</p> <p>*Good</p> <p>*Very good</p> <p>*Excellent</p> <p>*Unsure/ don't know</p>	Yes	

Select from the dropdown	Question	Available answers	Select from the dropdown	Logic If applicable
	<p>years and over</p> <p><b>RP 16:</b> Restricted to persons 16 years and over unless accompanied by a parent or guardian</p> <p><b>R 18 (Restricted 18):</b> Restricted to persons 18 years and over</p> <p><b>R (Restricted):</b> Restricted to a particular group or purpose</p>			
Single Textboxes	<b>QA7:</b> Please list everything you like about the New Zealand classification categories for films and computer games in the space below.		Yes	
Multiple Choice (Only One answer)	<p><b>QA8:</b> Please rate the overall quality of the British classification categories for films and computer games.</p> <p><b>U (Universal):</b> Suitable for all</p> <p><b>PG (Parental Guidance):</b> Parental guidance</p> <p><b>12A (12 Accompanied):</b> Cinema release suitable for 12 years and over</p> <p><b>12:</b> Video release suitable for 12 years and over</p> <p><b>15:</b> Suitable only for 15 years and over</p>	<p>*Poor</p> <p>*Fair</p> <p>*Good</p> <p>*Very good</p> <p>*Excellent</p> <p>*Unsure/ don't know</p>	Yes	

Select from the dropdown	Question	Available answers	Select from the dropdown	Logic If applicable
	<p><b>18:</b> Suitable only for adults</p> <p><b>R 18 (Restricted 18):</b> Adult works for licenced premises only</p>			
Single Textboxes	<p><b>QA9:</b> Please list everything you like about the British classification categories for films and computer games in the space below.</p>		Yes	
Multiple Choice (Only One answer)	<p><b>QA10:</b> Please rate the overall quality of the Dutch classification categories for films.</p> <p><b>AL:</b> Suitable for all ages</p> <p><b>6:</b> Not recommended for children younger than 6 years</p> <p><b>9:</b> Not recommended for children younger than 9 years</p> <p><b>12:</b> Not recommended for children younger than 12 years</p> <p><b>16:</b> Not allowed for children younger than 16 years</p>	<p>*Poor</p> <p>*Fair</p> <p>*Good</p> <p>*Very good</p> <p>*Excellent</p> <p>*Unsure/ don't know</p>	Yes	
Single Textboxes	<p><b>QA11:</b> Please list everything you like about the Dutch classification categories for films in the</p>		Yes	

Select from the dropdown	Question	Available answers	Select from the dropdown	Logic If applicable
	space below.			
Multiple Choice (Only One answer)	<p><b>QA12:</b> Please rate the overall quality of the European PEGI classification categories for computer games.</p> <p><b>3:</b> Suitable for ages 3 and older</p> <p><b>7:</b> Suitable for ages 7 and older</p> <p><b>12:</b> Suitable for ages 12 and older</p> <p><b>16:</b> Suitable for ages 16 and older</p> <p><b>18:</b> Suitable for aged 18 and older</p>	<p>*Poor</p> <p>*Fair</p> <p>*Good</p> <p>*Very good</p> <p>*Excellent</p> <p>*Unsure/ don't know</p>	Yes	
Single Textboxes	<p><b>QA13:</b> Please list everything you like about the European PEGI classification categories for computer games in the space below.</p>		Yes	
Multiple Choice (Only One answer)	<p><b>QA14:</b> Please rate the overall quality of the American ESRB classification categories for computer games.</p> <p><b>EC (Early Childhood):</b> Content is intended for young children</p>	<p>*Poor</p> <p>*Fair</p> <p>*Good</p> <p>*Very good</p> <p>*Excellent</p> <p>*Unsure/ don't know</p>	Yes	



Select from the dropdown	Question	Available answers	Select from the dropdown	Logic If applicable
	<p><b>E (Everyone):</b> Content is generally suitable for all ages.</p> <p><b>E 10+ (Everyone 10+):</b> Content is generally suitable for ages 10 and up</p> <p><b>T (Teen):</b> Content is generally suitable for ages 13 and up.</p> <p><b>M (Mature 17+):</b> Content is generally suitable for ages 17 and up.</p> <p><b>AO (Adults Only):</b> Content only available for adults ages 18 and up.</p>			
Single Textboxes	<b>QA15:</b> Please list everything you like about the North American ESRB classification categories for computer games in the space below.		Yes	
Rating Scale	<p><b>QA16:</b> An alternative set of categories and marking for classification of films and computer games in Australia is shown below. Please rate the overall quality of this alternative set of categories and markings.</p> <p><b>G (General):</b> Recommended for all</p> <p><b>PG 8+ (Parental Guidance</b></p>	<p>*Poor</p> <p>*Fair</p> <p>*Good</p> <p>*Very good</p> <p>*Excellent</p> <p>*Unsure/ don't know</p>	Yes	

Select from the dropdown	Question	Available answers	Select from the dropdown	Logic If applicable
	<p><b>8+):</b> Recommended for 8 years and over</p> <p><b>Y 13+ (Youth 13+)</b> :Recommended for 13 years and over</p> <p><b>M 15+ (Mature 15+):</b> Recommended for 15 years and over</p> <p><b>R 18+ (Adults Only):</b> Restricted to adults aged 18 and over</p> <p><b>X 18+ (Explicit Sex):</b> Restricted to adults aged 18 and over</p> <p><b>Prohibited:</b> Prohibited material</p>			
Rating Scale	<p><b>QA17:</b> Another alternative set of categories and marking for classification of films and computer games in Australia is shown below. Please rate the overall quality of this alternative set of categories and markings.</p> <p><b>G (General):</b> Recommended for all</p> <p><b>5+:</b> Recommended for 5 years and over</p> <p><b>10+:</b> Recommended for 10 years and over</p> <p><b>15+:</b> Recommended for 15 years and over</p> <p><b>R 18+:</b> Restricted to adults</p>	<p>*Poor</p> <p>*Fair</p> <p>*Good</p> <p>*Very good</p> <p>*Excellent</p> <p>*Unsure/ don't know</p>	Yes	

Select from the dropdown	Question	Available answers	Select from the dropdown	Logic If applicable
	aged 18 and over  <b>Prohibited:</b> Prohibited material			
Single Textboxes	<b>QA18:</b> Please write any other comments you would like to make about the categories and markings used to classify films and computer games in Australia in the space below.		Yes	

## Section B: Demographics

Select from the dropdown	Question	Available answers	Select from the dropdown	Logic If applicable
Single Textboxes	<b>QB1:</b> To which of the following age categories do you belong?	*Under 25 years  *25-29  *30-34  *35-39  *40-44  *45-49  *50-54  *55-59  *60-64  *65 or over	Yes	

Select from the dropdown	Question	Available answers	Select from the dropdown	Logic If applicable
		*I'd prefer not to say		
Single Textboxes	<b>QB2:</b> Are you a...?	*Male *Female *I'd prefer not to say	Yes	
Single Textboxes	<b>QB3:</b> How many people live in your house?		No	
Single Textboxes	<b>QB4:</b> And how many of those people are under the age of 18?		No	
Multiple Choice (Only One answer)	<b>QB5:</b> What is the highest level of formal education that you have completed?	*Under Year 10 *Year 10 or equivalent *Year 11 or equivalent *Year 12 or equivalent *TAFE, diploma, certificate *University degree *Other [Please specify.....] *I'd prefer not to say	Yes	
Multiple Choice (Only One answer)	<b>QB6:</b> In total, approximately how many films (including television programs released on DVD) have you classified/assessed either as an individual or as a member of a panel? Just give your best guess if you are unsure.	*None *Between 1 and 20 *Between 21 and 100 *Between 101 and 300 *Between 301 and 500	Yes	

Select from the dropdown	Question	Available answers	Select from the dropdown	Logic If applicable
		*More than 500		
Multiple Choice (Only One answer)	<b>QB7:</b> And did you classify/assess any of these films (including television programs released on DVD) in the past 12 months?	*Yes *No *Unsure	Yes	ASK IF B6=2-6 ; Else go to B8
Multiple Choice (Only One answer)	<b>QB8:</b> In total, approximately how many computer games have you classified/assessed either as an individual or as a member of a panel? Just give your best guess if you are unsure.	*None *Between 1 and 20 *Between 21 and 100 *Between 101 and 300 *Between 301 and 500 *More than 500	Yes	
Multiple Choice (Only One answer)	<b>QB9:</b> And did you classify/assess any of these computer games in the past 12 months?	*Yes *No *Unsure	Yes	ASK IF B8=2-6 ; Else end
Multiple Choice (Only One answer)	<b>QB10: Are you a...?</b>	*Industry assessor for computer games *Industry classifier for film *Industry assessor for advertising *Classification Board Member *Classification Review	Yes	

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<b>Select from the dropdown</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Available answers</b>	<b>Select from the dropdown</b>	<b>Logic If applicable</b>
		Board Member  *Classification Branch Staff Assessor  *Don't know  *Other (please specify)		

## Appendix C: Ratings categories for film and computer games

Rating	Description
<p>Advisory categories: there are no legal restrictions about viewing and/or playing these films and computer games with these markings.</p>	
<p>G—General</p>	<p>The content is very mild in impact.</p> <p>The G classification is suitable for everyone. G products may contain classifiable elements such as language and themes that are very mild in impact.</p> <p>However, some G-classified films or computer games may contain content that is not of interest to children.</p>
<p>PG—Parental Guidance</p>	<p>The content is mild in impact.</p> <p>The impact of PG (Parental Guidance) classified films and computer games should be no higher than mild, but they may contain content that children find confusing or upsetting and may require the guidance of parents and guardians. They may, for example, contain classifiable elements such as language and themes that are mild in impact.</p> <p>It is not recommended for viewing or playing by persons under 15 without guidance from parents or guardians.</p>
<p>M—Mature</p>	<p>The content is moderate in impact.</p> <p>Films and computer games classified M (Mature) contain content of a moderate impact and are recommended for teenagers aged 15 years and over.</p> <p>Children under 15 may legally access this material because it is an advisory category. However, M classified films and computer games may include classifiable elements such as violence and nudity of moderate impact that are not recommended for children under 15 years.</p> <p>Parents and guardians may need to find out more about the film or computer game’s specific content, before deciding whether</p>

Rating	Description
	the material is suitable for their child.
Restricted categories for films and computer games: there are legal restrictions on viewing and/or playing these films and computer games.	
MA 15+—Mature Accompanied	<p>The content is strong in impact.</p> <p>MA 15+ classified material contains strong content and is legally restricted to persons 15 years and over. It may contain classifiable elements such as sex scenes and drug use that are strong in impact.</p> <p>A person may be asked to show proof of their age before hiring or purchasing an MA 15+ film or computer game. Cinema staff may also request that the person show proof of their age before allowing them to watch an MA 15+ film. Children under the age of 15 may not legally watch, buy or hire MA 15+ classified material unless they are in the company of a parent or adult guardian. Children under 15 who go to the cinema to see an MA 15+ film must be accompanied by a parent or adult guardian for the duration of the film. The parent or adult guardian must also purchase the movie ticket for the child. The guardian must be an adult exercising parental control over the person under 15 years of age. The guardian needs to be 18 years or older.</p>
R 18+—Restricted	<p>The content is high in impact</p> <p>R 18+ material is restricted to adults. Such material may contain classifiable elements such as sex scenes and drug use that are high in impact. Some material classified R18+ may be offensive to sections of the adult community. A person may be asked for proof of their age before purchasing, hiring or viewing R18+ films and computer games at a retail store or cinema.</p>
Restricted categories for adult films	
X 18+—Restricted	<p>X 18+ films are restricted to adults.</p> <p>This classification is a special and legally restricted category</p>



Rating	Description
	which contains only sexually explicit content. That is, material which shows actual sexual intercourse and other sexual activity between consenting adults. X18+ films are only available for sale or hire in the ACT and the NT.
RC—Refused Classification	<p>Refused Classification (RC) is a classification category. Material that is Refused Classification is commonly referred to as being 'banned'.</p> <p>Films, computer games and publications that are classified RC cannot be sold, hired, advertised or legally imported in Australia.</p> <p>Material that is classified RC contains content that is very high in impact and falls outside generally accepted community standards.</p>

Source: Australian Government 2014

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