



Australian Government

Office of Film and Literature Classification

**REVIEW OF
CONSUMER ADVICE**

for

Films and Computer Games

Office of Film and Literature Classification

June 2005

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	iv
i. The Review	iv
ii. The National Classification Scheme	iv
iii. Consumer advice.....	v
iv. Stages of the Review.....	v
v. Key findings.....	vi
vi. Principles and framework for providing consumer advice	vii
vii. Conclusions.....	viii
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 The national classification scheme	1
1.2 Background to the Review	2
1.3 Government commitment to review consumer advice	2
1.4 Aims and objectives of the Review	3
2 THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF CONSUMER ADVICE.....	3
2.1 Consumer advice for cinema films, videos and DVDs.....	3
2.2 Consumer Advice for computer games.....	5
2.3 Consumer Advice for films for broadcast.....	5
3 CURRENT USE OF CONSUMER ADVICE BY THE BOARDS AND TELEVISION NETWORKS.....	6
3.1 Model of consumer advice used by the Boards	6
3.2 Model of consumer advice for television films and programs	7
4 STAGES OF THE REVIEW	8
4.1 Qualitative Research	9
4.2 Consideration of a range of consumer advice models and the development of consumer advice for market testing	10
4.3 Market testing of consumer advice	13
4.3.1 Generating consumer advice by viewing films and computer games	13
4.3.2 Market testing of consumer advice without viewing films or computer games	16
4.4 Analysis of correspondence	17
5 REVIEW OF DETERMINED MARKINGS FOR FILMS AND COMPUTER GAMES	18
6 PRINCIPLES AND FRAMEWORK FOR PROVIDING CONSUMER ADVICE	18
6.1 Consumer Advice Principles.....	18
6.2 Consumer Advice Framework	19
7 FINDINGS	21
8 CONCLUSIONS	21

9	APPENDICES.....	23
9.1	First system of consumer advice for films	23
9.2	Current system (2005) of consumer advice used by the Board for films and computer games	24
9.3	Consumer advice used by commercial television networks	26
9.4	Selected consumer advice lines from university study	27
9.5	Global models of consumer advice analysed by the Boards.....	28
9.6	Consumer advice developed by the Boards for consumer testing with specific films and computer games.....	30
9.7	Consumer advice provided by consumers participating in Community Assessment Panels (CAPS).....	31
9.8	Consumer advice tested with focus groups without viewing films or computer games	35
9.9	Correspondence to the OFLC about consumer advice during the review period.....	36

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a Review of Consumer Advice (the Review) which was conducted by the Office of Film and Literature Classification (the OFLC).

i. The Review

In 2001, the Howard Government released their action plan *Better Law, More Options*, where a commitment was made to:

“review consumer advice to ensure that it offers a sufficient and adequate guide to the themes or classifiable elements contained in specific entertainment products.” (p. 13)

The Review only considered consumer advice that is provided for films and computer games, not consumer advice that is provided for certain publications.

The aim of the Review was to develop a system of consumer advice that would meaningfully communicate the content of films and computer games, so that consumers could make informed entertainment choices.

Specifically, the Review explored issues related to consumer advice such as:

- how well it is understood by consumers;
- should it provide more information about content;
- do other systems of consumer advice used by other classifying bodies perform the same function, both globally and nationally;
- what are the types of language that communicate the most meaning; and,
- who are the target audiences.

ii. The National Classification Scheme

The OFLC is an Australian Government statutory agency within the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s portfolio of responsibilities.

The *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995* (the Commonwealth Classification Act) empowers the Classification Board (the Board) and the Classification Review Board (the Review Board) to provide classifications and consumer advice for cinema films, videos, DVDs and computer games.

The national classification scheme is a cooperative Commonwealth, State and Territory regulatory scheme for the classification of films, computer games and certain publications.

iii. Consumer advice

The Boards must provide consumer advice for all films and computer games that are classified higher than the G classification. The Boards have the discretion whether or not to provide consumer advice for products classified G.

Consumer advice is a phrase or phrases that provide information to consumers about certain content in a film or computer game. It is a part of the classification marking and is displayed alongside the classification symbol on both the product and the associated advertising materials.

The intention of this information is to help consumers make informed choices about the product they wish to view or play.

The practice of the Boards providing consumer advice for films first developed in 1988, and for computer games in 1994.

Consumer advice is also provided for television programs by the individual television networks under their codes of practice.

Currently the Boards' practice for providing consumer advice is to indicate the strongest classifiable element contained in the film or computer game, and the intensity and/or frequency of those elements.

iv. Stages of the Review

The Review is the first of its kind conducted in Australia. It is unique in that both the practitioners (those who provide consumer advice) and consumers (those who use consumer advice) provided input.

Consultation was undertaken with both Boards, and most significantly, community members. The Australian Broadcasting Authority participated in one of the stages of the Review by assisting with a research study.

The Review consisted of several stages which included:

- market research studies;
- analysis by the Boards of a range of international models for consumer advice, and the development of their preferred model;
- market testing of certain consumer advice with community focus groups; including the collection of consumer advice from focus groups; and
- analysis of correspondence about consumer advice received by the OFLC during the Review period.

Several qualitative research studies were conducted during the Review to seek the views of community members. The general purpose of these studies was to better understand community attitudes about consumer

advice, and to collect data about what they considered would be meaningful consumer advice.

These studies were conducted in all of the Australian jurisdictions in both metropolitan and regional areas, and with a wide range of community representatives including youth, parents of both younger and older children, young adults and seniors.

The study, “*Community Attitudes Towards Media Classification and Consumer Advice* (OFLC, 2004), was conducted in partnership with the Australian Broadcasting Authority (the ABA). Findings from this study indicate that consumers had poor awareness of the of consumer advice, particularly for cinema release films, but once they were made aware of it, they supported it. However, awareness of consumer advice used by television was higher and the voice over used by television was a strong contributor to this awareness.

They said:

“They [distributors] don’t want people making the choice not to watch the movie. At least make the consumer advice writing above the classification.” (p.35)

In all of the studies, there was certain consumer advice that was considered confusing. This related to the use of the same consumer advice, such as *medium level violence* at the different classification types.

Other consumer advice, such as *adult themes, sexual references and mature themes* was considered ambiguous, and too broad. In a study called “*2004 Community Assessment Panels*” (Urbis Keys Young, 2005), they said:

“..I didn’t want to write adult themes, but I was toying with it – but in the end that’s not telling you anything at all...” (app. A. p. 29)

The Review also considered the views of consumers who wrote to the OFLC during the review period. Generally the views expressed were consistent with findings from the qualitative studies, which were that consumers wanted as much detail as possible about the content of a product. Copies of the studies are available on the OFLC website oflc.gov.au

v. Key findings

The Review found that at a policy level, consumers:

- support the provision of consumer advice for films and computer games, and if aware of it, would use it to make entertainment viewing choices;
- would like to see consumer advice more prominently displayed
- seek consistency of consumer advice across all media

In terms of current practice, the review found:

- few consumers are aware of, or make use of, consumer advice
- when exposed to the issue, think that consumer advice provided by the Boards is mostly appropriate, although they feel some modifications to consumer advice would result in a more meaningful system

Moving forward, the review found that consumers:

- expect that consumer advice will effectively communicate the content of the film or computer game that would generally be of most concern to them
- want consumer advice to indicate the type and the impact and/or frequency of this content;
- think that different target audiences may have different needs when it comes to consumer advice, and this should be taken into account when providing consumer advice

More specifically, the review found consumers:

- feel that some descriptors are ambiguous, eg. *adult themes* and *mature themes*;
- can be confused by identical descriptors used across classification levels, ex. *medium level violence*;
- believe some descriptors were too broad, eg. *adult themes*, *mature themes*, *sexual references*;
- find the descriptor *animated* is redundant when applied to computer games.

vi. Principles and framework for providing consumer advice

As an outcome of the Review, the Boards developed principles for providing consumer advice and a framework of specific consumer advice.

The principles for providing consumer advice and the framework of specific consumer advice have been formally accepted by both Boards.

Both the principles and the specific framework give regard to the views expressed by consumers, as noted in the focus group studies.

The principles give flexibility to the Boards in providing consumer advice taking into account the needs of both industry (who are required to display the consumer advice on products), and consumers (who want as much detail as possible to be provided in consumer advice).

The framework of specific consumer advice contains consumer advice that is likely to be used most often, which will enable consumers to become familiar with specific consumer advice over time.

vii. Conclusions

The Review has conducted a detailed examination of consumer advice through a range of processes, including seeking the views of both the practitioners who provide consumer advice, and the users of consumer advice. In addition, the ratings schemes of 20 countries across six continents, which included consumer advice, were studied.

Qualitative studies conducted during the Review provided a greater understanding of the type of language that would be most meaningful to consumers.

Responses clearly indicate that the Boards were mostly providing consumer advice that generally contained meaning for consumers, however, some minor modifications could be made to the existing system in order for it to be more effective.

Using the information gathered, the Boards constructed principles for providing consumer advice and a framework of specific consumer advice and these principles and the framework have been formally agreed to by both Boards.

The outcome of the Review of the Determination of Markings for Films and computer games, which was conducted concurrently with this Review, will result in consumer advice being made more visible on packaging and associated advertising material for films and computer games.

The OFLC will continue to produce information products which will enable ongoing community education about consumer advice.

A copy of this report will be made available to all classifiers who provide consumer advice with the aim of providing consistency of consumer advice across all entertainment products.

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the Review of Consumer Advice (the Review) which was conducted by the Office of Film and Literature Classification (the OFLC).

Consumer advice is a phrase or phrases that provide information to consumers about certain content in a film or computer game. The intention of this information is to help consumers make informed choices about the product they wish to view or play.

1.1 The national classification scheme

The national classification scheme is a cooperative Commonwealth, State and Territory regulatory scheme for the classification of films, computer games and certain publications. Under this scheme the Australian Government is responsible for the classification of these products, while the States and Territories are responsible for the enforcement of classification decisions.

The OFLC is an Australian Government statutory agency within the Commonwealth Attorney-General's portfolio of responsibilities, and its primary role is to provide administrative support to the Classification Board (the Board) and the Classification Review Board (the Review Board).

The Board is a full time statutory body that classifies films (including cinema films, videos and DVDs), computer games and certain publications.

The Review Board is a part-time statutory body convened, as required, to review decisions made by the Board.

The *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995* (the Commonwealth Classification Act) empowers the Board and the Review Board to provide classifications and consumer advice for cinema films, videos, DVDs and computer games.

Consumer advice must be provided for all films and computer games which are classified higher than G, and may be provided for G films and computer games at the Boards' discretion.

It is a part of the classification marking, which consists of a letter in a shape, a description of the classification type and consumer advice. This is displayed on both the product and associated advertising material.

Currently the Boards' practice for providing consumer advice is to indicate the strongest classifiable elements contained in the film or computer game, and the intensity and/or frequency of those elements.

1.2 Background to the Review

During 2001, the guidelines for the classification of films and computer games were reviewed (complete findings were published in *A Review Of The Classification Guidelines For Films And Computer Games*, Dr. Jeffrey Brand, Co-director Bond University Centre for New Media Research and Education 2002, report to the OFLC, Sydney). The classification guidelines are reviewed regularly to ensure they continue to accurately reflect community standards. Dr. Brand's report is available on the OFLC website oflc.gov.au

To commence the review of these guidelines, the OFLC released a discussion paper with a call for public submissions. 372 submissions were received and analysed by an independent expert, Dr. Jeffrey Brand.

A majority of the submissions by individuals argued that films and computer games should share one set of classification symbols, and that there should be more consumer advice about classifiable elements. Classifiable elements are Themes, Violence, Sex, Language, Drug Use and Nudity.

1.3 Government commitment to review consumer advice

According to the *Portfolio Budget Statements 2004 – 05*, the Australian Government expects that the OFLC will operate a national classification scheme which will:

“...assist adults to make informed decisions about films, publications and computer games which they, or those in their care, may view, read or play by providing classifications advice which is consistent with community standards.” (p. 416)

In November 2001 the Howard Government released an action plan, *Better Law, More Options* which made a commitment to:

“review consumer advice to ensure that it offers a sufficient and adequate guide to the themes or classifiable elements contained in specific entertainment products.” (p. 13)

The entertainment products referred to in the action plan included audio recordings, programs on television, films, videos, computer games, and publications.

Accordingly, the OFLC commenced the Review. The Review considered consumer advice for films and computer games only; it did not include consumer advice that is provided for certain publications.

1.4 Aims and objectives of the Review

The aim of the Review was to develop a system of consumer advice that would meaningfully communicate the content of films and computer games, so that consumers could make informed entertainment choices.

Specifically, the Review explored issues related to consumer advice, such as:

- how well it is understood by consumers;
- should it provide more information about content;
- how do other systems of consumer advice used by other classifying bodies perform the same function, both globally and nationally;
- what are the types of language that communicate the most meaning; and
- who are the target audiences for consumer advice

2 THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF CONSUMER ADVICE

2.1 Consumer advice for cinema films, videos and DVDs

In 1985 a parliamentary committee,¹ was formed to inquire into the operation of the *Customs (Cinematograph Films) Regulations, Regulation 4A of the Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations* and the *ACT Classification of Publications Ordinance 1983* in relation to videotapes and videodiscs. This committee reported to the Parliament in 1988, making 29 recommendations. Recommendation III² made by the Committee was that:

*“the specific reasons for classifying a non-G film be displayed on the front cover of video slicks as part of the prescribed markings...[and]
the specific reasons must also be shown on all posters, advertising material and trailers...[and]
films must also exhibit the specific reasons as a preface to the film”* (p. 623)

At this time, Censorship Ministers agreed that a new system of labelling for videos and for film advertising should be introduced throughout Australia and it would mean, among other matters, that all videos, above the G classification would show consumer advice relating to the content, and that this advice would be displayed on the cover of each video, on the cassette itself and in all advertising material.

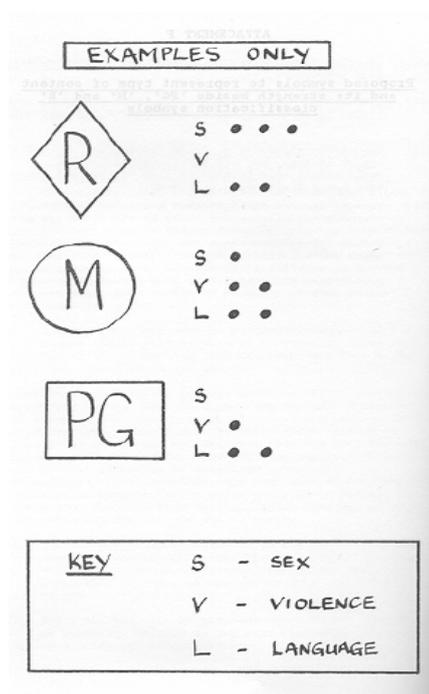
¹ The Joint Select Committee on Video Material.

² Australian Government Publishing Services 1988, *Report of the Joint Select Committee on Video Material*, The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

The Film Censorship Board (the Classification Board’s predecessor) made a submission to the parliamentary committee which consisted of letters to represent the classifiable elements³ and a hierarchy of explicitness/intensity ranging from low to medium to high, which was to be represented by dots.

The proposed strength of the classifiable elements of Sex (S), Violence (V) and Language (L) would be indicated by a number of dots. One dot corresponded to “low”, two dots corresponded to “medium” and three dots corresponded to “high” (see Diagram 1, below).⁴

Diagram 1 – Dot system to represent consumer advice – 1988



In 1990, the OFLC conducted a research study⁵ to find out what consumers knew about consumer advice. This study concluded that public reaction to the provision of consumer advice was positive, however, some of the phrases used for consumer advice could be reviewed. It was found that:

“...for consumer advice to be meaningful to the general public, it should be specific and written in plain language.”⁶

³ At this time, the three classifiable elements of sex, violence and language were explicitly listed in the guidelines.

⁴ Findings from subsequent market research studies indicated that the dot system would not be the best approach, and consequently the dot system was never used.

⁵ Diagnostic & Creative Workshop Pty Ltd., 1990, *Community Attitudes Toward Film and Video Censorship, Stage One*, report to the OFLC, Sydney.

⁶ OFLC 1991, *Office of Film and Literature Classification and Film and Literature Board of Review - Reports on Activities 1990-1991*, p. 17.

These findings meant that the dot system, as described above, was never implemented.

Following research and consultation with the film and video industries in 1990 regarding consumer advice, a list of consumer advice was developed which was specific and written in plain language.

The list was not exhaustive, but contained those elements appearing most frequently. This list evolved to include other types of content, as relevant (see Appendix at section 9.1).

The specific consumer advice was designed to meet primarily parent's needs for the information about the strength and the intensity of a classifiable element in a film.

Subsequently, Boards began assigning consumer advice based on the principles of indicating the strongest classifiable elements. Currently, these are: Themes, Violence, Sex, Language, Drug Use, and Nudity.

2.2 Consumer Advice for computer games

The classification of computer games, including the provision of consumer advice, commenced in 1994. The same principles of providing consumer advice for films, whereby the type of classifiable element and the intensity and/or frequency of those elements are indicated, was applied to computer games (see Appendix at section 9.2). The term *animated* was specifically associated with computer games.

2.3 Consumer Advice for films for broadcast

The OFLC does not regulate films or programs broadcast on television.

The *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (the Broadcasting Services Act) establishes a co-regulatory scheme for broadcast services on free to air television, relying on codes of practice developed by industry and registered with the Australian Broadcasting Authority (the ABA).

For the purposes of classifying films screened on free to air television networks, the Broadcasting Services Act requires that codes of practice apply the film classification system administered by the OFLC.

The national broadcasters, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), are regulated under their own Acts. Those Acts also provide for the development of codes of practice, which provide for consumer advice for some television programs.

Television broadcasters each have their own classifiers who are responsible for assigning consumer advice to television programs.

In 1991/2, the OFLC made submissions to the Senate Select Committee on Subscription Television Broadcasting Services that the classification system for films and videos be applied to pay television, the reason being that the public would benefit from consistency across all media.⁷

In September 1992 the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (the ABA's predecessor) inquired into the classification of program material on television.

Recommendation No. 5 from that Inquiry states:

*"..that the OFLC consumer advice be adopted for television. The consumer advice indicates the principal elements which have contributed to the classification of the material, and their intensity and/or frequency.."*⁸

In November 1992, the then Prime Minister, the Honourable Paul Keating M.P., announced to the Family Summit that there would be a single classification system for film, video and television.⁹ The television classifications of G, PGR and AO would be replaced by G, PG, M and MA classifications. For programs classified M and MA, consumer advice would be shown at the start of each program, similar to the consumer advice used by the OFLC. The purpose of these changes was so that consumers would benefit from a single system.

3 CURRENT USE OF CONSUMER ADVICE BY THE BOARDS AND TELEVISION NETWORKS

There are similarities and differences in the consumer advice used by the Board, the Review Board, and those used by the television networks, as outlined below.

3.1 Model of consumer advice used by the Boards

In determining consumer advice for a film or computer game, the current practice used by the Boards is to indicate the main classifiable elements that caused the film or computer game to be classified in a particular classification, and to indicate the intensity and/or frequency of these elements. The elements relate to the classifiable elements of Themes, Violence, Sex, Language, Drug Use and Nudity. For a list of the consumer advice currently used by the Boards, see Appendix at section 9.2.

⁷ OFLC 1992, *Office of Film and Literature Classification and Film and Literature Board of Review - Reports on Activities 1991-1992*, p. 2.

⁸ Australian Broadcasting Tribunal 1992, *Inquiry into the Classification of Program Material on Television IP/91/46 – Report and Recommendations September 1992*, p. 2.

⁹ OFLC 1993, *Office of Film and Literature Classification and Film and Literature Review Board - Reports on Activities 1992-93*, p. 1.

According to the Commonwealth Classification Act, if the Board (or the Review Board) classify a film PG, M, MA 15+, R 18+ or X 18+, or a computer game PG, M, or MA 15+ they must determine consumer advice for the film or computer game. The consumer advice must give information about the content of the film or computer game.

For the G classification, the option to provide consumer advice, or not, is at the Boards' discretion.

For films and computer games classified in Australia, the amount of consumer advice is constrained by the amount of information that can reasonably fit on product advertisements and packaging.

3.2 Model of consumer advice for television films and programs

The Free TV Australia *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (July 2004)* is applied by commercial television broadcasters when classifying programs, and Section 2.20 of this code contains a provision to provide consumer advice. The consumer advice framework used by commercial television stations is at Appendix 9.3 in this report

Select parts of this Code state that:

“...consumer advice provides viewers with information about the principal elements that contribute to a program’s classification, and indicates their intensity and/or frequency. It is intended to help people make informed choices about the programs they choose...”

and

consumer advice is mandatory for all MA and AV programs and for one-off programs classified M and very short series classified M – that is, feature films, telemovies, mini-series, series episodes presented in a feature film format, documentaries and specials...

and

consumer advice is mandatory for all PG films.” (p. 20)

The ABC code states that:

“...audio and visual consumer advice on the reasons for an M or MA classification will be given prior to commencement of an M or MA program”¹⁰

The SBS code states that:

“...The reasons for an M, MA 15+ and MAV 15+ classification will be shown before the program. SBS may provide other appropriate consumer advice at the start of the program. In

¹⁰ Australian Broadcasting Commission, *ABC Code of Practice* (current), viewed 21 March 2005, <<http://www.abc.net.au/corp/codeprac.htm>>.

particular, SBS will provide appropriate consumer advice at the start of a PG classified program where SBS considers that the program contains material of a strength or intensity which SBS reasonably believes parents or guardians of young children may not expect.”¹¹

Subscription television broadcasters also provide consumer advice for some programs.

The subscription television broadcasting code states that:

“...For "M" and "MA" films and drama programs consumer advice concerning the reasons for a classification must be given prior to the commencement of a program. The advice will be in a style consistent with the guidelines on consumer advice published by the Office of Film and Literature Classification.”¹²

4 STAGES OF THE REVIEW

The Review is the first of its kind conducted in Australia. It is unique in that both the practitioners (those who provide consumer advice) and consumers (those who use consumer advice) provided input.

Consultation was undertaken with a variety of stakeholders, including the Boards, the ABA, and consumers. The ABA is responsible for registering codes of practice developed by the television networks. These codes of practice provide a framework for television classifiers to determine consumer advice for broadcast programs.

Most significantly, community members were consulted for their views, as they are the primary users of consumer advice, through the qualitative research methods detailed below.¹³

The Review was conducted in stages and included:

- market research studies;
- analysis by the Boards of a range of international models for consumer advice, and the development of their preferred model;
- market testing of certain consumer advice with community focus groups; including the collection of consumer advice from focus groups; and

¹¹ Special Broadcasting Services, *SBS Codes of Practice* (current), viewed 21 March 2005, <<http://www.sbs.com.au/sbscorporate/index.html?id=1061#3.7>>.

¹² Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association, *Codes of Practice Subscription Broadcast Television revised July 2003*, <http://www.astra.org.au/content/pdf/codes/Revised_STB_Codes_July03.pdf>.

¹³ It is acknowledged that it is qualitative research, and as such, the findings are indicative of the range but not the extent of opinion, attitudes and perceptions which exist in the community.

- analysis of correspondence about consumer advice received by the OFLC during the Review period.

4.1 Qualitative Research

In October 2002, the OFLC appointed a market research consultant to conduct qualitative research in the form of focus group discussions. The ABA were invited to assist with this research. The aim of the research was to better understand community attitudes towards classification information, including consumer advice, which is provided for films, including cinema, video, DVD, computer games and television. The results of this research were published in a report titled “*Community Attitudes Towards Media Classification and Consumer Advice* (2004). This report is available on the OFLC website oflc.gov.au

A total of 10 focus groups were conducted in three geographical locations, these being Sydney, Bundaberg and Hobart, and represented key consumer segments of teenagers (14 to 15 years), young working adults (20 to 29), parents of younger children (3 to 9 years) and older children (10 to 15), and seniors (55 and over).

All groups were observed by an OFLC representative. In addition, some groups were also observed by members of the Board, the Review Board, and representatives from some television networks and the ABA.

The findings from this study indicate that the classification systems for film, TV and computer games, including consumer advice, are at different stages of evolution, and that consumer advice used by TV is the most evolved.

In relation to consumer advice for films, it was found that many people were not even aware that consumer advice was provided for films. They said:

“I think they need to advertise it [consumer advice] with the movie when it comes out.” (p. 27)

Once they were made aware of it, they said

“You have to look really hard to find the information [if the consumer advice is] in small print. The industry is just covering itself. They aren’t making it easy.” (p. 26)

When asked about the placement of consumer advice on video/DVD boxes, parents in particular were critical of the poor visibility of the consumer advice. They said:

“They [distributors] don’t want people making the choice not to watch the movie. At least make the consumer advice writing above the classification.” (p. 35)

Parents were more aware of consumer advice used on TV and used it to regulate viewing by their children. Parents had a more positive attitude towards classification information on television, than towards cinema films.

Although some of the consumer advice used by television broadcasters was preferred by some, this may have been because they were more familiar with it, which could be attributed to the voice-over which accompanies consumer advice on television. Participants considered the voice-over to be a powerful tool in achieving awareness. The practice of providing consumer advice before the program was also seen as positive. They said:

“It’s good they bring it up in front of the TV show” (p. 37)

One of the objectives of this study was to better understand consumer response to existing consumer advice. Although their awareness of consumer advice was low for films, and even lower for computer games, evidence emerged of some confusion related to the use of the same consumer advice such as *medium level violence*, across the different classifications, and the use of broad terms such as *adult themes*.

Select comments include:

“PG and M15+ - both have ‘medium level’ coarse language. Is it the same level?” (p. 34)

“What you classify as medium varies according to the person, strong violence is clearer.” (p. 37)

“...this is vague. What is ‘adult themes’?” (p. 35)

“[I have] No idea what ‘adult themes’ is.” (p. 57)

It was recognised that there was room for improvement with both the OFLC and the broadcast system of providing consumer advice. Consumers also preferred to have the same system of consumer advice applying to both film (cinema, VHS, DVD) and television programs.

Commonly, they said:

“I think it should be universal.” (p. 51)

4.2 Consideration of a range of consumer advice models and the development of consumer advice for market testing

In 2003 the OFLC commissioned researchers from Bond University to provide a resource which provided information on global classification

systems.¹⁴ The objective of this stage of the Review was to present the Board and the Review Board with models of global consumer advice systems for analysis. Both Boards considered the pros and cons of each model.

The classification ratings schemes of 20 countries across six continents were explored. Different media were represented including films, computer games and television broadcast. This information was used to collate a comprehensive list of consumer advice that is used around the world (see Appendix at section 9.4), and possible consumer advice models

For the purpose of the Review, the models were called:

- Pictogram Model
- Letter Model
- Word/Phrase Model
- Principal Elements¹⁵ Model A
- Principal Elements Model B
- Principal Elements Model C
- All Elements Model
- 2003 Guidelines¹⁶ Impact Model

A description of each of these models is at Appendix 9.5.

The Board held the following general views about each of the models:

- the Pictogram Model may be confusing and relies on a level of understanding that is not necessarily clear within the community. Although elements of pictures can be universal, it was largely felt that pictures could hold very different meanings for different people, and that some content may be difficult to represent by pictures
- single letters, such as V, S and L, as used in the Letter Model, indicate that the consumer has an assumed knowledge of the meaning of the letters. It may work for television as it is combined with a voice-over, but may not be suitable for product that is exhibited, sold or hired;
- the Principal Elements Model A, where only the classifiable element is listed, such as Violence, was considered to not provide enough information for the consumer, due to the lack of quantifying or qualifying terminology;
- the Board indicated a preference for using quantifying and qualifying words as described in Principal Elements Model B;
- the Principal Elements Model C was generally supported as a useful model provided that a product did not carry too much consumer advice, with four or five phrases being considered the most that could be used;

¹⁴ Bond University Centre for New Media Research and Education 2002, *Media Ratings and Classification Around the World*, OFLC, Sydney.

¹⁵ Elements refer to the classifiable elements of Themes, Violence, Sex, Language, Drug Use and Nudity.

¹⁶ *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games 2003*.

- the hierarchy of impact as presented in the 2003 Guidelines Impact Model, was considered to be meaningful and directly related to the decision-making process

The Board preferred a model of consumer advice that:

- uses quantitative and qualitative descriptors with the principal element that caused the classification;
- lists any elements that are one category lower in classification if they may be of concern to consumers;
- uses the impact hierarchy terminology with the specific classification types as described in the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games 2003* (2003 Guidelines);

Generally, the Board indicated that they would not like to be limited by the amount of consumer advice allocated to a product, although they recognised that too much consumer advice may be of little use to the consumer. In addition it was acknowledged that too much consumer advice may be difficult to implement by industry, who are required to mark all classified products with complete classification information, due to the fact that there are many competing priorities for information to be displayed on products and associated advertising material.

The Review Board held the following general views about each of the models:

- the Pictogram Model lacks clarity as pictures mean different things to different people;
- the Letter Model is ambiguous and consumers may not know what the letters mean, and this model does not provide enough description for the consumer;
- the All Elements Model may mean that there is too much consumer advice provided, particularly with the higher classification categories where it is possible that every classifiable element may be present in the product.

The Review Board currently use the 2003 Guidelines Impact Model. It was noted, however, that this model works well with elements such as Violence, but may not be as meaningful with other elements such as Themes.

The Review Board held the general view that consumer advice needs to be descriptive whilst still being simple and distinct.

Following a consideration of the proposed models of consumer advice, the current models used by the Board and the Review Board, and consumer advice used by other countries, the Boards developed a list of consumer advice to test with community focus groups (see Appendix at section 9.6).

4.3 Market testing of consumer advice

At this stage of the Review, focus groups were formed for the Community Assessment Panels¹⁷, and they were asked to provide consumer advice for films and computer games, with a view to understanding what language was in their minds, when it came to providing consumer advice. This research occurred from April – June 2004 in Canberra, Alice Springs and Melbourne.

4.3.1 Generating consumer advice by viewing films and computer games

This is, perhaps, the most unique aspect of the Review. The consumer, to date, has never had the opportunity to demonstrate what type of language they would naturally use and understand, with respect to consumer advice. This stage ensured that the community had a critical influence on the language used in the consumer advice framework.

The focus groups were asked to watch two films and play two computer games, and then they had to:

- decide consumer advice for the films and computer games that they viewed, and then;
- comment on the consumer advice that the Board had previously provided for these same films and computer games

Before performing this task, they were made aware of the concept of consumer advice, but there was no discussion about specific consumer advice, nor did they know the consumer advice that the Board had provided for each product.

The purpose of collecting these ‘top-of-mind’ responses was to see what kind of language they would use for consumer advice, thus indicating the type of language that was most meaningful to them, as it related to a specific product. The appendix at section 9.7 contains a list of the language that they chose for specific films and computer games.¹⁸

The most frequently used responses reflected the terms that currently appear in consumer advice used by the Board, and included quantitative and qualitative terminology such as *low level, moderate/medium, strong/high, frequent/infrequent*. They were also using terminology such as *very mild, mild, moderate, strong and high impact* which directly relate to the hierarchy of impact in the 2003 Guidelines.

They were then provided with a list of consumer advice which was developed by the Boards, to consider in relation to the material they had

¹⁷ Urbis Keys Young 2005, *2004 Community Assessment Panels*, OFLC, Sydney.

¹⁸ It should be noted that the participants would have had prior knowledge of advice lines before they viewed their first computer game, due to their earlier film experience.

viewed.¹⁹ The purpose of providing this list was to see if they could find more relevant consumer advice than that which they had first chosen by themselves (see Appendix in section 9.6).

In relation to the specific product that they had viewed, some of the more commonly selected phrases included the use of *incidental* to indicate infrequency, and qualitative descriptors regarding types of violence, such as *comedic violence* and *domestic violence*. Regarding themes, the terms *fantasy* and *supernatural* were among those selected.

Finally, they were asked to consider the consumer advice that the Board had provided. In most cases, they found that the consumer advice provided by the Board was appropriate, and similar to the consumer advice they had chosen.

Complete findings from this research are published in a report titled “*2004 Community Assessment Panels (Urbis Keys Young 2005)*”, and some indicative findings are listed below:

- Responses indicated that consumer advice was useful and they wanted consumer advice to provide information on the strength (impact), frequency and type of material (the classifiable element) present in the film or computer game. This confirms the practice that is currently used by the Board. In response to the consumer advice of *frequent coarse language* provided by the Board for the film ‘*Intermission*’, they said:

“...*Frequent coarse language sort of covers it, but should have ‘strong’ as well – ie. ‘frequent strong language’.* How much worse can it get than *f* and *c*, which they said all the time.” (p. 22)

- Generally, they wanted consumer advice to be more detailed for the classifiable elements, and specifically for Nudity. Overall, they thought that nudity should always be mentioned in the consumer advice when present in the product, and that the type of nudity should be indicated where possible. In responding to the Board’s consumer advice of *nudity* for the film, ‘*Welcome to Mooseport*’, classified PG, they asked:

“*Should it be ‘full frontal nudity’ or ‘partial nudity?’*” (app. A, p. 10)

and in responding to the consumer advice of *nudity* which was provided for ‘*Tom White*’, classified M, they said:

¹⁹ This list was provided for only half of the films viewed, the reason being that the Review wanted to collect immediate responses, so did not use the list for the second film that each panel saw. By the time the panels viewed games, the concept of consumer advice was already established, which may have influenced their choice of consumer advice.

“The nudity is low-level nudity. I really didn’t care about it, but it needs flagging.” (app. A, p. 88)

- They felt that the consumer advice of *adult themes* was too broad, and that more detail about the themes would be more meaningful. For the computer game, ‘*Castlevania*’, classified M, they discussed themes. They said:

“..I didn’t want to write adult themes, but I was toying with it – but in the end that’s not telling you anything at all, and I think supernatural themes is a good one to use.” (app. A, p. 29)

- Some responses indicated a concern about excessive or dependent use of alcohol, which was shown in two films that were viewed, and indicated that this information could be communicated through consumer advice. In relation to the film, ‘*Bad Santa*’, Classified MA, they considered that consumer advice could have been provided for the alcohol issues in the film. They said:

“...It can’t possibly hurt to have just a little more information.” (app. A, p. 48)

- The finding regarding consumer advice for G classified product is inconclusive. Some believed that consumer advice is not needed for material with a G classification, because such material should not contain any elements that warrant any warning, whereas others thought that films and computer games that are classified G, should carry warnings about whatever classifiable element is present.
- The consumer advice of *sexual references* was considered to be too broad to use as a guide when choosing material for younger viewers. They wanted more guidance on the impact and strength of *sexual references*, particularly if used at the PG classification level. When asked to comment on the consumer advice of *sexual references* that the Board provided for the film, ‘*Welcome to Mooseport*’, classified PG, they said:

“The sexual references – you don’t know what they are. Can you take a school group?” (app. A, p. 10)

- The term *animated*, which is used by the Board mostly for computer game violence was considered to be redundant by many, because it is a given that computer games are animated.

A more comprehensive account of these findings can be found in the full report for this research study.²⁰

²⁰ Urbis Keys Young 2005, *2004 Community Assessment Panels*, OFLC, Sydney.

4.3.2 Market testing of consumer advice *without* viewing films or computer games

Further market testing of consumer advice occurred with different focus groups in October 2004. These groups were conducted in Sydney and Ballarat, and were convened to test responses to classification markings, including consumer advice.²¹

The objective of this study, in relation to consumer advice, was to be able to distinguish between what people want for consumer advice and what the Board provides. The results of this study have been published in a report titled '*Qualitative Review of Determined Markings and Consumer Advice*' (Colmar Brunton, 2004).

In contrast to the process used with the Community Assessment Panels, where specific films and computer games were viewed, they did not view product but were given a set of words and phrases used as consumer advice in conjunction with the classification type (PG, M, MA 15+ and R 18+), with a view to the kind of content they would expect to see in a film or computer game if certain consumer advice were used with the particular classification type. The consumer advice that was tested is in the appendix at section 9.8.

This process allowed an investigation between the perceived meaning (and relationship to content) of a range of consumer advice.

Again, they generally considered that the consumer advice used by the Board was appropriate and provided useful guidance, in most cases. Overall, from the responses provided, the report also concluded that different target groups, such as parents of younger children and those of older children, seem to have different needs relating to consumer advice, and suggested that this may be considered when providing consumer advice lines at the different classification levels.

Responses in this study clearly indicate that improvements could be made to the consumer advice of *mature themes*, *adult themes* and *sexual references* when used in conjunction with certain classification types.

At the PG classification, consumer advice such as *mature themes* and *sexual references* were considered to be too broad. More detail would be preferred, such as the qualification of the term *theme*. For example, using a specific term, such as *divorce* with *themes* (*divorce themes*), and the qualifier *mild* with *sexual references* (*mild sexual references*).

Alternative suggestions were also provided for *mature themes*, such as:

“...*peer pressure* [and] *bullying*...” (p. 25)

²¹ OFLC 2004, *Qualitative Review of Determine Markings and Consumer Advice*, report prepared by Colmar Brunton Social Research, OFLC, Sydney.

At the MA 15+ classification, the consumer advice *adult themes* was also considered to be too broad, confirming views expressed in other focus group studies. It was determined through discussion that *adult themes* encapsulated content such as:

“...relationships, drug use, domestic violence, sex, suicide, depression, domestic violence and alcoholism.” (p. 25)

At the R 18+ classification, consumer advice provided for the classifiable element of Sex was tested. It was generally felt that the consumer advice of *high level sex scene* would be meaningful.

When asked about placement of consumer advice, they said:

“It’s useful in the front [of the product] when you’re scanning in the store...if you saw ‘frequent coarse language’ you’d say ‘no!’” (p. 16-17)

and indicated that it would not be noticed on the back cover, saying:

“It [the back cover] is already too crowded.” (p. 17)

4.4 Analysis of correspondence

The Review also considered the views presented by consumers in correspondence to the OFLC.

During the period of the Review from 2002 – 2004 the OFLC received 50 items of correspondence referring to consumer advice from 47 correspondents²². All of the correspondence related to films (see Appendix 9.9).

The most frequent request from these correspondents was that all classifiable elements should be listed as consumer advice. This indicates that they want detailed information about the content of a product.

The areas of concern for some correspondents was:

- the lack of consumer advice at the G classification;
- the lack of clarity of the term *adult themes*;
- the confusion created by the use of the same consumer advice terminology, such as *low level* and *medium level* at different classification types;
- the confusion over the use of and meaning of the terms *low*, *medium* and *high* at different classification types;
- the lack of visibility of consumer advice at the cinemas.

²² Two correspondents have addressed more than one piece of correspondence to the OFLC.

These views are consistent with findings from the various research studies conducted for the Review.

In addition to wanting to know about the classifiable elements of Themes, Violence, Sex, Language, Drug Use and Nudity, some correspondents also wanted to be advised about homosexuality themes/activity, blasphemy, substance abuse, torture, lewd scenes, sexual violence, and handheld cinematography.

Correspondence also reflected a lack of understanding about the principles that the Boards used for providing consumer advice.

5 REVIEW OF DETERMINED MARKINGS FOR FILMS AND COMPUTER GAMES

The OFLC has also conducted a review of the Determined Markings for Films and Computer Games. Determined markings consist of a classification letter inside a shape, a description of the classification and consumer advice.

This review had explored a range of designs for classification markings to implement common classifications for films and computer games which were passed by parliament in 2004.

One of the outcomes of this review is that consumer advice will appear more prominently on front cover of DVDs, videos, computer games and also on advertising material.

6 PRINCIPLES AND FRAMEWORK FOR PROVIDING CONSUMER ADVICE

Using the findings of the research studies conducted during the Review, which reflect the views of consumers, an analysis of international models of consumer advice, and the experience of both Boards, the result of the Review is a set of principles for providing consumer advice, and a framework of specific consumer advice that can be used by those bodies who provide consumer advice.

These principles and framework are the result of significant input and analysis from both Boards, and have been formally agreed to by both Boards.

6.1 Consumer Advice Principles

The principles for providing consumer advice are as follows:

- consumer advice is provided on a case by case basis;
- a two tier system is used to provide consumer advice;

Tier 1

- consumer advice will always, where possible, indicate the impact of, and where relevant, the frequency, of the classifiable elements which caused the material to reach a certain classification; and,
- impact terminology will correspond to the hierarchy of impact stated in the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games 2003*.

Tier 2

- consumer advice may also include classifiable elements assessed at a lower classification type that may be of concern to the community; and
 - at this tier, impact terminology relating to the guidelines hierarchy will not be used (see Tier 1 principles).
- consumer advice should be specific to each classification, to prevent repetition across the classifications see Consumer Advice Framework, Section 6.2);
 - consumer advice should be selected from the framework, whenever possible;
 - consumer advice should contain as much detail as possible, including the use of qualitative or quantitative terminology, where relevant;
 - consideration should be given to the amount of space available in the determined markings for consumer advice.

6.2 Consumer Advice Framework

A framework of specific consumer advice should be used to provide consumer advice for films and computer games. The framework has been constructed using the concepts of the classifiable elements, and the impact of these elements.

It is intended that the framework would be dynamic, and that if further consumer advice terminology was developed, it would be added to the framework.

The framework is shown below:

CLASSIFICATION	G	PG	M	MA 15+	R 18+	X 18+
Qualitative/Quantitative terminology (this list is not conclusive) This terminology can be used with any classification, unless otherwise indicated:	aggressive (usually M and above), animated, brief, comedic, coarse, explicit (usually MA 15+ and above), frequent/infrequent, graphic (MA 15+ and R 18+ only), occasional, incidental, some					
Themes Types include: adolescent, adult, alcohol dependency, bullying, child abuse, dark, discrimination, death, divorce, family separation/family conflict, drug, euthanasia, fantasy, gambling, incest, mature, racism, scary, smoking, suicide, horror, supernatural	consumer advice generally not provided	mild theme/s or [type] theme/s	moderate theme/s or [type] theme/s	strong theme/s or [type] theme/s	high level theme/s or [type] theme/s	
Violence Types include: animated, action, actual war footage (related to documentaries and news) battle, blood and gore, comedic, domestic, fantasy, gory, science fiction, sporting	consumer advice generally not provided	mild violence or [type] violence	moderate violence or [type] violence	strong violence or [type] violence	high level violence or [type] violence	
				sexual violence	sexual violence	
Sex Types include: sex education, sexual activity, sexual innuendo, sexual dialogue, sexually explicit language, actual sex	consumer advice generally not provided	mild sex scene/s	moderate sex scene/s	strong sex scene/s	high level sex scene/s	explicit sex
		sexual references	sexual references	sexual references	sexual references	
					mainly concerned with sex	
Language Types include: lyrics	consumer advice generally not provided	mild coarse language	moderate coarse language	strong coarse language	high level coarse language	
Drug Use Types include: drug education	consumer advice generally not provided	mild drug reference/s	moderate drug reference/s	strong drug reference/s	high level drug reference/s	
			drug use	drug use	drug use	
Nudity (outside of a sexual context) Types include: animated, brief, nudity, incidental, naturalistic, partial, sexualised (M and above)	consumer advice generally not provided	mild nudity or [type] nudity	moderate nudity or [type] nudity	strong nudity or [type] nudity	high level nudity or [type] nudity	
Miscellaneous: The following list does not relate to classifiable elements, but may be used as consumer advice where relevant.	Animal cruelty/slaughter, crude humour, dangerous stunts, martial arts instruction, self defence instruction, scary scenes, surgical procedures, content may change when played online (computer games), showing this film to under 18s may be a criminal offence(X 18+ only)					

7 FINDINGS

The Review has found that consumers:

- support the provision of consumer advice for films and computer games and would use it to make entertainment viewing choices;
- expect that consumer advice will effectively communicate the content of the product that would generally be of most concern to them;
- want consumer advice to indicate the type and the impact and/or frequency of this content;
- use similar language to the Boards when choosing consumer advice;
- would like to see consumer advice more prominently displayed;
- seek consistency of consumer advice across all media;
- feel that some descriptors are ambiguous, e.g. *adult themes* and *mature themes*;
- can be confused by identical descriptors used across classification levels, e.g.. *medium level violence*;
- believe some descriptors were too broad, e.g. *adult themes*, *mature themes*, *sexual references*;
- find the descriptor *animated* is redundant when applied to computer games;
- think different target audiences may have different needs when it comes to consumer advice, and this should be taken into account when providing consumer advice;
- think that consumer advice provided by the Boards is mostly appropriate, although they feel some modifications to consumer advice would result in a more meaningful system.

8 CONCLUSIONS

The Review has conducted a detailed examination of consumer advice through a range of processes, including seeking the views of consumers about consumer advice generally and specifically, consultation with the Boards, examination of a range of models of consumer advice used in Australia and around the world, and market testing of specific consumer advice lines.

Qualitative studies conducted during the Review provided a greater understanding of the type of language that would be most meaningful to consumers. Responses clearly indicate that the Boards were mostly providing consumer advice that generally contained meaning for consumers, however, some minor modifications could be made to the existing system in order for it to be more effective.

This process has enabled the Board and the Review Board to develop principles for providing consumer advice, and a framework of specific

consumer advice which can be used across all entertainment media. Both Boards have formally agreed to these principles and the framework of specific consumer advice.

Once these principles and framework are implemented by the Boards, the Review will have achieved its aim of developing a system of consumer advice that effectively advises consumers about the content of films and computer games. Consumer advice will be one of the tools that consumers can use so that they can make informed viewing choices.

This report will be shared with other bodies involved in classifying so that consistency of consumer advice can be provided across all entertainment products.

9 APPENDICES

9.1 First system of consumer advice for films

This is one of the earliest systems of consumer advice used by the Film Censorship Board (1989). It was modelled on the system used in Alberta Canada.²³ It is based on indicating the type of content (classifiable elements listed in the Guidelines for Films and Videotapes²⁴) and the explicitness/intensity of classifiable elements in films. The explicitness/intensity is indicated by the terms low, medium and high.

When developed, it was indicated that the list was not exhaustive, but did contain those elements appearing most frequently, and that the list would evolve over time to include other types of content, as relevant.

PG

Language: Low level coarse language
Medium level coarse language
Sex: Sexual references
Low level sex scenes
Violence: Low level violence
Medium level violence
Other Drug references
Nudity
Adult Themes

M15+

Language: Low level coarse language
Medium level coarse language
High level coarse language
Sex: Sexual references
Low level sex scenes
Medium level sex scenes
High Level Sex Scenes
Violence: Low level violence
Medium level violence
High level violence
Other: Drug Use
Nudity
Adult themes

Note: There was no MA classification until 1993.

R18+

Language: Medium level coarse language
High level coarse language
Sex: Medium level sex scenes
High level sex scenes
Violence: Medium level violence
High level violence
Other: Drug Use
Nudity
Adult themes
Mainly concerned with sex (special genre only)

X Contains sexually explicit material

²³ Anecdotal evidence provided by John Dickie, Chief Censor, Film Censorship Board and Classification Board, 1988 – 1998.

²⁴ OFLC 1991, *Office of Film and Literature Classification and Film and Literature Review Board - Reports on Activities 1990-91*, pp. 15-18.

9.2 Current system (2005) of consumer advice used by the Board for films and computer games

Since 1989, the list of consumer advice has evolved to include specific consumer advice that may be used with the G classification, the addition of the MA classification, and additional consumer advice listed as “other”.

Films

G

(not generally provided)

Some scenes may be unsuitable for very young children.

PG

Violence: Low level violence
Medium level violence
Sex: Low level sex scenes
Medium level sex scenes
Language: Low level coarse language
Medium level coarse language
Other: Drug references
Adolescent themes/issues
Adult themes
Nudity
Sexual references
War footage
Supernatural theme
Comic horror
Martial arts instruction
Safety awareness
Motor accident footage

M

Violence: Low level violence
Medium level violence
Sex: Low level sex scenes
Medium level sex scenes
Language: Low level coarse language
Medium level coarse language
Other: Nudity
Drug references
Drug use
Adolescent themes/issues
Adult themes
Sexual references
Supernatural theme
Horror theme
War footage
Martial arts instruction

MA

Violence: Medium level violence
High level violence
Sex: Medium level sex scenes
High level sex scenes
Language: Medium level coarse language
High level coarse language
Other: Nudity
Sexual references
Adult themes
Horror theme
Martial arts instruction
Contains graphic images of injuries

R

Violence: Medium level violence
Sex: High level sex scenes
Language: Medium level coarse language
High level coarse language
Other: Nudity
Sexual references
Sex education
Health education
Drug education
Adult themes
Horror theme
Martial arts instruction
Mainly concerned with sex (special genre only)

X Contains sexually explicit material

Computer Games**G**

(not generally provided)

G(8+)

adult themes
comic/mild horror
low level animated violence
medium level animated violence
mild horror

M(15+)

adult themes
low level realistic violence
low level sexual references
low level animated violence
medium level horror
medium level animated violence

MA(15+)

adult themes
medium level animated violence
high level animated violence
medium level realistic violence
sexual references
realistic horror

9.3 Consumer advice used by commercial television networks

The following excerpt is from the Commercial Television Code of Practice and is representative of the consumer advice that is used by the commercial television networks.

2.21.2 Consumer advice text: The advice must specify one or more of the classification elements set out below. Where the frequency of classification elements is not indicated in the listed terms, the adjective “some” or “frequent” should be used (e.g. “some nudity”).

2.21.2.1 Language

- mild coarse language
- some coarse language
- frequent coarse language
- very coarse language
- frequent very coarse language

2.21.2.2 Violence

- stylised violence
- mild violence
- some violence
- frequent violence
- realistic violence
- strong violence

2.21.2.3 Sex

- sexual references
- a sex scene
- sex scenes
- strong sex scenes

2.21.2.4 Drugs

- drug references
- drug use

2.21.2.5 Other

- adult themes
- strong adult themes
- medical procedures
- supernatural themes
- horror
- nudity

2.22 Consumer advice after breaks: Briefer written consumer advice must be broadcast as soon as is practicable after the resumption of the program at each break. A lower frame graphic or graphics must show (in addition to any station/network logo) the title plus the classification symbol and the consumer advice, abbreviated in letter form, beside the symbol. The letters to be used are one or more of:

- A** = adult themes or medical procedures
- D** = drug use/references
- H** = horror or supernatural themes
- L** = coarse language
- N** = nudity
- S** = sexual references/sex scenes
- V** = violence

9.4 Selected consumer advice lines from university study²⁵

<u>Themes</u> Abortion Death Discrimination Divorce Domestic violence Gender Incest Paedophilia Race Religion Sexual orientation Suggestive themes Themes	<u>Violence</u> (Comedic) violence (Graphic) violence (Mild) fantasy violence (Minimal) violence Animated blood Blood Blood and gore Brutal violence Cartoon violence Gory violence Historical violence Horror May frighten children (young children) (very young children) Sexual violence War violence	<u>Sex</u> (Explicit) sexual activity (Intensely) suggestive dialogue Mature sexual themes Sexual dialogue Sexually explicit material Suggestive dialogue
<u>Language</u> Coarse language Crude language Expletives Indecent language Profanity	<u>Drug use</u> Alcohol reference Drug reference Gambling Substance abuse Tobacco reference Use of alcohol Use of drugs Use of tobacco	<u>Qualitative/Quantitative</u> words Brutal Comedic Explicit Frequent Graphic Infrequent Intense(ly) Make-believe Mature Mild Minimal cartoon Moderate Occasional prolonged Partial Realistic Some Strong Aggressive
<u>Nudity</u> (Frontal) nudity (Natural) nudity (Partial) nudity (Rear) nudity Nudity in a sexual context	<u>Other</u> Comic mischief Edutainment Imitable techniques Informational Sex education Slapstick comedy	

²⁵ Bond University Centre for New Media Research and Education 2002, *Media Ratings and Classification Around the World*, OFLC, Sydney.

9.5 Global models of consumer advice analysed by the Boards

Pictogram Model

The pictogram model is used for interactive games and is used by Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. It is known as the PEGI system – Pan European Games Information – and commenced in 2003.

The following pictograms are used in conjunction with the age ratings of 18+, 16+, 12+ and 3+. The pictures represent the content contained in the product. These icons appear on the back cover of interactive games. The icons represent content areas of violence, sex, drugs, fear, discrimination and bad language.



Letter Model

This model is based on using a letter to represent content in a film or computer game. It is currently used by television networks and channels when the film or program resumes after a break. It is also printed in TV guides.

A = adult themes or medical procedures

D = drug use/references

H = horror

L = coarse language

N = nudity

S = sexual references/sex scenes

V = violence

Word/Phrase Model

Words and phrases that describe the element(s) contained in the product (for example, the type of words and phrases provided by the Classification Board and the Classification Review Board). Television also uses a word model.

Principal Elements Model (A)

Provide consumer advice for the element(s) that caused the material to reach a classification level. This model would advise that a film or computer game contained an element but would not quantify or qualify the element. For example, if a film/computer game was going to be classified MA 15+ for violence, the consumer advice would read “violence”.

Principal Elements Model (B)

Provide consumer advice for the element(s) that caused the material to reach a classification level and quantify or qualify this element. For example, if a film/computer game was going to be classified MA 15+ for violence, the consumer advice may read “[quantifier/qualifier] violence”.

Some examples of quantifiers and qualifiers:

Aggressive	Infrequent	Moderate
Brutal	Intense(ly)	Occasional
Comedic	Make-believe	Partial
Explicit	Mature	Prolonged
Frequent	Mild	Realistic
Graphic	Minimal cartoon	Some
		Strong

Principal Elements Model (C)

Provide consumer advice for the element(s) that caused the material to reach a classification level and any other elements of concern at a lower classification level.

All Elements Model

Provide information about all of the elements that are present at any level. For example, a film or game may contain language at M, sex at M and violence at MA 15+ therefore the consumer advice would read “language, sex, violence”.

2003 Guidelines Impact Model

This model uses the impact hierarchy in the 2003 Guidelines as a basis for the wording of consumer advice lines. The hierarchy of impact from the 2003 Guidelines is:

Classification and impact

G – very mild
PG – mild
M – moderate
MA – strong
R – high

Consumer Advice

Very mild violence (if consumer advice used)
Mild violence
Moderate violence
Strong violence
High level violence

9.6 Consumer advice developed by the Boards for consumer testing with specific films and computer games

The following range of consumer advice was developed by the Boards for use with Community Assessment Panels. After viewing certain films and computer games and providing their own consumer advice, panellists were asked to select consumer advice from the following list, if they thought it would be more relevant.

<u>Themes</u> Child Abuse Theme Domestic Violence Theme Fantasy Theme Supernatural Theme Horror Theme Suicide Theme Mature Theme Adult Theme	<u>Violence</u> Graphic Violence Strong Violence Frequent/Infrequent Violence Moderate Violence Mild Violence Comedic Violence High Impact Violence Blood and Gore Animated Violence Sexual Violence	<u>Sex</u> Strong Sex Scene(s) Moderate Sex Scene (s) Mild Sex Scene(s) Simulated Sex High Level Sex Scene(s) Sexual innuendo Sexual references
<u>Language</u> Aggressive Coarse Language Frequent/Infrequent Coarse Language Strong Coarse Language Some Coarse Language Moderate Coarse Language Mild Coarse Language Incidental Coarse Language	<u>Drug Use</u> Drug References Drug themes Drug Use Strong Drug Use	<u>Nudity</u> Partial Nudity Nudity Incidental Nudity Sexualised Nudity
<u>Other</u> Some scenes may frighten young children		

9.7 Consumer advice provided by consumers participating in Community Assessment Panels (CAPS)

The following lists of consumer advice were provided by consumers after viewing and discussing the films and computer games. They were not aware of the consumer advice that had been provided by the Board. The consumer advice chosen by consumers is indicative of some of the consumer advice that the Boards regularly use.

Film: 'Bad Santa'

The Board classified this film MA 15+ with the consumer advice of frequent coarse language, sexual references.

<i>'Top-of-mind' consumer advice – this means that viewers decided individually on consumer advice without knowing the consumer advice provided by the Board</i>	<i># of times nominated</i>
Frequent coarse language	12
Very frequent coarse language	1
Frequent language	1
Frequent strong language	1
Moderate language use	1
Mild language	1
Excessive language	1
Low level sex scene	5
Sexual scenes	1
Sex scene	1
Occasional sex scenes	1
Sexual references	3
Occasional sex references	1
Adult themes	3
Strong adult themes	2
Some adult themes	1
Alcohol dependency themes	1
Some drug themes	1
Violence	1
Some violence	1
Low level violence	8
Non graphic violence undertone	1
Alcohol abuse	1
Frequent alcohol usage	1

Film: 'Two Men Went to War'

The Board classified this film PG with the consumer advice of low level coarse language, low level violence

<i>'Top-of-mind' consumer advice – this means that viewers decided individually on consumer advice without knowing the consumer advice provided by the Board</i>	<i># of times nominated</i>
War scenes	1
War theme(s)	3
Low war theme	3
Adult themes	4
Violence	1
Very mild violence	1
Mild violence	1
Low level violence	7
Low violence	1
Low impact war movie	1
Coarse language	1
Low level coarse language	2
Mild language	2
Mild coarse language	2
Moderate use of language	1
Infrequent language	1
Light humour	1
Light and funny	1

Film: 'Welcome to Mooseport'

The Classification Board classified this film PG with the consumer advice of low level coarse language, low level violence

<i>'Top-of-mind' consumer advice – this means that viewers decided individually on consumer advice without knowing the consumer advice provided by the Board</i>	<i># of times nominated</i>
Low level violence	3
Occasional violence	1
Implied sex themes	1
Low level sexual references	3
Mild sexual references	1
Low sexual themes	1
Some sexual references	1
Sexual reference	2
Coarse language	2
Low level coarse language	3
Some coarse language	4
Low level language	1
Mild language	3
Bad language	2
Adult themes	5
Nudity	4
Low level nudity	3
Mild nudity	1
Infrequent nudity	1
Drug references	1

Computer Game: 'Castlevania-Lament of Innocence'

The Board classified this computer game M with the consumer advice of medium level animated violence

<i>'Top-of-mind' consumer advice – this means that viewers decided individually on consumer advice without knowing the consumer advice provided by the Board</i>	<i># of times nominated</i>
Violence	1
Moderate violence with weapons	1
Moderate violence	7
Medium level violence	1
Frequent moderate combat violence	1
Frequent moderate level violence	3
Action violence	1
Frequent violence	3
Frequent low level violence	1
Horror (theme)	3
Very mild horror	1
Supernatural themes	1
Visual impact	1
Some sense of threat or menace	2
Not suitable for young children	1

Computer Game: 'Rogue Ops'

The Board classified this computer game MA 15+ with the consumer advice of medium level animated violence

<i>'Top-of-mind' consumer advice – this means that viewers decided individually on consumer advice without knowing the consumer advice provided by the Board</i>	<i># of times nominated</i>
Moderate violence	1
High level violence	8
High impact violence	1
Frequent acts of violence	1
Strong level violence	2
Strong violence	2
Low level coarse language	2
Low level language	1
Mild coarse language	2
Coarse language	1
Infrequent coarse language	2
Adult theme (s)	7
Strong adult themes	2
Strong themes	1
Strong themes of continuous shooting	1
Strong sound effects	1
Bloodthirsty	1

Computer Game: 'R: Racing'

The Classification Board classified this computer game G, and as such did not provide consumer advice.

<i>'Top-of-mind' consumer advice – this means that viewers decided individually on consumer advice without knowing the consumer advice provided by the Board</i>	<i># of times nominated</i>
No violence	1
Moderate level violence	1
Very low level infrequent language	1
Low level language	3
Low level coarse language	3
Mild language	1
Mild coarse language	1
Moderate coarse language	1
Mature theme(s)	7
Adult themes	3
Low level adult themes	1
Some adult themes	1
Mild adult themes	1
Nudity	2
Very low level of threat/menace	2

9.8 Consumer advice tested with focus groups without viewing films or computer games

Consumers in these focus groups were shown the following consumer advice with the classification types (PG, M, MA 15+ and R 18+), and asked to describe their expectations of the specific content if they saw the consumer advice alongside the classification type as it appears on packaging and advertising of products.

PG	coarse language mild coarse language sexual references mature themes peer group themes
M	coarse language
MA 15+	adult themes strong sex scenes drug use drug and alcohol dependency themes
R 18+	high level sex scenes real sex drug use

9.9 Correspondence to the OFLC about consumer advice during the review period

Relating to:	Consumer advice concern:
The films <i>15 Minutes</i> and <i>Panic Room</i>	Lack of consumer advice for coarse language
The film <i>Predator 2</i>	Lack of consumer advice for nudity
The film <i>Body Shots</i>	Request consumer advice for sexual violence
The film <i>Analyse That</i>	'Medium level coarse language' too low
The film <i>Kiss of the Dragon</i>	'Medium level violence' too low
The Film <i>Dirty Deeds</i>	'Medium level coarse language' too low
The film <i>Final Destination 2</i>	'Medium level violence' too low
The film <i>Double Whammy</i>	Lack of consumer advice for coarse language
The issue of the combined guidelines	Should be consumer advice at G
The issue of the combined guidelines	Should be consumer advice at G
The issue of the combined guidelines	Should be consumer advice at G
The issue of advertising in print media	Absence of consumer advice
The issue of consumer advice for <i>world view</i>	Consumer advice to reflect world view of material
The film <i>Ghost Ship</i>	Lack of consumer advice for coarse language and nudity
The issue of consumer advice for <i>blasphemy</i>	Should be consumer advice for blasphemy
The film <i>Under Siege</i>	Lack of consumer advice for sexual activity and nudity. Should be consumer advice for homosexual activity
The film <i>Roadkill</i>	All elements should be listed
The films <i>Confidence</i> and <i>The Life of David Gale</i>	All elements should be listed
The issue of A15+	Confusion over the meaning of low – high in different categories
The film <i>The Runner</i>	Lack of consumer advice for coarse language
The issue of consumer advice definitions	Confusion over the meaning of low – high in different categories
The film <i>Love Actually</i>	Not clearly visible consumer advice at cinema.
The film <i>Brother Bear</i>	No consumer advice warnings at G.
The film <i>Dogville</i>	No consumer advice warnings regarding handheld cinematography.