



Australian Government

Classification Review Board

14 September 2005

**23-33 MARY STREET
SURRY HILLS, NSW**

MEMBERS: The Hon Trevor Griffin (Deputy Convenor)
Mr Anthony Hetrih
Mrs Gillian Groom

APPLICANT: Roadshow Films, original applicant for classification,
represented by: Mr Brett Rosengarten (National Sales
Manager).

BUSINESS: To review the Classification Board's decision to classify the
film *Wolf Creek* (the film) R 18+ with the consumer advice
'High level violence, coarse language, Adult themes'.

DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION

1. Decision

The Classification Review Board (the Review Board) unanimously classified the film R 18+, with the consumer advice 'High level realistic violence, Strong coarse language'.

2. Legislative provisions

The *Classification (Publications, Film and Computer Games) Act 1995* (the Act) governs the classification of films and the review of classification decisions. Section 9 of the Act provides that films are to be classified in accordance with the National Classification Code (the Code) and the classification guidelines.

Relevantly, the Code in paragraph 3 of the Table under the heading 'Films' provides that:

Films (except RC films, X18+ films) that are unsuitable for a minor to see

are to be classified 'R 18+'. The Code also sets out various principles to which classification decisions should give effect, as far as possible.

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

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

Three essential principles underlie the use of the *2005 Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games* (the Guidelines), determined under s.12 of the Act:

- The importance of context
- Assessing impact
- Six classifiable elements – themes, violence, sex, language, drug use and nudity.

3. Procedure

The Review Board convened on 14 September 2005 to determine the validity of the application for review from Roadshow Films received on 30 August 2005, view the film and consider the substance of the application.

Three members of the Review Board viewed the film *Wolf Creek* at the Review Board's meeting on 14 September 2005. The Review Board received an oral submission from Mr Brett Rosengarten representing the Applicant. This was provided in addition to a written submission.

The Review Board then considered the matter.

4. Evidence and other material taken into account

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

- (i) Roadshow Film's application for review;
- (ii) Roadshow Film's written and oral submissions;
- (iii) The film;
- (iv) The relevant provisions in the Act;
- (v) The relevant provisions in the Code, as amended in accordance with s.6 of the Act
- (vi) The Classification Board's report; and
- (vii) The *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games*.

5 Synopsis

Using true events as a basis for its story line, *Wolf Creek* is the chilling story of three young backpackers (Ben, Kristy and Lizzie) travelling in remote Outback Australia. When their vehicle breaks down and as night falls, they accept help from a friendly local, Mick Taylor (John Jarratt) who inspects their vehicle and persuades them to let him tow it, promising to replace the faulty part which he has at his camp. It takes hours to reach his place, an abandoned mining site complete with tunnels, huts and sheds. The travellers cook food while Mick begins to repair their car. The water they drink, provided by Mick, seems to contain a sleep-inducing drug. Mick recalls his life as a professional vermin shooter, and then works on the car as the three backpackers fall asleep.

Later, they wake – Lizzie is bound and gagged, Kristy is bound to a post in a shed, being taunted and threatened by Mick and, later, we see Ben has been nailed through his wrists to a horizontal rail, arms outstretched crucifixion-style. Mick has no intention of fixing their vehicle, the engine of which is in parts on the ground. He is a sadistic serial killer.

6 Applicant's Submissions

In its written submission, the Applicant submitted by way of conclusion that it:

“feels that the treatment of violence in this film appears stronger than it actually is simply because it is Australian and because there is no satisfactory end to the film for an audience wanting “the bad guy” to get what is coming to him. When you review the film and take into account each individual scene referred to above in the context of consistent use of the guidelines, we believe that it fits into the impact test for an MA 15+ film as material that is no higher than strong. As a suggestion, the consumer advice could be “high level violence”.

In his oral submission, the representative of the Applicant acknowledged that the film was a confronting movie and harrowing. Both the written and oral submissions sought to make a comparison between the treatment of the acts of violence in *Wolf Creek* and those in the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *House of Wax*, arguing that there was inconsistency in the way *Wolf Creek* on the one hand, and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *House of Wax* on the other, have been treated by the Classification Board.

The Applicant analysed the significant scenes of violence in *Wolf Creek*, arguing that the impact individually and collectively was strong rather than high.

For the reasons which follow, the Review Board does not agree with either submission.

7 Findings on material questions of fact

The Review Board found that the film contains scenes reflecting various classifiable elements, namely, adult themes, violence and language.

THEMES

The theme is of a sadistic serial killer who has entrapped his victims, has bound and gagged the two young women and has nailed the young male victim through his wrists. He threatens and performs acts of cruelty upon them and threatens to rape Kristy who is tied to a post. He pursues his victims as they attempt to escape, killing the two women and a male stranger who has stopped his car on an outback road offering help to Kristy. These scenes are high in impact and create an atmosphere of terror.

VIOLENCE

The lead-up to the scenes of violence (from approximately 14 minutes to approximately 50 minutes) creates a sense of foreboding. Then, as the backpackers awake to a nightmare situation, the violent scenes occur in dim night light, creating an ominous atmosphere. The scenes of concern include the following:

- 1 At approximately 50 minutes, Lizzie wakes to find herself on the floor of a shed, bound hands and feet and gagged, panicky, crying and struggling with her bonds. She cuts herself free and escapes from the shed.
- 2 At approximately 54 minutes, Lizzie hears screams coming from a shed. She makes her way across a yard strewn with junk and peers in a window of another shed to see Kristy tied to a post, being taunted and threatened by Mick with a rifle and knife. Kristy is distressed and is pleading for her life. Then Mick fires a shot past Kristy. The scene is prolonged, lasting for at least 6 minutes.
- 3 At approximately 57 minutes, Mick threatens to rape Kristy while she is tied to the post.
- 4 At approximately 60 and 62 minutes there are camera shots of mutilated human bodies hanging on the wall of the shed and at the latter time Mick says: "I could cut your tits off, eh."
- 5 At 63 minutes Lizzie shoots Mick in the neck. He falls to the ground and Lizzie tries to shoot him again but the rifle is out of bullets. She beats him with the rifle butt.
- 6 At approximately 77 minutes to 80 minutes, there is a prolonged scene (lasting for about 3 minutes) where Mick cuts off several of Lizzie's fingers and there is a shot of her fingers on the ground and a shot of her hand with fingers cut off and blood spurting. Also a close-up of the bloodied knife is shown. Mick has a knife and refers to "a head on a stick once the spine is severed" as he drives the knife into her spine. She is shown on the ground, unable to move her body.
- 7 At approximately 82 minutes, Kristy is shown being helped by a passerby on the side of the road. Then there is a blood spatter over the rear windscreen as the man is shot in the head.
- 8 At approximately 85 minutes there is a car chase as Kristy tries to escape and Mick is shown revving a "hot" vehicle before pursuing her. She forces him off the road, he shoots out her rear tyre and she rolls her car, gets out of the vehicle and is shot in the back in a distance shot. Mick is then shown standing over her with the rifle pointed at her and then another shot is heard. For all the scenes since the camera has focused on Kristy bound to a post, she has been shown with bloodied face and blood on her shirt.
- 9 At approximately 88 minutes, Ben is shown nailed to the wall and is attempting to pull his wrists from the nails to release his arms as a vicious

dog in a cage nearby lunges at him. There are close-up camera shots of his bloodied wrists and the movement of the nails as he wrests his wrists free.

The scenes of violence from approximately 50 minutes to about 80 minutes are all in dark and gloomy light, enhancing the fear factor.

LANGUAGE

There is coarse language throughout the film. “Cunt” and “fuck” are used frequently. The impact of the coarse language, in the view of the Review Board, is strong but when regarded in the context of the film it has the effect of reinforcing the violence.

8 Reasons for the decision

The Review Board is of the opinion that the documentary style of this film creates a level of realism which heightens the impact of the violence. That violence is frequent and, in some scenes, prolonged. Unlike typical “horror” movies, *Wolf Creek* does not employ the usual tension-releasing devices (such as exaggerated special effects or comedic relief), nor the stylised approaches to depictions of violence, instead striving for a tone of realism that takes it out of the realm of fantasy. This very realistic tone results in a film of high impact and the impact of the violence is high. The film is not suitable for minors to view.

9 Summary

The Review Board concluded unanimously that the impact of the violence in the film was high and, therefore, the appropriate classification is R 18+ with the consumer advice: “High level realistic violence, Strong coarse language.