



CLASSIFICATION REVIEW BOARD

19 April 2002

23-33 MARY STREET
SURRY HILLS, NSW

MEMBERS: Mr Jonathan O’Dea (Deputy Convenor)
Dr Robin Harvey
Ms Dawn Grassick

APPLICANT: Palace Films

BUSINESS: To review the decision of the Classification Board to assign the classification "MA15+" under the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995 to the film *Australian Rules* with the consumer advice "Drug use, Medium level violence".

DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION

1. Decision

The Classification Review Board (the Board) decided to set aside the decision of the Classification Board to classify the film *Australian Rules* "MA 15+", and to assign the classification "M 15+" with Consumer Advice "Medium Level Violence, Drug Use, Adult Themes".

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. The Act provides that films be classified in accordance with the National Classification Code (the Code) and the classification guidelines (the Guidelines).

Relevantly, the National Classification Code (the Code) in paragraph 4 of the Table under the heading "films" provides that films (except RC films, X films, and R films) that depict, express, or otherwise deal with sex, violence, or coarse language in such a manner as to be unsuitable for viewing by persons who are under 15, are to be classified "MA". Para 5 of the Table provides that films ... that cannot be recommended for viewing by those under 15 are to be classified "M".

3. Procedure

Three members of the Board were empanelled and viewed the film at the Board's meeting on 19 April 2002.

The Board received written application for review and a supporting submission from Palace Films. It also received a written submission from the film's Director, Paul Goldman and an oral submission from the film's Producer, Mr Mark Lazarus.

The Board then met in camera to consider the matter.

4. Matters taken into account

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

- (i) The applicant's Application for Review (including oral and written submissions).
- (ii) The relevant provisions in the Act.
- (iii) The film *Australian Rules*.
- (iv) The relevant provisions in the *National Classification Code* as amended in accordance with Section 6 of the Act.
- (v) The *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Videotapes* determined under Section 12 of the Act.

5. Findings on material questions of fact

The film is seen through the perspective of the main character, Gary, a young white adolescent growing up in the small Australian rural town of 'Prospect Bay'. The film examines Gary's maturation, his relationship with his father and relationships between residents of the town from caucasian and aboriginal backgrounds.

The film contained significant use of coarse language, particularly the word "fuck" and its derivatives.

There were scenes of drug use at 17 mins (use of a bong by an adolescent called 'Pickles' under a wharf) and 57 mins (a joint being smoked by Gary and his female friend Clarence).

The film contained numerous scenes of violence, most notably at 26 minutes ('Pretty' verbally threatens another man); 34 minutes (implied rape of Gary's mother by his father); 67 minutes (shooting of young aboriginal adolescent during a pub robbery);

78 minutes (Gary physically assaulted by his father and verbally abused along with the young aboriginal woman Clarence when they are found lying in bed together); and 90 minutes (Gary's mother is shown with black eye and his father beats him).

The film contains adult themes relating to racism, domestic violence and emotional trauma (particularly relating to the father-son relationship).

The Review Board found that the film as a whole can not be recommended to those under the age of 15 years, but that the impact of depictions and references was not so strong as to require restriction. The film was therefore considered to be appropriately classified M15+.

6. Reasons for the decision

The Review Board based its decision to set aside the decision of the Classification Board, and to assign the classification "M 15+" to the film *Australian Rules* on the content of the film as set out in 5. above.

It found that the coarse language could be accommodated in the M15+ classification.

The scenes of drug use were portrayed in a way that was discreet and did not amount to promoting or encouraging drug use, particularly as the main drug user (Pickles) is not a sympathetic character.

The scenes of violence were discreetly portrayed (with restraint evident) and were justified by the narrative. There were no depictions of violence that contained a lot of detail or that were prolonged.

There were adult themes relating to racism, domestic violence and emotional trauma (particularly relating to the father-son relationship). However, the adult themes were overtly (yet sensitively) presented in a way that did not require a higher level of maturity to understand the film's positive messages. These messages do contribute to the film's strong educational merit, as argued by the Applicant. The film also ended on an essentially positive note, and did not rely on Gary resorting to violence against his father to gain control of his life, as could easily have been the case.

The combination of all elements were not such that the film would be likely to be harmful or disturbing to those under 15 years of age such as to justify the restriction of a MA15+ classification.

However, in the Review Board's view, the depictions of violence and drug use and the adult themes did warrant consumer advice at the M15+ classification level.

7. Summary

The Classification Review Board found that the film warranted a M15+ classification as it contained material that it considered to be potentially but not likely to be harmful or disturbing to those under 15 years of age. The Review Board therefore decided to classify the film *Australian Rules* M15+ with Consumer Advice "Medium Level Violence, Drug Use, Adult Themes".

Jonathan O'Dea

Jonathan O'Dea
Deputy Convener

10 May 2002