



**Australian Government**  
**Classification Review Board**

**CLASSIFICATION REVIEW BOARD**

**8 June 2004**

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

**MEMBERS:** The Hon Trevor Griffin (Deputy Convenor)  
Mr Rob Shilkin  
Ms Kathryn Smith  
Ms Jan Taylor

**APPLICANT:** Roadshow Film Distributors Pty Ltd

**BUSINESS:** To review the Classification Board's decision to classify the film *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* M under the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995*

**DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION**

**1. Decision**

The Review Board unanimously determined that the film, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, is classified PG. By majority the Board determined that the consumer advice should be '*Some fantasy scenes may frighten young children*'.

**2. Legislative provisions**

The *Classification (Publications, Film and Computer Games) Act 1995* (the Classification Act) governs the classification of films and the review of classification

decisions. Section 9 of the Classification Act provides that films are to be classified in accordance with the National Classification Code (the Code) and the classification guidelines.

### **3. Procedure**

The Review Board convened in response to an application from the applicant, Roadshow Film Distributors Pty Ltd. The Review Board watched the film *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, received a written submission from the applicant and heard oral submissions from Mr Joel Pearlman, the Managing Director of the applicant and Mr Brett Rosengarten the National Sales Manager of the applicant.

### **4. Evidence and other material taken into account**

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

- (i) the applicant's application for review (including written and oral submissions);
- (ii) the report of the Classification Board relating to *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*;
- (iii) the film *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*;
- (iv) the relevant provisions in the Classification Act;
- (v) the relevant provisions in the Code, as amended in accordance with section 6 of the Classification Act; and
- (vi) the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games*.

### **5. Synopsis**

The film, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, is the third in the Harry Potter series of films. Harry Potter commences his third year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. It is asserted that he is the target of Sirius Black, a notorious escaped prisoner. Harry is presented with numerous challenges as he progresses at the school.

### **6. Findings on material questions of fact**

The Review Board found that *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* contains the classifiable elements of "themes" which generally have a low sense of threat or menace and "violence" which is mild and infrequent, both justified by the context of the film. Those scenes, which fall within those elements generally, are resolved with a positive outcome by the use of "magic" or "wizardry". Those scenes are fantasy, some of which may frighten young children.

Among the stronger scenes are:

- (i) At approximately 1 hour 28 minutes, a black wolf runs at Harry and Hermione aggressively, jumps over them, attacks Ron and drags him into its lair. Later he is seen to have escaped;
- (ii) At approximately 1 hour 29 minutes, a tree captures Harry Potter and Hermione and throws them around while clutching them in its branches;
- (iii) At approximately 1 hour 39 minutes, under the influence of a full moon, Professor Lupin transforms into a werewolf. The werewolf strikes out at Professor Snape, the black wolf intervenes, there is a fight, then the werewolf menacingly turns towards Harry Potter before running off;
- (iv) At approximately 1 hour 42 minutes, dementors circle over Harry Potter and the body of Sirius Black, which is lying near the shore of a lake. The dementors attack Sirius Black and Harry Potter and are seen sucking the life force from the two. The scene is repeated at approximately 2 hours when Harry fends off the dementors;
- (v) At approximately 1 hour 58 minutes the werewolf threatens Harry and Hermione who flee to hide in the trees. The werewolf searches for the pair but then is attacked by the half-horse/half-bird creature, Buckbeak, who saves them from the werewolf.

## **7. Reasons for the decision**

The Review Board considered that the context of the film was important. The film is based on a very popular children's fantasy book and film series that a large part of the audience would be very familiar with.

In the unanimous view of the Review Board the sense of threat or menace in the scenes described above (and others) is generally low. While they may frighten some young children, older children are likely to regard such scenes as stylised rather than realistic. The scenes are generally of a fantasy nature and in the view of the Review Board, older children should be able to discern that relatively easily. However, the guidance and supervision of young children by parents or guardians will be necessary. That is the reason for the consumer advice: '*Some fantasy scenes may frighten young children*'.

A minority of the Review Board was of the view that the consumer advice should have been: '*Some fantasy scenes and low level violence may frighten young children*'.

## **8. Summary**

The Review Board concluded that the impact of the classifiable elements in the film could be accommodated in the PG classification. That impact was, in the Review Board's view, no higher than mild.

The "themes" and "violence" elements were justified by the overall context of the film.

The Review Board was therefore unanimously of the view that an M classification was not warranted.