



# Australian Government

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## Classification Review Board

11 December 2018

23–33 Mary Street  
Surry Hills, NSW

## Review of Classification Board’s decision to classify the film ‘Bumblebee’

Members: Ms Fiona Jolly [Convenor]  
Ms Susan Knowles (Deputy Convenor)  
Mr Peter Attard (Member)

Applicant: Paramount Pictures Australia

Interested parties: Australian Council on Children and the Media

Business: To review the Classification Board’s decision to classify the film ‘*Bumblebee*’ M (Mature) with the consumer advice ‘Action violence’.

### Decision and reasons for decision

#### 1. Decision

The Classification Review Board (the Review Board) unanimously classified the film ‘*Bumblebee*’ PG (Parental Guidance) with the consumer advice ‘Mild science fiction violence, mild themes, some scenes may scare young children’.

#### 2. Legislative provisions

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

##### *The Review Board*

Part 5 of the Classification Act outlines the provisions relevant to the Review Board and its procedures.

Section 42 of the Classification Act sets out the persons who may apply for review of a decision:

- a) the Minister
- b) the applicant for classification of the film, or the likely classification of the film under section 33
- c) the publisher of the film, or
- d) a person aggrieved by the decision.

Section 43 sets out the conditions regarding the manner and form of applications for review, including time limits. Under section 44, the Review Board must deal with an application for review in the same way that the Classification Board deals with an application for classification of a film.

#### *Classification of films under the Classification Act*

Section 9, subject to section 9A, provides that films are to be classified in accordance with the National Classification Code (the Code) and the classification guidelines. Section 9A states that a film that advocates the doing of a terrorist act must be classified RC.

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

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

#### *The National Classification Code*

Relevantly, the Films Table of the National Classification Code (the Code) provides that: [Films (except RC films, X 18+ films, R 18+ films, MA 15+ films and M films) that cannot be recommended for viewing by persons who are under 15 without the guidance of their parents or guardians are to be classified PG.

The Code also sets out various principles to which classification decisions should give effect, as far as possible:

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

#### *The Guidelines*

Three essential principles underlie the use of the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films 2012* (the Guidelines), determined under section 12 of the Classification Act, the:

- importance of context
- assessment of impact, and
- six classifiable elements—themes, violence, sex, language, drug use and nudity.

### 3. Procedure

Three members of the Review Board met on 11 December 2018 in response to the receipt of an application from Paramount Pictures Australia on 4 December 2018 to conduct the review of the film *Bumblebee*, which had previously been classified M (Mature) by the Classification Board. The Review Board determined that the application was a valid application.

The Review Board was provided a written submission from the Applicant and heard an oral submission from the Applicant.

The Review Board viewed the film.

The Review Board was provided a written submission from the Australian Council on Children and the Media.

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) Paramount Pictures Australia's application for review
- (ii) Paramount Pictures Australia's written and oral submissions
- (iii) a written submission received from the Australian Council on Children and the Media
- (iv) the film, *Bumblebee*
- (v) the relevant provisions in the Classification Act, the Code and the Guidelines, and
- (vi) the Classification Board's report.

#### 5. Synopsis

The film is a science fiction action film set in the late 1980s which relates the tale of the Autobot Bumblebee who has sought refuge in a Californian town. Bumblebee, having assumed the appearance of a yellow VW beetle, is found by Charlie, an 18-year-old girl coming to terms with her father's death. The film depicts the Decepticons coming to earth to find Bumblebee and their trail of deception as they find and are inevitably disposed of by Bumblebee, his friend Charlie and several other characters.

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

The Review Board found that the film contains aspects or scenes of importance under various classifiable elements:

- (a) Themes—The film includes the theme of a teenager coming to terms with the death of her father, and two depictions of bullying behaviour toward Charlie by other young people.

The impact of this element is no higher than mild and can be accommodated at the PG level.

- (b) Violence—The film contains several instances of battles scenes between Autobots, specifically the Decepticons and various transformers. The battle scenes are animated and only the opening and final scenes are prolonged, with a mild sense of menace and although the Transformers lose limbs, this is depicted as machinery being damaged and there is no detail of injury. The impact of the battle scenes is mild in impact, particularly as these are separated by prolonged and primarily light-hearted scenes of the growing friendships between Charlie and Bumblebee and Charlie and her neighbour.

Scenes of violence against humans are minimal and when they occur there is only very mild detail of injury and no depiction of more than passing pain. For example, there are two instances in the film where humans are 'liquidated' by the Decepticons. In each scene the person disappears into a splash of slime like substance—there is no blood detail and the people disappear immediately. Similarly, when Bumblebee arrives on earth he lands upon a group of soldiers. There is reference to soldiers being injured and needing assistance, but there is no detail of any soldiers or depiction of injury. At 11 minutes, Agent Burns is depicted stuck underneath a burning vehicle. He appears concerned but is lying still. There is minimal blood on his face and he does not appear in pain. The impact of these scenes is mild.

The impact of this element is no higher than mild and can be accommodated at the PG level.

- (c) Sex—There is no sex in the film.

- (d) Language—The film contains the use of ‘shit’, ‘freakin’ and ‘screwed’ on one occasion each. The impact of this element is no higher than mild and can be accommodated at the PG level.
- (e) Drug Use—There is no drug use in the film.
- (f) Nudity—There is no nudity in the film.

## 7. Reasons for the decision

In making this decision the Classification Review Board has applied the Classification Act, the Guidelines.

In the Review Board’s opinion, the film warrants a PG classification as it is suitable for viewing by children under the age of 15 with parental guidance.

In the Review Board’s opinion, the film is set in a science fiction environment and is primarily concerned with a friendship between Charlie and the Autobot Bumblebee. Although the film concerns the Decepticons search for Bumblebee, the violence in the film is primarily between the Autobots and lacks detail of injury other than mechanical injury. In the Review Board’s opinion, the violence between Autobots is no more than mild in impact and can be accommodated at the PG level.

The Review Board also considered that there are few scenes which depict violence towards people and on the occasions where there is either fighting between Transformers and humans or ‘liquefaction’ of humans, there is no detail other than mild injury, little blood detail, and no suffering other than fleeting glimpses of humans in pain. In the Review Board’s opinion the impact of these scenes is no more than mild and can be accommodated at the PG level.

The Review Board considered that the scenes of violence in the film are interspersed between the prolonged storyline of the growing friendship between Charlie and Bumblebee and Charlie and her neighbour, and the relationship between Charlie and her family. In the Review Board’s opinion, the overall impact of the violent elements in the film is no more than mild and can be accommodated at the PG level.

The Review Board also noted that the film contained two scenes of bullying behaviour toward Charlie from other children at her school. The Review Board considered that the impact of these scenes is no more than mild.

## 8. Summary

The Classification Review Board has applied the Classification Act, the Classification Code and the Guidelines in considering the appropriate classification of the film *Bumblebee*.

In the Review Board’s opinion, the film warrants a PG classification as it is suitable for viewing by children under the age of 15 with parental guidance. The Review Board considers that the film should be accompanied by consumer advice indicating that the film contains ‘Mild science fiction violence and mild themes, some scenes may scare young children’.