



Australian Government  
Attorney-General's Department

# Classifiable elements, impact descriptors and consumer advice

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Research with the general public

Classification Branch

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## Executive summary

### Background to the research

In response to the phenomenon of media convergence and its potential implications for existing policy and regulatory frameworks, the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) was commissioned to undertake a review of the Australian National Classification Scheme.

The ALRC final report, published in February 2012, recommended that the classification process and guidelines (including classification symbols and content advice) should be reviewed periodically through a comprehensive program of research, including the collection of both qualitative and (ideally nationally representative) quantitative data, in order to ensure that they reflect prevailing community standards and preferences.

In response to this recommendation the Classification Branch of the Attorney General's Department has commenced a program of research. To date, the following projects have been undertaken:

- A review of research and grey (unpublished) literature relating to views, knowledge and use of media classification systems in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions. This document titled *Efficacy of Film and Computer Game Classification Categories and Consumer Advice* is available online at the Classification website [www.classification.gov.au](http://www.classification.gov.au)
- A study investigating views, knowledge and use of ratings symbols, and views on the process and regulation of classification, among the Australian public. This study also included the views of stakeholders from government and regulatory agencies, industry and consumer advocacy groups, as well as classification practitioners (ie members of the Classification Board, Review Board and staff assessors)<sup>1</sup>.
- A study investigating the Australian public's understanding and perceptions of classifiable elements and impact descriptors as they are used in consumer advice and classification decisions.

The latter project is the subject of this report.

### Classifiable elements

Under the current National Classification Scheme (NCS) there are six Classifiable Elements which are considered when making classification decisions: Themes, Violence, Sex, Language, Drug Use and Nudity.

### Impact descriptors

The current classification guidelines include an impact test that determines the threshold for each classification category. The following hierarchy is used for assessing the impact of content:

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<sup>1</sup> Staff assessors view and assess film and game content and produce classification recommendations for the consideration of the Classification Board.

Category	Level of impact
<b>G</b>	Very mild
<b>PG</b>	Mild
<b>M</b>	Moderate
<b>MA 15+</b>	Strong
<b>R 18 +<sup>2</sup></b>	High
<b>RC</b>	Very high

Impact descriptors are the individual terms used to describe the various levels of impact in the hierarchy.

### Consumer advice

The Classification Board and Classification Review Board determine consumer advice for films, computer games and certain publications. Films and computer games must be assigned consumer advice but the nature of advice varies. Generally consumer advice gives the principal elements that contributed to the classification of the product and indicates the level of impact associated with those elements, often using an impact descriptor (see above) or, where relevant, a descriptor of frequency.

### Study objectives

The aims of this study are to assess the following in relation to the Australian general public:

- understanding of current classifiable elements
- perceptions of the current set of classifiable elements, with a particular focus on unprompted suggestions for improvement/ additional elements
- possible changes to the current set of classifiable elements, including consideration of (a) additional elements, (b) expansion in scope of existing elements, and (c) provision of more specific guidance on the treatment of new areas of concern
- understanding of current impact descriptors
- perceptions of current impact descriptors, with a particular focus on unprompted suggestions for improvement
- response to alternative impact descriptors
- preferences regarding the use of classifiable elements and impact descriptors in consumer advice.

### Methodology

The study was conducted in August 2014 and included the following components:

- A national, representative online survey of 1,000 participants
- Six focus groups, three conducted in regional Western Australia and three conducted in Adelaide, South Australia, as shown in the following table:

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<sup>2</sup> X 18+ is a special category which contains only sexually explicit content. For this reason it is not included in the current impact hierarchy. Material with this classification is only available in the ACT and Northern Territory.

Adelaide SA (Metropolitan)	Northam WA (Regional)
Parents 18+	Parents 18-39
Non parents 18-39	Non parents 18-39
Non parents 40+	Non parents 40+

## Key findings, conclusions and potential ways forward

### Classifiable elements

- The classifiable elements of Sex, Nudity, Language and Violence are well understood and accepted by the general public.
- Drug Use is broadly understood, and agreed to be an appropriate classifiable element, but there was some variation in views on how alcohol, smoking and prescription medications should be treated- in particular whether alcohol use and smoking should be categorised and featured in consumer advice under Drug Use.
- Violence and Drug Use were considered more important in classification decisions (each considered extremely important by 44% of participants) than Nudity, Language or Themes (33%, 29% and 22% respectively). However all six classifiable elements were considered necessary to the process of classification.
- Participants did not express a strong desire for the introduction of any new classifiable elements.

**Further research may be required to gauge support for various treatments of alcohol and smoking in consumer advice, and whether these should be considered under the classifiable element of Drug Use.**

### Themes

- The classifiable element of Themes is poorly understood. Universal misinterpretation of the term Themes by both survey respondents and frequent misunderstanding among focus group participants strongly implies that the classifiable element of Themes is of limited utility as an element of consumer advice. The term Themes was most commonly misconstrued as being synonymous with content (64% of survey respondents) or genre (12% of survey respondents).
- The term Social Issues was preferred over Themes by 56% of survey respondents and many focus group participants. Few workable alternatives to Themes were suggested due to limited understanding of the term, but those given included 'perspectives' and 'social context'.
- Survey respondents and focus group participants ranked animal cruelty, substance abuse and suicide as the most important content types of those currently covered by Themes (80-82% agreeing they should be considered in classification decisions).
- There was some support in focus groups for the separate consideration and/or labelling of certain content that is currently covered under the term Themes. Relevant content types (in order of support) included cruelty/abuse/malicious behaviour (when not captured under violence or coarse language) sexual violence, suicide, death, and religion and occult practices.

- Alternatively people advocated the inclusion of more specific descriptions in consumer advice, eg *Bullying Themes*, *Suicide Themes* and so on.

**Themes may need to be replaced with more meaningful/specific terms, at least in consumer advice, even if it remains as 'Themes' for internal classification purposes.**

**Although consideration could be given to creating additional classifiable elements, simply labelling some content types alongside classifiable elements in consumer advice is likely to perform the same function. Relevant content types include cruelty/abuse/malicious behaviour, sexual violence and suicide.**

### Impact descriptors

- There appears to be general support for the basic six level structure of the current impact hierarchy.
- The current impact scale contains descriptors that are not readily distinguished from one another, impairing the utility of the scale. In particular, Mild and Moderate were considered interchangeable, as were Strong and High.
- Impact descriptors in their current form were not meaningful to consumers when shown outside the context of the whole scale- for example Moderate did not consistently mean 'medium level' to consumers, and was frequently construed as 'mild.' This was especially confusing given Moderate is shown in combination with an M rating.
- An alternative scale tested, incorporating Very Low, Low, Moderate, High, Very High and Extreme, was moderately preferred over the current scale of Very Mild, Mild, Moderate, Strong, High and Very High (56% of survey respondents and most focus group participants preferred this scale). In particular the term Low was preferred to Mild, and Extreme to Very High.
- A numbered impact scale (eg level 1 being lowest to level 6 being highest) was suggested by participants as an alternative to a linguistic scale.
- Context was found to be of considerable significance in people's own assessments of impact, to the extent that it is possible for the same sort of content to have a different level of impact in different contexts. This has implications both for the perceived impact of content in computer games relative to films, and the comparative impact of films. The key contextual factors likely to influence impact are:
  - realism
  - interactivity
  - length of exposure
  - presence or absence of adult supervision
  - genre, tone or intent.
- Contextual factors thought to magnify the impact of computer games relative to film included realism (especially in relation to violence), interactivity and role play (in relation to violence, drug use or other antisocial or criminal activity), length of exposure (eg several hours of immersion in game play as opposed to periods of approximately two hours in front of a film) and lack of supervision (as parents are less likely to be observing or participating in game play than to watch a film with their children).
- Contextual factors relating to films included:

- the intent or tone in which coarse language was used
- the extent of nudity, and whether it was related to sex
- in relation to drug use-
  - the substance being used
  - whether alcohol was being used responsibly or abused
  - the depiction of excessive alcohol use or illicit drug use in either a positive or negative light.
- However, the device on which films were viewed (be it mobile device, television screen, cinema etc) was considered to have minimal bearing on impact.

**It may be necessary to either find impact descriptors that are meaningful as stand-alone terms, or to show the entire scale on labelling, highlighting the relevant level, for example reproducing the matrix that has been developed for use on the Classification website.**

**Market testing of individual elements of the alternative scale to see how well understood they are in isolation may be desirable. In addition a numbering system could be tested as an alternative to the current linguistic scale.**

**The results suggest that the current classification guidelines align with community sentiment in consideration of context. This will be tested in future research on community standards.**

**Given the frequently held view that computer game content should be treated more stringently by classifiers than similar content appearing in films, it may be valuable to explore and compare responses to equivalent content in both platforms in future research.**

## **Consumer advice**

- Research participants, especially parents, want more detail in consumer advice at all levels of classification than is currently provided. Over two thirds of survey respondents (68%) agreed that they wanted as much detail as possible in consumer advice.
- Most people (including 83% of survey respondents) indicated they would like both the type and impact level of content to be included in consumer advice.
- Most (including 81% of survey respondents) would like all content types to be included in consumer advice, as opposed to only the content with the highest impact (on which the classification is based).
- To accommodate a range of information requirements it was suggested that consumer advice be provided at three levels, each appearing in a different location:
  - 'topline' advice in the most prominent location (eg front cover of a game or DVD)
  - more detailed but still brief advice (eg content types and levels other than the classifiable element/s on which the classification was based) in a secondary location (eg back cover)
  - very detailed advice on content in a separate but accessible location (probably online) for those who wish to seek it out.
- Suggestions regarding labelling included:
  - using the first initial of classifiable elements and a numbered scale (eg from 1 to 6) for impact.

- age recommendations in consumer advice for lower level classifications (ie G, PG, M), eg G= 0-8 years, PG= 8+, M= 12-15 or 15+
- colour coding the impact scale to assist interpretations of individual impact labels (classification categories are already colour coded, but research conducted as part of the current program suggests that the current colour scheme, in particular the blue M label, is problematic).
- The general public consider consumer advice at various locations useful when selecting a film to see at the cinema. It is considered most useful when it can be viewed prior to attending the cinema (eg in television advertising [87%] or online [85%]) or, once at the cinema, prior to selecting a film (eg on boards showing session times [83%]).

**Research with internal stakeholders (especially practitioners) is needed to inform development of revised consumer advice for market testing.**

**Market testing is recommended to gauge the user friendliness of a new model of consumer advice including:**

- **first initial and number based labelling system for classifiable elements and impact descriptors to be used in consumer advice**
- **additional terms to notify consumers about content of concern that is currently captured under Themes (eg malicious behaviour)**
- **provision of increasingly detailed information on content in different locations, for example use of the existing 'content and impact' matrix found on the Classification website on the reverse of game and DVD packaging and detailed content descriptions available online (either on the Classification website or by linking to an existing information source such as IMDB.com if deemed appropriate).**

**Further research is recommended relating to the use of consumer advice in various contexts (eg purchase of games and DVDs).**

# 1 Background to the research program

## 1.1 Current arrangements for media classification in Australia

### 1.1.1 Film, computer games and publications

The National Classification Scheme is a cooperative arrangement between the Australian Government and the state and territory governments where the Classification Board classifies films, computer games and certain publications.

The respective roles of the Boards and the Classification Branch of the Attorney Generals Department are outlined in the Table 1 below.

*Table 1: parties involved in Classification*

<b>Classification Board</b>	<b>Classification Branch</b>	<b>Classification Review Board</b>
independent statutory body (separate from government)	Part of the Attorney General's Department	independent statutory body (separate from government and the Classification Board)
makes classification decisions about films, computer games and publications under the Classification Act and the Broadcasting Services Act for internet content	manages the application process for both Boards handles complaints responsible for monitoring compliance and providing education programs	makes decisions about applications for review; these replace the original Classification Board decisions

*Source: Commonwealth of Australia (2014)*

### Governance

The National Classification Scheme is overseen by ministers from the Commonwealth, states and territories. The Minister with responsibility for classification matters is usually the Attorney-General for each state or territory. Ministers with responsibility for classification matters are not involved in Classification Board decisions.

Commonwealth classification policy and operation is the responsibility of the Attorney-General's Department.

Under the National Classification Scheme, the states and territories are responsible for enforcing classification decisions (Commonwealth of Australia 2014).

### Ratings categories for film and computer games

The *National Classification Code* (the Code) sets out the different classification categories and detailed criteria for classification decisions made by the Classification Board and Classification Review Board.

According to the Code (2013):

Classification decisions are to give effect, as far as possible, to the following principles:

- 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.

Classifications for films and computer games are either **advisory** or **restricted**. A further level of restriction applies to adult films. The hierarchy of classification categories is set out in Table 2 below. A more detailed version of the table is included in **Appendix C**.

*Table 2- ratings categories for film and computer games*

Rating	Description
Advisory categories: there are no legal restrictions on viewing/playing these films/computer games	
G—General	The content is very mild in impact. The G classification is suitable for everyone.
PG—Parental Guidance	The content is mild in impact. However, it is not recommended for viewing or playing by persons under 15 without guidance from parents or guardians.
M—Mature	The content is moderate in impact. Films and computer games classified M (Mature) contain content of a moderate impact and are recommended for teenagers aged 15 years and over. However, children under 15 may legally access this material.
Restricted categories: there are legal restrictions on viewing / playing these films/ computer games.	
MA 15+—Mature Accompanied	The content is strong in impact. MA 15+ classified material contains strong content and is legally restricted to persons 15 years and over.
R 18+—Restricted	The content is high in impact. R 18+ material is restricted to adults.
Restricted categories for adult films	
X 18+—Restricted	X 18+ films are restricted to adults. X 18+ films are only available for sale or hire in the ACT and the NT.
RC—Refused Classification	Refused Classification (RC) is a classification category. Material that is Refused Classification is commonly referred to as being ‘banned’.

*Source: Commonwealth of Australia (2014)*

## Publications

Most publications including magazines do not need to be classified. Only 'submittable publications' (publications which may be Refused Classification or restricted to adults) require classification. These publications usually contain sexualised nudity or sexually explicit content (Commonwealth of Australia 2014).

### 1.1.2 Classification of television and online content

As television and online content are outside the remit of the National Classification Scheme in its current form, only a brief description of these classification arrangements is given here. The key features of these classification arrangements are as follows.

#### Television

As provided for under the Broadcasting Services Act (1992), (the Act) television content is largely regulated by broadcasters, under a system of industry-developed codes of practice (ACMA 2014).

The Act mandates time-zone restrictions for commercial television broadcasting licensees and community television broadcasting licensees. These require, for example, that films classified as Mature (M) may be broadcast only between the hours of 8:30 pm on a day and 5:00 am on the following day, or between the hours of noon and 3:00 pm on any day that is a school day (Australian Law Reform Commission 2012 p50). The Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (2010) applies similar time zone restrictions to programs made for television (Free TV Australia 2010).

The classification categories for commercial television are as follows:

- Childrens (C) and Preschool (P) classification
- General (G) classification
- Parental Guidance Recommended (PG) classification
- Mature (M) classification
- Mature Audience (MA) classification
- Adult Violence (AV) classification (Free TV Australia 2010)

#### Online content

Online content is regulated through the Online Content Scheme under Schedule 5 and 7 of the Act. The complaints-based Scheme applies to content accessed through the internet, mobile phones and convergent devices, and applies to content delivered through emerging content services such as subscription-based internet portals, chat rooms, live audio-visual streaming, and link services.

Where content is hosted in Australia and is found by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) to be prohibited, the ACMA has the authority to direct the relevant content service provider to remove the content from their service. Where content is not hosted in Australia and is prohibited, the ACMA will notify the content to the suppliers of approved filters, so that access to the content using such filters is blocked.

In addition, regardless of where it is hosted, if the ACMA considers the content to be of a sufficiently serious nature, it must notify an Australian police force (Australian Government Department of Communications, 2014).

## 1.2 Media convergence and the report of the ALRC

Media convergence – a phenomenon enabled by (a) the digitisation of media content, (b) the increasingly widespread availability of high-speed broadband connections and (c) the proliferation of internet-enabled devices including ‘Smartphones’ and mobile tablets – has fundamentally transformed the way media content is distributed and consumed. Most notably, Australian media consumers – including children and young people – can now access a vast array of local and international media (including media from broadcasters, news organisations, social media sites, iTunes, YouTube, and so on) online via an ever increasing number of internet-enabled devices and screens. The choice of devices for accessing the internet combined with 3G/4G and wireless broadband networks also gives consumers further flexibility in *how* (eg via a Smartphone or mobile tablet) and *where* (eg at a café or on public transport) they access media.

Recent developments in media distribution and consumption enabled through convergence pose both opportunities and challenges for Australian governments and for the Australian business community. While key industry sectors have been prompt in responding to convergence opportunities – for example, through the introduction of new multi-platform and interactive services – selected policy and regulatory frameworks, many of which were designed for traditional platforms and industry sectors, remain potentially ill-suited to the emerging convergent media environment. With this in mind, the then Attorney-General, Robert McClelland MP, tasked the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) to undertake a review of censorship and classification. The resulting *Final Report – Classification – Content Regulation and Convergent Media* (ALRC Report 118, 2012) – was provided to the then Attorney-General, Nicola Roxon MP, on 28 February 2012.

With regard to classification categories and criteria, the ALRC report proposed that the Classification Board be retained as an independent statutory body responsible for making classification decisions, including decisions about films scheduled for cinema release and computer games likely to be classified MA 15+ or above. The report also recommended that classification categories should be harmonised across platform type (eg cinema, television, online and so on) and that the underlying criteria should be combined so that the same categories and criteria are applied in the classification of all media, irrespective of its form and the platform by which it is delivered or accessed. **Further to this, it was suggested that the classification process and guidelines (including classification symbols and content advice) should be reviewed periodically through a comprehensive program of research, including the collection of both qualitative and (ideally nationally representative) quantitative data, in order to ensure that they reflect prevailing community standards and preferences.**

## 1.3 Research program

In response to the latter recommendation, the Classification Branch has commenced a program of research.

It is intended that the research program, in investigating the knowledge, views and behaviours of the general public in relation to media classification, will ensure measures taken to reconcile the

current classification system with an increasingly convergent media environment are reflective of the general public's standards and values and maximise the utility of the system for both the general public and industry.

While the focus of the research is primarily the views of the general public, the expertise of other parties on key issues of relevance to the evolution of the classification system is also being considered.

To date, the following projects have been undertaken:

- A review of research and grey (unpublished) literature relating to views, knowledge and use of media classification systems in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions. This document titled *Efficacy of Film and Computer Game Classification Categories and Consumer Advice* is available online at the Classification website [www.classification.gov.au](http://www.classification.gov.au)
- A study investigating the views, knowledge and use of classification information, in particular ratings symbols, and views on the process and regulation of classification, by the Australian public. This study also included the views of stakeholders from government and regulatory agencies, industry and consumer advocacy groups, as well as classification practitioners (ie members of the Classification Board, Review Board and staff assessors)<sup>3</sup>.
- A study investigating the Australian public's understanding and perceptions of classifiable elements and impact descriptors as they are used in consumer advice and classification decisions.

The latter project is the subject of this report.

### 1.3.1 Literature review

As a precursor to the research a comprehensive review of relevant literature and 'grey' data from Australia and overseas was conducted. The review set out to synthesise recent research on the public's knowledge, perceptions and use of media classification in Australia and comparable jurisdictions, and summarised approaches taken in comparable jurisdictions to media classification. This review was intended to inform the planning of the research program to be undertaken and assist in formulating research questions.

### 1.3.2 Stage 1: Classification information research

The ALRC's report recommended that research be conducted to investigate:

- 9-4 (b) Awareness of classification information
- 9-4 (c) Adequacy of classification categories, the classifiable elements and the impact test.

Following on from these recommendations, Stage One of the research program has involved two studies.

The first study focussed on classification categories or ratings, investigating the Australian public's:

- awareness and understanding of current classification ratings

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<sup>3</sup> Staff assessors view and assess film and game content and produce classification recommendations for the consideration of the Classification Board.

- use of current classification ratings, with a particular focus on the impact of a convergent media environment
- perceptions of current classification ratings, with a particular focus on unprompted suggestions for improvement
- response to alternative classification ratings
- perceptions of the current National Classification Scheme, including the process and regulation of classification and the current and ongoing role of the scheme.

The views of classification practitioners (ie Classification Board Members, Review Board Members and Classification Branch Staff Assessors) and stakeholders from industry, government and regulation and advocacy groups were also sought.

Separate reports relating to research with the general public and to stakeholder and practitioner consultation have been produced for this study.

The second study, which is the subject of this report, involved quantitative and qualitative research with members of the general public about classifiable elements, impact descriptors and their use in consumer advice. More detailed background information on this study is given in the next Chapter.

Stage Two of the research, currently in the planning phase, will investigate community standards in relation to media content.

## 2 Introduction to Study 2: classifiable elements, impact descriptors and consumer advice

### 2.1 Components of classification and consumer advice

#### 2.1.1 Classifiable elements

Under the current National Classification Scheme (NCS), there are six classifiable elements forming the basis of classification criteria: Themes, Violence, Sex, Language, Drug Use, and Nudity. Classifiable elements are also usually included in the consumer advice that accompanies classifications.

Recommendation 9–4(c) in the ALRC report provides that research should be conducted into classifiable elements (among other things). This recommendation reflects the suggestion in the ALRC’s Discussion Paper (2011) that consideration should be given to whether new classifiable elements should be created, in line with the practices of some other international classification bodies which consider elements such as:

- fear or scariness
- gambling (particularly interactive gambling)
- animal cruelty
- tobacco and alcohol use.

These issues are all currently considered by the Classification Board under the classifiable element of Themes but there is no specific guidance or requirements in the Act, Code or Guidelines on these matters.

In addition, the review of literature including previous market research into media classification conducted by the Classification Branch in 2013 found that there were concerns that exposure to gambling and non-illicit drug use (ie alcohol and tobacco) via films and computer games may be harmful, both at an individual and societal level.

Under the circumstances, revisions such as the introduction of a specific ‘Gambling’ element, and the expansion in scope of the ‘Drug use’ element to include portrayals of smoking and alcohol consumption, may be appropriate.<sup>4</sup> The current research aimed to explore the level of concern relating to the treatment of content such as that above and the potential need for revisions.

#### 2.1.2 Impact descriptors

The current classification guidelines include an ‘impact test’ that determines the threshold for each category. For example, sex scenes in the PG category must have an impact that is no more than mild. The *Guidelines for the Classification of Films 2012* and the *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2012* specify the following hierarchy for assessing the impact of content (reproduced in Table 3):

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<sup>4</sup> Currently the classifiable element Drug Use includes illicit drugs but not alcohol or tobacco use.

Table 3. *Impact hierarchy and corresponding classification ratings*

Category	Level of impact
<b>G</b>	Very mild
<b>PG</b>	Mild
<b>M</b>	Moderate
<b>MA 15+</b>	Strong
<b>R 18 +<sup>5</sup></b>	High
<b>RC</b>	Very high

Impact descriptors are often included in the consumer advice that accompanies selected classifications, for example a PG rated film may have consumer advice such as ‘mild violence.’

These descriptors may be difficult for consumers to interpret in isolation from the hierarchy (as when they used in consumer advice). Therefore the present research has sought to assess the public’s views on the clarity of these terms.

### 2.1.3 Consumer advice

The Classification Board and Classification Review Board determine consumer advice for films, computer games and certain publications. Films and computer games must be assigned consumer advice but the nature of advice varies. Generally consumer advice gives the principal elements that contributed to the classification of the product and indicates the level of impact associated with those elements, often using an impact descriptor (see above) or, where relevant, a descriptor of frequency.

As noted, the ALRC recommended in their review of the NCS that classification information- including consumer advice- should be reviewed via research with the general public. In addition, previous research including Study One for the present research program, has found evidence that consumer advice is of increasing importance to consumers, and thus it is timely to investigate the views of the Australian public on this topic.

## 2.2 Objectives of this study

The aims of this study are to assess the following in relation to the Australian general public:

- understanding of current classifiable elements
- perceptions of the current set of classifiable elements, with a particular focus on unprompted suggestions for improvement/additional elements
- possible changes to the current set of classifiable elements, including consideration of (a) additional elements, (b) expansion in scope of existing elements, and (c) provision of more specific guidance on the treatment of new areas of concern
- understanding of current impact descriptors
- perceptions of current impact descriptors, with a particular focus on unprompted suggestions for improvement
- response to alternative impact descriptors

<sup>5</sup> X 18+ is a special category which contains only sexually explicit content. For this reason it is not included in the current impact hierarchy. Material with this classification is only available in the ACT and Northern Territory.

- preferences regarding the use of classifiable elements and impact descriptors in consumer advice.

## 2.3 Methodology

The study methodology included:

- A national, representative online survey of 1,000 participants
- Six focus groups, three conducted in regional Western Australia and three conducted in Adelaide, South Australia.

### 2.3.1 Online survey with general public

Quantitative research best-practice principles were applied in questionnaire development.

A copy of the questionnaire has been included at **Appendix A**.

The survey was conducted online, using a quota-based sample<sup>6</sup>, sourced from an online panel. This methodology was adopted for the following reasons:

- An online survey is a cost-effective method for accessing a large sample.
- Adoption of an online survey methodology meant that participants could be presented with visual stimulus material (ie images showing current and alternative impact hierarchies).
- An online survey methodology is less prone to socially desirable responding, which can be important when asking questions that have a degree of social sensitivity.
- The timeframe required to conduct an online survey is relatively short when compared with alternative methodologies.
- There are no interviewer data entry or data editing errors, or bias through third parties processing surveys.

Sample provision, questionnaire programming, and fieldwork management was undertaken by an external consultant, The Online Research Unit in September 2014. The total sample size achieved was n=1,000.

### 2.3.2 Focus groups with general public

Qualitative research with the general public took place via a combination of metropolitan and regional focus groups (three metropolitan focus groups and three regional focus groups) with community members aged over 18. The recruitment specifications of the groups are shown in Table 4.

*Table 4. Focus group specifications.*

<b>Adelaide SA (Metropolitan)</b>	<b>Northam WA (Regional)</b>
Parents 18+	Parents 18-39
Non parents 18-39	Non parents 18-39
Non parents 40+	Non parents 40+

<sup>6</sup> Quotas were applied to age, gender, and location.

Focus groups were conducted in July and August 2014. Participants were recruited professionally via market research recruiters with specifications supplied by the Classification Branch; the recruitment process was managed by specialist research consultants who also facilitated the groups. Participants were awarded an incentive payment consistent with current market research practice.

Focus groups ran for 1.5 hours. A copy of the focus group Discussion Guide (including concept testing material) is at **Appendix B**.

### 2.3.3 Survey with members of the Classification Board

To gauge the views of members of the cl

## 2.4 Structure of this report

Chapters 3 to 6 of this report present findings from both the survey and focus groups under thematic headings within the following key topic areas:

- Chapter 3 presents findings relating to classifiable elements overall
- Chapter 4 presents findings relating to the classifiable element of Themes
- Chapter 5 presents findings relating to impact descriptors
- Chapter 6 presents findings relating to consumer advice.

Chapter 7 presents a summary of key findings and conclusions, and outlines some potential ways forward arising from the study results.

### 3 Classifiable elements

#### 3.1 Content to be considered in classification decisions

In order to see how the current classifiable elements compare against content of concern to the general public, focus group participants were asked to name (without reference to classifiable elements) the sorts of content that should be considered in classifying films and computer games.

In relation to both films and computer games, responses were consistent in their focus on:

- violence
- drug use
- sex scenes or sexual references.

Other content or issues mentioned included horror, language and genre.

##### 3.1.1 Computer games

There was little difference in the range of issues participants felt should be included in assessment of computer games versus films.

However, the issue of realism was particularly prominent in discussion of games content. There was also greater emphasis on consideration of language in the classification of games than of films. The issue of realism, and its effect on impact, is discussed in section 5.3 of this report.

#### 3.2 Understanding of current classifiable elements

Focus group participants were shown the six classifiable elements and briefed on the role these elements play in film and computer game classification. As a means of gauging their understanding of each of the classifiable elements, they were asked what sorts of content they believed were covered under each. The ensuing discussion and suggestions indicated that overall, participants had a sound and fairly homogenous understanding of the following classifiable elements:

- Violence
- Sex
- Language
- Nudity.

However, there was less clarity in relation to Themes and less agreement in relation to the type of content that would- or should- be covered by Drug Use.

Discussion focused on whether alcohol and smoking should be covered under Drug Use, and thus have a bearing on a film or game's classification. Some focus group participants (often parents) supported this idea, but others believed that smoking and drinking needed to be differentiated from harder drugs, at least in consumer advice, if not also in ratings determinations.

*"Alcohol abuse also needs to be covered as it is a serious problem in today's society."*

*"Alcohol doesn't need to be on the list as it is a normal part of life these days."*

Some respondents considered smoking unworthy of inclusion under Drug Use as they didn't find it offensive in films; others worried about the normalisation or glamorisation of smoking. However, most agreed that the *context* in which drinking and smoking occurred needed to be considered in both classification decisions and consumer advice. Of particular concern was whether alcohol use was occurring in a socially acceptable form. The importance of context is discussed in more detail in section 5.3 of this report.

In each group, participants' comments frequently revealed confusion about the meaning of the term Themes when used as a classifiable element. The degree of confusion indicated by participants' comments has implications for the current utility of this term as a component in consumer advice. This is discussed in more detail in section 4.1 of this report.

### 3.3 Most and least important classifiable elements

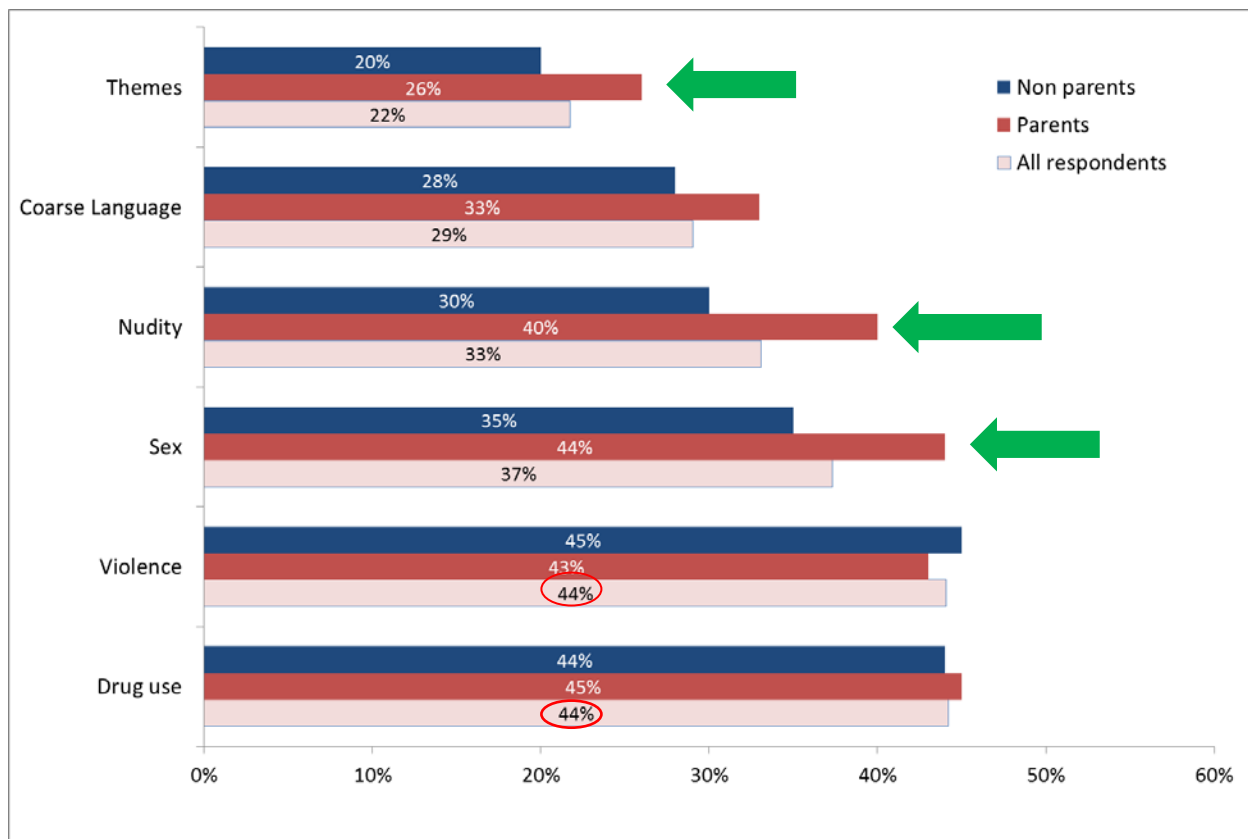
Survey respondents were asked about the importance of each of the six classifiable elements (Themes, Violence, Sex, Language, Drug Use, Nudity) in classifying a film or computer game. They were not told that these were the elements used to classify films and games. Figure 1 overleaf shows the proportion of respondents who considered each element 'extremely important' (on a scale of one to ten, with ten being extremely important)<sup>7</sup>. The results indicate that Drug Use and Violence were considered extremely important by a higher proportion of respondents than other elements, with just over 44% rating each of these elements as such.

Themes had the lowest proportion of 'extremely important' responses. Just over 1 in 5 (22%) considered this element extremely important in classification decisions. The lower level of importance accorded to 'Themes' may result from confusion and uncertainty about the meaning of this element (as discussed above and in section 4.1).

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<sup>7</sup> Here, only results for 'extremely important' have been shown, as all elements were considered at least 'somewhat important' (the middle rating) by a large proportion of respondents and our aim was to establish what was most important to respondents.

Figure 1. QA1: When a film or computer game is classified, how important do you think it is that the final rating takes into account the level of...? Proportion of 'extremely important'



Source: general public survey September 2014. Classification Branch, Attorney General's Department

A comparison of survey responses from parents and non-parents found that parents were significantly more likely than non-parents to consider the following extremely important:

- Sex (44% extremely important for parents compared to 35% for non-parents)
- Nudity (40% extremely important for parents compared to 30% for non-parents)
- Themes (26% extremely important for parents compared to 20% for non-parents).<sup>8</sup>

However, rather than reflecting that parents had different priorities to non-parents, this result is due to parents finding a greater variety of classifiable elements extremely important than non-parents. In other words, in thinking about the classification of media, parents considered a greater range of criteria to be important than non-parents.

Following an explanation of the six classifiable elements, focus group participants were also asked to consider the importance of these elements relative to each other.

There was clear focus on Violence as the most important element, followed by Drug Use and Sex Scenes. Conversely, Nudity and Language were generally nominated as the least important classifiable elements.

<sup>8</sup> Green arrows on Figure 1 indicate where differences between parents and non-parents were statistically significant.

*“Swearing is quite prevalent in Australian society these days”*

However, when asked whether any classifiable elements were unnecessary, most participants believed that all were important and needed to be retained.

### 3.4 Additional content types to be considered

Survey respondents were asked to suggest any additional types of content they believed should be considered in determining a film or computer game’s rating aside from the existing classifiable elements.

The majority of respondents *did not provide a suggestion* in response to this open ended question. The following topics were each suggested by less than 5% of respondents: religious themes, racism, antisocial behaviour, alcohol abuse, animal cruelty, bullying, domestic violence and suicide. This lack of response appears to indicate that the majority of respondents could not, unprompted, think of any other content types (that did not fit into existing categories) which should be considered during the classification process.

Focus group participants were asked if any additional content types should be considered in determining classifications. Responses varied between groups. In some groups, there were few or no suggestions. In addition, several focus group participants said that adding new classifiable elements to consumer advice may cause confusion to consumers. Some specifically stated that it was not additional classifiable elements that were required, but community education on the *existing* classifiable elements.

However, other participants suggested additional classifiable elements. These included:

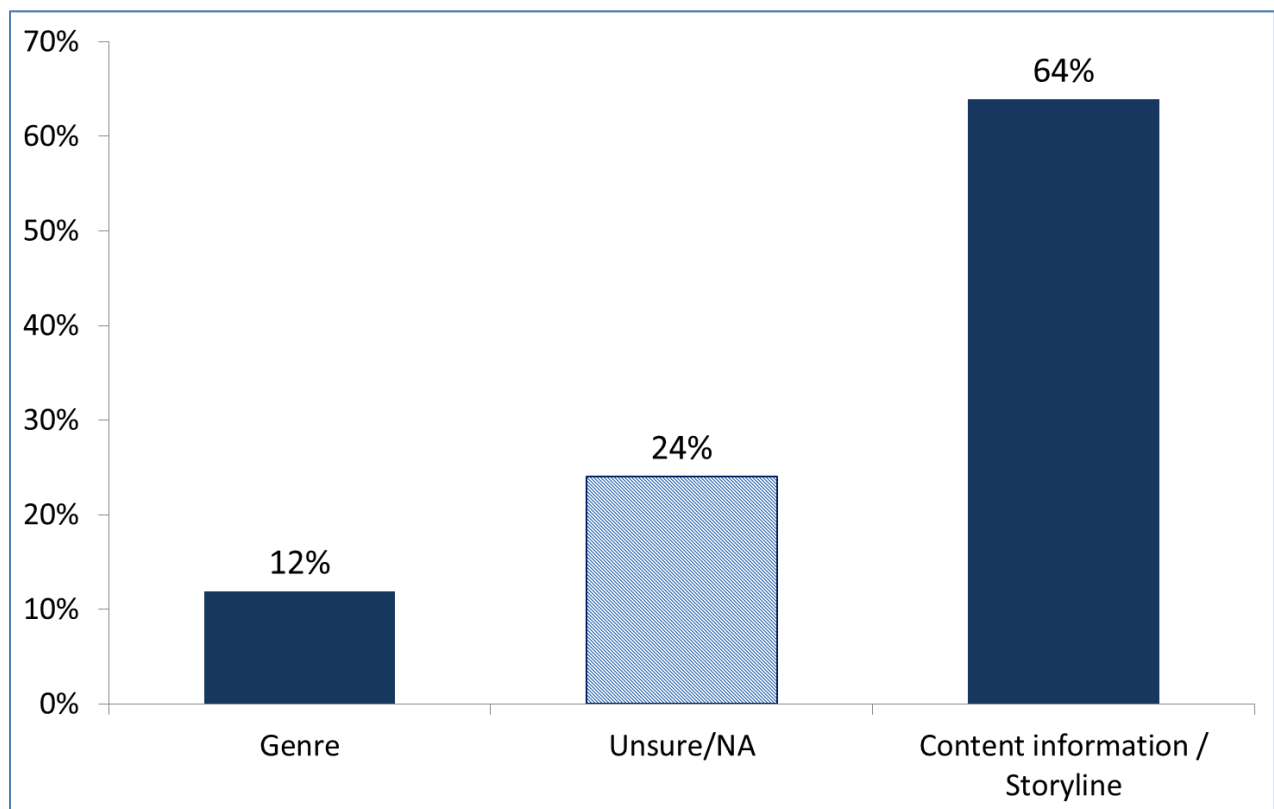
- sexual violence (distinct from other forms of violence)
- horror (as opposed to violence, eg monsters and supernatural images)
- content that may trigger fears or phobias eg spiders
- abuse (as opposed to violence, including verbal abuse which may not be captured under language)
- death
- suicide
- medical procedures
- racial violence/incitement.

## 4 Themes

### 4.1 Understanding of Themes

Survey respondents were asked to give their interpretation of the term Themes as applied in classification. Responses were given unprompted and then coded at a later stage. Approximately two thirds of respondents (64%) understood Themes to relate to content information or storyline, while just over 1 in 10 (12%) thought the term related to genre. Almost 1 in 4 (24%) either did not provide an answer or said they were unsure. Therefore the survey results indicate that misinterpretation of the term Themes when used in the context of classification is highly prevalent, and that there is a strong tendency among the general public to confuse Themes with 'general content' or 'storyline' as opposed to social issues or context. The results are shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. QA2: The following content types are considered when determining a film or computer game's rating: Themes, Violence, Sex, Coarse Language, Drug Use, and Nudity. What do you think is meant by the term 'Themes'?



Source: general public survey September 2014. Classification Branch, Attorney General's Department

Focus group participants' comprehension of the term Themes in the context of classifiable elements was also poor.

In line with the survey results, the most common misconception among focus group participants was that Themes referred to the film's genre (comedy, drama and so on) or was a general term synonymous with 'content'. A few people also became confused during the discussion and referred to Classifiable Elements as Themes- illustrating the potentially confusing nature of this term.

The usefulness of Themes as an element of consumer advice was questioned by participants who had found themselves watching films where the setting or plot components were not what they had expected.

*“It can be a nasty shock sometimes.”*

Confirming the apparent confusion relating to themes, several focus group participants described the term as ‘vague.’

However, a few participants had a more complete understanding of the term. Suggestions from these participants regarding what is and should be covered by Themes included:

- cruel or malicious behaviour
- racism
- illness
- sinister ideas
- death/animals dying
- sexual fetishes
- fantasy
- political agendas.

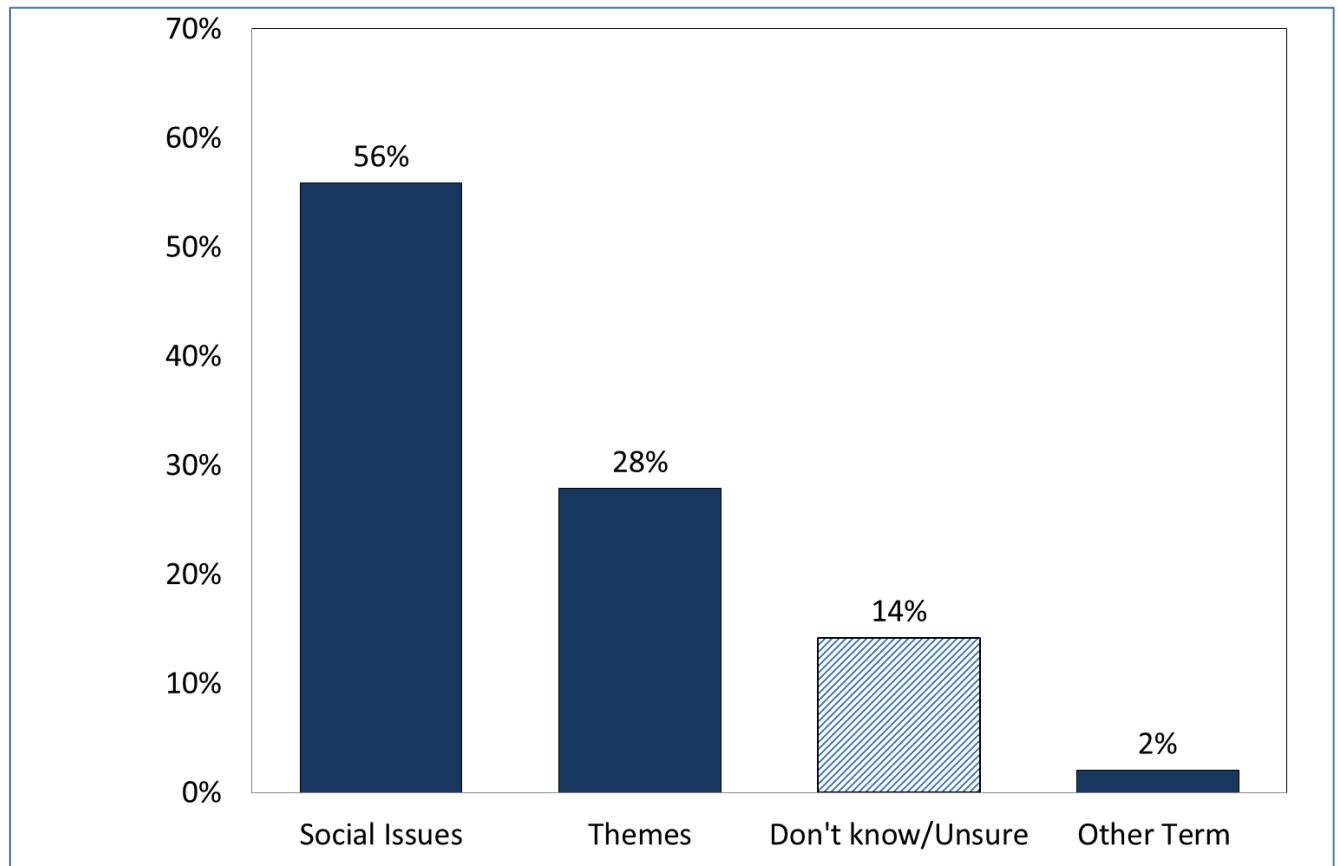
One respondent described Themes as:

*“Things that might upset a child but aren’t related to other (Classifiable Elements).”*

## **4.2 Alternatives to ‘Themes’**

Survey respondents were shown a list of content types which are all currently considered under the broad umbrella of Themes (without being told how they are currently categorised) and asked whether these items collectively would be better referred to as Themes or Social Issues. As shown in Figure 3 overleaf, a majority (56%) preferred the alternative term Social Issues. Less than a third of respondents (28%) preferred Themes.

Figure 3. QA5.2 Do you think that 'themes' or 'social issues' is a better term...)?



Source: general public survey September 2014. Classification Branch, Attorney General's Department

Focus group participants were also asked to consider alternatives to the term Themes, including Social Issues. However, responses to Social Issues were often negative, or provided further evidence that the term Themes was misunderstood.

Negative responses to 'Social Issues' related largely to the perception that the term was too narrow to encompass all the types of content listed.

*"Social issues would cover racism, religion and bullying – as these are 'social issues' but not things like animal cruelty."*

*"Themes' is more general."*

A few however, suggested alternative terms which indicated a sound grasp of the intended meaning of the term Themes, including:

- Perspectives
- Social context.

### 4.3 Ranking of importance of content currently covered by Themes

Respondents were shown a list of content types (that are currently considered under the classifiable element Themes) and asked the extent to which they agreed that each should be considered when determining a film or computer game's rating. The objective of this exercise was to see whether some content types stood apart from others as being particularly important to the general public, to inform consideration of separately considering, and labelling these content types. The results are shown in Figure 4 overleaf.

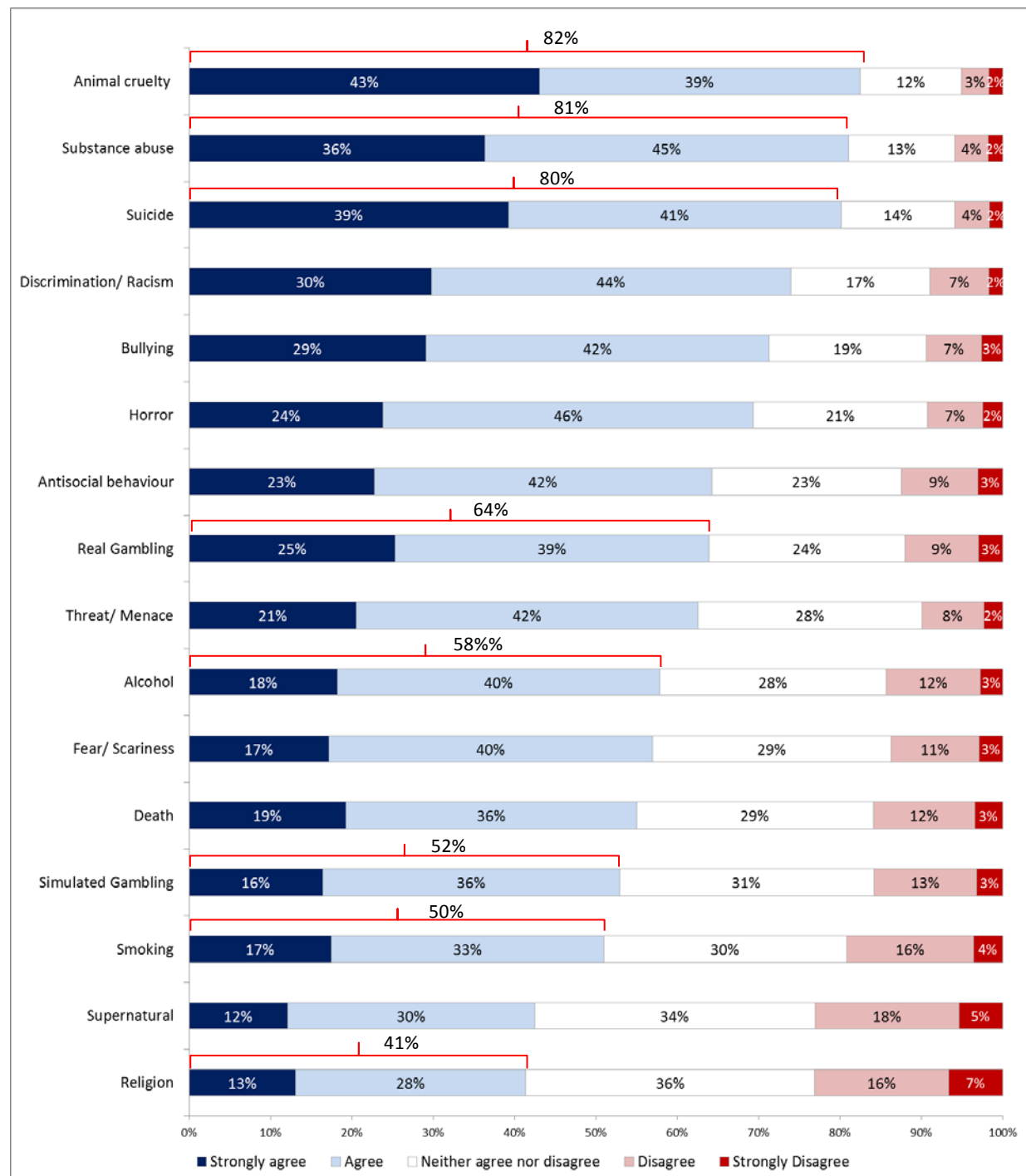
Overall, a substantial proportion of respondents agreed that every topic listed should be considered when determining a film or computer game's rating. The topics which the highest proportion of respondents agreed should be considered were:

- animal cruelty with a total of **82%** (43% Strongly agree, 39% Agree)
- substance abuse with a total of **81%** (36% Strongly agree, 45% Agree)
- suicide with a total of **80%** (39% Strongly agree, 41% Agree)

Respondents *least* frequently agreed that Religion should be considered when determining a film or computer game's rating (total of **41%** agreement).

It is noteworthy that content types rated less prominently also included Smoking (total of 50% agreement) and Simulated Gambling (52%) (although agreement that Real Gambling should be considered was higher, at 64%, and 58% agreed that Alcohol should be considered).

Figure 4. QA5.1 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following content should be considered when determining a film or computer game's rating?



Source: general public survey September 2014. Classification Branch, Attorney General's Department

Focus group participants were given the same list of content types. They were not informed of the relationship of these content types to Themes but were asked to individually rank the content types in order of importance (from 1<sup>st</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>).

The rankings given by all focus group respondents have been averaged and these averages are shown in Table 5 below. The topics given the highest average ratings were suicide, animal cruelty,

substance abuse, horror and death. These are similar to the survey results discussed earlier (and also to additional classifiable elements suggested in focus groups, as discussed earlier in section 3.4). The topics given the lowest rankings, including smoking, simulated gambling and religion, are also consistent with the survey results.

*Table 5: Ranking of the importance of various content types in determining a film or computer game classification*

Content Type	Average ranking
Suicide	1
Animal cruelty	2
Substance abuse	3
Horror	4
Death	5
Discrimination/racism	6
Fear/scariness	7
Threat/menace	8
Bullying	9
Antisocial behaviour	10
Supernatural	11
Alcohol	12
Real gambling	13
Religion	14
Simulated gambling	15
Smoking	16

*Source: general public focus groups September 2014. Classification Branch, Attorney General's Department*

#### 4.4 Desirability of separating certain content types from Themes

As discussed, it was apparent that most participants struggled to find meaning in the term Themes in the classification context. As such, few were able to make suggestions regarding content that might be separated from Themes to form its own classifiable element.

However, some people did nominate content types which they believed should be considered, and in particular labelled, separately.

In several of the groups, concern was expressed about cruelty, abuse and malicious behaviour. People were concerned about children being exposed to this content- particularly as it may not always be expressed through physical violence, obscene language or overtly antisocial behaviour and therefore may not be mentioned under one of the other classifiable elements in consumer advice. This concern also relates potentially to lack of understanding of, and therefore lack of faith in Themes as a tool of classification and particularly as a component of consumer advice.

Other content types suggested included:

- Sexual violence -there was considerable support for this participant suggestion.
- Suicide- a number of participants made or supported this suggestion
- Death- there were mixed views on whether this was something children needed to be shielded from, however many participants believed it would be helpful to parents if this was included in consumer advice (so that parents could make an informed choice).
- Religion and occult practices – mentioned by one respondent.

Instead of suggesting content that could be separated from Themes as a separate classifiable element, several participants supported the inclusion of specific descriptions of Themes in consumer advice, for example *Bullying Themes*, *Suicide Themes* and so on (also preferring this more specific advice to Mature or Adult Themes).

*“Themes is fine but you need a sub-category that includes more information such as ‘suicide themes’ or ‘smoking themes’ under the (Themes) term.”*

## 5 Impact descriptors

### 5.1 Response to the current impact scale

Focus group participants were shown the current impact hierarchy and asked to give their unprompted response.

Response to the current impact scale among participants was mixed. Participants had little feedback on how the scale operated as a tool of classification, but identified several factors impeding the usefulness of the current impact descriptors in consumer advice.

Overall, the main issue raised about the current scale was that some items were not sufficiently distinct from one another.

While some believed the scale was acceptable in its current form, several participants suggested that the positioning of Strong and High impact could be reversed. Similar suggestions were made regarding Mild and Moderate impact.

Similarly, people did not find the individual descriptors meaningful, outside of the context of the whole scale. The term Moderate in particular, in relation to an M rating, was puzzling to some people who considered it a term similar to 'mild'.

*"The definition of Mild doesn't really categorise what is in a PG film... it is a misrepresentation."*

*"Mild impact versus Moderate impact needs to be defined more for consumer understanding."*

A few people suggested the current scale has too many categories.

#### 5.1.1 Suggested improvements

Focus group participants were asked to individually devise their own impact scale in their own words, using the current scale and ratings as a guide. The form they were asked to complete for this exercise is included in the discussion guide at Appendix B. Some examples of participants' suggestions are shown below in Table 6 overleaf.

Table 6. Examples of alternative impact scales from focus group participants

Rating	Current scale	Eg 1	Eg 2	Eg 3	Eg 4	Eg 5
<b>G</b>	<b>Very Mild</b>	Low Impact	Very Mild (General)	Family/Children's (Level 0 Themes/content)	No Violence, Sex, Drug Use, Swearing. Pleasant Themes	General
<b>PG</b>	<b>Mild</b>	Low-Medium Impact	Mild	Supervision required for under 12 (Level 1 Themes/content)	Some of the above but <i>Mild</i> Themes that may require some explanation	Parental Guidance
<b>M</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	Medium Impact	Moderate (No Cruelty, No Bullying)	Level 2 Themes/content	<i>Medium</i> of all the above	Mild
<b>MA 15+</b>	<b>Strong</b>	Medium-High Impact	High (High Nudity, High Sex/Violence, No Cruelty)	Level 3 Themes/content	<i>Medium</i> of all the above	Medium
<b>R 18+</b>	<b>High</b>	High Impact	Very High	Adults Only (Level 4 Themes/content)	<i>Strong</i>	Adults Only
<b>RC</b>	<b>Very High</b>	Extreme Impact	Extreme	Unrated/Banned	<i>High frequency strong content</i>	Extreme

Source: general public focus groups September 2014. Classification Branch, Attorney General's Department

The examples in the table are indicative of the broad range of impact scales created by participants. It is noteworthy that many of the suggested scales (like Egs 3 and 5 in the table) included references to age groups or referred to specific types of content (like Egs 2 and 4 in the table). The scale in Eg 1, which contains overlapping levels, also demonstrates the complexity in constructing a workable hierarchy in this context, and the use of a numbered scale (such as in Eg 3) speaks to the difficulty in finding linguistic common ground in the construction of a hierarchy of impact, and offers a possible solution.













A number of these approaches were also raised during focus group discussion, in particular the use of a numbered scale and/or the application of age guidelines for each impact category (and by association each rating).

*"Perhaps they could give the consumer a more definitive age group for each descriptor on the scale."*

## 5.2 Preference between current or alternative scales

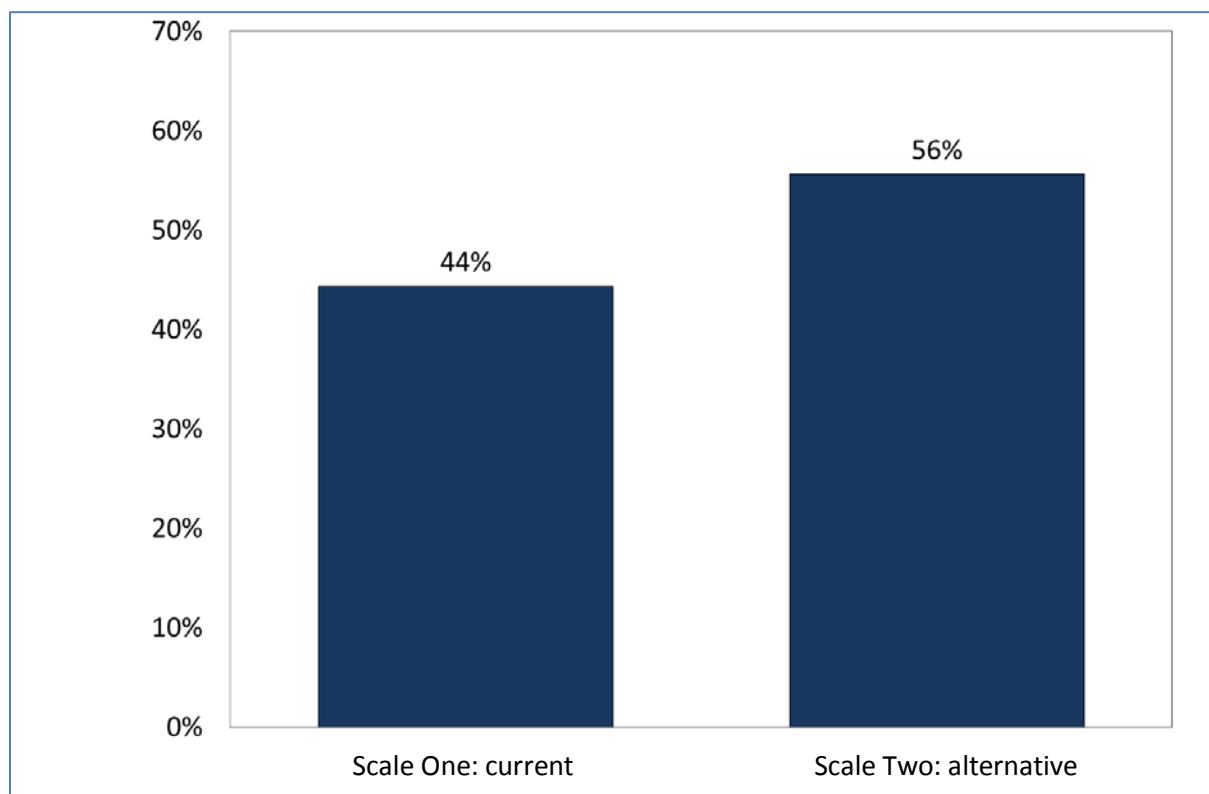
Figure 5 depicts two scales relating to the impact of content. Scale One is the current model, and Scale Two is an alternative that was tested among research participants. Both have the same ratings symbols but the terms used to describe impact are different (though with the same meaning) for each scale. Survey respondents were shown both (without being told one was the current scale) and asked to indicate their preference. The results are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 5. Current (Scale One) and alternative (Scale Two) impact scales for classification

Scale One	Scale Two
 Contains <b>VERY MILD</b> level content	 Contains <b>VERY LOW</b> level content
 Contains <b>MILD</b> level content	 Contains <b>LOW</b> level content
 Contains <b>MODERATE</b> level content	 Contains <b>MODERATE</b> level content
 Contains <b>STRONG</b> level content	 Contains <b>HIGH</b> level content
 Contains <b>HIGH</b> level content	 Contains <b>VERY HIGH</b> level content
 Contains <b>VERY HIGH</b> level content	 Contains <b>EXTREME</b> level content

Source: general public survey September 2014. Classification Branch, Attorney General's Department

Figure 6: QA6. Which of these scales do you prefer? (Current and alternative impact scales)



Source: general public survey September 2014. Classification Branch, Attorney General's Department

As shown, a moderate preference was shown for the alternative hierarchy, Scale Two, 56% of respondents preferring this scale. Just under half (44%) preferred the current scale, Scale One.

Focus group participants also tended to prefer the alternative scale. They regarded this scale as having a clearer, more intuitive structure and individual terms which were easier to understand independently of the whole scale. In particular, Extreme was preferred over Very High as the highest level of impact, and Low was preferred over Mild.

A few people considered Very Low in the alternative scale to be 'too low', and thought that the lowest descriptor on the scale should be called low. No suggestions were made on how this should be addressed in the re-labelling of the corresponding ratings PG and M, however.

### 5.3 Impact 'accelerators' and determinants

During focus groups, several participants raised the idea that the impact of content on consumers could potentially be magnified or influenced by certain other factors. The main factors raised were:

- realism
- interactivity
- length of exposure
- presence or absence of adult supervision
- context- in particular, genre and tone or intent.

### 5.3.1 Relative impact of content featured in films and computer games

During focus groups there was extended discussion of the treatment of content in films and computer games. Most participants were of the view that the content of computer games- even when similar 'on paper' to that of films- was generally more impactful. The higher impact of computer games was thought to be due to the presence of 'accelerators' listed above, in particular realism, interactivity, length of exposure and absence of adult supervision.

Some of the key examples given are as follows.

- The impact of violence was considered to be greater in computer games as players are participating in the violence rather than passively watching it.

*"When playing a computer game you are affecting what is happening ... when watching a movie you are a more passive participant so the themes in the game should be described more in the classification rating."*

- The impact of content that would currently be classified under Themes, such as antisocial behaviour or criminal activity, or under Drug Use, was considered potentially greater in computer games due to the interactive nature of games and the subversive manner in which this content is portrayed in some games.

*"You can choose to be a drug dealer in some games."*

- The impact of violence, horror and gore were considered particularly great in computer games with highly realistic graphics. The interactivity of the games was also thought to contribute to their realism.
- It was also suggested that players may spend several hours at a time playing a game as opposed to up to two and a half hours watching a film, increasing the level of exposure to disturbing material.

*"Computer game classification needs extra thought as you may only see a movie once or twice whereas people play the same computer game on a regular basis – sometimes everyday – the impact is different"*

*"Have to take into account the impact of violence and desensitisation when you play computer games on a regular basis"*

- Concern was expressed that minors often played games unsupervised, and that adults may not be able to familiarise themselves with the entire content or how it was presented as easily as they would in the case of a film.

As a result of these concerns, many people agreed that classification measures applied to computer games should be more stringent than those for films, for example, that the type of content that is classified as PG in a DVD should be pushed up to M for computer games.

Some even suggested a separate classification hierarchy, or additional classifiable elements, were required to reflect the different elements present in a computer game (eg interactivity, role play, realism).

However, support for the idea of a separate hierarchy for computer games was tempered by the acknowledgement that it was easier to remember a single set of ratings or impact descriptors for both films and computer games.

*“It should be along the same lines as films”*

### 5.3.2 Context

The broad issue of context was discussed not only in relation to the relative impact of computer game and film content, but also in terms of variation *between* films.

There was general agreement that the impact of classifiable elements within a film (in particular Violence, Drug Use, Language and Nudity) could be influenced by contextual factors:

- As with games, realism was considered a powerful accelerator of the impact of Violence. Conversely, Violence presented in a stylised or fantasy-themed manner was potentially of lower impact, as was Violence presented in a slapstick or cartoon-like manner.
- The context of Drug Use was also considered critical to its potential impact and the way in which it should be classified. A number of issues were raised in relation to Drug Use, including:
  - which substance was being used- most believed illicit drugs were high impact content, whereas social/responsible drinking or smoking tobacco were considered relatively benign by most.

*“Alcohol and smoking needs to be covered – a rating scale would be good which outlines (tobacco) smoking up to someone shooting up with drugs in a bathroom.”*

- in the case of alcohol, whether it was being abused or consumed in a responsible, social manner by adults. At a deeper level, the impact of depictions of drunkenness was also considered variable, as drunkenness associated with violence was considered to have a higher impact than ‘happy’ drunkenness by most, although some suggested any depictions of alcohol abuse could have a potentially high impact.

*“When alcohol abuse is involved with violence then this definitely needs to be included in the classification”*

- Several suggested that even if alcohol use was not considered high impact it should be mentioned in consumer advice for lower level classified films.
- whether illicit drug use or substance abuse (including alcohol and prescription drugs) was glamourised/glorified or presented as unpleasant/tragic:

*“The actual act of taking the drugs and how it is portrayed –the way it is portrayed as a cool thing in teenage movies, alcohol abuse – major problem in today’s society – this needs to be mentioned.”*

- Coarse language was considered far more impactful when used in an aggressive or threatening manner than in the context of comedy:

*“Where language is used in a violent and demeaning way it needs to be part of the classification decision.”*

- The impact of Nudity was bound by context (in particular whether it was sexual) and frequency within a particular film:

*“I’m not worried about nudity by itself in a film but if it was coupled with sex or violence then I would want to be warned about this in the classification.”*

### **5.3.3 Influence of viewing device on impact**

Participants were asked about the influence of the viewing device being used on the impact of a film’s content, to see whether screen size was considered to affect impact of visual content such as violence.

The prevailing view was that viewing device, or presentation of content in 3D, did not have a significant bearing on the impact of such content.

*“If something is going to disturb you, it will still disturb you know matter if you see it on the big screen or on a mobile tablet.”*

## 6 Consumer advice

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements relating to consumer advice. The results are shown in Figures 7- 10. Focus group points of discussion relating to various aspects of consumer advice are also discussed.

Survey respondents were also asked about placement and use of consumer advice in the cinema. The results are discussed in section 6.4.

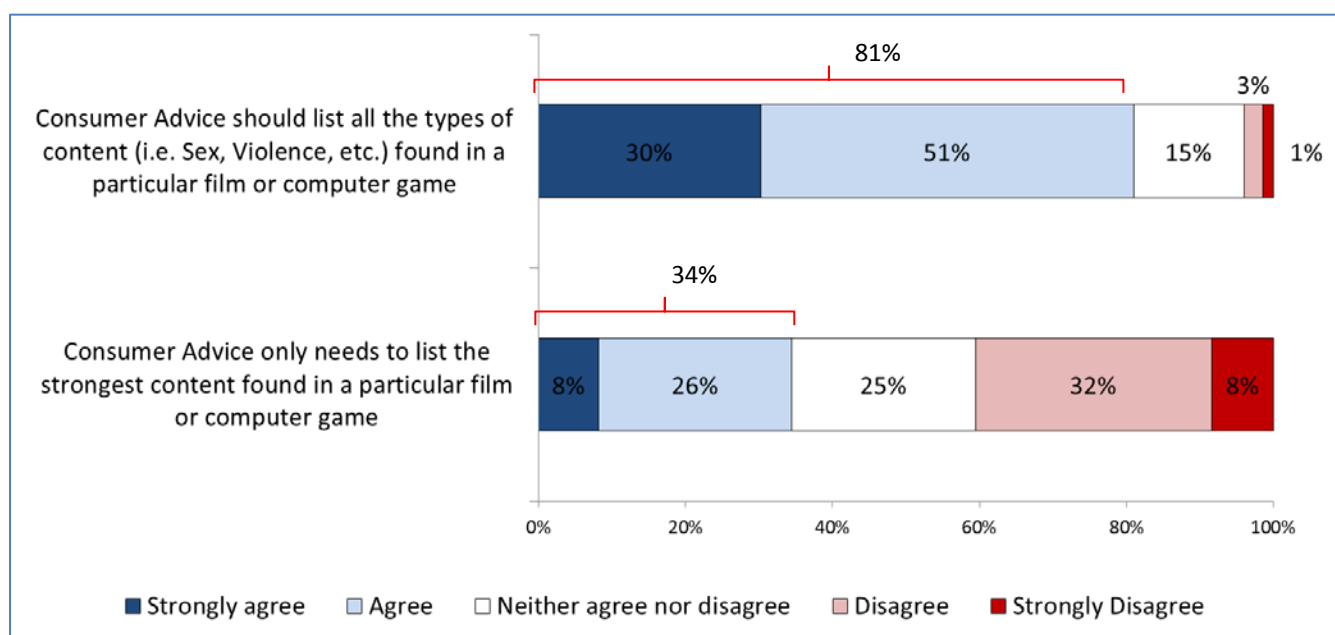
### 6.1 Preference for including all classifiable elements in consumer advice

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement (on a scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) with the statement 'Consumer advice should list *all* the types of content (ie Sex, Violence, etc) found in a particular film or computer game'. See Figure 7 for results.

Agreement with this statement was very high; a total of 81% either agreeing or agreeing strongly.

Consistent with this result, only 34% agreed that 'Consumer advice only needs to list the *strongest* content found in a particular film or computer game'.

Figure 7.QA3 Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about Consumer advice (QA3.3 and A3.4)



Source: general public survey September 2014. Classification Branch, Attorney General's Department

Focus groups were also asked about whether all classifiable elements, or only those with the highest impact, should be included in consumer advice. Participants were generally unaware that the current practice is to list only the classifiable element/s relating to the strongest content in consumer advice.

However, consistent with the survey results, participants expressed a clear preference for all classifiable elements present in a film or computer game to be mentioned, regardless of whether the rating was based on this content.

People generally recognised that it would be difficult to fit all of the classifiable elements in the consumer advice section on the front cover of a DVD or game, and some suggested that additional details such as ‘secondary’ classifiable elements could be contained on the back cover.

However, a small number of people were concerned that including all types of content in consumer advice could lead to confusion.

## 6.2 Perceptions of consumer advice approaches for PG, MA 15+ and R 18+ versus M classifications

Focus group participants were asked to consider the potential strengths and weaknesses of two approaches to consumer advice currently used for different classifications:

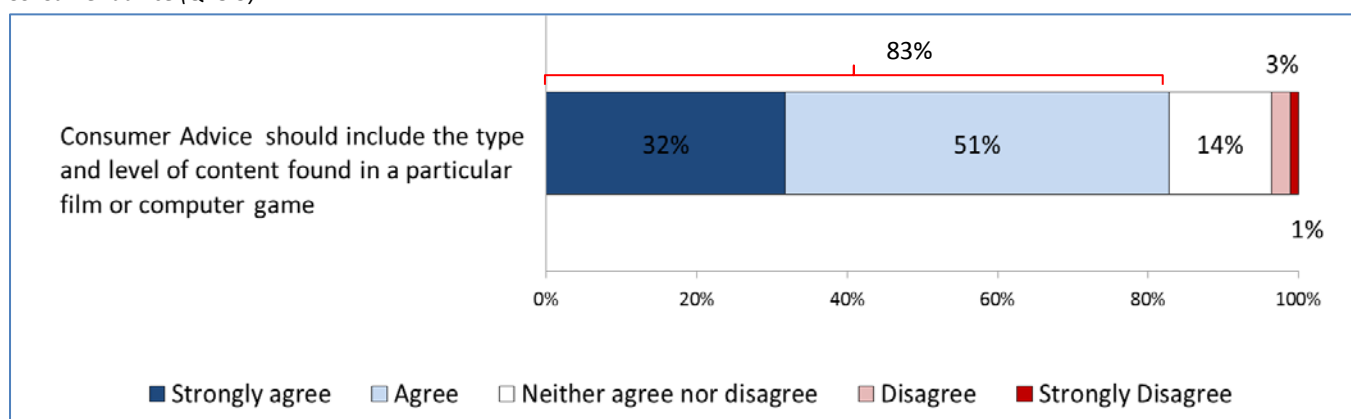
1. including the content type/s (classifiable element/s) on which the classification is based with no reference to level of impact - as is done with material rated M
2. including both the type of content (classifiable element) and level of impact (impact descriptor) that applies to the content on which the classification is based- as done for PG, MA 15+ and R18+ material.

Participants invariably preferred that consumer advice for all classifications include both type and level of content, particularly when the material contained violence or horror.

They recognised that the alternative approach, currently taken for M rated material, was short and to the point and took up slightly less space on packaging and advertising material, but considered the need for detailed information to outweigh this consideration. It was also suggested that the use of a numbered scale (as described previously in section 5.1.1) could overcome the issue of limited space, particularly if combined with a strategy of placing additional detail in another location, such as the back cover of a DVD or game.

Attitudes to the two approaches were also canvassed in the survey. The results indicated very high agreement with the statement ‘Consumer advice should include the type (eg Sex, Violence, etc) and level (eg Very Mild, Mild etc) of content found in a particular film or computer game’; 83% of respondents agreeing or agreeing strongly with this statement. These results are shown in Figure 8 below.

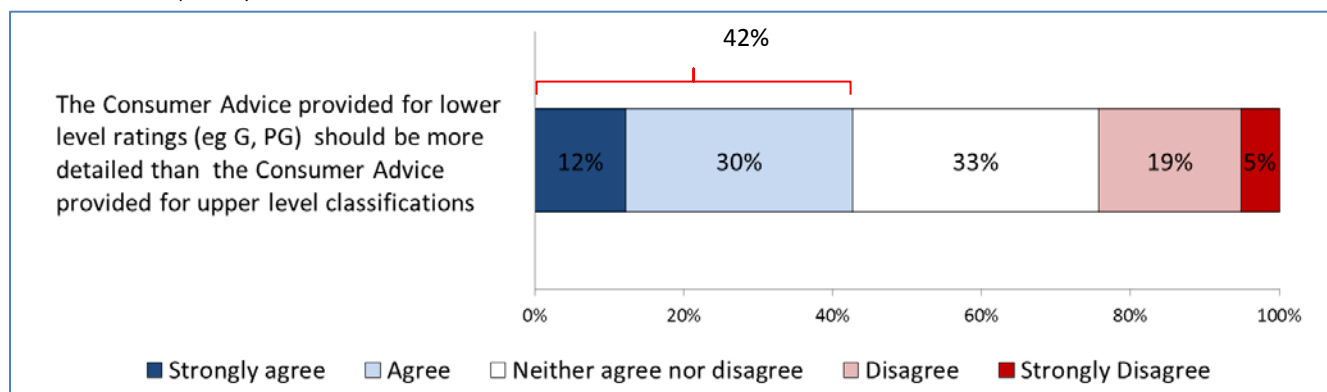
Figure 8. QA3 Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about Consumer advice (QA3.5)



Source: general public survey September 2014. Classification Branch, Attorney General's Department

Only a minority (42%) agreed or strongly agreed that ‘The consumer advice provided for lower level ratings (eg G, PG) should be more detailed than the consumer advice provided for upper level classifications (eg M, MA 15+, R 18+)’ (see Figure 9 below).

Figure 9. QA3 Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about consumer advice (QA3.2)



Source: general public survey September 2014. Classification Branch, Attorney General's Department

However, it is noteworthy that a number of focus group participants supported the idea that detailed consumer advice was especially important for lower level classifications likely to be viewed by children.

### 6.2.1 Understanding and suggested improvements to 'Mature Themes'

Occasionally, films and computer games with an M classification have consumer advice which includes the term Mature Themes. Focus group participants were asked to describe how they interpreted this term, and to suggest a better term if one existed.

Interpretations of the Term Mature Themes tended to fall into two groups. One group understood the term to mean that the material was for adults only- despite the fact that it currently applies to an M rating which is not restricted to adults.

*"Mature equals adult to me."*

*"Mature themes means an adult (should be) watching it, not a teenager."*

The other group were closer to a correct interpretation (but not entirely correct)<sup>9</sup> in suggesting Mature Themes refers to material that was not for young children, but possibly suitable for minors aged over 12 years or in their mid-teens, depending on their level of maturity. It was suggested that content labelled with Mature Themes contained concepts that may be upsetting or difficult for a young child to understand.

*"Mature themes are not childhood based themes but more emotional content that young teenagers can understand."*

<sup>9</sup> Mature Themes appears on M rated material which can be legally accessed by those under 15 years but is recommended for those aged 15 and over.

*“Things that are a little bit more challenging emotionally and mentally for children at a certain age such as animals dying for example.”*

*“You need to be mature to watch and understand the content. Should be over 12 years of age before watching an M rated movie.”*

Some suggested Adult or Teenage Situations as alternatives to Mature Themes.

*“Underage drinking for example is a ‘Teenage Situation.’”*

In addition, similar to the feedback on Themes, several suggested that instead of using the term Mature Themes more content-specific advice, for example Bullying, Racism and so on could be used.

*“Rather than describing it as moderate or mature – describe the actual (content) in the film in more detail.”*

### **6.3 Suggested improvements to consumer advice labelling**

Overall, the main sentiment emerging from focus groups in relation to consumer advice was that the current classifiable elements (with the exception of Themes) and impact descriptors were broadly acceptable as elements of consumer advice, but that people would like more detailed consumer advice for all levels of classification. Parents in particular were eager to see more detail, and others suggested that more detail should be readily accessible for those who wanted it.

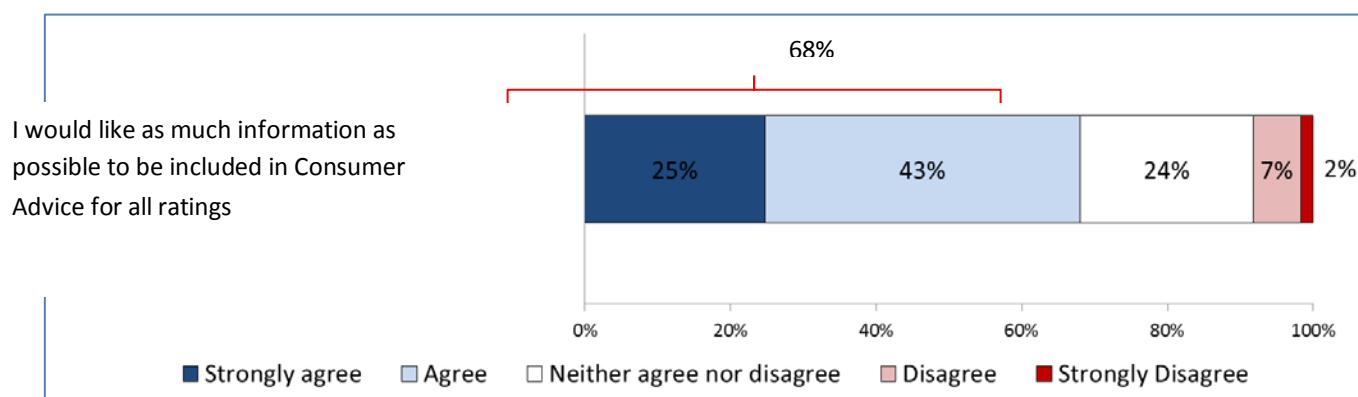
*“As a parent (I would like) the ability to gain more information (as well as) a very clear classification system.”*

Parents reported that current consumer advice sometimes lacked the necessary information on content, to the point that they had undertaken research online to supplement this advice before exposing children to certain material.

While detailed advice, indicating all types and levels of content, was considered desirable, some specified that additional detail was crucial for material rated G, PG and M as this material is not legally restricted.

Survey responses reflected the above findings, however there was greater support for increased detail across *all* ratings categories than for adding detail to consumer advice for the lower level ratings only. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement ‘I would like as much information as possible to be included in consumer advice for all ratings’. The results are shown in Figure 10. Over two thirds agreed with this statement (a total of 68% either agreeing or agreeing strongly). There was thus greater agreement with this statement than for the statement ‘The consumer advice provided for lower level ratings should be more detailed than the consumer advice provided for upper level classifications’ (42%- see Figure 9 in section 6.2).

Figure 10. QA3 Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about consumer advice (QA3.1)



Source: general public survey September 2014. Classification Branch, Attorney General's Department

Other than increasing detail, with more specific reference to content types and their level of impact, there was also a suggestion that some terms were open to misinterpretation. Difficulty in understanding the classifiable element Themes when used in consumer advice and varied interpretations of Mature Themes have been discussed earlier (see sections 4.1 and 6.2.1 respectively). Some also considered the terms Sexual References and Drug References too vague.

Several suggestions were made as to how the expression and placement of consumer advice could be improved. These included the following:

- Classifiable elements and impact descriptors could be labelled using the first initial of the classifiable element combined with a number representing impact level, eg V5 would be high level violence (corresponding to an R rating).
- Different versions of consumer advice could be placed in locations of varying prominence, depending on the impact level of particular content. For example for a DVD or game, the locations could include the front cover, the back cover and a website (with increasingly detailed advice). A specific example given was that alcohol use could be placed on the back cover or on a website (as moderate alcohol use was generally considered to be of concern to fewer people than illicit Drug use). Very detailed advice on content would be available online for those who were interested. It was suggested that a QR code or web address could be included that would direct consumers to more detailed information.
- Consumer advice for lower level classifications (ie G, PG, M) could include age recommendations. Suggestions included G= 0-8 years, PG= 8+, M= 12-15 or 15+ (it is noteworthy that there was less clarity in relation to the ideal age range for the M rating).
- To assist interpretation of impact descriptors – be they words or numbers- as stand-alone labels, the practice of colour coding was supported.

## 6.4 Consumer advice in relation to films at the cinema

### 6.4.1 Placement of consumer advice about a film showing at the cinema

Survey respondents were asked about the usefulness of consumer advice in various locations in relation to a film showing at the cinema. As shown in Figure 11 overleaf, all locations were considered *at least somewhat useful* by a majority of respondents, although some were considered more useful than others. More than 80% of respondents considered the following either extremely, very, or somewhat useful:

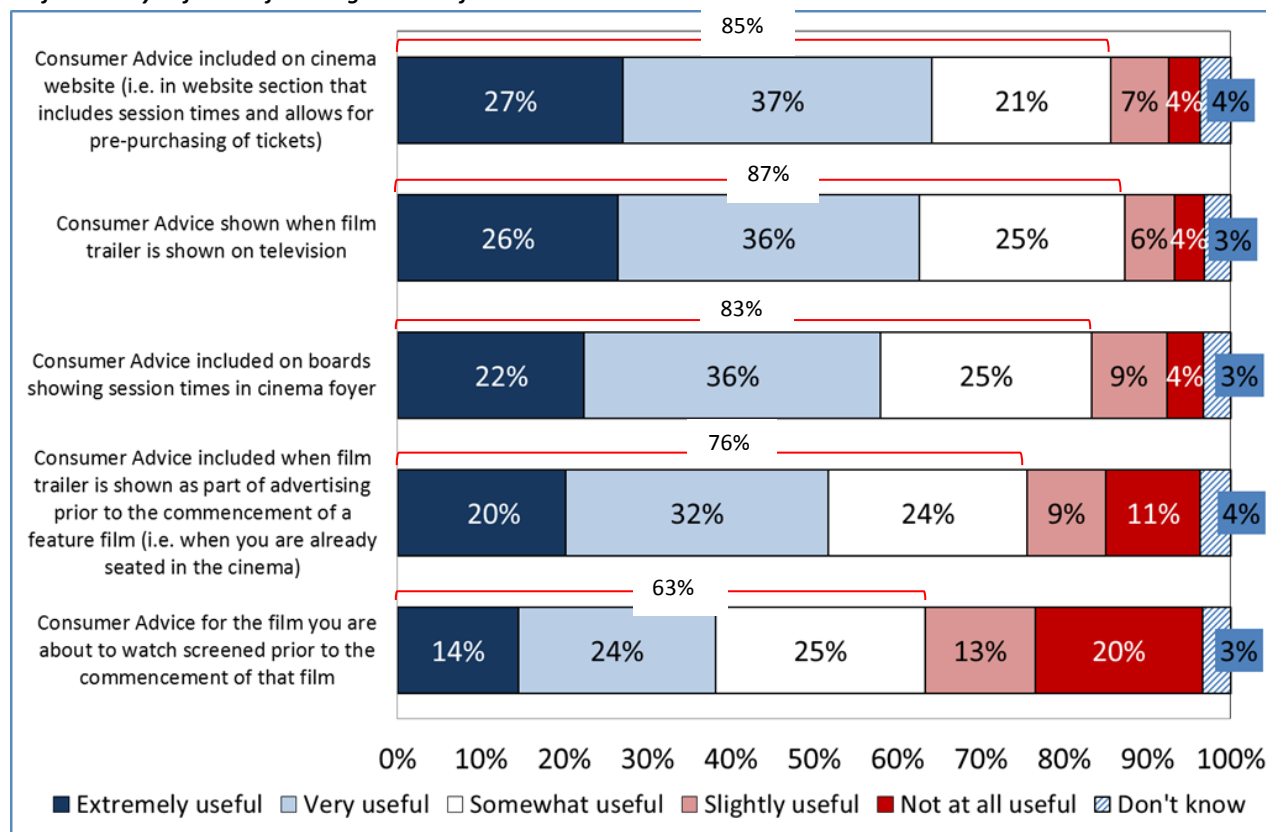
- Consumer Advice shown when film trailer is shown on television (87%)
- Consumer Advice included on cinema website (85%)
- Consumer Advice included on boards showing session times in cinema foyer (83%).

Fewer considered the following at least somewhat useful:

- Consumer Advice included when film trailer is shown as part of advertising prior to the commencement of a feature film (ie when you are already seated in the cinema) (76%)
- Consumer Advice for the film you are about to watch screened prior to the film (63%).

Consumer advice is therefore considered most useful when given prior to attending the cinema. While at the cinema, it is most useful while deciding which film to see, and least useful once the choice of film has been made.

Figure 11. QB2 Thinking about when you are deciding whether or not to watch a film showing in cinemas only, how useful would you find the following locations for consumer advice?



Base: n= 1,000. Source: general public survey September 2014. Classification Branch, Attorney General's Department

#### 6.4.2 Use of consumer advice on a film showing at the cinema

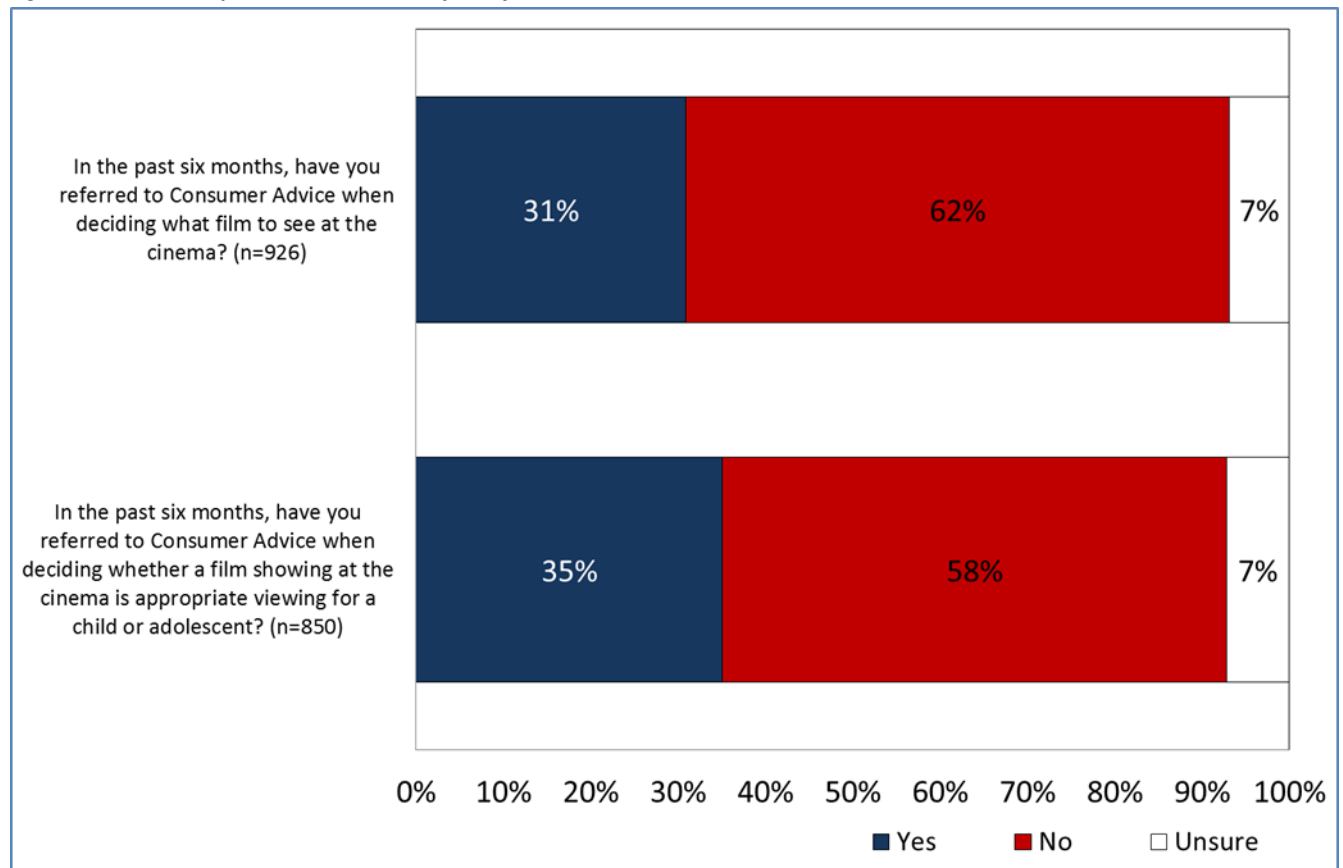
Survey respondents were asked about their use of consumer advice in relation to a film showing in the cinema in the last six months.

As shown in Figure 12, in this period, approximately one third of respondents had referred to consumer advice when either:

- deciding whether a film showing at the cinema is appropriate viewing for a child or adolescent (35%)
- deciding what film to see at the cinema themselves (31%).

The above results appear to be inconsistent with those shown earlier on the usefulness of consumer advice. However, given the survey did not include any qualifying questions on possible factors affecting use of consumer advice in the cinema (eg asking respondents if they had been to the cinema in past six months) these results should be treated with caution until further research is undertaken.

Figure 12. QB1 In the past six months, have you referred to consumer advice when...?



Base: n= 1,000. Source: general public survey September 2014. Classification Branch, Attorney General's Department

## 7 Key findings, conclusions and potential ways forward

### 7.1 Classifiable elements

- The classifiable elements of Sex, Nudity, Language and Violence are well understood and accepted by the general public.
- Drug Use is broadly understood, and agreed to be an appropriate classifiable element, but there was some variation in views on how alcohol, smoking and prescription medications should be treated- in particular whether alcohol use and smoking should be categorised and featured in consumer advice under Drug Use.
- Violence and Drug Use were considered more important in classification decisions (each considered extremely important by 44% of participants) than Nudity, Language or Themes (33%, 29% and 22% respectively). However all six classifiable elements were considered necessary to the process of classification.
- Participants did not express a strong desire for the introduction of any new classifiable elements.

**Further research may be required to gauge support for various treatments of alcohol and smoking in consumer advice, and whether these should be considered under the classifiable element of Drug Use.**

#### 7.1.1 Themes

- The classifiable element of Themes is poorly understood. Universal misinterpretation of the term Themes by both survey respondents and frequent misunderstanding among focus group participants strongly implies that the classifiable element of Themes is of limited utility as an element of consumer advice. The term Themes was most commonly misconstrued as being synonymous with content (64% of survey respondents) or genre (12% of survey respondents).
- The term Social Issues was preferred over Themes by 56% of survey respondents and many focus group participants. Few workable alternatives to Themes were suggested due to limited understanding of the term, but those given included 'perspectives' and 'social context'.
- Survey respondents and focus group participants ranked animal cruelty, substance abuse and suicide as the most important content types of those currently covered by Themes (80-82% agreeing they should be considered in classification decisions).
- There was some support in focus groups for the separate consideration and/or labelling of certain content that is currently covered under the term Themes. Relevant content types (in order of support) included cruelty/abuse/malicious behaviour (when not captured under violence or coarse language) sexual violence, suicide, death, and religion and occult practices.
- Alternatively people advocated the inclusion of more specific descriptions in consumer advice, eg *Bullying Themes*, *Suicide Themes* and so on.

**Themes may need to be replaced with more meaningful/specific terms, at least in consumer advice, even if it remains as 'Themes' for internal classification purposes.**

Although consideration could be given to creating additional classifiable elements, simply labelling some content types alongside classifiable elements in consumer advice is likely to perform the same function. Relevant content types include cruelty/abuse/malicious behaviour, sexual violence and suicide.

## 7.2 Impact descriptors

- There appears to be general support for the basic six level structure of the current impact hierarchy.
- The current impact scale contains descriptors that are not readily distinguished from one another, impairing the utility of the scale. In particular, Mild and Moderate were considered interchangeable, as were Strong and High.
- Impact descriptors in their current form were not meaningful to consumers when shown outside the context of the whole scale- for example Moderate did not consistently mean 'medium level' to consumers, and was frequently construed as 'mild.' This was especially confusing given Moderate is shown in combination with an M rating.
- An alternative scale tested, incorporating Very Low, Low, Moderate, High, Very High and Extreme, was moderately preferred over the current scale of Very Mild, Mild, Moderate, Strong, High and Very High (56% of survey respondents and most focus group participants preferred this scale). In particular the term Low was preferred to Mild, and Extreme to Very High.
- A numbered impact scale (eg level 1 being lowest to level 6 being highest) was suggested by participants as an alternative to a linguistic scale.
- Context was found to be of considerable significance in people's own assessments of impact, to the extent that it is possible for the same sort of content to have a different level of impact in different contexts. This has implications both for the perceived impact of content in computer games relative to films, and the comparative impact of films. The key contextual factors likely to influence impact are:
  - realism
  - interactivity
  - length of exposure
  - presence or absence of adult supervision
  - genre, tone or intent.
- Contextual factors thought to magnify the impact of computer games relative to film included realism (especially in relation to violence), interactivity and role play (in relation to violence, drug use or other antisocial or criminal activity), length of exposure (eg several hours of immersion in game play as opposed to periods of approximately two hours in front of a film) and lack of supervision (as parents are less likely to be observing or participating in game play than to watch a film with their children).
- Contextual factors relating to films included:
  - the intent or tone in which coarse language was used
  - the extent of nudity, and whether it was related to sex
  - in relation to drug use-
    - the substance being used
    - whether alcohol was being used responsibly or abused

- the depiction of excessive alcohol use or illicit drug use in either a positive or negative light.
- However, the device on which films were viewed (be it mobile device, television screen, cinema etc) was considered to have minimal bearing on impact.

**It may be necessary to either find impact descriptors that are meaningful as stand-alone terms, or to show the entire scale on labelling, highlighting the relevant level, for example reproducing the matrix that has been developed for use on the Classification website.**

**Market testing of individual elements of the alternative scale to see how well understood they are in isolation may be desirable. In addition a numbering system could be tested as an alternative to the current linguistic scale.**

**The results suggest that the current classification guidelines align with community sentiment in consideration of context. This will be tested in future research on community standards.**

**Given the frequently held view that computer game content should be treated more stringently by classifiers than similar content appearing in films, it may be valuable to explore and compare responses to equivalent content in both platforms in future research.**

### **7.3 Consumer advice**

- Research participants, especially parents, want more detail in consumer advice at all levels of classification than is currently provided. Over two thirds of survey respondents (68%) agreed that they wanted as much detail as possible in consumer advice.
- Most people (including 83% of survey respondents) indicated they would like both the type and impact level of content to be included in consumer advice.
- Most (including 81% of survey respondents) would like all content types to be included in consumer advice, as opposed to only the content with the highest impact (on which the classification is based).
- To accommodate a range of information requirements it was suggested that consumer advice be provided at three levels, each appearing in a different location:
  - ‘topline’ advice in the most prominent location (eg front cover of a game or DVD)
  - more detailed but still brief advice (eg content types and levels other than the classifiable element/s on which the classification was based) in a secondary location (eg back cover)
  - very detailed advice on content in a separate but accessible location (probably online) for those who wish to seek it out.
- Suggestions regarding labelling included:
  - using the first initial of classifiable elements and a numbered scale (eg from 1 to 6) for impact.
  - age recommendations in consumer advice for lower level classifications (ie G, PG, M), eg G= 0-8 years, PG= 8+, M= 12-15 or 15+
  - colour coding the impact scale to assist interpretations of individual impact labels (classification categories are already colour coded, but research conducted as part of the current program suggests that the current colour scheme, in particular the blue M label, is problematic).

- The general public consider consumer advice at various locations useful when selecting a film to see at the cinema. It is considered most useful when it can be viewed prior to attending the cinema (eg in television advertising [87%] or online [85%]) or, once at the cinema, prior to selecting a film (eg on boards showing session times [83%]).

**Research with internal stakeholders (especially practitioners) is needed to inform development of revised consumer advice for market testing.**

**Market testing is recommended to gauge the user friendliness of a new model of consumer advice including:**

- **first initial and number based labelling system for classifiable elements and impact descriptors to be used in consumer advice**
- **additional terms to notify consumers about content of concern that is currently captured under Themes (eg malicious behaviour)**
- **provision of increasingly detailed information on content in different locations, for example use of the existing 'content and impact' matrix found on the Classification website on the reverse of game and DVD packaging and detailed content descriptions available online (either on the Classification website or by linking to an existing information source such as IMDB.com if deemed appropriate).**

**Further research is recommended relating to the use of consumer advice in various contexts (eg purchase of games and DVDs).**

## **Appendix A: Questionnaire**

### **Classification Branch, Commonwealth Attorney General's Department**

#### **Developmental research and initial market testing –**

#### **Questionnaire for General Public – 2 September 2014**

##### **Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. This research is being conducted by the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department.

The aim of the research is to gauge your opinion on some topics related to the classification of films and computer games in Australia. The survey should take about 5 minutes to complete, but may take slightly longer depending on your responses.

Your responses will be treated as private and confidential. No individual will be able to be identified from the research results.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this questionnaire or the information you gave, please email [Research@classification.gov.au](mailto:Research@classification.gov.au)

**Section A –Classifiable Elements, Impact Descriptors, and Consumer Advice**

**ASK ALL:**

<b>A1.</b>	<b>Single response, Randomise order</b>	<p>In Australia, most films and computer games have to be classified before they can be made available to the public. As part of this process, films and computer games are assigned a rating (e.g. G, PG, M, MA 15+, or R 18+).</p> <p>When a film or computer game is classified, how important do you think it is that the final rating takes into account the level of...?</p>										
		0 Not at all important	1	2	3	4	5 Somewhat important	6	7	8	9	10 Extremely important
<b>A1.1</b>	Themes	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>A1.2</b>	Violence	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>A1.3</b>	Sex	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>A1.4</b>	Coarse Language	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>A1.5</b>	Drug use	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>A1.6</b>	Nudity	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**ASK ALL:**

<b>A2.</b>	<p>The following content types are considered when determining a film or computer game's rating: Themes, Violence, Sex, Coarse Language, Drug Use, and Nudity.</p> <p>What do you think is meant by the term 'Themes'? Just give your best guess if you're unsure.</p>	<b>Open response</b>

**ASK ALL:**

<b>A3.</b>	<p><b>Consumer Advice tells consumers about the presence of the following types of content: Themes, Violence, Sex, Coarse Language, Drug Use, and Nudity. It is commonly found alongside the rating on film and computer game packaging and advertising material.</b></p> <p><b>[Insert Consumer Advice image]</b></p> <p><b>Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about Consumer Advice.</b></p>					
	<b>Single response, Randomise order</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
<b>A3.1</b>	I would like as much information as possible to be included in Consumer Advice for all ratings	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A3.2</b>	The Consumer Advice provided for lower level ratings (e.g. G, PG) should be more detailed than the Consumer Advice provided for upper level classifications (e.g. M, MA 15+, R 18+)	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A3.3</b>	Consumer Advice should list all the types of content (i.e. Sex, Violence, etc.) found in a particular film or computer game	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A3.4</b>	Consumer Advice only needs to list the strongest content found in a particular film or computer game	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A3.5</b>	Consumer Advice should include the type (e.g. Sex, Violence, etc.) and level (e.g. Very Mild, Mild etc.) of content found in a particular film or computer game	1	2	3	4	5

**ASK ALL:**

<b>A4.</b>	<b>The following content types are considered when determining a film or computer game's rating: Themes, Violence, Sex, Coarse Language, Drug Use, and Nudity.</b>	<b>Open response</b>
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	<b>What other content types do you think should be considered when determining a film or computer game's classification?</b>	

**ASK ALL:**

<b>A5.1</b>	<b>To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following content should be considered when determining a film or computer game's rating?</b>					
	<b>Single response, Randomise order</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
<b>A5.1.1</b>	Animal cruelty	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A5.1.2</b>	Alcohol	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A5.1.3</b>	Bullying	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A5.1.4</b>	Simulated Gambling	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A5.1.5</b>	Real Gambling	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A5.1.6</b>	Discrimination/ Racism	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A5.1.7</b>	Fear/ Scariness	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A5.1.8</b>	Smoking	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A5.1.9</b>	Suicide	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A5.1.10</b>	Horror	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A5.1.11</b>	Supernatural	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A5.1.12</b>	Threat/ Menace	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A5.1.13</b>	Religion	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A5.1.14</b>	Substance abuse	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A5.1.15</b>	Death	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A5.1.16</b>	Antisocial behaviour	1	2	3	4	5
<b>A5.2</b>	<b>Do you think that 'Themes' or 'Social Issues' is a better term to describe the content types listed above?</b>					

	Themes	1
	Social Issues	2
	Other Term (please specify_____)	3
	Don't know/ Unsure	99

**ASK ALL:**

<b>A6.</b>	<b>Which of these scales do you prefer?</b>	<b>Single response, Randomise order of scales</b>
	<b>[Insert Scale 1 Image and Scale 2 Image]</b>	

**Section B – Use of classification information (film showing in cinema only)**

The questions in this section require you think specially about films that are showing in cinema only.

**ASK ALL:**

<b>B1</b>	<p>Consumer Advice tells consumers about the presence of the following types of content: Themes, Violence, Sex, Coarse Language, Drug Use, and Nudity. It is commonly found alongside the rating on film and computer game packaging and advertising material.</p> <p><b>[Insert Consumer Advice image]</b></p> <p>In the past six months, have you referred to Consumer Advice when....?</p>				
	<b>Single response, Randomise order</b>	Yes	No	Unsure	N/A
<b>B1.1</b>	...deciding what film to see in at the cinema?	1	2	3	4
<b>B1.2</b>	...deciding whether a film showing at the cinema is appropriate viewing for a child or adolescent?	1	2	3	4

**ASK ALL:**

<b>B2</b>	<p><b>Consumer Advice</b> warns consumers about the presence of the following types of content: Themes, Violence, Sex, Course Language, Drug Use, and Nudity. It is commonly found alongside the rating on film and computer game packaging and advertising material.</p> <p><b>[Insert Consumer Advice image]</b></p> <p>Thinking specifically about when you are deciding whether or not to watch a film showing in cinemas only, how useful would you find the following locations for Consumer Advice?</p> <p>Remember to think specifically about <i>Consumer Advice</i>, not the film's rating.</p>						
	<b>Single response, Randomise order</b>	Not at all useful	Slightly useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Extremely useful	Don't know
<b>B2.1</b>	Consumer Advice shown when film trailer is shown on television	1	2	3	4	5	99
<b>B2.2</b>	Consumer Advice included when film trailer is shown as part of advertising prior to the commencement of a feature film (i.e. when you are already seated in the cinema)	1	2	3	4	5	99
<b>B2.3</b>	Consumer Advice for the film you are about to watch screened prior to the commencement of that film	1	2	3	4	5	99
<b>B2.4</b>	Consumer Advice included on boards showing session times in cinema foyer	1	2	3	4	5	99
<b>B2.5</b>	Consumer Advice included on cinema website (i.e. in website section that includes session times and allows for pre-purchasing of tickets)	1	2	3	4	5	99

### Section C – Regulation of classification

#### ASK ALL:

C1.	Who do you think should be responsible for the classification of films and computer games in Australia?	Single response
	Film and computer game classification should be the responsibility of <b><u>GOVERNMENT</u></b>	1
	Film and computer game classification should be the responsibility of the <b><u>FILM AND COMPUTER GAME INDUSTRIES</u></b>	2
	Film and computer game classification should be the joint responsibility of <b><u>GOVERNMENT</u></b> and the <b><u>FILM AND COMPUTER GAME INDUSTRIES</u></b>	3
	Unsure/ don't know	99

C2.	<p>There are two types of categories in the current set of ratings – advisory (G, PG, and M) and legally restricted (MA 15+, R 18+, X 18+).</p> <p>This is a question about the MA 15+ rating.</p> <p><b>[Insert MA 15+ image]</b></p> <p>MA 15+ is a legally restricted rating. People under 15 must legally be accompanied by an adult if they want to watch films rated MA 15+ in the cinema or if they want to buy films or computer games rated MA 15+.</p> <p>Do you think the MA 15+ rating should be a legally restricted?</p>	Single response
	Yes, MA 15+ should be a legally restricted rating	1
	No, MA 15+ should be advisory only (i.e. no legal restrictions)	2

	Unsure/ don't know	99
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## Section D – Demographics

**Introduction Screen:** You are nearly at the end! Now just a few questions about you to ensure that we have the views of a wide range of people.

<b>D1.</b>	<b>How old are you?</b>	<b>Open response</b>
	I'd prefer not to say	99

<b>D2.</b>	<b>Are you a....</b>	<b>Single response</b>
	Male	1
	Female	2
	I'd prefer not to say	99

<b>D3.</b>	<b>Which of the following areas do you live in?</b>	<b>Single response</b>
	Sydney	1
	Other NSW	2
	ACT	3
	Melbourne	4
	Other VIC	5
	Brisbane	6
	Other QLD	7
	Adelaide	8
	Other SA	9

	Perth	10
	Other WA	11
	Other WA	12
	Tasmania	13
	Northern Territory	14

<b>D4.</b>	<b>What is the postcode where you live?</b>	<b>Open response</b>
		1
	I'd prefer not to say	99

<b>D5.</b>	<b>How many children under the age of 18 do you have <u>usually living at home</u> with you?</b>	<b>Open response</b>
	None	98
	I'd prefer not to say	99

<b>D6.</b>	<b>Thinking specifically about the [IF D5=1: 'child'; ELSE: 'children'] under the age of 18 who usually lives at home with you, how old [IF D5=1: 'is this child'; ELSE: 'are each of these children']?</b>	<b>Open response</b>
	<b>Open numeric response; min 1 and max 17</b>	
	Less than one year old	98
	I'd prefer not to say	99

**[Repeat grid for each child]**

<b>D7.</b>	<b>Which of the following best describes your caring responsibilities for these [IF D5=1: 'child'; ELSE: 'children']?</b>	<b>Single response</b>
	<b>Open numeric response; min 1 and max 17</b>	
	Sole carer (i.e. single parent)	1
	Primary carer	2
	Shared	3
	Secondary carer	4
	Other [Please specify.....]	98

## Appendix B: Focus group discussion guide

### Classification Branch, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department

#### Stage One – Project Two / Three: Classifiable Elements, Impact Descriptors, and Content Advice

#### Discussion Guide for focus groups with general public

##### *Explanatory notes*

- This issues guide provides an idea of the range and coverage of issues that will come out of the research project.
- It is a guide for discussion, and will not be used as a script—phrasing, wording, and order will be adapted as appropriate for the target audience.
- This guide does not represent a complete list of the questions that will be asked or covered in each discussion group or interview. The coverage and flow of issues will be guided by the researchers and informed by the participants. All questions are fully open-ended.
- Some questions are similar because they are trying to get at an issue from a number of angles and to validate responses/ views.
- Reported issues/ data will be probed for evidence/ examples wherever relevant.

##### *Introduction (5 minutes)*

- Introduction of self and Department:
  - This research is being undertaken by the Classification Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department.
  - The Attorney-General's Department serves the public by maintaining and improving Australia's system of law and justice.
- Background and purpose:
  - This research project is related to the classification of films and computer games in Australia.  
*[Show DVD and/ or computer game and point out the rating and consumer advice]*
  - The research is being undertaken to improve public understanding of classification information.
- Confidentiality and anonymity.
- Length of group – no more than 90 minutes.

In Australia, most films and computer games have to be classified before they can be legally made available to the public. As part of this process, films and computer games are assigned a classification rating. The current ratings are G, PG, M, MA 15+, R 18+, and X 18+.

*[Show Board 1: Classification ratings]*

- What sorts of things do you think should be considered when determining a film or DVD's ratings? Anything else?

*[Probe till no further suggestions]*

- What sorts of things do you think should be considered when determining a computer game's ratings? Anything else?

*[Probe till no further suggestions]*

Under the current system, classification decisions are based on the presence and impact of the following types of content:

*[Show Board 2: List of Classifiable Elements (Themes, Violence, Sex, Language, Drug use, Nudity)]*

These are referred to as Classifiable Elements.

- What sorts of things do you think are covered by... *[Randomise order between groups]*
  - Themes?
  - Violence?
  - Sex?
  - Language?
  - Drug use?
  - Nudity?
- Which content type do you think is the *most important* to consider when determining a film or computer game's classification?
- And which content type do you think is the *least important* to consider when determining a film or computer game's classification?
- Which, if any, of the current Classifiable Elements do you think are unnecessary? Any others?
  - Why do you think this element is unnecessary?
- What other things should be considered when determining a film or DVD's rating? Anything else?

*[Probe till all additional areas of concern are mentioned]*

- And what other things should be considered when determining a computer game's rating? Anything else?

*[Probe till all additional areas of concern are mentioned]*

### Themes (15 minutes)

#### NOTEBOOK EXERCISE ONE [5 minutes]

I'd now like you to turn to the first page of your notebook. On this page you will find a list of content types. Which content type do you think is the *most important* to consider when determining a film or computer game's classification? Please rank the content types in order of importance, with 1 being the *most important* and 16 being the *least important*.

*[Brief discussion of notebook exercise answers]*

*[Show Board 2: List of Classifiable Elements (Themes, Violence, Sex, Language, Drug use, Nudity)]*

- This content is currently covered by 'Themes'. What other things do you think should be covered by 'Themes'? Anything else?
- Do you think any of this content should be covered by one of the other elements? Which element? Why?
- Do you think that any of this content should be a separate Classifiable Element? Why? Why not?
  - *[If yes]* Do you think this element is more important than any of the existing elements? Why do you say that?
- Can you think of a better term to describe the content covered by 'Themes'? Anything else?
 

*[Probe till no further suggestions]*
- Do you think that 'Social Issues' is a better or worse term to describe this content? Why do you say that?

### Impact descriptors (15 minutes)

Currently, when films and computer games are classified, the impact of each Classifiable Element is assessed by a trained classifier. This is the scale used to assess impact:

Very mild – G

Mild – PG

Moderate – M

Strong – MA 15+

High – R 18+

Very High – Refused Classification (i.e. banned)

*[Show Board 3: Impact descriptors]*

For example, violence in a film rated MA 15+ must have an impact which is not more than strong.

These descriptors are also used to communicate with the public via the consumer advice that accompanies a film or computer game's rating.

*[Show example of consumer advice on a DVD cover]*

- Do you think the scale is in the correct order? Why? Why not?
- What is your overall opinion of the impact scale? Why do you say that?  
*[Probe for strengths and weaknesses]*
- The scale is intended to move from Very Mild through to Very High in an ascending order. What changes could be made so that the scale better meets this objective? Anything else?  
*[Show Board 4: Alternative scale]*
- Do you think this scale is better, worse, or about the same as the current scale? Why do you say that?
- Given that the impact of material may be affected by the device on which it is delivered, do you think that is appropriate to use an impact test to classify films and computer games? Why? Why not?

[n.b. If participants are confused about differential impact, mention that material viewed on a cinema screen is more impactful than material viewed on a mobile phone screen]

- Can you think of a better method for determining the rating of a film or computer game? Why do you think this is a better method?

### NOTEBOOK EXERCISE TWO [5 minutes]

**Please come up with your own scale for the classification of films and computer games. Be sure to provide a descriptive term at each classification level.**

### Consumer advice (25 minutes)

Consumer Advice reflects the key elements that contributed to the classification of a film or computer game. It does not list all of the types of content in the product – just the content with the greatest impact. It is displayed on packaging and advertising and is intended to assist consumers in making informed decisions about the films they wish to watch and the computer games they wish to play.

*[Show example of consumer advice]*

*[Ensure that all participants have a copy of current consumer advices]*

- Do you think that consumer advice should include all elements found in a film or computer game? Why do you say that?
- Are there any problems with consumer advice including all the elements found in a film or computer game? Anything else?
- The consumer advice at PG, MA 15+, and R 18+ describes the type of content and qualifies the impact. What do you think are the key strengths of this approach? And what about the weaknesses?
- Do you think this approach works better for some types of content than for other types of content? Why?

*[n.b. Types of content consist of Violence, Sex, Language, Drug Use, Nudity, and Themes]*

- Do you think this approach works better at some classification levels than other classification levels? Why?

*[n.b. Classification levels consist of PG, MA 15+, and R 18+]*

- What could be done to improve public understanding of consumer advice at...
  - ...PG?
  - ...MA 15+?
  - ...R 18+?
- The consumer advice at M mostly describes content type with no qualifier. What do you think are the key strengths of this approach? And what about the weaknesses?
- Do you think public understanding of consumer advice would be better or worse if this approach was also taken at PG, MA 15+, and R 18+?
- Mature themes is sometimes used as a consumer advice on M films and computer games. What do you think is meant by 'Mature themes'? Anything else?
  - Can you think of a better way to describe themes at M? Anything else?
- What could be done to improve public understanding of consumer advice at M?

**Notebook Exercise One: Which content type do you think is the most important to consider when determining a film or computer games classification? Please rank the content types in order of importance, with 1 being the most important and 16 being the least important.**

<b>Content</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Animal cruelty	
Alcohol	
Bullying	
Simulated Gambling	
Real Gambling	
Discrimination/ Racism	
Fear/ Scariness	
Smoking	
Suicide	
Horror	
Supernatural	
Threat/ Menace	
Religion	
Substance abuse	
Death	

Antisocial behaviour

**Notebook Exercise Two: Please come up with your own scale for the classification of films and computer games. You can use some of the words in the current scale, if you would like to.**

**NOTE: RC = Refused Classification (i.e. banned)**

Current Scale	My scale
---------------	----------

<b>G</b>	<b>Very Mild</b> 
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<b>PG</b>	<b>Mild</b> 
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<b>M</b>	<b>Moderate</b> 
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<b>MA 15+</b>	<b>Strong</b> 
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<b>R 18+</b>	<b>High</b> 
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**RC**

**Very High** 

## Consumer Advice:

### G – GENERAL

Consumer advice is not generally provided for G films although there may be circumstances where the Board deem it to be warranted.

### Violence

**PG** - Mild violence

**PG** - Mild science fiction/battle/fantasy/horror violence

**M** - Violence

**M** - Science fiction/battle/fantasy/horror violence

**MA 15+** - Strong violence

**MA 15+** - Strong science fiction/battle/fantasy/horror violence/blood and gore

**R 18+** - High impact violence

**R 18+** - High impact science fiction/battle/fantasy/horror violence/blood and gore

### Sex

**PG** - Mild sex scene (s)/sexual reference(s)

**M** - Sex scene (s)/sexual reference(s)

**MA 15+** - Strong sex scene (s)/sexual reference(s)

**R 18+** - High impact sex scene(s)/sexual reference(s)

### Language

**PG** - Mild coarse language

**M** - Coarse language

**MA 15+** - Strong coarse language

**R 18+** - High impact coarse language

### Drug Use

**PG** - Mild drug use/reference(s)

**M** - Drug use/reference(s)

**MA 15+** - Strong drug use/reference(s)

**R 18+** - High impact drug use/reference(s)

### Nudity

**PG** - Mild nudity

**M** - Nudity

**MA 15+** - Strong nudity

**R 18+** - High impact nudity

**Themes**

**PG** - Mild themes

**PG** - Mild horror/supernatural/science fiction themes

**PG** - Scary scenes

**M** - Mature themes

**M** - Horror/supernatural/science fiction themes

**MA 15+** - Strong themes

**R 18+** - High impact themes

## Appendix C: Ratings categories for film and computer games

Rating	Description
Advisory categories: there are no legal restrictions about viewing and/or playing these films and computer games with these markings.	
G—General	<p>The content is very mild in impact.</p> <p>The G classification is suitable for everyone. G products may contain classifiable elements such as language and themes that are very mild in impact.</p> <p>However, some G-classified films or computer games may contain content that is not of interest to children.</p>
PG—Parental Guidance	<p>The content is mild in impact.</p> <p>The impact of PG (Parental Guidance) classified films and computer games should be no higher than mild, but they may contain content that children find confusing or upsetting and may require the guidance of parents and guardians. They may, for example, contain classifiable elements such as language and themes that are mild in impact.</p> <p>It is not recommended for viewing or playing by persons under 15 without guidance from parents or guardians.</p>
M—Mature	<p>The content is moderate in impact.</p> <p>Films and computer games classified M (Mature) contain content of a moderate impact and are recommended for teenagers aged 15 years and over.</p> <p>Children under 15 may legally access this material because it is an advisory category. However, M classified films and computer games may include classifiable elements such as violence and nudity of moderate impact that are not recommended for children under 15 years.</p> <p>Parents and guardians may need to find out more about the film or computer game's specific content, before deciding whether the material is suitable for their child.</p>

Rating	Description
Restricted categories for films and computer games: there are legal restrictions on viewing and/or playing these films and computer games.	
MA 15+—Mature Accompanied	<p>The content is strong in impact.</p> <p>MA 15+ classified material contains strong content and is legally restricted to persons 15 years and over. It may contain classifiable elements such as sex scenes and drug use that are strong in impact.</p> <p>A person may be asked to show proof of their age before hiring or purchasing an MA 15+ film or computer game. Cinema staff may also request that the person show proof of their age before allowing them to watch an MA 15+ film. Children under the age of 15 may not legally watch, buy or hire MA 15+ classified material unless they are in the company of a parent or adult guardian. Children under 15 who go to the cinema to see an MA 15+ film must be accompanied by a parent or adult guardian for the duration of the film. The parent or adult guardian must also purchase the movie ticket for the child. The guardian must be an adult exercising parental control over the person under 15 years of age. The guardian needs to be 18 years or older.</p>
R 18+—Restricted	<p>The content is high in impact</p> <p>R 18+ material is restricted to adults. Such material may contain classifiable elements such as sex scenes and drug use that are high in impact. Some material classified R 18+ may be offensive to sections of the adult community. A person may be asked for proof of their age before purchasing, hiring or viewing R 18+ films and computer games at a retail store or cinema.</p>
Restricted categories for adult films	
X 18+—Restricted	<p>X 18+ films are restricted to adults.</p> <p>This classification is a special and legally restricted category which contains only sexually explicit content. That is, material which shows actual sexual intercourse and other sexual activity between consenting adults. X 18+ films are only available for</p>

Rating	Description
	sale or hire in the ACT and the NT.
RC—Refused Classification	<p>Refused Classification (RC) is a classification category. Material that is Refused Classification is commonly referred to as being 'banned'.</p> <p>Films, computer games and publications that are classified RC cannot be sold, hired, advertised or legally imported in Australia.</p> <p>Material that is classified RC contains content that is very high in impact and falls outside generally accepted community standards.</p>

Source: Australian Government 2014

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