



Australian Government
Attorney-General's Department

Classification ratings

Research with the general public

Classification Branch

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Executive summary

Background to the research

- Media convergence has transformed the way media content is distributed and consumed.
- Policy and regulatory frameworks are potentially ill-suited to the emerging convergent media environment.
- The Australian Law Reform Commission was therefore commissioned to undertake a review of the Australian National Classification Scheme.

The ALRC final report 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- A review of research and grey (unpublished) literature relating to views, knowledge and use of media classification systems in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions.
- A study focussing on members of the Australian public to investigate views, knowledge and use of classification information, in particular ratings symbols, and views on the process and regulation of classification. 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)¹.

The latter project is the subject of this and another report produced concurrently. This report relates to the views of **the general public**. The other report produced in relation to this study concerns the views of stakeholders and practitioners. This report is titled *Classification ratings: stakeholder and practitioner consultation*.

Study objectives

Using quantitative and qualitative research methods, the study assessed the following amongst the general public aged 18+:

- awareness and understanding of current classification ratings
- 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

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

- responses 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 were also sought.

As noted above, this report relates to the views of **the general public**.

Methodology

An online survey was conducted over the internet using a quota-based sample², sourced from an online panel. Sample provision, questionnaire programming, and fieldwork management was undertaken by an external consultant, the Online Research Unit in April 2014. The total sample size achieved was n=1030.

Qualitative research with the general public took place via a combination of metropolitan and regional focus groups (n=3 metropolitan focus groups; n=4 regional focus groups) with community members aged over 18 years. Metropolitan focus groups were conducted in Sydney, NSW and regional focus groups were undertaken in Shepparton, Victoria and Toowoomba, Queensland.

Key findings, conclusions and recommendations

Role and use of classification

Conclusion One: the general public are supportive of the continued existence of a classification scheme but believe it needs to adapt to remain useful in the context of media convergence.

Consistent with the findings of previous research (see for example Newspoll, 2002; Galaxy Research, 2005), the results of this study suggest that adult Australians continue to see a role for classification in the 2014 media and entertainment landscape. Almost eight in ten survey respondents (78%) indicated classification remains useful in the context of media convergence.

There was, however, general agreement among focus group participants that a timely update of the current scheme is paramount to ensuring the continued relevance, utility, and usefulness of classification.

In particular, it was consistently suggested that the ability of government to police media purchasing/access appeared to be limited, and that this has implications for classification.

People's understanding of these implications varied. The prevailing view was that classification would need to move toward an advisory function; however some held the alternative view that more needed to be done to restrict access to material, particularly online.

² Quotas in line with ABS population statistics were applied to age, gender, and location.

Focus group participants generally believed that it was most feasible for the classification system to move to an advisory model. In addition, survey respondents suggested providing more detailed content information and encouraging use of classification (especially by parents) through education; both of which focus on the advisory rather than restrictive capacity of the classification system.

However, some respondents suggested *tightening* regulation and *toughening* enforcement measures, particularly in relation to online material.

It is also noteworthy that in a subsequent survey, respondents strongly supported the continued restriction of the MA 15+ category (see Appendix D).

Recommendation: Classification needs to continually and rapidly evolve to maximise relevance, utility, and usefulness in a convergent media environment. This evolution should, as much as possible, involve a decreased focus on restricting media and an increased focus on making recommendations and providing advice regarding content. Further research is required to determine how community concerns about access to MA 15+ content and online content could be addressed within a primarily advisory model.

Conclusion Two: the general public view the role of classification as twofold: the protection of children and the empowerment of adult consumers.

Overall, the findings relating to usage suggest that classification is used most often in relation to choosing media for children and occasionally to inform people's own media choices.

The results of the general public survey suggest that adult Australians are particularly likely to refer to classification ratings when choosing media for minors (70% at least some of the time for films/DVDs, 59% for games), somewhat likely to refer to them when choosing a film or DVD for themselves (55% at least some of the time) and less likely to do so when deciding on a computer game for themselves (38% at least some of the time). These findings are also consistent with previous research (see for example Newspoll, 2002; Galaxy Research, 2005).

Focus group participants believed that the primary role for film and computer game classification is to protect the viewer/player, especially children and young people, from discomfort or harm. This is comparable with results from previous research eg BBFC (2014). Only a few focus group participants mentioned that classification is used by adult consumers when deciding on media for themselves, reflecting the survey findings.

The role that classification plays in prohibiting media is not top-of-mind for the general public, other than those who are highly engaged with the subject of media classification.

Recommendation: The protection of children and empowerment of adult consumers should continue to be integral to the classification scheme.

Conclusion Three: consumer advice will become increasingly important in a convergent media environment.

Focus group participants consistently expressed a strong desire for the inclusion of more detailed consumer advice on packaging and advertising material, which they believed would be particularly important if classification moved to a more advisory model (see Conclusion One).

As noted previously, consumer advice (as is usually present on advertising and packaging material) was not included in the stimulus, as the focus of the study was classification categories and symbols. This may have influenced some responses; however, the desire for more detailed information was expressed not only in discussion of the current scheme, but also in appraisals of the alternatives tested (see Conclusion Eleven).

Recommendation: Where possible, efforts should be made to include more detailed consumer advice on packaging and advertising material. As a first step in this process, general public attitudes toward and preferences for consumer advice should be examined in further research.

Process and regulation of classification

Conclusion Four: there is support among the general public for co-regulation of classification by industry and government.

Just over half of the general public survey respondents (51%) indicated that responsibility for classification should lie with government, but almost one third (32%) indicated the alternate view, that responsibility should lie with the film and computer game industries, and almost 1 in 5 indicated that they were uncertain.

There was more detailed discussion of possible arrangements for regulation of classification in focus groups. On the whole, participants were opposed to self-regulation by industry but supportive of co-regulation by industry and government. As with the survey a number also expressed ambivalence or uncertainty on this matter.

A subsequent national survey conducted in September 2104 included a similar question on regulation, but this time gave *joint responsibility of government and industry* as a response option in addition to *government* and *industry* alone. There was considerably more support for the joint responsibility option (60%) than for either government alone (19%) or industry alone (12%).

Recommendation: further research with the general public is needed to gauge and quantify support for moving toward a co-regulatory arrangement in which primary responsibility lies with industry and secondary responsibility lies with the Commonwealth Government (as recommended in the ALRC's final report [2012]).

Conclusion Five: the independence of the Classification Board (and Classification Review Board) from government is viewed as a key strength of the current process for film and computer game classification in Australia.

Focus group participants considered the independence of the Classification Board (and Review Board) from government to be a strength of the current classification process.

Other key strengths noted about the process included rigour in approach (eg training of board members, existence of guidelines, and so on) and that there was an opportunity for decisions to be reviewed.

Awareness and understanding of the current classification ratings

Conclusion Six: awareness of current classification categories amongst adult Australians is high, with the exception of restricted categories.

Consistent with previous research, the current study found that adult Australians are highly familiar with most classification categories, with the general public survey revealing the following noteworthy findings:

- More than half of respondents were able to name, unprompted, the PG (61%); G (56%), and R 18+ (52%) classification categories.
- Around 9 in 10 respondents showed prompted awareness of the PG (93%) and G (88%) classification categories.

Reflecting opportunity for exposure, unprompted (10%) and prompted (50%) awareness was lowest for the X 18+ classification category.

Recommendation: High awareness of current ratings should be taken into account if changes are to be made to the current classification ratings. Changes should only be made if deemed necessary and would need to be supported by a comprehensive public education campaign.

Conclusion Seven: understanding of current classification ratings amongst adult Australians varies between categories.

Consistent with previous research, there was substantial evidence to suggest that the Australian public find mid-level classifications (ie M and MA 15+) confusing. Key findings of note are as follows:

- 76% of respondents provided an incorrect definition of MA 15+.
- 36% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: *I am confused about the difference between the M and MA 15+ ratings.*
- Qualitative research participants commonly expressed confusion when asked about the difference between the M and MA 15+ categories, with the problem being mentioned in all focus groups.

There was also evidence to suggest that the Australian public do not fully comprehend the difference between the R 18+ and X 18+ categories: 48% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are confused about the difference between the R 18+ and X 18+.

Recommendation: The Classification Branch (and other stakeholders) should work to eliminate public confusion of mid- and upper- level classifications. This may entail renaming categories, providing additional information to distinguish categories or educating the public, especially parents.

Conclusion Eight: inconsistencies between film and television classification categories, in particular MA and MA 15+, confuse the Australian public.

General public survey respondents commonly provided the television definition when they were asked what the MA 15+ symbol meant, suggesting the presence of confusion in the community. This finding is in line with submissions made to the ALRC review of classification.

Recommendation: Further research with the general public is required to pinpoint areas of confusion between ratings systems, so that the Classification Branch and television regulators can work together to bring the categories into alignment.

Perceptions of current classification ratings and responses to alternatives

Conclusion Nine: adult Australians consider the current classification ratings favourably, but identify specific areas for improvement.

Asked to rate the overall quality of the current classifications, a combined total of 80% of general public survey respondents indicated that the ratings were either 'Excellent' (17%) 'Very good' (32%) or 'Good' (31%), indicating the current ratings are favourably viewed, but there may be room for improvement. Asked to list ways in which the current classification ratings could be improved, the largest proportion (44%) did not have changes to suggest, however specific suggestions were made by others, including more information on specific content (16%)³ and resolving confusion between R 18+ and X 18+ categories (11%).

A number of improvements were also suggested by focus group participants, including greater differentiation between M and MA 15+, and introducing more specific guidance (or additional classifications) for younger viewers and teens.

However, focus group participants were more in favour of minor adjustments to classification categories, rather than a complete overhaul. Support for the current categories was associated with high levels of familiarity and at least adequate understanding of the categories amongst the Australian public, especially parents. As noted earlier, general public survey respondents also demonstrated very high awareness and a solid understanding of *most* classification categories.

Recommendation: positive general public views on the current classification categories (combined with high awareness and use and sound understanding amongst the general public) suggest that

³ Note that Consumer Advice was not included on stimuli.

a major overhaul of all categories is not required. Weaknesses should be addressed through minor adjustments rather than substantive changes.

Conclusion Ten: the general public responded positively to alternative classification ratings (especially Option One: G, PG 8+, Y 13+, M 15+, R 18+, X 18+, Prohibited) but, taken in conjunction with other results, the response was not positive enough to warrant changing to either system.

Around half of survey respondents (51%) indicated that they preferred alternative Option One (G, PG 8+, Y 13+, M 15+, R 18+, X 18+, Prohibited) to the current classification ratings and just under half (46%) indicated that they preferred Option Two (G, 5+, 10+, 15+, 18+, Prohibited) to the current classification ratings. In addition, more than one in five considered both alternative options 'about the same' as the current ratings hierarchy. However, when the favourable responses on the current ratings are taken into account, these results do not warrant a change to either alternative set of ratings.

Similar results were found in focus groups, with the exception of one group where a clear preference for the maintenance of the *current* classification ratings was expressed. Focus group participants said that neither alternative option was superior enough to replace the current classification hierarchy, especially given that the public were familiar with the current categories and they appeared to be functioning adequately.

A number of strengths were attributed to the alternatives, the implications of which are discussed below. Suggested refinements to the alternative categories included:

- renaming the 'Youth' category
 - renaming the 'Prohibited' category
 - increasing the number of lower-level categories (ie aimed at ages 0-13) and decreasing the number of upper-level categories (ie aimed at ages 13+)
 - using the term 'Recommended' rather than 'Suitable' in descriptions of non-restricted categories.
-

Conclusion Eleven: consistent feedback on the alternative options, and suggestions for improvement of the current set of ratings, suggest that any revisions to the current ratings should include greater age differentiation across lower level categories and more detailed information on content.

During focus groups, there were frequent unprompted suggestions to include more specific age recommendations, including increasing the number of categories for younger audiences.

This desire was also reflected in feedback on the two alternative sets of ratings categories tested. Both alternative categories had a number of perceived strengths, however, the most commonly noted by survey respondents and focus group participants was greater differentiation at lower-level age categories. In addition, many of those who preferred one or both alternatives to the current ratings gave reasons such as:

- easier to understand (especially mid- level categories) (both options)
- more detailed information (Option One)
- 'traffic light' colour coding of the symbols aids interpretation (both options).

Recommendation: Neither alternative classification hierarchy (Option One and Option Two) should be adopted at present, however, general public feedback on these scales, particularly the inclusion of more specific age recommendations for 'lower level' material, should be taken into account if changes are made to current classification ratings or information.

1

This chapter outlines the research context, objectives and methodology

1. Introduction

1.1 Current arrangements for media classification in Australia

The National Classification Scheme

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 Scheme commenced in 1996 following recommendations made by the Australian Law Reform Commission about censorship procedure (see 1991 Report No. 55). The Commonwealth, states and territories entered into the Intergovernmental Agreement on Censorship to underpin the scheme.

The *Commonwealth Classification Act 1995* established both the Classification Board and Classification Review Board and set out the procedures to be followed in making decisions (Commonwealth of Australia 2014).

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

Classification Board	Classification Branch	Classification Review Board
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. Each state and territory government has classification enforcement legislation to complement the Commonwealth Classification Act. Enforcement legislation sets out how films, publications and computer games can be sold, hired, exhibited, advertised and demonstrated. Some states and territories have reserved censorship powers and varying classification requirements which are outlined in their legislation (Commonwealth of Australia 2014).

Ratings categories

The *National Classification 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.

The Classification Board uses six *classifiable elements* to assess impact when making a classification decision. These are:

- Themes
- Violence
- Sex
- Language
- Drug use
- Nudity (Commonwealth of Australia 2014)

Film and computer games

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 classification and may be legally bought and read by children. 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).

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:

- Children's (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 selected classification and reviewing 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. The research thus includes consultation with industry, consumer advocacy and government and regulation agencies (referred to henceforth as 'stakeholders'). In addition, the unique perspective of Classification 'practitioners' (ie members of the Classification Board, Classification Review Board and Classification Branch staff assessors) has been sought.

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 for the first project.

The literature review concluded that:

- There is broad backing for and confidence in classification systems, both in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions.
- There is a high awareness of the National Classification Scheme and categories/ markings amongst the Australian public; however, quantitative research undertaken in this area is dated.
- Understanding of classification ratings amongst the Australian public (and amongst the public in comparable jurisdictions) is mixed, with significant variation observed across categories.
- Understanding of mid-level (ie M and MA 15+) classifications amongst the Australian public is problematic
- (Self-reported) use of classification and rating information amongst the general public (especially parents) is relatively high across jurisdictions.

In order for a classification system to be successful, it is essential that classification ratings are recognised, understood and used correctly by members of the general public, especially parents and other primary caregivers. The conclusions outlined above suggest that this may not be reliably occurring. In addition, the Australian public's awareness and use of current classification ratings (and accompanying advice) has not been quantitatively examined by the Branch since 2007; as such the influence of media convergence on use and perceptions of classification has not been the subject of a dedicated investigation.

This study

Following on from the findings of the literature review, the Classification Branch undertook a quantitative and qualitative study with members of the general public to investigate:

- awareness and understanding of current classification ratings
- 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
- responses 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.

1.4 Methodology

The study included the following components:

- an online survey with 1030 members of the general public
- 7 focus groups with members of the general public
- an online survey with 16 practitioners
- in-depth interviews, either face to face or by telephone, with 24 stakeholders.

This report contains the findings of research with **the general public only**. Findings from consultation with stakeholders and practitioners are presented in a separate report, titled *Classification Ratings: Stakeholder and Practitioner Consultation*, produced concurrently with this report. The methodology used for research with the general public is discussed in detail below.

Online survey with general public

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

Questionnaire sub-sections are as follows:

- awareness and understanding of current classification ratings and symbols
- use and perceived relevance of current classification ratings and symbols
- strengths and weaknesses of current and alternative classification ratings and symbols
- demographic and media consumption profile.

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

The survey was conducted online, using a quota-based sample⁴, 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 classification markings).

⁴ Quotas were applied to age, gender, and location.

- 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 (eg familiarity with and understanding of the current X 18+ classification category and markings).
- 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 April 2014. The total sample size achieved was n=1030.

Focus groups with general public

Qualitative research with the general public took place via a combination of metropolitan and regional focus groups (n=3 metropolitan focus groups; n=4 regional focus groups) with community members aged over 18. Efforts were made to recruit a mix of ages, genders, and parents/ non-parents but no quotas were placed on these demographic variables.

Metropolitan focus groups were conducted on Monday 16 December 2013 (1pm – 2.30pm; 6pm-7.30pm) and Tuesday 17 December 2013 (1pm – 2.30pm) at the Classification Branch (Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department) offices in Surry Hills, Sydney. Focus group participants were recruited from a register of self-nominated research volunteers maintained by the Department. This group of volunteers responded to offline and online advertising which requested participants for classification-related research. No incentives were provided for participation, but reasonable travel costs were reimbursed.

Regional focus groups were conducted on Monday 24 February 2014 (6pm-7.30pm; 8pm-9.30pm) in Shepparton, Victoria and on Wednesday 30 April 2014 (4pm – 5.30; 6pm – 7.30pm) in Toowoomba, Queensland. Focus group participants were recruited using a professional recruiter, and an \$80 incentive was provided for participation.

Note that variation in recruitment approach (including incentives) has been taken into account in reporting; however, comparisons across metropolitan and regional groups should nevertheless be interpreted with caution.

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

1.5 Presentation of findings

Qualitative data

Findings from the focus groups are presented in a qualitative manner. This approach does not allow for the exact number of participants holding a particular view on individual issues to be measured. As such, general themes and reactions, rather than exact proportions, are reported for all qualitative data.

For the purposes of this report, *qualitative research* refers to the data collected during focus groups. When data has been collected through a single data-collection method, the approach is directly stated.

While the most common findings are generally reported, opinions held by a minority of participants have been included when they are considered to be important and to have wide-ranging implications/ applications. Quotes have been provided throughout the report to support the main results or findings under discussion.

Quantitative data

Unless directly stated, percentages presented in the report are based on the total number of valid responses made to the question being reported on. Therefore, in most cases the base consists of the total number of respondents who had a view and for whom the question was relevant. 'Don't know' and 'Unsure', and 'Not Applicable' responses have been included when this aids in the interpretation of results.

Overall percentage results for the general public survey (answered by 1030 respondents) have a degree of sampling error (ie confidence interval) at the 95% level of ± 3 percentage points (pp). This means that there is a 95% probability (abstracting from non-sampling error) that the percentage results will be within ± 3 pp of the results that would have been obtained if the entire population had responded. Higher degrees of sampling error apply to questions answered by fewer respondents.

For the purposes of this report, quantitative research refers to the data collected via the online survey with the general public.

2

This chapter outlines general public views on the purpose, process, and regulation of classification

2. Perceptions of the Australian National Classification Scheme

2.1 Role of classification

When asked about the purpose of film and computer game classification, focus group participants most commonly reported that the classification system exists so that parents (and other caregivers, including teachers) can protect children and adolescents from exposure to disturbing, and potentially harmful, media. Indeed, parents often noted that they had been unaware, or only vaguely aware, of classification information prior to having children. Classification was more strongly associated with films/DVDs and television than computer games, with several focus group participants expressing surprise that ratings are applied to computer games.

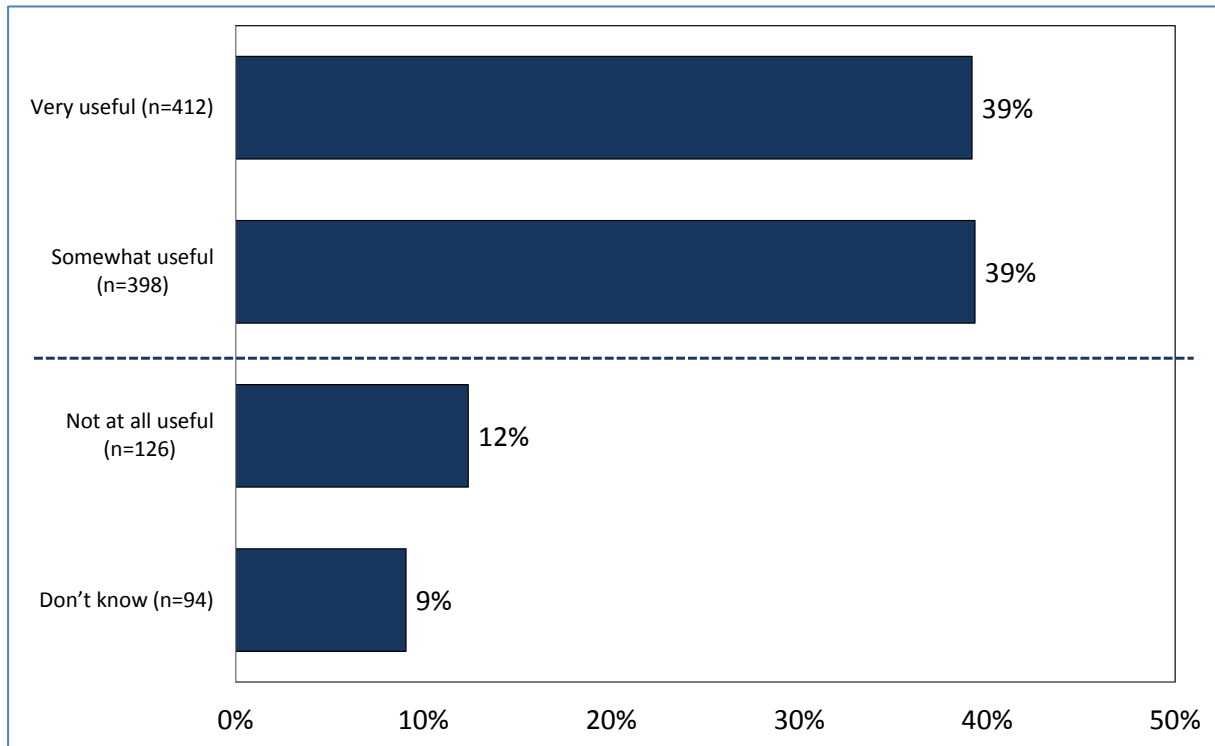
I didn't know anything about classification until I had kids. Kids are always wanting to watch the next higher classification than they are allowed.

Frequently, focus group participants suggested that personal use of ratings and/or consumer advice by adults is limited. However, many acknowledged classification plays a role in allowing adults to make informed decisions about the media that they consume.

Only a few focus group participants mentioned the role that classification plays in prohibiting material. These focus group participants were generally computer game enthusiasts who made reference to particular games that had received a rating of 'Refused Classification'.

When specifically prompted on the role of classification in a convergent media environment, focus group participants commonly envisaged a classification system that increasingly focussed on education (especially for parents) and advice, rather than restrictions.

It is unavoidable that you can now get content bypassing the classification restrictions entirely but it doesn't mean that the general public shouldn't be educated about classifications.

Figure 1: Usefulness of classification in a convergent media environment

Base: n=1030

Q. Australian media consumers are currently able to access a vast array of local and international media online (including media from broadcasters, news organisations, social media sites, iTunes, YouTube, and so on) via an ever increasing number of internet-enabled devices and screens. How useful is the classification of films and computer games in this environment?

Survey respondents were also asked about the ongoing usefulness of classification ratings within the context of a convergent media environment. As shown in Figure 1 above, almost eight in ten respondents (78%) indicated classification remains useful, with 39% selecting 'Very useful' and a further 39% selecting 'Somewhat useful'. Only 12% of respondents felt that classification was 'Not at all useful' in a convergent media environment. Those who did not consider classification *very useful* were asked what could be done to make it more useful. The results are discussed in section 5.2.

2.2 Process of classification

Focus group participants were read a brief description of the classification process in Australia and asked to list the strengths and weaknesses of the process.⁵ The following key themes emerged in the list of strengths produced by focus group participants:

⁵ The description read to qualitative research participants is shown in Appendix B.

Perceived strengths

Rigorous approach

On the whole, participants spoke favourably of having material systematically reviewed by a trained Board, with several pleased that there existed guidelines to direct decision-making. Focus group participants further noted that the rigour applied to the classification process in Australia meant that the public (especially parents) could be confident when fully or partially basing their media choices on classification information. The process for Board appointment and training was, however, repeatedly questioned by focus group participants, with several participants asking directly for further information, or suggesting that the rigour of the system was dependent on the way in which the Board was appointed and/or trained.

It's comforting to know that someone has looked at the movie and it has been classified using a set of regulations. It gives you comfort that the movie you choose for you or your family is appropriate.

Independence from government

The independence of the Board (and Review Board) from government was also commonly cited as a strength of the classification process in Australia. Some focus group participants felt that this independence would assist in ensuring that classification decisions are not influenced by the social and moral alignment of the government of the day. A few tended to be more cynical of the relationship between the Boards and government, with several participants directly suggesting that classification decisions (and Board appointments) are sometimes highly political.

Theoretically the government is not imposing their belief system [on the classification process]

Opportunity for review

Focus group participants were also pleased that the classification process in Australia included an opportunity for decisions to be reviewed, suggesting that this component added to the robustness of the classification process.

There was less detailed discussion of weaknesses in the classification process amongst focus group participants; these are discussed below.

Perceived weaknesses

Lack of communication

While most focus group participants responded positively when read the description of the classification process in Australia, some participants also expressed surprise, and consequently suggested that engagement with and use of classification information could be improved if the processes were successfully communicated to the Australian public, especially parents.

Ability to restrict material

A small minority of participants felt that the Classification Board and Review Board should not have the ability to prevent adults aged over 18 from watching or playing desired media. Most of these participants were not opposed to certain material being 'banned', but felt that the procedure should be managed outside of the classification process (ie through police and criminal justice system). A small number of participants believed there should be no restrictions placed on access to media; these views appeared to be motivated by a personal experience (eg. 'Gamers' who were dissatisfied that a computer game had been assigned a 'Refused Classification' rating).

Doubts about independence

As noted above, a few focus group participants were sceptical of the independence of the Classification Board and Review Board from government.

2.3 Regulation of classification

Survey results suggested that the Australian public have mixed views on who should be responsible for the regulation of classification, with just over half of respondents (51%) indicating that the responsibility should lie with government, around a third of respondents (32%) indicating that responsibility should lie with industry, and almost one in five (17%) indicating that they were uncertain (see Findings from focus groups with the general public diverged from survey results in that most focus group participants were opposed to sole regulation by industry. This opposition tended to be motivated by a scepticism about whether any industry (including the film and computer game industries) could be motivated by anything other than profits.

Self-regulation in interest group industries does not work, nobody polices it.

Self-regulation is weak and pretty ineffective.

However, focus group participants were often supportive of co-regulation, with most participants responding positively to suggestions of a system jointly managed by industry and government.

Figure 2, overleaf). These results suggest a preference for government regulation but also a degree of ambivalence on this matter.⁶

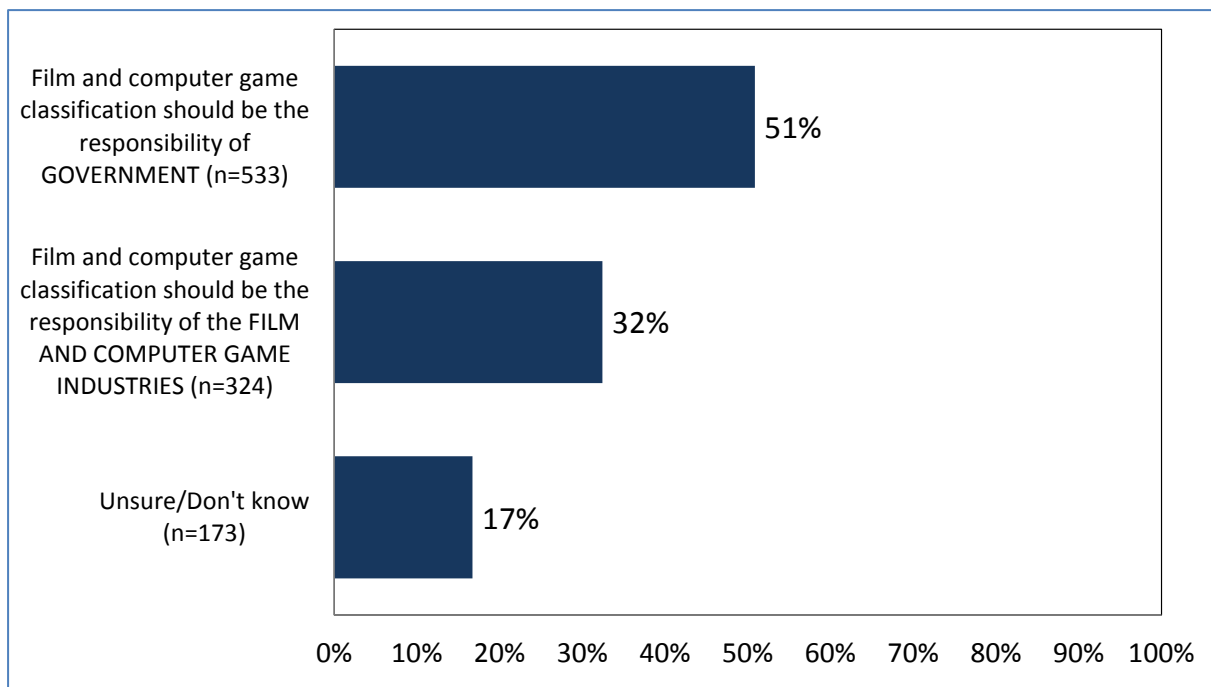
Findings from focus groups with the general public diverged from survey results in that most focus group participants were opposed to sole regulation by industry. This opposition tended to be motivated by a scepticism about whether any industry (including the film and computer game industries) could be motivated by anything other than profits.

Self-regulation in interest group industries does not work, nobody polices it.

Self-regulation is weak and pretty ineffective.

However, focus group participants were often supportive of co-regulation, with most participants responding positively to suggestions of a system jointly managed by industry and government.

Figure 2: Responsibility for film and computer game classification in Australia



Base: n=1030

Q. Who do you think should be responsible for the classification of films and computer games in Australia?

⁶ It was decided to rephrase the question in a subsequent survey, adding the response option "Film and computer game classification should be the *joint* responsibility of government and the film and game industries". In response, 60% of respondents preferred this option, 19% preferred government alone and 12% preferred industry alone. Full results are shown in Appendix C.

3

This chapter outlines awareness and understanding of classification categories and markings amongst the general public

3. Awareness and understanding of current classification ratings

3.1 Awareness of classification ratings

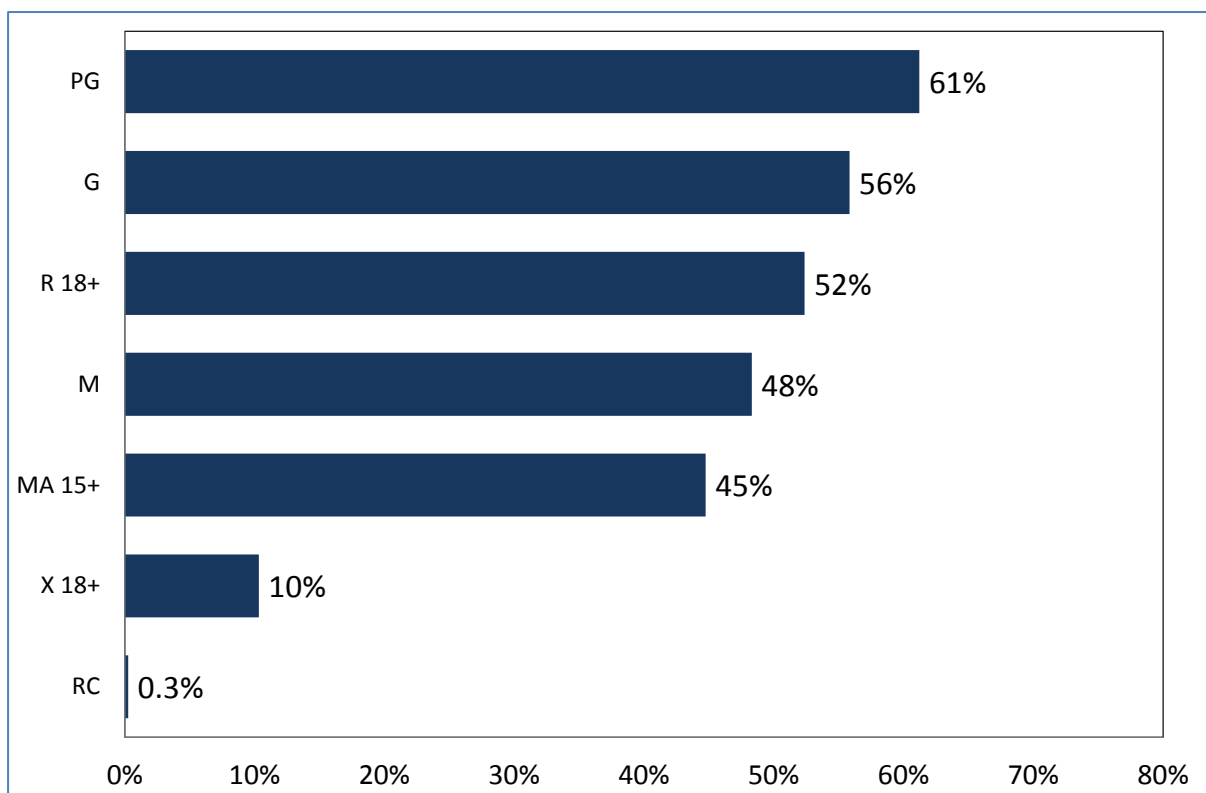
Awareness of classification ratings amongst the general public was assessed via unprompted and prompted questions included in the quantitative survey. The results for each are reported below.

Unprompted assessment of awareness

Survey respondents were asked, in a completely open-ended fashion, to list all the classification ratings for films and computer games that they are currently aware of. The proportion of respondents who correctly named each of the current classification ratings is shown in Figure 3, below.

Unprompted awareness was highest for the PG (61%), G (56%), and R 18+ (52%) classification ratings, with more than half of survey respondents mentioning each of these categories. Awareness of the RC category was very low, less than 1% of respondents spontaneously mentioning this category.

Figure 3: Unprompted awareness of classification ratings



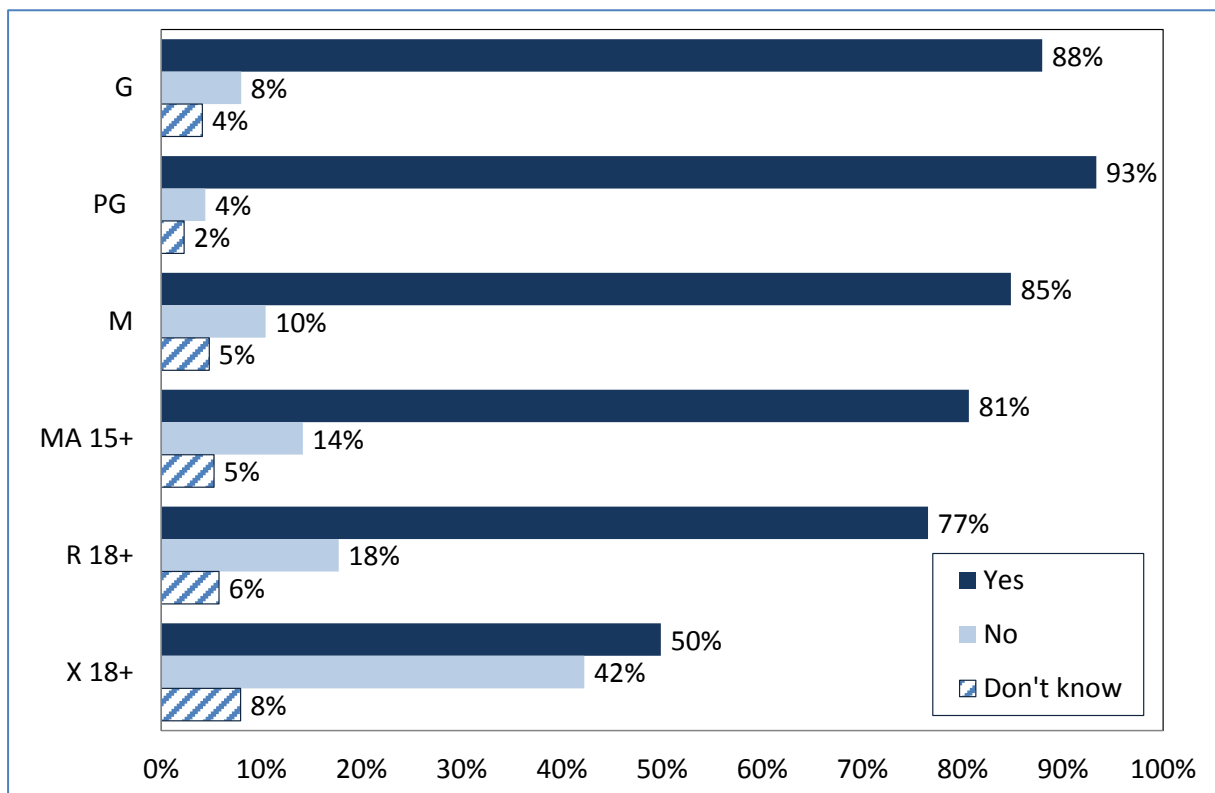
Base: n=1030

Q. 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. Can you name all of the ratings for films and computer games that you are currently aware of?

Prompted assessment of awareness

Prompted awareness of classification ratings was considerably higher than unprompted awareness. Survey respondents were shown each of the current Australian classification symbols (in a random order) and asked to indicate whether they had seen the symbol prior to completing the survey (see Figure 4, below). Awareness was high for all symbols bar X 18+, with more than 7 in 10 respondents indicating that they had previously seen the G (88%), PG (93%), M (85%), MA 15+ (81%), and R 18+ (77%) categories. Not surprisingly given the more limited opportunity of exposure, awareness of the X 18+ symbol was lower, with 50% of respondents indicating that they had seen the symbol previously, 42% indicating that they had not seen the symbol previously, and 8% indicating that they were unsure.

Figure 4: Prompted awareness of classification ratings

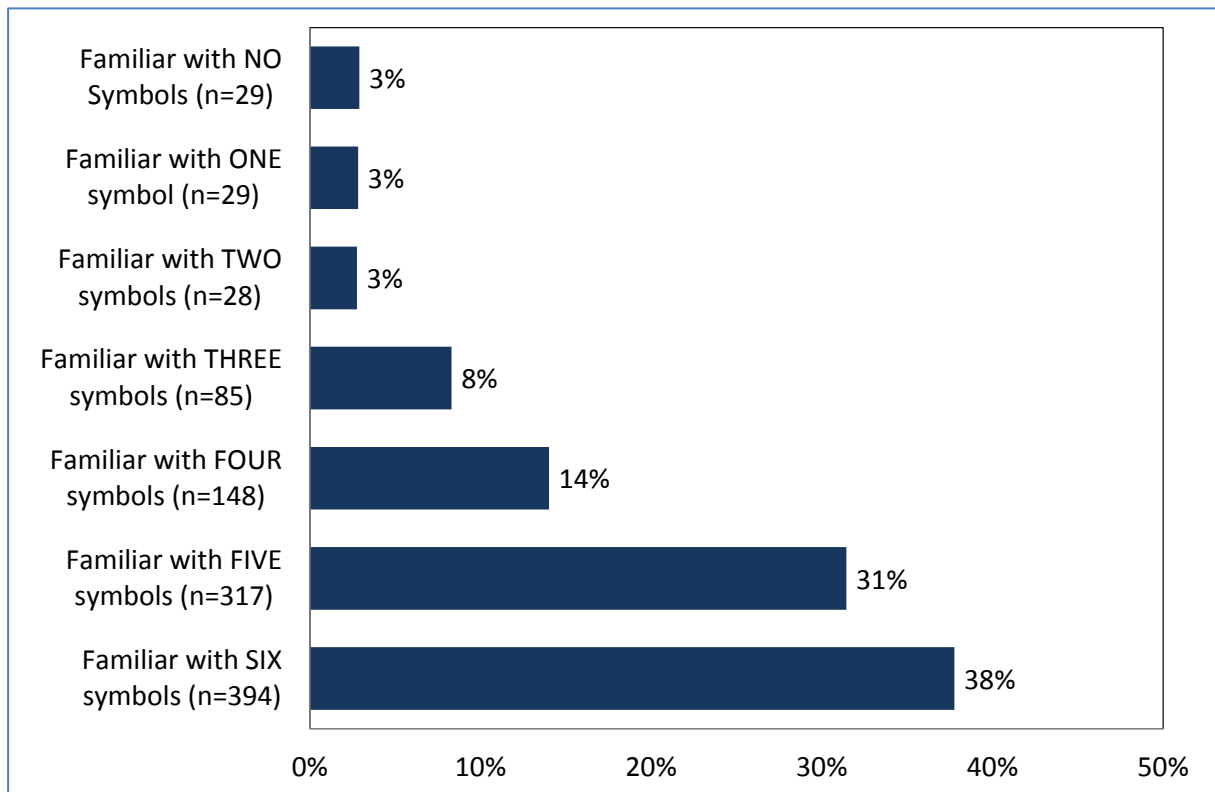


Base: n=1030

Q. Have you seen this symbol before today?

As shown in Figure 5, 83% of respondents were familiar with four or more of the classification symbols, providing further evidence of high awareness amongst the Australian public. Only around 3% were familiar with no classification symbols.

Figure 5: Number of classification symbols seen before completing survey



Base: n=1030

Q. Have you seen this symbol before today?

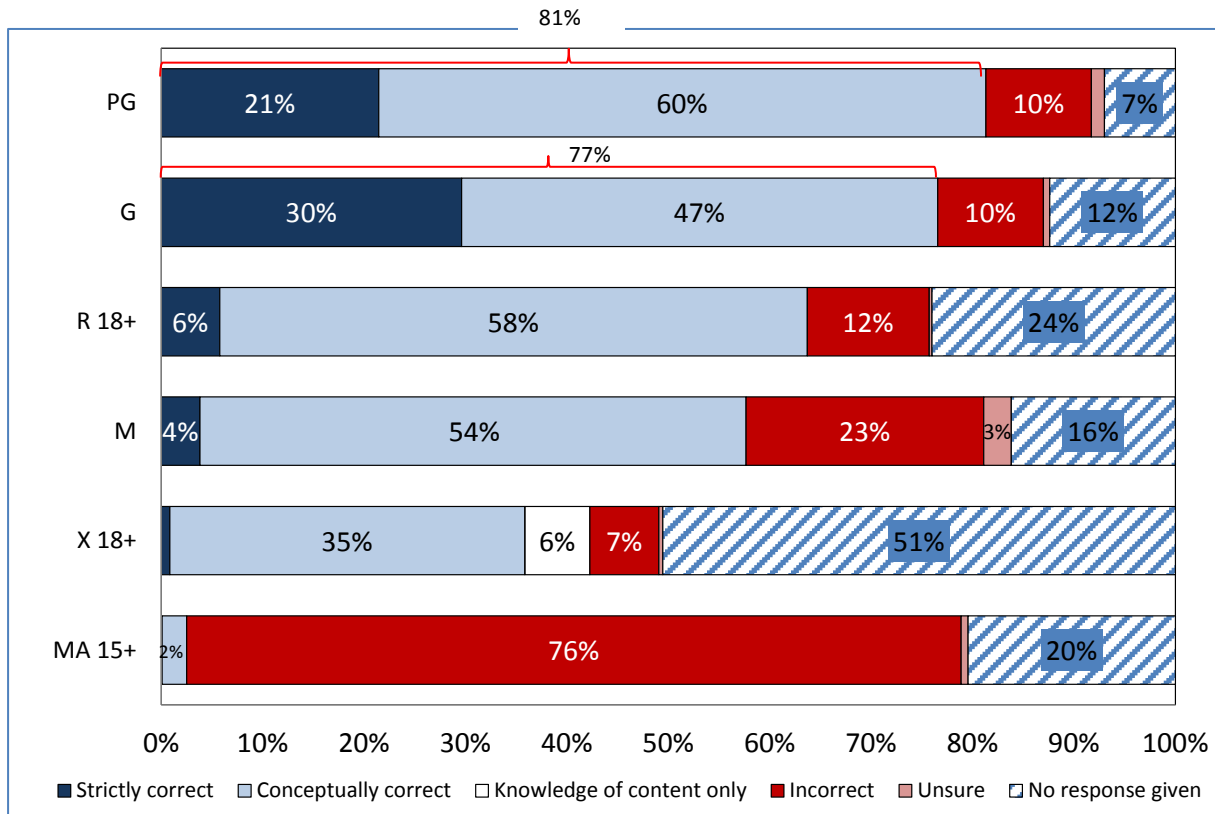
3.2 Understanding of classification ratings

Unprompted assessment of understanding

Understanding of classification categories/markings was firstly assessed by asking survey respondents who indicated that they were familiar with each marking (ie prompted awareness – see Figure 4, above) to provide a definition of that marking (ie What do you think this symbol means?). Consistent with the approach taken for *Classification Study* (Galaxy Research, 2005), the text responses given by respondents were then coded into the following categories: Strictly correct (ie exact or close to exact wording of formal definition of category); Conceptually correct (where the response was not strictly correct but it was clear that the respondent had a conceptual understanding of the classification description); Knowledge of content only (in relation to X 18+); Incorrect (where the description included errors); and Unsure (see Figure 6, overleaf). In an effort to accurately portray the overall level of understanding amongst adult Australians, the 'No response given' category includes both respondents who failed to provide a definition *and* those who were unfamiliar with the symbol.

Level of understanding varied significantly across categories, with understanding highest for PG (81% of respondents provided a definition that was at least conceptually correct) and G (77% of respondents provided a definition that was at least conceptually correct) and lowest for MA 15+ (2% of respondents provided a correct definition). Survey respondents who provided an incorrect definition for the MA 15+ category most commonly interpreted the category as either ‘*Mature adults only aged 15 and over*’ or ‘*Mature Audiences*’.

Figure 6: Understanding of classification categories



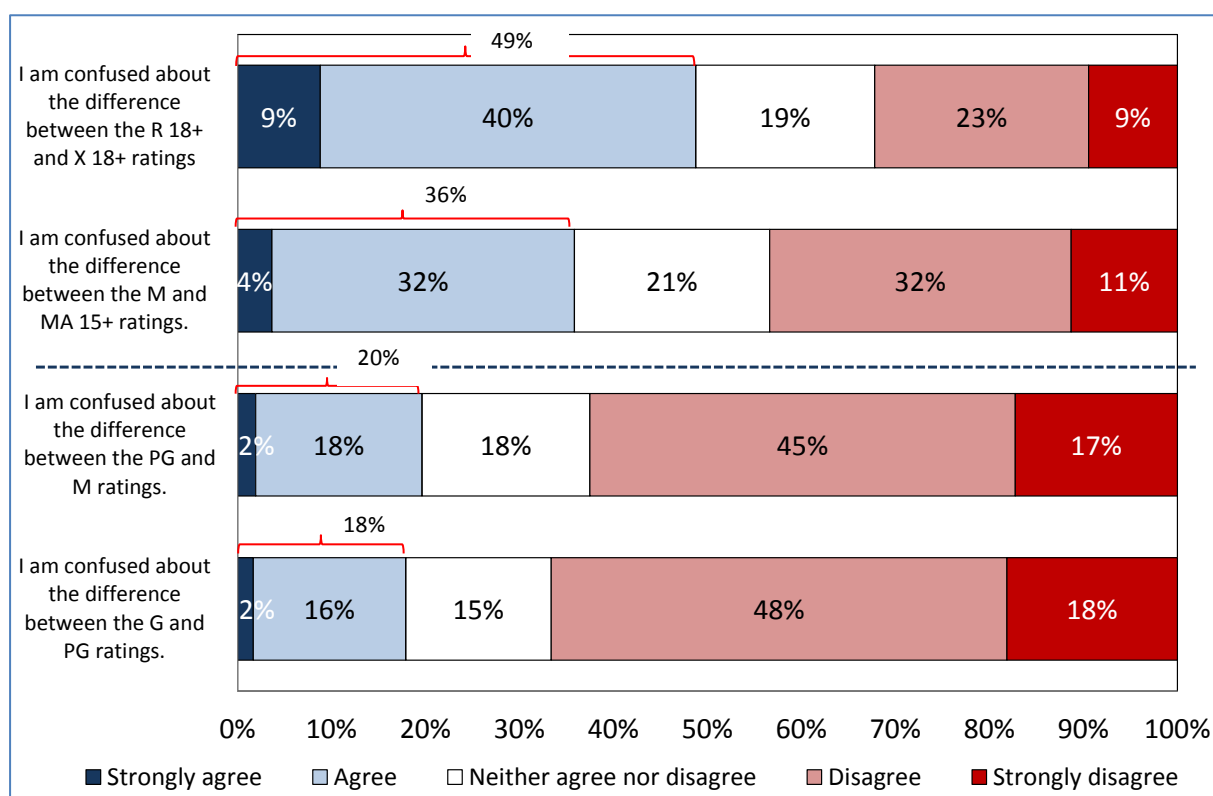
Base: n=1030

Q. What do you think this symbol means?

Prompted assessment of understanding

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about confusion between classification ratings. This question was included as previous studies have suggested that the Australian public do not fully comprehend the difference between M and MA 15+, and R 18+ and X 18+. The results of this question provided further evidence in support of this view, with almost half of respondents (49%) either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were confused about the difference between R 18+ and X 18+, and around a third (36%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were confused about the difference between M and MA 15+ (see Figure 7 below). In contrast, less than a quarter of respondents were confused about the difference between PG and M ratings (20%) or G and PG ratings (18%).

Figure 7: Confusion between classification categories



Base: n=1030

Q. Below are some statements about ratings currently used to classify films and computer games in Australia. For each statement, please indicate whether you agree or disagree.

Focus group participants also commonly expressed confusion when asked about the difference between the M and MA 15+ categories, with the problem being mentioned in all focus groups. When commenting on the R 18+ and X 18+ categories, in contrast, participants were more likely to suggest that the X 18+ category is redundant. It was felt that the nature of content, pornographic or otherwise, could be communicated via consumer advice.

The M and MA 15+ bothers me... they're too similar.

The X symbol is redundant. Things are either open to all adults or not. People must be responsible for their personal behaviour.

4

This chapter outlines the nature and the extent of the use of classification information by the general public.

4. Use of classification ratings

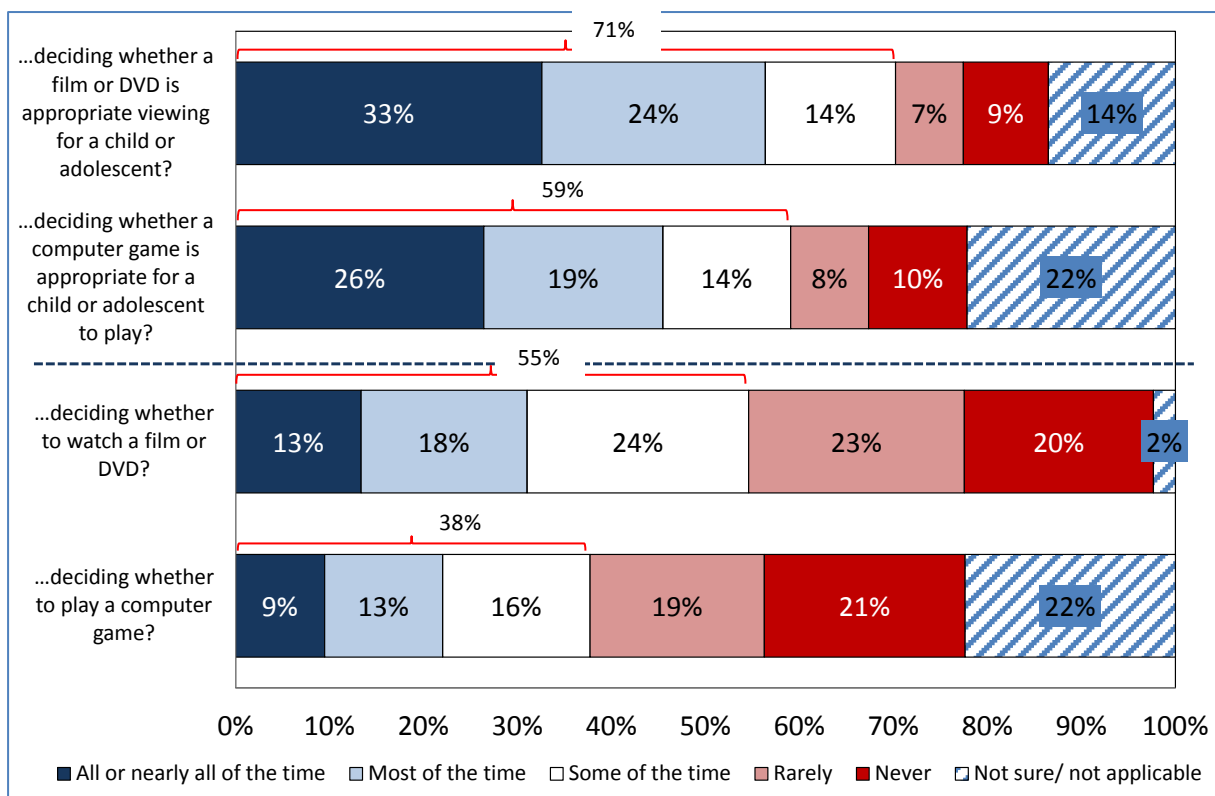
4.1 Use of classification information

Consistent with previous studies, (see for example Newspoll 2002; Galaxy Research 2005) the survey results suggest that Australian adults are most likely to use classification ratings when deciding whether a film or DVD is appropriate viewing for a child or adolescent, with some 70% using ratings at least some of the time in this context. This includes 33% indicating that they use ratings for this purpose either 'All or nearly all of the time' and 24% 'Most of the time' (see Figure 8, below).

Use of ratings when deciding whether a computer game is appropriate for a child or adolescent to play was also relatively commonplace: 59% said they use ratings at least some of the time in this context (including 26% 'All or nearly all of the time' and 19% 'Most of the time').

Respondents were less, but still fairly likely to report referring to ratings when deciding for themselves whether to watch a DVD (55% at least some of the time, including 31% 'All or nearly all of the time' or 'Most of the time'). However a minority (38%) used ratings at least some of the time when deciding whether to play a computer game (9% 'All or nearly all of the time' and 13% 'Most of the time').

Figure 8: Classification ratings – frequency of use (All respondents)

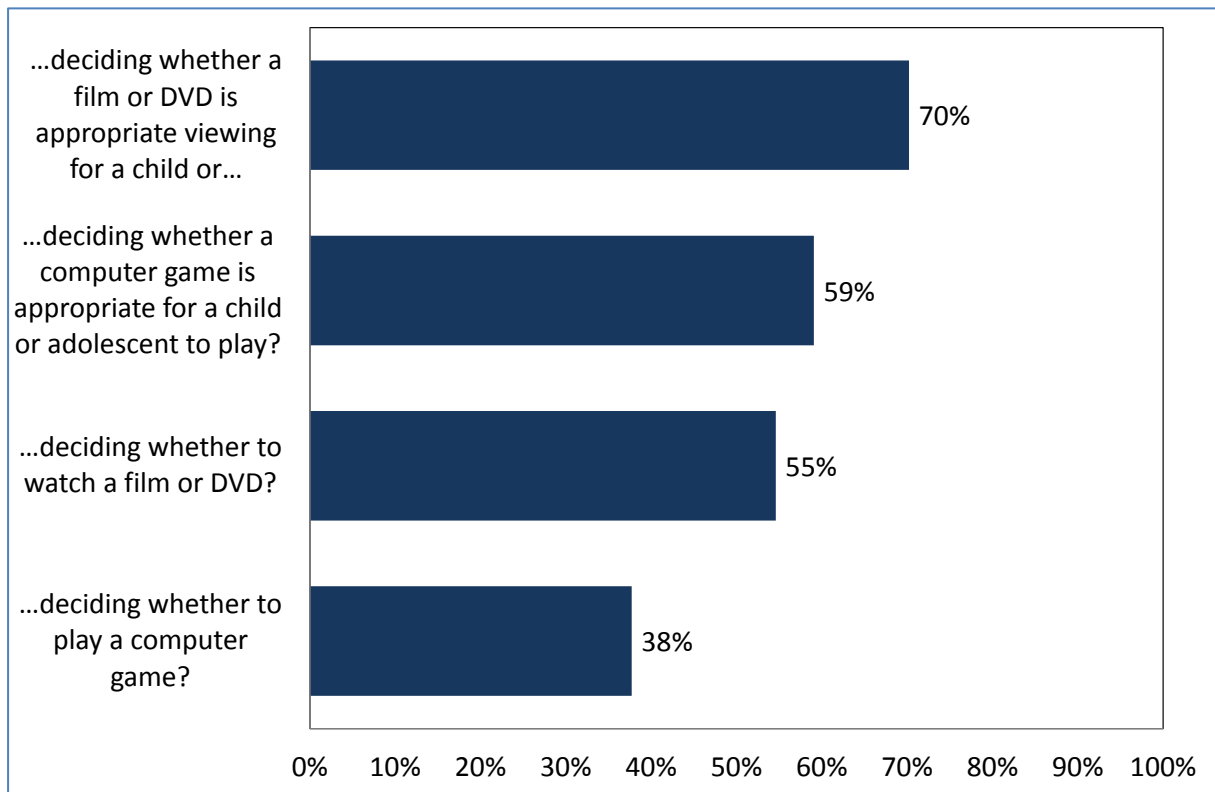


Base: n=1030

Q. How often do you refer to a rating when...?

Figure 9 shows the proportion of survey respondents who indicated that they refer to ratings at least some of the time (ie proportion of respondents who selected 'All or nearly all of the time', 'Most of the time', or 'Some of the time').

Figure 9: Proportion of regular users



Base: n=1030

Q. How often do you refer to a rating when...?

In line with survey results, focus group participants were most likely to report that they refer to classification ratings when deciding whether a film or DVD is appropriate viewing for a child or adolescent. Parents of adolescent 'gamers' tended to further stress that they pay particular attention to the ratings included on computer games. This attention was mostly driven by (a) the belief that computer games have the potential to be more 'harmful' than DVDs or films, or (b) a lack of confidence in self-assessment of suitability due to a lack of familiarity with the media type.

As noted above, only a minority of focus group participants reported that classification information, especially ratings, guides their personal media consumption. However, a clear theme emerged when these participants were queried on the ways in which they use this information, with most adult-users reporting that ratings and/or consumer advice helps them to avoid content – most notably, violence and coarse language – that they do not feel comfortable viewing. Accordingly, these participants tended to indicate that they rely more heavily on consumer advice than on ratings.

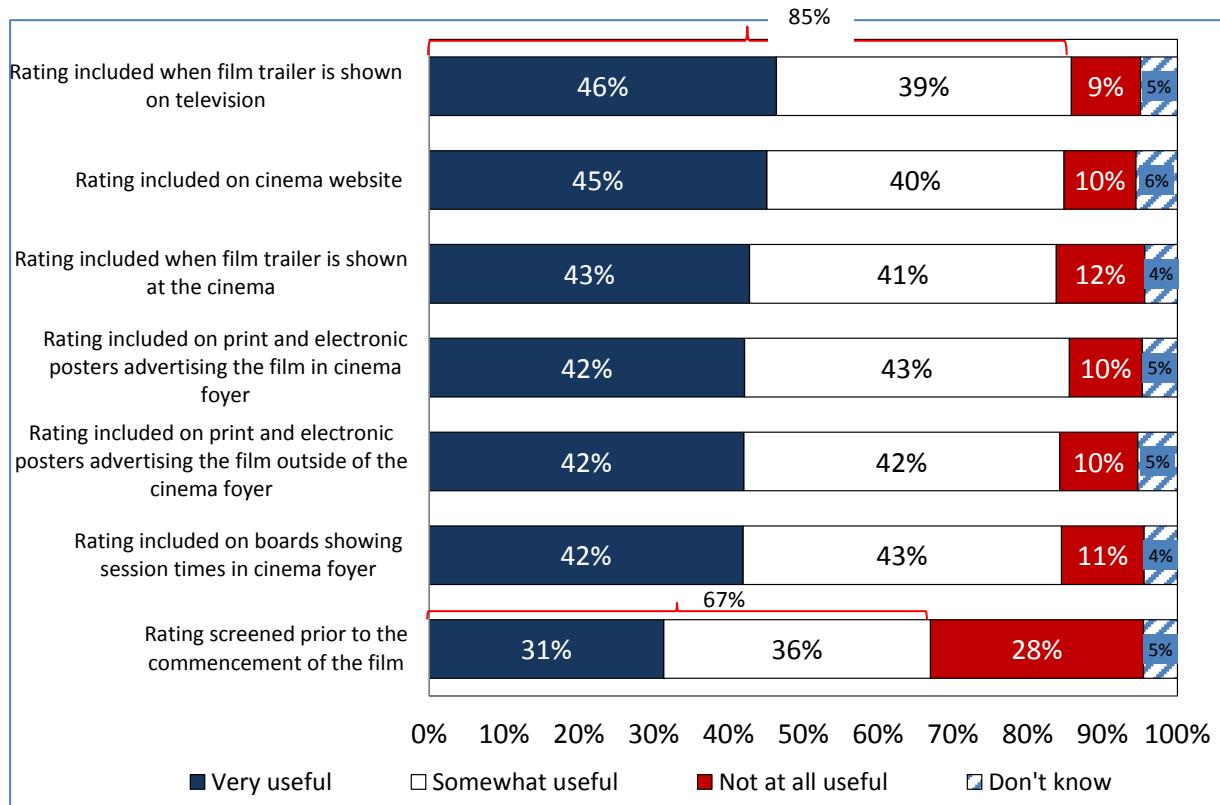
Rating system to help you make an educated judgment for you or your child.

It's about choice, choice for the duty of care for our children and also for myself. It gives me a quick way to work out if I'm going to enjoy something or not because I know what I like and what I don't like or am not comfortable with and by experience I know what ratings I don't get into – it's for myself as well as for my family.

4.2 Perceived usefulness of film classification information in various contexts

Survey respondents were asked specifically about the usefulness of selected classification information in guiding decisions about whether to see a film showing in the cinema only. The results for this question are shown in Figure 10.

On the whole, all proposed locations for film ratings were considered useful, with a total of between 67% and 85% of respondents selecting either 'Very useful' or 'Somewhat useful' for each. There was strong support for the rating to be included when the trailer is shown on television and on the cinema website, with almost half of respondents (46% and 45%, respectively) indicating that these locations were 'Very useful'. However, 28% of survey respondents felt that screening the rating prior to the commencement of the film would be 'Not at all useful', presumably because the decision to view the film had already been made at this point.

Figure 10: Usefulness of rating locations (film shown in cinema only)

Base: n=1030

Q. Thinking specifically about when you are deciding whether or not to watch a film showing in cinemas only, how useful would you find this classification information?

5

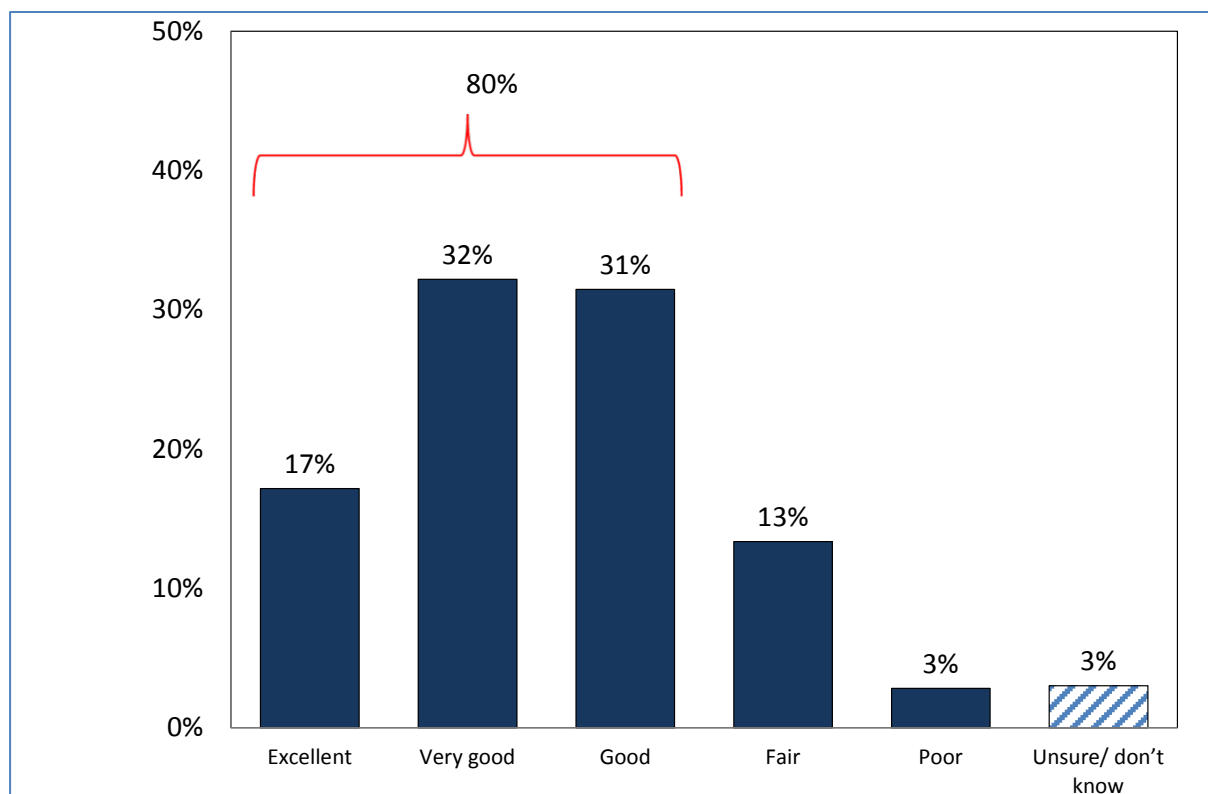
This chapter outlines general public views on the current classification categories and markings. Suggestions for improvement are also considered.

5. Perception of current classification ratings

5.1 Assessment of the current classification hierarchy

Survey respondents were shown the ratings used to classify films and computer games in Australia, and asked to rate their overall quality as a set. A combined total of 80% indicated that the ratings were either 'Excellent' (17%) 'Very good' (32%) or 'Good' (31%), suggesting that the Australian public aged 18+ have a generally positive view of the current ratings (see Figure 11, below).

Figure 11: Satisfaction with classification hierarchy – General public



Base: n=1030

Q. The ratings currently used to classify films and computer games in Australia are shown below. Overall, would you say this set of ratings is...?

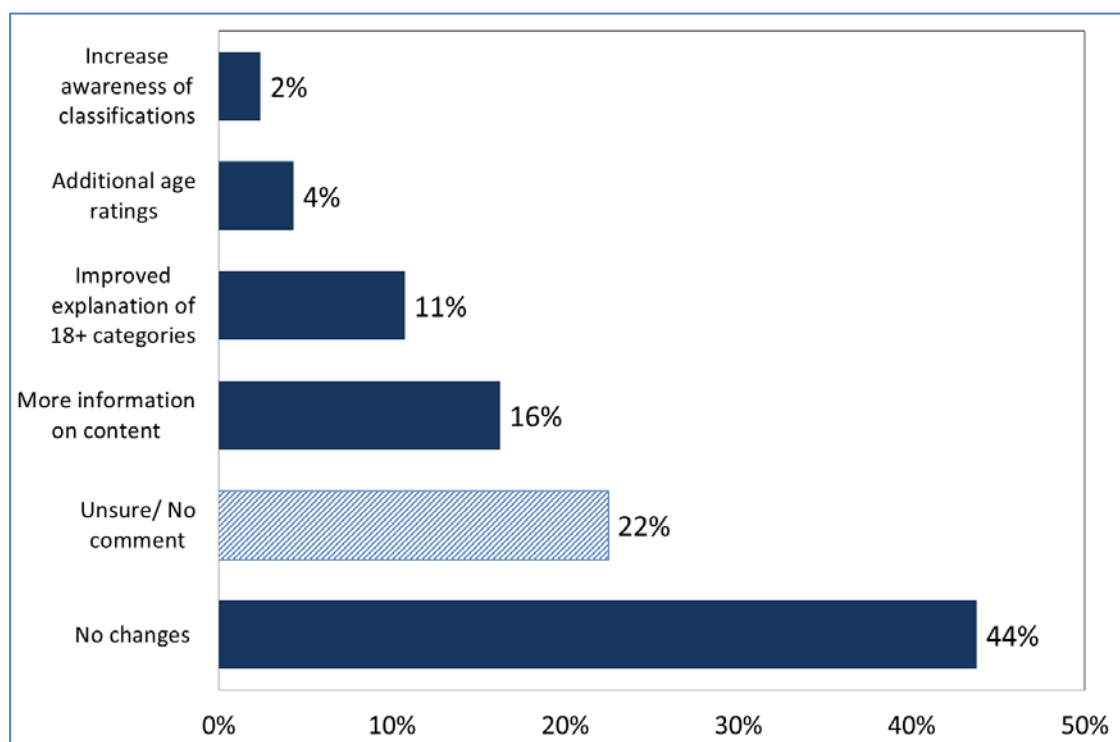
On the whole, focus group participants were also supportive of the current classification ratings, with even the most critical participants tending to suggest minor alterations rather than a complete overhaul of the hierarchy. Support for current classification ratings appeared to be associated with familiarity and at least adequate understanding amongst the general public. Put simply, while imperfections were noted, these imperfections were not considered to warrant major changes. Participants were also quick to point out that there would be weaknesses with all alternative sets of categories/markings. Specific suggestions for improvement have been outlined in the following section.

5.2 Suggestions for improvement

When asked to list the ways in which the current classification ratings and symbols could be improved, the largest proportion (44%) said they had no suggestions or that no changes were required and a further 22% made no comment or said they were uncertain (see Figure 12 overleaf).

This result appears to reflect the high level of satisfaction with the current ratings reported by respondents. Sixteen percent of respondents requested additional information on specific content⁷ and 11% felt that the difference between content allowed at R 18+ and X 18+ was unclear, and that these categories should be altered to better communicate the difference to the public.

Figure 12: Suggestions for improvement – current classification ratings



Base: n=1030

Q. Please list all the ways in which you think the current ratings could be improved. Please consider both the ratings and the symbols (including colours) used to represent each rating.

Respondents who had rated the classification of films and games as less useful in the context of media convergence (see section 2.1, Figure 1) were also asked what could be done to make classification information *more useful*. Many did not make a suggestion; however the most frequent suggestions were:

- Provide more information in relation to content (87 comments)
- Increase awareness of classification/educate the community/ parents on the benefits of using classification information (46 comments)
- Facilitating restriction of online material (32 comments)
- Introducing tougher restrictions or enforcement measures relating to classification (29 comments).

Focus group participants were also asked to list all the ways in which the current ratings could be improved. The most frequently made suggestions included:

⁷ Note that Consumer Advice was not included on stimuli.

- differentiate M and MA 15+ - alternatively merge M and MA 15+⁸

"M and MA 15+ are too similar and need to have a better distinction."

"M is misleading as its place in the scale implies early teen."

- reduce the number of categories
- introduce more specific classifications for younger children (as opposed to the one G rating)

"...G and PG – it is difficult to know which ratings would suit various age groups."

- introduce classifications for older and younger teens (as opposed to 15 year olds and everyone under 15)
- combine R 18+ and X 18+ categories and differentiate content via descriptors (eg sex, strong violence)

"The X symbol is redundant. Things are either open to all 'adults' or not"

- take steps to improve differentiation between PG and M, MA 15+ and R 18+
- adopt clearer, possibly age based colour coding (eg traffic light colours)
- include more detailed information on content.⁹

Several focus group participants expressed a preference for an increase in the number of lower-level classification categories (ie categories aimed at ages 0-13) and a decrease in the number of upper-level classification categories (ie categories aimed at ages 13+). This desire tended to be motivated by a belief that the classification system needs to evolve to be more advisory (and less restrictive) in an increasingly convergent media environment. Participants were also supportive of combining the R 18+ and X 18+ categories into a single 'adults only' category.

However, many focus group participants specifically noted that they were happy with the current system and did not see an urgent need for change. Some were even opposed to switching or making major changes to the current system.

"(Major changes) would be inconvenient, costly and have a large impact on those accustomed to the current system"

⁸ M is currently an advisory category, while MA 15+ is restricted to those aged 15 or over unless they are accompanied by an adult. Therefore merging these categories would involve altering or lifting the restriction. Respondents to a subsequent survey conducted in September 2014 were asked whether the MA 15+ rating should be legally restricted. The majority, 66% supported the maintenance of the legal restriction for MA 15+. Full results are shown in Appendix D.

⁹ As above

6

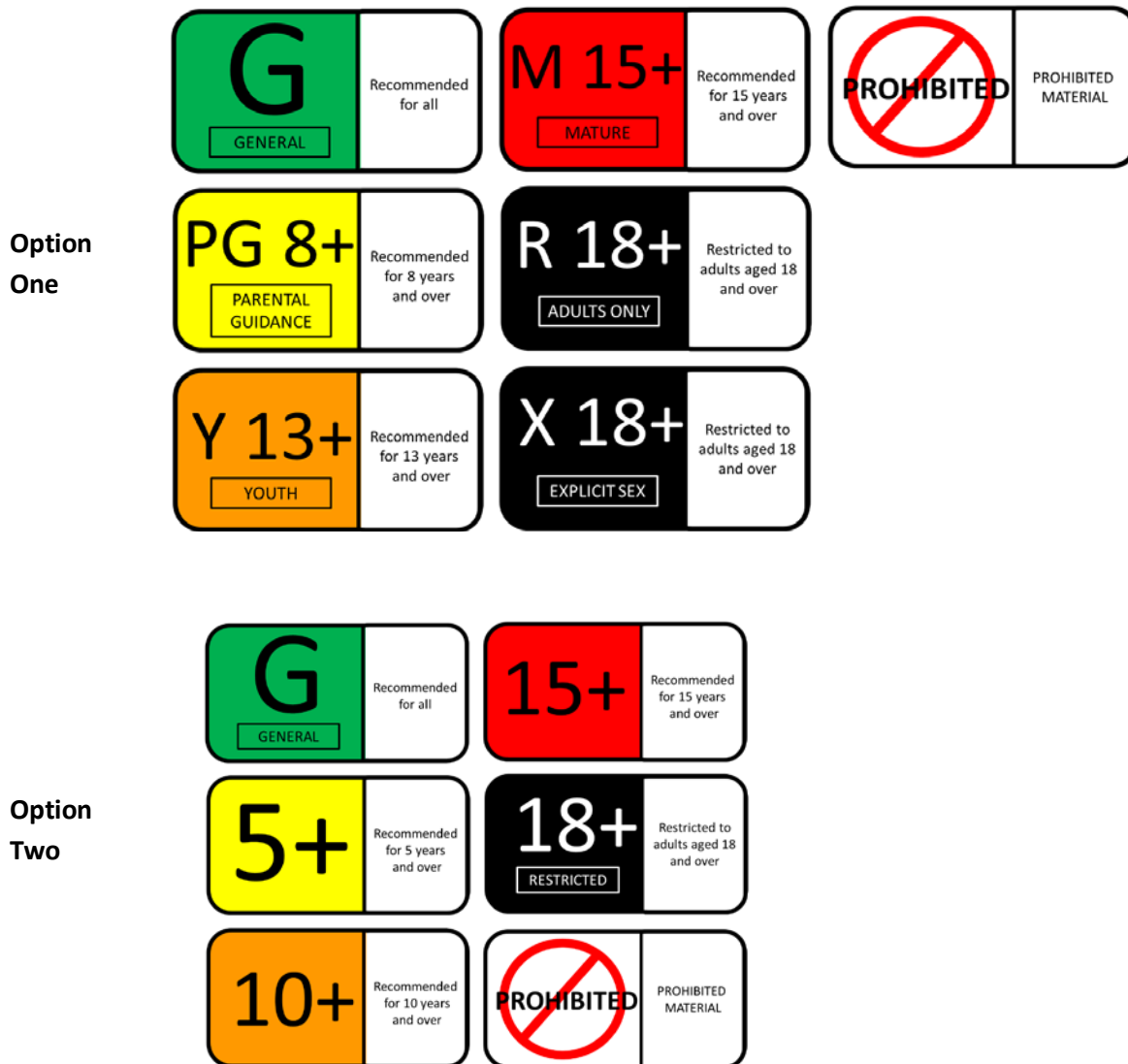
This chapter outlines general public views on two possible alternative classification hierarchies. Suggestions for improvement are also considered.

6. Response to alternative classification ratings

6.1 Preference between current and alternative classification ratings

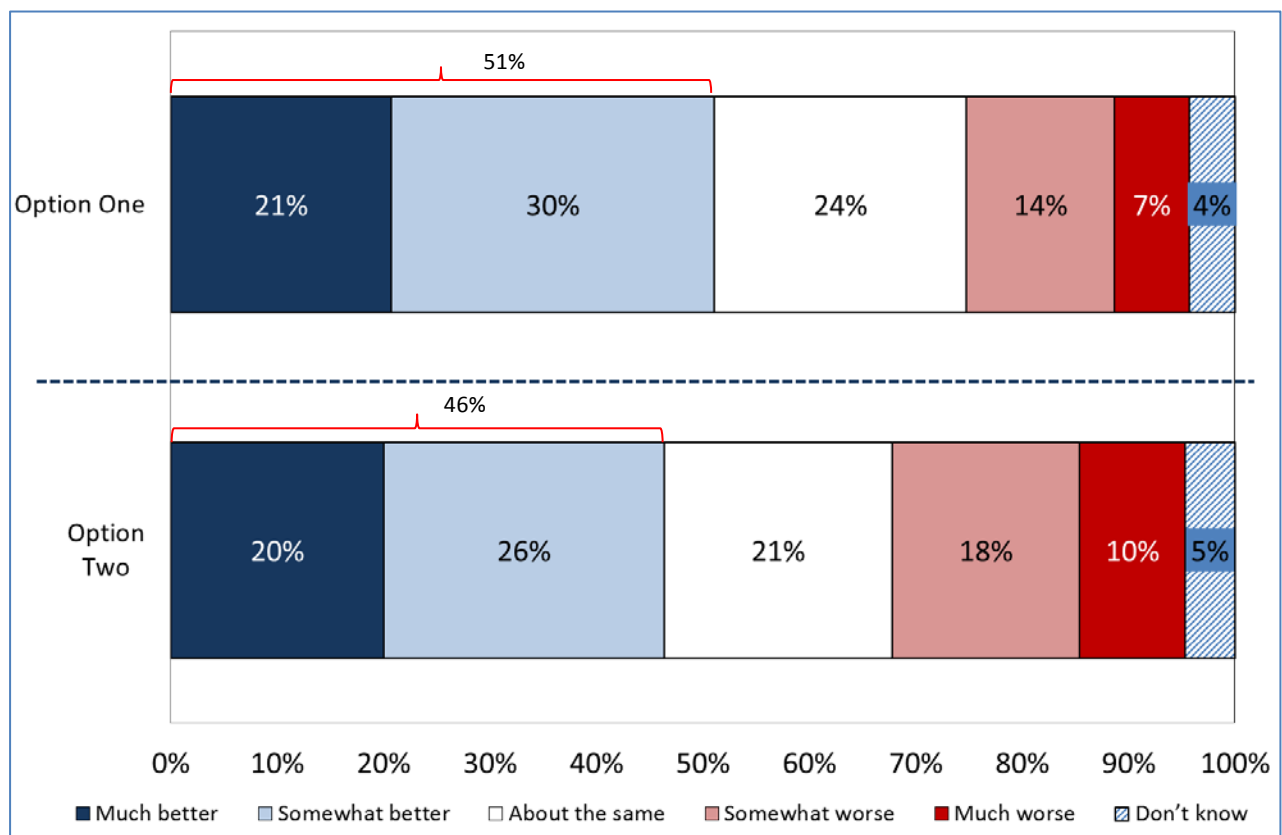
Survey respondents were shown the following alternative classification ratings (Option One and Option Two- see Figure 13 below) and asked to indicate the extent to which they thought each alternative was better or worse than the current classification categories/ markings. Note that the order of options was randomised between subjects. The results for each option are shown in Figure 14, overleaf.

Figure 13: alternative classification ratings shown to research participants



Overall, reactions to both Option One (G, PG 8+, Y 13+, M 15+, R 18+, X 18+, Prohibited) and Option Two (G, 5+, 10+, 15+, 18+, Prohibited) were moderately positive in comparison to the current classification hierarchy. Option One received a slightly higher proportion of positive responses in comparison to the current system than Option Two (a total of 51% 'Better' or 'Much Better' compared to a total of 46%). Option One also received a slightly lower proportion of negative responses than Option Two (a total of 21% 'somewhat worse' or 'much worse' compared with 28%). For both Options One and Two, just over one in five (24% and 21% respectively) considered the proposed scale 'about the same' as the existing one (see Figure 14 below).

Figure 14: General public opinion of alternative classification ratings (Option One: G, PG 8+, Y 13+, M 15+, R 18+, X 18+, Prohibited) and Option Two (G, 5+, 10+, 15+, 18+, Prohibited)



Base: n=1030

Q. On the whole, do you think the alternative set of ratings is better or worse than the current set of ratings?

The views of focus group participants on the alternative classifications in comparison with the current set of ratings were varied. Some believed that Option One (G, PG 8+, Y 13+, M 15+, R 18+, X 18+, Prohibited) and Option Two (G, 5+, 10+, 15+, 18+, Prohibited) were no better or worse than the current classification ratings, others considered them preferable.

The prevailing view in one focus group was that the current classification ratings should be retained. This preference was generally motivated by a belief that there is high recognition and at least adequate understanding of these ratings (especially the symbols) amongst the general public. Put

simply, these focus group participants felt that the current markings and symbols were not ‘broken enough’ to warrant major, and possibly costly, changes.

It [current categories and symbols] has been there for so long... It’s so ingrained that everyone understands what it means on some level.

6.2 Feedback on alternative ratings

Strengths of the alternative Options

Where survey respondents found Option One or Option Two “somewhat better” or “much better” than the current classification ratings, they were asked to provide comments as to what made that Option preferable. Reasons given for preferring Option One included:

- more explicit age recommendations (40% of those who preferred this Option, or 211 comments mentioning this factor)
- more straightforward, clearer, easier to interpret (40% of those who preferred this Option, or 211 comments)
- more detailed information (29% of those who preferred this Option, or 153 comments).¹⁰

Reasons given for preferring Option Two related almost exclusively to the more explicit age recommendations (42% of responses) and respondents finding this Option clearer and easier to interpret (39% of responses). Some respondents also suggested the graphics were clearer and more prominent.

Additional strengths of the alternative options cited by focus group participants included:

- greater differentiation at lower-level categories, increasing utility for parents and other caregivers
- less confusing mid-level classifications (eg M and MA 15+)
- ‘Traffic light’ colours aid interpretation.

New options are both much clearer than the current system. Both of them are better than what we have at the moment. The numbers make a difference and the colours work well together.

Overall preference for Option One over Option Two

Focus group participants who were supportive of a change to the classification ratings were split on whether they preferred Option One (G, PG 8+, Y 13+, M 15+, R 18+, X 18+, Prohibited) or Option Two (G, 5+, 10+, 15+, 18+, Prohibited); however, Option One was favoured by slightly more participants.

That being said, a clear majority of participants expressed a preference for the upper-level classifications included in Option Two (ie only one adult category), with several directly stating that the nature of the content (pornographic or otherwise) could clearly be communicated via consumer

¹⁰ Some comments mentioned multiple reasons for preferring either Option, hence percentages total to more than 100%.

advice. Participants' preference for Option One (G, PG 8+, Y 13+, M 15+, R 18+, X 18+, Prohibited) over Option Two was driven by:

- a positive response to the age categories of 8 and 13 (ie categories considered superior to 5 and 10)
- a belief that the Australian public are familiar with age/letter categories, and therefore moving to number-only categories may cause unnecessary confusion
- the perception that Option One would be more useful for parents and other caregivers.

There is more definition. It is clearer than the current classifications.

There is too big a leap from the current set to this set [Option2].

Participants further suggested that the Option Two (G, 5+, 10+, 15+, 18+, Prohibited) symbols that consist of numbers only could easily be missed or mistaken for 'discount stickers' (eg 5% Off) when included on DVD and computer game packaging.

Preference for 'Recommended' over 'Suitable'

Focus group participants were directly asked whether they thought descriptions of non-restricted categories should include the term 'Recommended' or 'Suitable' (eg *Recommended* for all or *Suitable* for all). The term 'Recommended' was preferred by the majority of focus group participants, with participants speaking favourably of the fact that the term was not overly directive and left the final choice with the consumer. It should, however, be noted that participants who were supportive of a more restriction-based classification system tended to prefer the term 'Suitable' – these participants commonly felt that the term 'Recommended' is unclear and would be interpreted inconsistently by consumers. Focus group participants generally responded positively when 'Appropriate' (eg *Appropriate* for all) and, to a lesser extent, 'Classified' (eg *Classified* for all) were suggested as possible alternatives.

If you have said that a movie is suitable for my seven year-old and my seven year-old now has nightmares then how suitable is it? Recommend gives you a choice.

6.3 Suggestions for improvement of alternative ratings

When focus group participants were asked to suggest ways in which the alternative ratings could be improved, the following themes emerged:

- The majority of focus group participants responded negatively to the term 'Youth', and suggested that alternative titles (including maintenance of the PG rating) should be considered for this category.

Use PG instead of Y as parental guidance is still required. People will look for the PG as they are used to it.

- Focus group participants tended to have a negative reaction to the term 'Prohibited', with several stating that it is too forceful and authoritarian. Upon prompting, participants did, however, acknowledge that 'Prohibited' was a clearer category title than 'Refused Classification'. It was suggested that alternative titles should be considered for this category. Participants repeatedly questioned how the ages attached to selected categories (eg age 8, 13, 15, and so on) had been chosen, with most stressing that cut-off points should be based on 'scientific research' and consultation with child-development experts, including teachers and psychologists. A number of participants specifically suggested that developmental psychology theories should be considered in the construction of all age-based hierarchies.

7

This chapter outlines conclusions and potential ways forward arising from the research

7. Key findings, conclusions and recommendations

7.1 Role and use of classification

Conclusion One: the general public are supportive of the continued existence of a classification scheme but believe it needs to adapt to remain useful in the context of media convergence.

Consistent with the findings of previous research (see for example Newspoll, 2002; Galaxy Research, 2005), the results of this study suggest that adult Australians continue to see a role for classification in the 2014 media and entertainment landscape. Almost eight in ten survey respondents (78%) indicated classification remains useful in the context of media convergence.

There was, however, general agreement among focus group participants that a timely update of the current scheme is paramount to ensuring the continued relevance, utility, and usefulness of classification.

In particular, it was consistently suggested that the ability of government to police media purchasing/access appeared to be limited, and that this has implications for classification.

People's understanding of these implications varied. The prevailing view was that classification would need to move toward an advisory function; however some held the alternative view that more needed to be done to restrict access to material, particularly online.

Focus group participants generally believed that it was most feasible for the classification system to move to an advisory model. In addition, survey respondents suggested providing more detailed content information and encouraging use of classification (especially by parents) through education; both of which focus on the advisory rather than restrictive capacity of the classification system.

However, some respondents suggested *tightening* regulation and *toughening* enforcement measures, particularly in relation to online material.

It is also noteworthy that in a subsequent survey, respondents strongly supported the continued restriction of the MA 15+ category (see Appendix D).

Recommendation: Classification needs to continually and rapidly evolve to maximise relevance, utility, and usefulness in a convergent media environment. This evolution should, as much as possible, involve a decreased focus on restricting media and an increased focus on making recommendations and providing advice regarding content. Further research is required to determine how community concerns about access to MA 15+ content and online content could be addressed within a primarily advisory model.

Conclusion Two: the general public view the role of classification as twofold: the protection of children and the empowerment of adult consumers.

Overall, the findings relating to usage suggest that classification is used most often in relation to choosing media for children and occasionally to inform people's own media choices.

The results of the general public survey suggest that adult Australians are particularly likely to refer to classification ratings when choosing media for minors (70% at least some of the time for films/DVDs, 59% for games), somewhat likely to refer to them when choosing a film or DVD for

themselves (55% at least some of the time) and less likely to do so when deciding on a computer game for themselves (38% at least some of the time). These findings are also consistent with previous research (see for example Newspoll, 2002; Galaxy Research, 2005).

Focus group participants believed that the primary role for film and computer game classification is to protect the viewer/player, especially children and young people, from discomfort or harm. This is comparable with results from previous research eg BBFC (2014). Only a few focus group participants mentioned that classification is used by adult consumers when deciding on media for themselves, reflecting the survey findings.

The role that classification plays in prohibiting media is not top-of-mind for the general public, other than those who are highly engaged with the subject of media classification.

Recommendation: The protection of children and empowerment of adult consumers should continue to be integral to the classification scheme.

Conclusion Three: consumer advice will become increasingly important in a convergent media environment.

Focus group participants consistently expressed a strong desire for the inclusion of more detailed consumer advice on packaging and advertising material, which they believed would be particularly important if classification moved to a more advisory model (see Conclusion One).

As noted previously, consumer advice (as is usually present on advertising and packaging material) was not included in the stimulus, as the focus of the study was classification categories and symbols. This may have influenced some responses; however, the desire for more detailed information was expressed not only in discussion of the current scheme, but also in appraisals of the alternatives tested (see Conclusion Eleven).

Recommendation: Where possible, efforts should be made to include more detailed consumer advice on packaging and advertising material. As a first step in this process, general public attitudes toward and preferences for consumer advice should be examined in further research.

7.2 Process and regulation of classification

Conclusion Four: there is support among the general public for co-regulation of classification by industry and government.

Just over half of the general public survey respondents (51%) indicated that responsibility for classification should lie with government, but almost one third (32%) indicated the alternate view, that responsibility should lie with the film and computer game industries, and almost 1 in 5 indicated that they were uncertain.

There was more detailed discussion of possible arrangements for regulation of classification in focus groups. On the whole, participants were opposed to self-regulation by industry but supportive of co-

regulation by industry and government. As with the survey a number also expressed ambivalence or uncertainty on this matter.

A subsequent national survey conducted in September 2014 included a similar question on regulation, but this time gave *joint responsibility of government and industry* as a response option in addition to *government* and *industry* alone. There was considerably more support for the joint responsibility option (60%) than for either government alone (19%) or industry alone (12%).

Recommendation: further research with the general public is needed to gauge and quantify support for moving toward a co-regulatory arrangement in which primary responsibility lies with industry and secondary responsibility lies with the Commonwealth Government (as recommended in the ALRC's final report [2012]).

Conclusion Five: the independence of the Classification Board (and Classification Review Board) from government is viewed as a key strength of the current process for film and computer game classification in Australia.

Focus group participants considered the independence of the Classification Board (and Review Board) from government to be a strength of the current classification process.

Other key strengths noted about the process included rigour in approach (eg training of board members, existence of guidelines, and so on) and that there was an opportunity for decisions to be reviewed.

7.3 Awareness and understanding of the current classification ratings

Conclusion Six: awareness of current classification categories amongst adult Australians is high, with the exception of restricted categories.

Consistent with previous research, the current study found that adult Australians are highly familiar with most classification categories, with the general public survey revealing the following noteworthy findings:

- More than half of respondents were able to name, unprompted, the PG (61%); G (56%), and R 18+ (52%) classification categories.
- Around 9 in 10 respondents showed prompted awareness of the PG (93%) and G (88%) classification categories.

Reflecting opportunity for exposure, unprompted (10%) and prompted (50%) awareness was lowest for the X 18+ classification category.

Recommendation: High awareness of current ratings should be taken into account if changes are to be made to the current classification ratings. Changes should only be made if deemed necessary and would need to be supported by a comprehensive public education campaign.

Conclusion Seven: understanding of current classification ratings amongst adult Australians varies between categories.

Consistent with previous research, there was substantial evidence to suggest that the Australian public find mid-level classifications (ie M and MA 15+) confusing. Key findings of note are as follows:

- 76% of respondents provided an incorrect definition of MA 15+.
- 36% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: *I am confused about the difference between the M and MA 15+ ratings.*
- Qualitative research participants commonly expressed confusion when asked about the difference between the M and MA 15+ categories, with the problem being mentioned in all focus groups.

There was also evidence to suggest that the Australian public do not fully comprehend the difference between the R 18+ and X 18+ categories: 48% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are confused about the difference between the R 18+ and X 18+.

Recommendation: The Classification Branch (and other stakeholders) should work to eliminate public confusion of mid- and upper- level classifications. This may entail renaming categories, providing additional information to distinguish categories or educating the public, especially parents.

Conclusion Eight: inconsistencies between film and television classification categories, in particular MA and MA 15+, confuse the Australian public.

General public survey respondents commonly provided the television definition when they were asked what the MA 15+ symbol meant, suggesting the presence of confusion in the community. This finding is in line with submissions made to the ALRC review of classification.

Recommendation: Further research with the general public is required to pinpoint areas of confusion between ratings systems, so that the Classification Branch and television regulators can work together to bring the categories into alignment.

7.4 Perceptions of current classification ratings and responses to alternatives

Conclusion Nine: adult Australians consider the current classification ratings favourably, but identify specific areas for improvement.

Asked to rate the overall quality of the current classifications, a combined total of 80% of general public survey respondents indicated that the ratings were either 'Excellent' (17%) 'Very good' (32%) or 'Good' (31%), indicating the current ratings are favourably viewed, but there may be room for improvement. Asked to list ways in which the current classification ratings could be improved, the

largest proportion (44%) did not have changes to suggest, however specific suggestions were made by others, including more information on specific content (16%)¹¹ and resolving confusion between R 18+ and X 18+ categories (11%).

A number of improvements were also suggested by focus group participants, including greater differentiation between M and MA 15+, and introducing more specific guidance (or additional classifications) for younger viewers and teens.

However, focus group participants were more in favour of minor adjustments to classification categories, rather than a complete overhaul. Support for the current categories was associated with high levels of familiarity and at least adequate understanding of the categories amongst the Australian public, especially parents. As noted earlier, general public survey respondents also demonstrated very high awareness and a solid understanding of *most* classification categories.

Recommendation: positive general public views on the current classification categories (combined with high awareness and use and sound understanding amongst the general public) suggest that a major overhaul of all categories is not required. Weaknesses should be addressed through minor adjustments rather than substantive changes.

Conclusion Ten: the general public responded positively to alternative classification ratings (especially Option One: G, PG 8+, Y 13+, M 15+, R 18+, X 18+, Prohibited) but, taken in conjunction with other results, the response was not positive enough to warrant changing to either system.

Around half of survey respondents (51%) indicated that they preferred alternative Option One (G, PG 8+, Y 13+, M 15+, R 18+, X 18+, Prohibited) to the current classification ratings and just under half (46%) indicated that they preferred Option Two (G, 5+, 10+, 15+, 18+, Prohibited) to the current classification ratings. In addition, more than one in five considered both alternative options 'about the same' as the current ratings hierarchy. However, when the favourable responses on the current ratings are taken into account, these results do not warrant a change to either alternative set of ratings.

Similar results were found in focus groups, with the exception of one group where a clear preference for the maintenance of the *current* classification ratings was expressed. Focus group participants said that neither alternative option was superior enough to replace the current classification hierarchy, especially given that the public were familiar with the current categories and they appeared to be functioning adequately.

A number of strengths were attributed to the alternatives, the implications of which are discussed below. Suggested refinements to the alternative categories included:

- renaming the 'Youth' category
- renaming the 'Prohibited' category

¹¹ Note that Consumer Advice was not included on stimuli.

- increasing the number of lower-level categories (ie aimed at ages 0-13) and decreasing the number of upper-level categories (ie aimed at ages 13+)
- using the term 'Recommended' rather than 'Suitable' in descriptions of non-restricted categories.

Conclusion Eleven: consistent feedback on the alternative options, and suggestions for improvement of the current set of ratings, suggest that any revisions to the current ratings should include greater age differentiation across lower level categories and more detailed information on content.

During focus groups, there were frequent unprompted suggestions to include more specific age recommendations, including increasing the number of categories for younger audiences.

This desire was also reflected in feedback on the two alternative sets of ratings categories tested. Both alternative categories had a number of perceived strengths, however, the most commonly noted by survey respondents and focus group participants was greater differentiation at lower-level age categories. In addition, many of those who preferred one or both alternatives to the current ratings gave reasons such as:

- easier to understand (especially mid- level categories) (both options)
- more detailed information (Option One)
- 'traffic light' colour coding of the symbols aids interpretation (both options).

Recommendation: Neither alternative classification hierarchy (Option One and Option Two) should be adopted at present, however, general public feedback on these scales, particularly the inclusion of more specific age recommendations for 'lower level' material, should be taken into account if changes are made to current classification ratings or information.

Appendix A: General public online survey questionnaire

Classification Branch, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department

**Developmental research and initial market testing – Classification categories
and markings**

Questionnaire for General Public – 1 April 2014

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study.

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 10 minutes to complete.

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

Participation is Voluntary

Participation in this research is voluntary, so please feel free to skip any questions that you don't feel comfortable answering or terminate the questionnaire at any time.

Section A – Awareness and understanding of current ratings and symbols

ASK ALL:

A1.	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. Can you name all of the ratings for films and computer games that you are currently aware of?	Open response

ASK ALL:

A2.	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 <u>GOVERNMENT</u>	1
	Film and computer game classification should be the responsibility of the <u>FILM AND COMPUTER GAME INDUSTRIES</u>	2
	Unsure/ don't know	99

ASK ALL:

A3.	Have you seen this symbol before today?			
	Single response, Randomise order	Yes	No	Don't know
A3.1	[Insert G marking]	1	2	99
A3.2	[Insert PG marking]	1	2	99
A3.3	[Insert M marking]	1	2	99
A3.4	[Insert MA 15+ marking]	1	2	99
A3.5	[Insert R 18+ marking]	1	2	99
A3.6	[Insert X 18+ marking]	1	2	99

A4.	What do you think this symbol means?	
	Randomise order	
A4.1	[Ask if: A3.1=1] [Insert G marking]	Open response
A4.2	[Ask if: A3.2=1] [Insert PG marking]	Open response
A4.3	[Ask if: A3.3=1] [Insert M marking]	Open response
A4.4	[Ask if: A3.4=1] [Insert MA 15+ marking]	Open response
A4.5	[Ask if: A3.5=1] [Insert R 18+ marking]	Open response
A4.6	[Ask if: A3.6=1] [Insert X 18+ marking]	Open response

Section B – Use and relevance of current classification ratings and symbols
ASK ALL:

B1.	How often do you refer to a rating when...?						
	Single response, Randomise order	All or nearly all of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Rarely	Never	Not sure/ not applicable
B1.1	...deciding whether to watch a film or DVD?	1	2	3	4	5	99
B1.2	...deciding whether a film or DVD is appropriate viewing for a child or adolescent?	1	2	3	4	5	99
B1.3	...deciding whether to play a computer game?	1	2	3	4	5	99
B1.4	...deciding whether a computer game is appropriate for a child or adolescent to play?	1	2	3	4	5	99

ASK ALL:

B2.	Australian media consumers are currently able to access a vast array of local and international media online (including media from broadcasters, news organisations, social media sites, iTunes, YouTube, and so on) via an ever increasing number of internet-enabled devices and screens.	Single response
	How useful is the classification of films and computer games in this environment?	
	Very useful	1
	Somewhat useful	2
	Not at all useful	3
	Don't know	99

ASK IF B2=1, Else got to B4

B3.	Why do you think that classification of films and computer games is very useful?	Open response

ASK IF B2=2/3, Else go to C1

B4.	What could be done to make classification information more useful?	Open response

ASK ALL:

B5.	Thinking specifically about when you are deciding whether or not to watch a film showing in cinemas only, how useful would you find this classification information?				
	Single response, Randomise order	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Not at all useful	Don't know
B5.1	Rating included when film trailer is shown on television	1	2	3	99
B5.2	Rating included when film trailer is shown at the cinema	1	2	3	99
B5.3	Rating included on print and electronic posters advertising the film in cinema foyer	1	2	3	99
B5.4	Rating included on print and electronic posters advertising the film <i>outside</i> of the cinema foyer (ie on bus shelters, billboards, and websites)	1	2	3	99
B5.5	Rating screened prior to the commencement of the film	1	2	3	99
B5.6	Rating included on boards showing session times in cinema foyer	1	2	3	99
B5.7	Rating included on cinema website (ie in website section that includes session times and allows for pre-purchasing of tickets)	1	2	3	99

Section C – Strengths and weaknesses of current and proposed ratings and symbols

ASK ALL:

C1.	<p>The ratings currently used to classify films and computer games in Australia are shown below.</p> <p>Overall, would you say that this set of ratings is....?</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="300 465 1110 898"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Description</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>G</td> <td>General</td> </tr> <tr> <td>PG</td> <td>Parental guidance recommended</td> </tr> <tr> <td>M</td> <td>Recommended for mature audiences</td> </tr> <tr> <td>MA 15+</td> <td>Not suitable for people under 15. Under 15s must be accompanied by a parent or adult guardian</td> </tr> <tr> <td>R 18+</td> <td>Restricted to 18 and over</td> </tr> <tr> <td>X 18+ (applies only to films)</td> <td>Restricted to 18 and over</td> </tr> <tr> <td>RC</td> <td>Refused Classification</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Description	G	General	PG	Parental guidance recommended	M	Recommended for mature audiences	MA 15+	Not suitable for people under 15. Under 15s must be accompanied by a parent or adult guardian	R 18+	Restricted to 18 and over	X 18+ (applies only to films)	Restricted to 18 and over	RC	Refused Classification	Single response
Category	Description																	
G	General																	
PG	Parental guidance recommended																	
M	Recommended for mature audiences																	
MA 15+	Not suitable for people under 15. Under 15s must be accompanied by a parent or adult guardian																	
R 18+	Restricted to 18 and over																	
X 18+ (applies only to films)	Restricted to 18 and over																	
RC	Refused Classification																	
	Poor	1																
	Fair	2																
	Good	3																
	Very good	4																
	Excellent	5																
	Unsure/ don't know	99																

ASK ALL:

C2.	Below are some statements about the ratings currently used to classify films and computer games in Australia. For each statement, please indicate whether you agree or disagree.					
	Single response, Randomise order	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
C2.1	I am confused about the difference between the G and PG ratings	1	2	3	4	5
C2.2	I am confused about the difference between the PG and M ratings	1	2	3	4	5
C2.3	I am confused about the difference between the M and MA 15+ ratings	1	2	3	4	5
C2.4	I am confused about the	1	2	3	4	5

	difference between the R 18+ and X 18+ ratings					
--	--	--	--	--	--	--

ASK ALL:

C3.	<p>[Insert image showing current Australian classification categories/ markings]</p> <p>Please list all the ways in which you think the current ratings could be improved. Please consider both the <i>ratings</i> and the <i>symbols</i> (including colour) used to represent each ratings.</p>	

ASK ALL:

C4

The current set of ratings used to classify films and computer games in Australia is shown below:

Category	Description
G	General
PG	Parental guidance recommended
M	Recommended for mature audiences
MA 15+	Not suitable for people under 15. Under 15s must be accompanied by a parent or adult guardian
R 18+	Restricted to 18 and over
X 18+ (applies only to films)	Restricted to 18 and over
RC	Refused Classification

An alternative set of ratings for classification of films and computer games in Australia is shown below:

C4.1 (Option1)

Category	Description
G	Recommended for all
PG 8+ (Parental Guidance)	Recommended for 8 years and over
Y 13+ (Youth)	Recommended for 13 years and over
M 15+ (Mature)	Recommended for 15 years and over
R 18+ (Adults Only)	Restricted to adults aged 18 and over
X 18+ (Explicit Sex) (Applies only to films)	Restricted to adults aged 18 and over
Prohibited	Prohibited

C4.2 (Option2)

Category	Description shown on marking
----------	------------------------------

Single response

	G	Recommended for all			
	5+	Recommended for 5 years and over			
	10+	Recommended for 10 years and over			
	15+	Recommended for 15 years and over			
	18+	Restricted to adults aged 18 and over			
	Prohibited	Prohibited			
	<p>On the whole, do you think the alternative set of ratings is better or worse than the current set of ratings?</p> <p>Rotate Option 1 and Option 2</p>				
	Much worse		1		
	Somewhat worse		2		
	About the same		3		
	Somewhat better		4		
	Much better		5		
	Don't know		99		
ASK IF C4.1=4 or 5, Else got to C6					
C5.	<p>Why do you think these ratings are better than the current set of ratings?</p> <p>[Insert text/ image Australian classification Option 1]</p>			Open response	
ASK IF C4.2=4 or 5, Else got to D1					
C6.	<p>Why do you think these ratings are better than the current set of ratings?</p> <p>[Insert text/ image Australian classification Option 2]</p>			Open response	

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.

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

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

D2.	What is the postcode where you live?	Open response
		1
	I'd prefer not to say	99

D4.	Broadly speaking, is the gross weekly income of your household before tax...? Gross = income from all sources (eg wages, salary, rent, dividends, government payments) for all people living in the household; do not deduct tax, superannuation or life insurance.	Single response
	Under \$500	1
	\$500 to under \$1,000	2
	\$1,000 to under \$2,000	3
	\$2,000 to under \$3,000	4
	\$3,000 to under \$4,000	5
	\$4,000 or more	6
	I'd prefer not to say	99

D5.	How many children under the age of 18 do you have <u>usually living at home</u> with you?	Open response
	None	98

	I'd prefer not to say	99
--	-----------------------	----

D5.	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']?	Open response
	Open numeric response; min 1 and max 17	
	Less than one year old	98
	I'd prefer not to say	99

[Repeat grid for each child]

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

D7.	Do you speak a language other than English at home?	Single response
	Yes [Please specify.....]	1
	No, English only	2
	I'd prefer not to say	99

D8.	What is the highest level of formal education that you have completed?	Single response
	Under Year 10	1
	Year 10 or equivalent	2
	Year 11 or equivalent	3
	Year 12 or equivalent	4
	TAFE, diploma, certificate	5
	University degree	6
	Other [Please specify.....]	7

	I'd prefer not to say	99
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D9.		How often do you...					
Single response, Randomise order		Daily	A few times a week	A few times a month	Once a month or less	Never	Don't know
a.	Watch free-to-air television channels 9, 7, 10, ABC or SBS? (and their digital channels)	1	2	3	4	5	99
b.	Watch Pay TV channels?	1	2	3	4	5	99
c.	Watch television online via catch-up services such as iView and Jump-in?	1	2	3	4	5	99
d.	Watch DVDs?	1	2	3	4	5	99
e.	Watch downloaded movies or television programs?	1	2	3	4	5	99
f.	Watch movies at the cinema?	1	2	3	4	5	99
G.	Play computer games?	1	2	3	4	5	99
k.	Use the Internet to search for information or to read articles or view video clips?	1	2	3	4	5	99

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. This research is being undertaken by the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department.

Appendix B: Discussion guide for general public focus groups

Classification Branch, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department
Developmental research and initial market testing – Classification categories and markings

Discussion Guide for General Public – 20 Dec 2013

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:
 - It is essential that the ratings and symbols used to classify films and computer games are recognised, understood, and correctly used by members of the general public, especially parents and other primary caregivers.
 - It is possible that changes will be made to the ratings and symbols used to classify films (including cinema and DVD) and computer games in Australia. This research is being conducted to explore community attitudes toward current and potential future classification ratings and symbols.
- Confidentiality and anonymity.
- Length of group – 90 minutes.

- Ask each participant to introduce self, including why they are interested in classification and whether they have any children or grandchildren.

Awareness and understanding of current classification categories and markings (20 minutes)

We're going to start with brief discussion about your understanding and use of classification information for films, DVDs, and computer games.

- What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about the classification of films and computer games?
 - And what is the second thing that comes to mind?

- What do you think is the purpose of film and computer game classification?

[Probe for whether purpose has changed given the options that have recently become available for accessing media]

- Who do you think is responsible for the classification of films and computer games in Australia? And who do you think should be responsible?

[Probe for consideration of government versus non-government organisation]

- Taking into account everything you know about the process of film and computer game classification in Australia, what do you think are the key strengths of the process? And what about the weaknesses?

[Probe for strengths and weaknesses for them personally and strengths and weaknesses for society as a whole]

[Read brief description of the classification system in Australia]

- Having heard this description, what do you now think are the strengths of the classification process in Australia? And what about the weaknesses?

[Probe for strengths and weaknesses for them personally and strengths and weaknesses for society as a whole]

- When a film or computer game undergoes classification, it is assigned a particular category. This category is sometimes referred to as the film or computer game's 'rating'. Can you name all the classification ratings that you are aware of?

[Probe till all classification categories, excluding RC, are mentioned]

NOTEBOOK EXERCISE ONE [10 minutes max]

I'd now like you to turn to the first page of your notebook. On this page you will find the symbols used for each of the current Australian film and computer game ratings. Please first indicate whether you have seen each of the symbols before today and then write what you think the symbol means in the space provided.

Use and perceived relevance of current classification categories and markings (30 minutes)

Okay, now we're going to talk about the ways in which you (and people you know) use classification information.

- How do you use classification information in your own life?

[Probe for regularity of use]

- Are you more likely to use classification information when choosing films/ DVDs or computer games? Why?
- Do you know anyone who uses classification information more than you do? Why do you think they use it more than you?
 - And do you know anyone who uses classification information less than you do? Why?
- What aspects of the classification system do you think are most useful for parents? And least useful? Why?
- What aspects of the classification system do you think are most useful for non-parents over the age of 18? And least useful? Why?
- Based on your experience, do you think that children and young people use the classification system? What do they use it for?
- Thinking about the classification ratings, which rating do you think is the most useful? And which do you think is the least useful? Why?
- Thinking again about the classification ratings, are there any ratings that you think are unnecessary? Why?
- There are two types of categories in the current set – advisory and legally restrictive. What do you think about access to certain types of media being restricted?

GROUP EXERCISE ONE [15-20 minutes max, including reporting back to group]

The way in which people access media has changed in recent years. Put simply, Australian media consumers are now able to 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.

Please work with your group members to develop an ideal classification system for this environment.

Exploration of possible new classification categories and markings (40 minutes)

Thank you all for your feedback so far. We're now going to explore some possible new classification ratings and symbols.

NOTEBOOK EXERCISE TWO [10 minutes max]

I'd now like you to open up your notebook to the second page. This page includes an image showing all current Australian ratings and symbols. It is possible that changes will be made to the ratings and symbols used to classify films and computer games. Below the image, please list all the ways in which you think the current ratings and symbols could be improved.

[Brief discussion of notebook exercise answers]

We're now going to discuss an alternative set of classification ratings and symbols for the classification of films and computer games in Australia.

[Show image of Option 1 – rating and description only (ie no colours)]

Category	Description shown on marking
G	Recommended for all
PG 8+ (Parental Guidance)	Recommended for 8 years and over
Y 13+ (Youth)	Recommended for 13 years and over
M 15+ (Mature)	Recommended for 15 years and over
R 18+ (Adults Only)	Restricted to adults aged 18 and over
X 18+ (Explicit Sex)	Restricted to adults aged 18 and over
Prohibited	Prohibited material

- Reactions to Option 1 as a whole
 - Do these ratings work well together? Why? Why not?
 - Are there any ratings that don't fit with the others? Why?
 - What do you think about the number of ratings?

[Probe for too many or too few]

- How useful do you think this set of ratings would be for parents? And what about non-parents aged over 18?
- What is your reaction to the term 'Recommended'? Can you think of a better term to include in these descriptions?

[Probe for reactions to 'Suitable']

- What could be done to improve this set of ratings?
- On the whole, do you think this set of ratings and symbols is better, worse, or about the same as the existing set? Why?

- Comprehension of individual ratings
 - Assess understanding of each rating (ie what do you think this rating means?)
 - Are there any ratings that are difficult to understand? Why? What could be done improve comprehension?
 - Thinking specifically about the rating names, how well do they correspond to the age categories? Why?
- Exploration of colours
 - Bearing in mind that symbol colour should aid in correct interpretation of the rating, what colours do you think each symbol should be? Why?

[Show image of proposed symbols – G (Green), PG (Yellow), Y (Orange), M 15+ (Red), and R 18+ (Black)]

 - Do the chosen colours correspond well to the ratings? Why? Why not?
 - Do some colours work better than others? Why?

[Show image of Option 2 – rating and description only (ie no colours)]

Category	Description shown on marking
G	Recommended for all
5+	Recommended for 5 years and over
10+	Recommended for 10 years and over
15+	Recommended for 15 years and over
18+	Restricted to adults aged 18 and over
Prohibited	Prohibited material

- Reactions to Option 2 as a whole
 - Do these ratings work well together? Why? Why not?
 - Are there any ratings that don't fit with the others? Why?
 - What do you think about the number of ratings?

[Probe for too many or too few]

 - How useful do you think this set of ratings would be for parents? And what about non-parents aged over 18?
 - Do you prefer the term 'Suitable' to the term 'Recommended'? Why? Why not?
 - Baring in mind that additional information would be provided in the consumer advice that accompanies ratings, do you think it is better or worse to have one restrictive category?

-
- This set of symbols includes only numbers – do you think this approach is less or more clear than letters and numbers? Why?
 - What could be done to improve this set of ratings?
 - On the whole, do you think this set of ratings and symbols is better, worse, or about the same as the existing set? Why?
 - And do you think this set is better, worse, or about the same as the first set that you were shown? Why?
 - Comprehension of individual ratings
 - Assess understanding of each rating (ie what do you think this rating means?)
 - Are there any ratings that are difficult to understand? Why? What could be done improve comprehension?
 - Exploration of colours
 - Bearing in mind that symbol colour should aid in correct interpretation of the rating, what colours do you think each symbol should be? Why?
 - [Show image of proposed symbols – G (Green), 5+ (Yellow), 10+ (Orange), 15+ (Red), and 18+ (Black)]*
 - Do the chosen colours correspond well to the ratings? Why?
 - Do some colours work better than others? Why?

Communication preferences (5 minutes)

- If changes were made to the classification ratings and/ or symbols, what would be the best way for these changes to be communicated to the Australian public? Why?
 - Can you think of any other ways that this information could be communicated to the Australian public?

Description of the current process of classification in Australia











The Classification Board is a statutory body which makes classification decisions for films, computer games and certain publications. The Classification Board is a full-time Board based in Sydney. Principles for decision making are set out in the National Classification Code, agreed by the Australian Government and the States and Territories. The Classification Board is independent from government.





The Director of the Classification Board is responsible for management and oversight of the Classification Board and its decision making processes.

The Classification Review Board is also an independent statutory body. Its role is to review classification decisions in certain circumstances and make a fresh classification decision. The Classification Review Board is a different Board to the Classification Board. The Classification Review Board is independent from government.

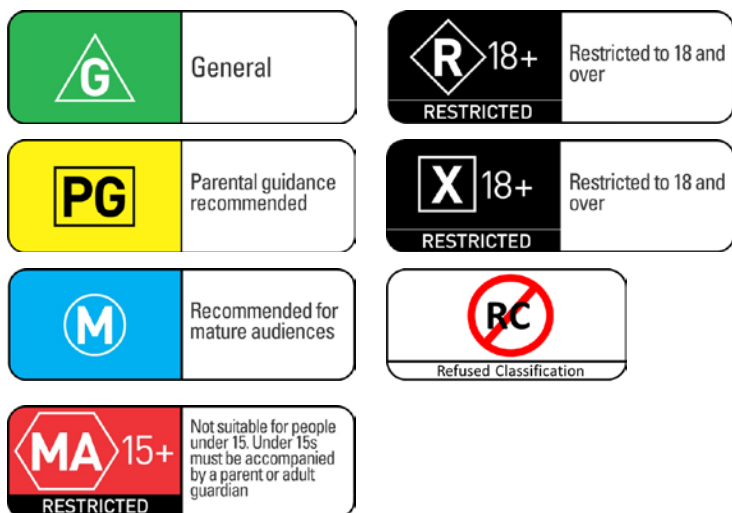
The Classification Branch is a Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department which is co-located with the Classification Board in Sydney. The Classification Branch provides operational and policy advice on classification issues to the Minister for Justice, provides secretariat services to the Classification Board and the Classification Review Board, operates the Classification Liaison Scheme and provides classification training for both Boards, for industry and for government.

Notebook Exercise One: This table shows the symbols used for each of the current Australian film and computer game ratings. In the space provided, please indicate whether you have seen the symbol before today and what you think the symbol means in the space provided.

Symbol	Have you seen this symbol before today?	What does this symbol mean?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure <input type="checkbox"/> No	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure <input type="checkbox"/> No	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure <input type="checkbox"/> No	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure <input type="checkbox"/> No	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure <input type="checkbox"/> No	

Symbol	Have you seen this symbol before today?	What does this symbol mean?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure <input type="checkbox"/> No	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure <input type="checkbox"/> No	

Notebook Exercise Two: The current set of ratings and symbols used to classify films and computer games in Australia is shown below. It is possible that changes will be made to these ratings and symbols. In the space provided, please list all the ways in which you think the ratings and symbols could be improved.



Please list **ALL** the ways in which you think these ratings and symbols could be improved



-

-

-

-

-

-

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-

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

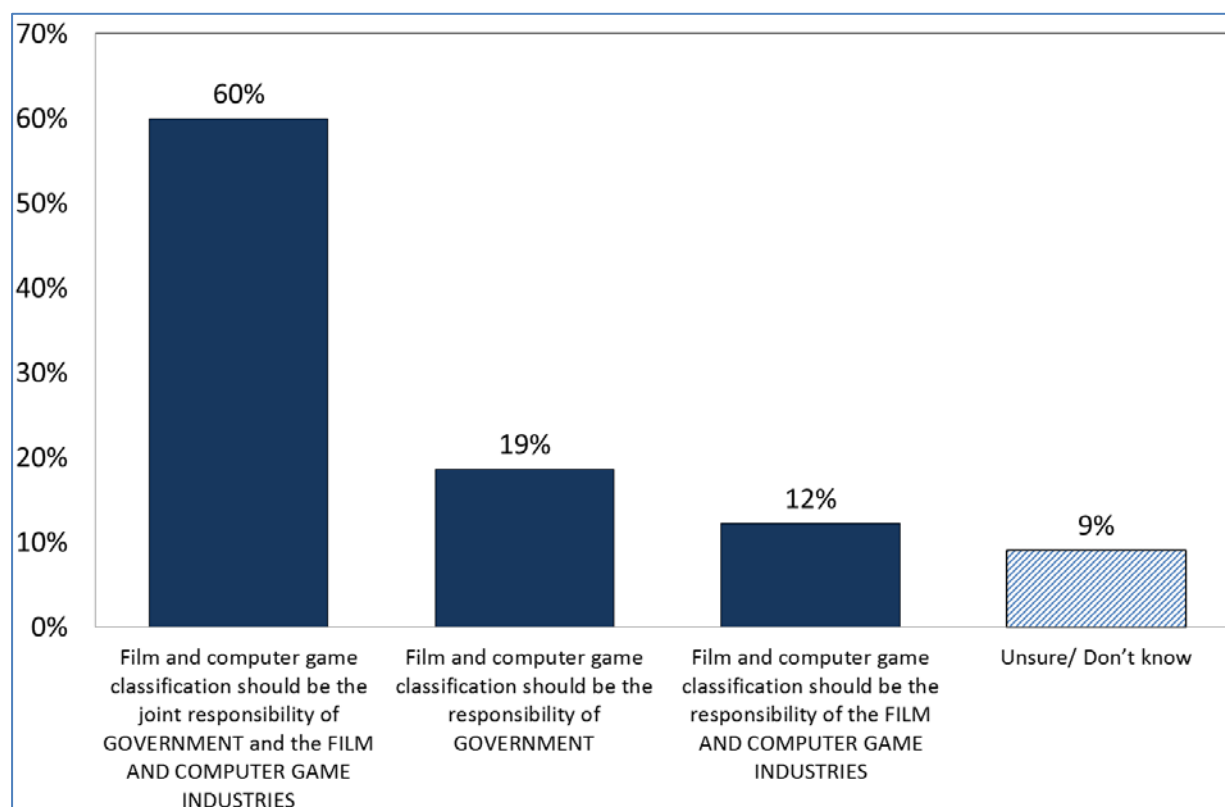
Appendix D: supplementary data

This appendix contains findings from a survey conducted in September 2014 as part of a separate study by the Classification Branch. The survey related primarily to classifiable elements, impact descriptors and their use in consumer advice; however two questions were included for the purposes of augmenting the April survey results from Study One.

Regulation of classification

Respondents were asked the following:

Figure D1: QC1. Who do you think should be responsible for the classification of films and computer games in Australia?



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

Respondents were asked who they thought should be responsible for film and computer game classification. While the original question asked in the April 2014 survey gave government and industry as the only response options, this version also gave joint responsibility of government and industry as a response option.

As shown in Figure D1 above, a clear majority of respondents, 60% preferred this option, while only 19% supported soled regulation by government and even fewer respondents (12%) preferred sole regulation by industry.

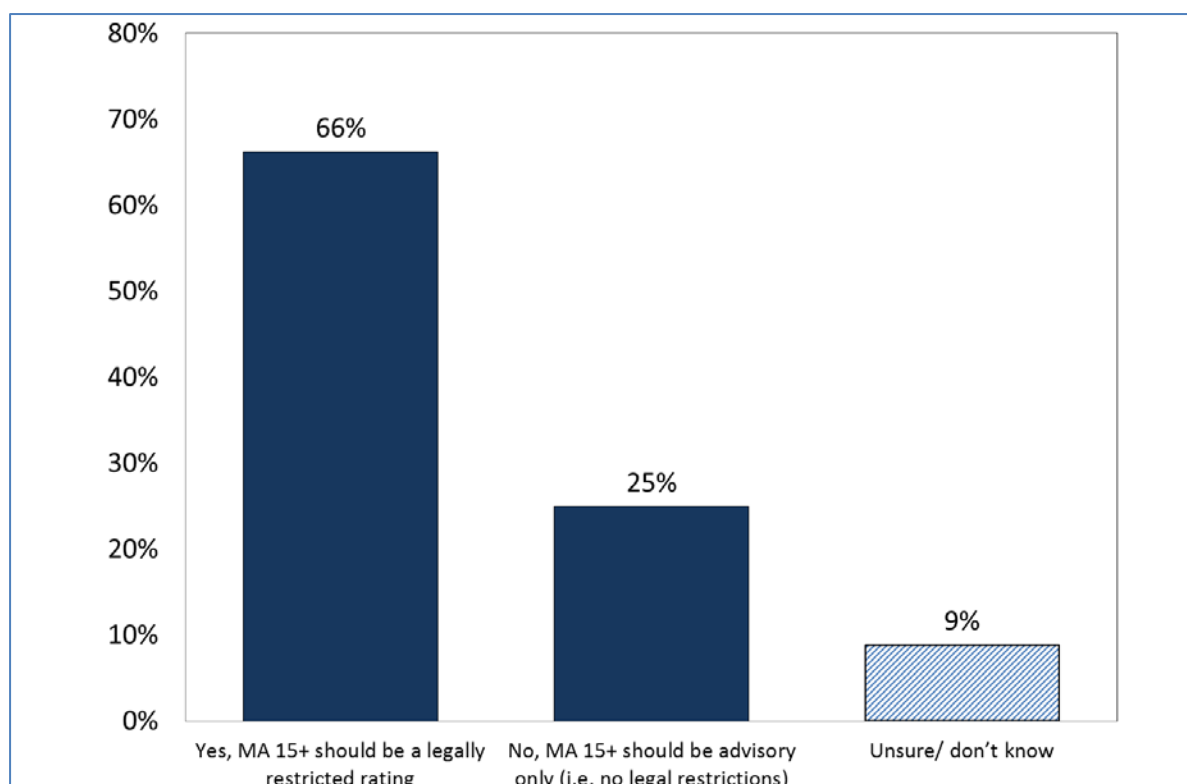
Restriction of MA 15+

Respondents were asked the following:

QC2. 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+). This is a question about the MA 15+ rating.

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+. Do you think the MA 15+ rating should be legally restricted?

Figure D2: Should MA 15+ be legally restricted?



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

As shown in Figure D2, some two thirds of respondents (66%) support the legal restriction of the MA 15+ rating, while a quarter (25%) thought it should be advisory only.

This finding needs to be considered in combination with the other findings, in particular:

- apparent support for classification to move towards an advisory rather than restrictive function
- suggestions as to how confusion between the M and MA 15+ categories can be resolved.

It is likely that more research will be required specifically in relation to these categories, and more broadly how an advisory model can effectively address apparent concerns about access to material rated MA 15+.

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