Efficacy of film and computer game classification categories and consumer advice: A comparative analysis of public opinion

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1. Executive summary

1.1 Background, objectives, and methodology

Social research best-practice recommends that a comprehensive literature review be undertaken prior to the implementation of a new research program. Undertaking such a review assists in ensuring that the program (a) does not unnecessarily replicate existing research (including research that has been carried out in comparable jurisdictions) and (b) adheres to recognised methodological and ethical standards within the specific research area of interest. The results of a literature review can also be used to guide research priorities, especially when the proposed program is limited by budgetary and timing considerations. With this best-practice recommendation in mind, public opinion research covering the following topics was reviewed:

- Public awareness and understanding of classification categories and consumer advice (Chapter 3);

- Public perception of classification categories and consumer advice (Chapter 4);

- Public use of classification categories and consumer advice (Chapter 5); and

- Alignment of classification categories and consumer advice with community standards (Chapter 6).

The first stage of the literature review consisted of conducting database and website searches and collecting all relevant literature. Following the completion of searches, relevant articles were classified as:

1. Research conducted in Australia and/or comparable jurisdictions (i.e. New Zealand, UK, Ireland, USA, Canada, and Europe).

   a. Qualitative studies

   b. Quantitative studies

   c. Mixed-method studies

2. Research conducted elsewhere (excluded from the review).

In addition to this public opinion research, academic studies (including experimental and longitudinal designs) examining the potential harmful effects of media exposure, with a particular focus on exposure to violent video games, smoking, and gambling, were also briefly examined in the review. This literature was not reviewed systematically, and therefore relevant conclusions should be interpreted with caution.

1.2 Public awareness and understanding of classification categories and consumer advice

- Awareness and understanding of classification categories and markings amongst the Australian community was comprehensively assessed via representative quantitative research

in 2002 (AC Nielsen, 2002), 2005 (Galaxy Research, 2005), and 2007 (Galaxy Research, 2007). These studies showed:

- o High unprompted and prompted awareness of film and computer game classification categories and markings; and

- o Moderate understanding of film and video game classification categories and markings, with confusion most commonly observed for mid-level classifications.

- Quantitative and qualitative research has further suggested that the Australian publics' understanding of the consumer advice that accompanies classification markings is moderate (see for example Urbis, Keys and Young, 2004; Galaxy Research, 2007). Key areas of concern are as follows:

  - o The public appears to have a confused and often incorrect comprehension of the term 'Themes', which is included in selected consumer advice (e.g. Supernatural themes, Drug themes).

  - o The relationship between classification markings and consumer advice is poorly understood, with evidence suggesting that the public are not clear on whether consumer advice is based on standards operating in each classification category, or whether there is a wider framework that all advice fits into.

- International studies have provided further evidence that film and computer game consumers find mid-level classifications to be the most confusing, especially when similar labels are used across multiple categories (see for example IFCO, 2013; Colmar Brunton 2011, 2011a).

1.3 Public perception of classification categories and consumer advice

- There has been a consistently high level of support for the existence of a classification system in Australia, with few members of the general public (including academics and engaged stakeholders) disputing the benefits of system that allows individuals to make fully informed decisions about the media they (and their children) consume.

  - o Despite broad community and stakeholder support for the existence of a classification system, opinions are far less unanimous regarding specific elements of the system; most notably, the RC category.

- Qualitative research suggests that the general public have mixed views on what (and indeed whether) material should be banned or restricted (Urbis Pty Ltd, 2011).

  - o Surveys have regularly shown that members of the Australian general public tend to agree with the classifications and advice assigned to films and computer games (see for example Galaxy Research, 2005; Galaxy Research, 2007; Newspoll, 2002).

- International studies suggest that disagreement with classification decisions is most common for mid-level classifications (Hardie, Goldstone, & Slesenger, 2009; Lansdowne Market Research, 2004).

- Parents (and other primary caregivers) appear to be more supportive of classification and rating systems when compared to the general public, both in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions (see for example Newspoll, 2002, US FTC, 2007; 2009).

- Public opinion research suggests that young people across jurisdictions are generally supportive of classification systems; however many youth believe that assigned classifications are too strict (see AC Nielsen, 2002; Dublin City University & Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology, 2005).

1.4 Public use of classification categories and consumer advice

- Use of classification and rating information amongst the general public appears to be relatively high across the jurisdictions included in this review.

  o For example, research undertaken with the Australian public in 2005 concluded that around three quarters of Australians (76%) use classification symbols to decide on the suitability of movies, up from 71% in 2002 (Galaxy Research, 2005).

- There is significant cross-jurisdictional evidence to suggest that parents and other primary caregivers use classifications and ratings when choosing (or assisting in choosing) media for children and young people – this is especially true when children are younger (see for example Newspoll, 2002; Colmar Brunton, 2002a; US FTC, 2007).

  o Evidence of the use of consumer advice when choosing for children and young people is more limited; however advice is most often used by parents and other primary caregivers when it is comprehensive and easily understood.

- Research undertaken directly with children and young people has produced mixed results, with some studies providing further evidence of parental use of classification symbols and ratings information and other studies suggesting that use (and especially enforcement practices) may be overestimated by parents (see IFCO, 2005; US FTC, 2007).

1.5 Classification categories and consumer advice: Alignment with current community standards

- The potential harmful effects of media exposure have been examined in an extensive literature, including experimental and longitudinal studies.

  o Evidence suggesting harm (or lack thereof) should be taken into account when assessing community attitudes and preferences toward media content.

- Participants in quantitative research studies (both in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions rarely indicated that they find general sexual content offensive, and many noted that sexual content is treated in an overly restrictive way by regulators, especially when compared to violence (see for example Urbis Pty, Ltd, 2011; Urbis, Keys, Young, 2004).

  o Australians and International studies have provided evidence of broad community support for the inclusion of selected fetishes in higher-level, restricted content Urbis Pty Ltd, 2011; BBFC, 2005) .

- Community support for allowing depictions of sexual violence and solicitation of young people/ pedophilia in higher-level, restricted films/ computer games is limited, with several caveats being placed on suggested acceptable content (Ipsos MediaCT, 2012; Urbis Pty Ltd, 2011; Galaxy Research, 2007; Urbis Keys Young, 2004).

- Evidence suggests that violence continues to be a major concern for members of the general public, with research participants (both in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions) consistently expressing concern for the potential negative impact of screen violence on individuals and society (see for example Urbis Pty Ltd, 2011; OFLC & BSA, 2008; BBFC, 2005).

- The general public remains concerned about depictions of drugs and drug-taking, with a number of research studies suggesting that the public believe that it is one of the most important, if not the most important, element for classifiers to consider (see Urbis Pty Ltd, 2011; BBFC, 2009; IFCO, 2004; Urbis, Keys, Young, 2004).

- While on the whole community members felt that offensive language was not as impactful as other classifiable elements, the impact of this element was generally thought to increase with frequency (BBFC, 2005; Urbis, Keys, Young, 2004)

- There are concerns that exposure to gambling and non-illicit drug use (i.e. alcohol and tobacco) via films and computer games may be harmful, both at an individual and societal level. It is therefore worth considering (a) the inclusion of a specific ' Gambling' element within the NCS, and (b) the expansion in the scope of the 'Drug use' element to including portrayals of smoking and alcohol consumption.

1.6 Conclusions

Review conclusions are as follows:

1. There is broad backing for and confidence in classification systems, both in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions.

2. There is a high awareness of the NCS and categories/ markings amongst the Australian public; however, quantitative research undertaken in this area is dated.

3. Understanding of classification categories and markings amongst the Australian public (and amongst the public in comparable jurisdictions) appears to be limited, with significant variation observed across categories/ markings.

4. Understanding of mid-level classifications amongst the Australian public is especially problematic, and sometimes compares unfavourably to the levels observed in comparable jurisdictions.

5. The Australian publics' understanding of the consumer advice that accompanies classification symbols is incomplete, and sometimes compares unfavourably to the level of understanding observed in other jurisdictions.

6. Using separate classifications for sexually explicit films and other 'adults only' films can cause confusion.

7. Despite broad community and stakeholder support for the existence of a classification system, views on the RC category (and similar) are mixed.

8. Classification decisions for films and computer games are broadly aligned with community standards, both in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions.

9. Parents (and other primary caregivers) are more supportive of classification and rating systems when compared to the general public.

10. Young people across jurisdictions are, on the whole, knowledgeable and supportive of classification systems; however, self-reported support may not translate into actual use of the system to avoid (or prepare to view) material, especially amongst older children and adolescents.

11. Use of classification and rating information amongst the general public (especially parents) appears to be relatively high across jurisdictions, with Australia comparing favourably; however use amongst parents may be overestimated.

12. Empirical evidence assessing potential for harm should be critically considered in conjunction with data assessing community standards.

13. There is widespread agreement amongst community members that certain content is likely to be harmful (especially to children and young people); however the relative potential for harm is thought to be mediated by:

    Frequency;

    Duration; and

    Context.

14. There is broad community support for the inclusion of selected fetishes in higher-level, restricted content.

15. There are concerns that exposure to gambling and non-illicit drug use (i.e. alcohol and tobacco) via films and computer games may be harmful, both at an individual and societal level. It is therefore worth considering (a) the inclusion of a specific ' Gambling' element within the NCS, and (b) the expansion in scope of the 'Drug use' element to including portrayals of smoking and alcohol consumption.

2. Introduction

2.1 Research context

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 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 is also gives consumers further flexibility in *how* (e.g. via a Smartphone or mobile tablet) and *where* (e.g. 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 is mind, the then Attorney-General, Robert McClelland MP, tasked the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) to undertake a review of the Australian National Classification Scheme (NCS). In doing so, the ALRC was required to consider the extent to which the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995, state and territory enforcement legislation, Schedules 5 and 7 of the Broadcasting Services Act, and the Intergovernmental Agreement on Censorship and related laws continued to provide an effective framework for the classification of media content in Australia. The terms of reference also noted that this was the first comprehensive review of classification in Australia since the ALRC's review in 1991.

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. The report makes a total of 57 recommendations, covering matters including: what content must be classified and by whom; classification categories and criteria; restricting access to content classified R18+ and X18+; the scope of prohibited content; industry codes and co-regulation; and the responsibilities for classification laws, regulation and enforcement.

The report proposed that the Classification Board be retained as an independent statuary body responsible for making selected classification decisions, including those 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 (e.g. 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 classification

criteria and guidelines 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.

2.2 Objectives

Social research best-practice recommends that a comprehensive literature review be undertaken prior to the implementation of a new research program. Undertaking such a review assists in ensuring that the program (a) does not unnecessarily replicate existing research (including research that has been carried out in comparable jurisdictions) and (b) adheres to recognised methodological and ethical standards within the specific research area of interest. The results of a literature review can also be used to guide research priorities, especially when the proposed program is limited by budgetary and timing considerations. With this best-practice approach in mind, public opinion research covering the following topics was reviewed:

- Public awareness and understanding of classification categories and consumer advice (Chapter 3);

- Public perception of classification categories and consumer advice (Chapter 4);

- Public use of classification categories and consumer advice (Chapter 5); and

- Alignment of classification categories and consumer advice with community standards (Chapter 6).

The methodology adopted for this review is outlined in detail in Section 2.3 below.

2.3 Methodology

Search methods

Electronic database searches

The following databases were searched for relevant literature:

- CSA Illumina (including Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstract, MEDLINE, NTIS, PAIS Archive, Conference Papers Index, PAIS International, Social Services Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, British Humanities Index, Criminal Justice Abstracts, Health and Safety Science Abstracts, Risk Abstracts, CSA Engineering Research Database, Worldwide Political Science Abstracts)

- Informit (including Attorney-General's Information Service, Australian Public Affairs full text, Australian Federal Police Digest, Australian Library and Information Science Abstracts, Australian Medical Index, Australian Public Affairs Information Service, APEX Literature Database, Australian Transport Index, Australian Criminology Database, Australian Engineering Database, Health and Society, Science and Geography Education, SCANfile)

- JSTOR (disciplines limited to General Science, Health Sciences, History of Science and Technology, Law, Political Science, Public Policy and Administration, Statistics)

- OvidSP (including EMBASE (1988 to 2010 Week 33), EBM Reviews: Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials, Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, Cochrane Methodology Register and Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effects)

- ProQuest (Academic Research Library, Dissertations and Theses, ProQuest Science Journals, ProQuest Social Science Journals)

- Psyc Info

- Science Direct (Elsevier)

- SCOPUS

- Web of Science

The search strategies used were designed to find as many articles as possible relating to the topic area. While this produced a large number of results, including many articles falling outside the scope of the review, it ensured that a broad range of relevant literature was found.

Internet searches

Websites for government agencies and non-government classification-related groups were searched for literature relating to classification and censorship, and for references to such literature. Details of all websites searched are provided in Appendix B.

Literature collection and analysis

The first stage of the literature review consisted of conducting database and website searches and collecting all relevant literature. Following the completion of searches, relevant articles were classified as:

1. Research conducted in Australia and/or comparable jurisdictions (i.e. New Zealand, UK, Ireland, USA, Canada, and Europe).

    d. Qualitative studies

    e. Quantitative studies

    f. Mixed-method studies

2. Research conducted elsewhere (excluded from the review).

In addition to this public opinion research, academic studies (including experimental and longitudinal designs) examining the potential harmful effects of media exposure, with a particular focus on exposure to violent computer games, smoking, and gambling, were also briefly examined in the review. This literature was not reviewed systematically, and therefore relevant conclusions should be interpreted with caution.

2.4 Presentation of findings

It should be noted that data from comparable jurisdictions was included in this review in an effort to ascertain general trends in awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour, rather than to directly compare the performance of different classification systems. Due to significant variations in methodological approaches (and dates of publication), direct comparisons across jurisdictions should be interpreted with caution.

3. Classification and rating systems

3.1 Australia

The Australian Classification Board applies the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995 (the Act), the *National Classification Code and the Classification Guidelines* (the Guidelines). Classification categories for films and computer games are as follows: G, PG, M, MA 15+, R 18+, X 18+, and Refused Classification (RC). Classification categories for publications are as follows: Unrestricted, Category 1 Restricted (cannot be sold in Qld), Category 2 Restricted (cannot be sold in Qld), and Refused Classification (RC).

A comprehensive outline of the Australian classification system has been provided at Appendix A.

3.2 New Zealand

The New Zealand Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) is government agency established under the *Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993* (FVPC Act). Classification categories are as follows: G, PG, M, R13, RP13, R15, RP16, R16, R18, and R.

A comprehensive outline of the New Zealand classification system has been provided at Appendix A.

3.3 United States

The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) is an industry-run scheme that is not enforced by law and is administered by the Classification & Ratings Administration (CARA). Films can be exhibited without a rating although the majority of cinemas refuse to exhibit non-rated or NC-17 rated films. Classification categories for films are as follows: G, PG, PG13, R, and NC-17.

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) assigns rating for computer games and apps to assist American parents in making informed choices. The ESRB is a non-profit, industry-funded body and includes a rating system that provides guidance about age-appropriateness, content, and interactive elements. It also has a self-regulatory role where it enforces industry-adopted advertising guidelines and helps ensure responsible web and mobile privacy practices under its Privacy Online program. ESRB was established in 1994 by the Entertainment Software Association (ESA). Classification categories are as follows: EC (Early Childhood), E (Everyone), E10+ (Everyone 10+), T (Teen), M (Mature), AO (Adults Only).

A comprehensive outline of the US classification system has been provided at Appendix A.

3.4 United Kingdom

The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) is an industry-funded body. Classification decisions are based on Guidelines that are updated regularly and reflect the current views on film, DVD and video game regulation. Classification categories are as follows: U (Suitable for all), PG, 12A, 12, 15, 18, and R18.

The BBFC rates theatrically released films, and rates videos and video games that forfeited exemption from the Video Recordings Act 1984, which was discovered in August 2009 to be unenforceable until

the act was re-enacted by the Video Recordings Act 2010. Legally, local authorities have the power to decide under what circumstances films are shown in cinemas, but they nearly always choose to follow the advice of the BBFC.

A comprehensive outline of the UK classification system has been provided at Appendix A.

3.5 Canada

The classification of computer games is the responsibility of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) Canada. Classification of films is the responsibility of provinces in Canada and each has its own legislation. For home video purposes, the Canadian Home Video Rating System provides general categories, which are differentially adopted across provinces. Classification categories for films are as follows: G, PG, 14A, 18A, R, and A.

3.6 Europe

The Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE) are representatives for the video game industry on a European policy level. It aims to protect the industry and its employees against the threat of piracy and they also promote the industry-run Pan European Game Information (PEGI) ratings system. PEGI classification categories are as follows: 3, 7, 12, 16 and 18.

A comprehensive outline of the PEGI classification system has been provided at Appendix A.

3.7 Ireland

The Irish Film Classification Office (IFCO) is responsible for examining and certifying all cinema films and videos/DVDs distributed in Ireland. IFCO is a statutory body that is administered under two acts; the *Censorship of Films Act, 1923* and the *Video Recordings Act, 1989*. The aim of IFCO is to provide the public (in particular, parents) with a modern and dependable system of classification that protects children and young persons, has regard for freedom of expression and has respect for the values of Irish society. Classification categories are as follows: G, PG, 12A, 15A, 16, and 18.

A comprehensive outline of the Irish classification system has been provided at Appendix A.

4. Public awareness and understanding of classification categories and consumer advice

4.1 Overview of findings

- Awareness and understanding of classification categories and markings amongst the Australian community was comprehensively assessed via representative quantitative research in 2002 (AC Nielsen, 2002), 2005 (Galaxy Research, 2005), and 2007 (Galaxy Research, 2007). These studies showed:

    o High unprompted and prompted awareness of film and computer game classification categories and markings; and

    o Moderate understanding of film and computer game classification categories and markings, with confusion most commonly observed for mid-level classifications.

- Quantitative and qualitative research has further suggested that the Australian publics' understanding of the consumer advice that accompanies classification markings is moderate (see for example Urbis Keys Young, 2004; Galaxy Research, 2007). Key areas of concern are as follows:

    o The public appears to have a confused and often incorrect comprehension of the term 'Themes', which is included in selected consumer advice (e.g. Supernatural themes, Drug themes).

    o The relationship between classification markings and consumer advice is poorly understood, with evidence suggesting that the public are not clear on whether consumer advice is based on standards operating in each classification category, or whether there is a wider framework that all advice fits into.

- International studies have provided further evidence that film and computer game consumers find mid-level classifications to be the most confusing, especially when similar labels are used across multiple categories (see for example Colmar Brunton & NZ OFLC, 2011; 2011a; IFCO, 2013).

4.2 Awareness of classification categories – Australia

Unprompted awareness of the classification categories applied to films and computer games was last comprehensively assessed via a telephone survey undertaken by Galaxy Research in 2007 (Galaxy Research, 2007). This survey included 1,516 interviews with a representative sample of Australian community members aged 15 years or older[1]. The results of this survey, which were reported to the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department through the *Classification Decisions and Community Standards 2007 Report*, showed high awareness of classification categories, with 93% of surveyed film consumers indicating that they were aware that films carry classifications and 89% of surveyed

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[1] Full interlocking age/ gender/ region quotas were utilised. The data was not weighted.

computer game consumers indicating that they were aware that computer games carry classifications. Amongst film consumers who spoke a language other than English at home, three in four (75%) indicated that they were aware that there are classification categories for films. Reported awareness was lower amongst 15-17 year olds (85%) when compared to those aged 18 years or older (94%).

Other notable findings from this survey included the following:

- Unprompted awareness of individual categories amongst film consumers was very high, with nine in 10 consumers (90%) able to name (or imply knowledge of), unprompted, at least one correct classification category.

  - The classifications that rated the highest mentions were the G (69%), PG (71%), and M (64%) classification categories.

  - Only 23% of consumers were able to name the MA 15+ classification and only 12% were able to name the R18+ classification; however, implied knowledge of these categories was moderate (59% for MA 15+; 66% for R 18+).

  - The X18+ classification was named correctly or near correctly by 18% of consumers – this low result is not surprising given that restrictions on sale limits opportunities for exposure to items in this classification category.

- Upon prompting, 99% of consumers reported being aware of at least one film classification category, with 96% aware of the G classification, 97% aware of PG, 95% aware of M, 94% aware MA15+, and only 51% aware of X18+.

- Unprompted awareness of classification ratings amongst computer game consumers was high, with eight in 10 consumers (80%) able to name, unprompted, at least one correct classification.

  - The classifications that rated the highest unprompted mentions were the G (57%), PG (56%), and M (54%) classifications.

- Prompted awareness was high for all four computer game classifications current at the time of surveying, with 93% of computer game consumers aware of the G classification, 88% aware of the PG classification, 91% aware of the M classification, and 88% aware of the MA 15+ classification.

Large surveys measuring awareness and understanding of film and computer game classification categories amongst the Australian public were undertaken in February 2002 (AC Nielsen, 2002)[2], and June 2005 (Galaxy Research, 2005)[3]. Consistent with the results of the most recent survey undertaken by Galaxy Research (2007), these studies suggested that prompted awareness of the

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[2] A national consumer survey was conducted using AC Nielsen's face-to-face omnibus study. A total of 1075 individuals aged 14 years and over were interviewed. Quotas were placed on residential area, sex and age of respondents. Data was post-weighted to reflect the Australian population distribution on age, sex, and area

[3] 1002 interviews were undertaken with opt-in online panel members aged 14 years and older. Quotas were placed on residential area, sex and age of respondents. Data was post-weighted to reflect the Australian population distribution on age, sex, and area.

categories/ markings used to classify films is very high: only 3% of respondents indicated that they were unaware of any symbols in 2002 and less than .05% indicated that they were unaware of any symbols in 2005. There was also a significant increase in levels of awareness for the classification symbols used for computer games between 2002 and 2005: 64% of respondents indicated that they were aware of the G classification symbol in 2005 (compared to 28% in 2002), 42% indicated that they were aware of the G8+ symbol (compared to 20% in 2002), 55% indicated that they were aware of the MA 15+ symbol (compared to 25% in 2002), and 47% indicated that they were aware of the MA 15+ symbol (compared to 20% in 2002).

Awareness of classification markings has also been assessed by non-government organisations in Australia. For example, as part of the recent Digital Australia 2014 (DA14) survey undertaken by Bond University for the Interactive Games and Entertainment Association (IGEA), an unweighted sample of the general public was asked about their level of familiarity with computer game classification labels.[4] Reported familiarity was mixed, with 57% of respondents indicating that they are 'quite' or 'completely' familiar with Australian determined markings and 43% indicating that they are either 'vaguely' or 'not at all' familiar with the markings.

4.3 Understanding of classification categories – Australia

Public understanding of film classification categories was assessed both in the survey undertaken in February 2002 (AC Nielsen, 2002) and the survey undertaken in June 2005 (Galaxy Research, 2005). In contrast to awareness, reported understanding of film classification categories was moderate, with significant variation observed across symbols. Most notably, both studies concluded that a significant portion of consumers were confused about the difference between M and MA 15+ classifications. For example, in 2005 almost half of respondents who reported being aware of the MA 15+ classification interpreted the symbol as meaning 'Recommended for mature audience', suggesting little understanding for the stricter conditions that apply to this classification. This conclusion is further supported by the results of the stakeholder consultation undertaken by the ALRC for the review of classification and censorship, through which a number of contributors suggested that the public did not fully comprehend the difference between the M and MA 15+ categories. These contributors proposed that public understanding could be improved either through changes to the classification categories and consumer advice, or through a consumer education campaign.

Evidence from the surveys undertaken in 2002 (AC Nielsen, 2002) and 2005 (Galaxy Research, 2005) further suggest that the Australian public are confused about the meaning of the R 18+ and X 18+ symbols. For example, in the 2005 survey only around half of respondents (including consumers and non-consumers) successfully interpreted the R 18+ symbol as meaning that the product is restricted to an audience aged 18 years and over. In addition, 18% of respondents incorrectly assumed that films rated X 18+ contain violence. In the case of both the R 18+ and X 18+ ratings, respondents who made errors in interpretation most commonly assumed that the symbol indicated that the film was 'suitable' for adults aged 18+, rather than legally restricted. While it is not directly stated in the

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[4] Digital Australia 2014 (DA14) is a study of 1220 Australian households and 3398 individuals of all ages living in those households. These participants were from an online national random sample using the Nielsen Your Voice Panel in June 2012. The research was designed and conducted by Bond University. The margin of error is ±2.8%.

Classification - Content Regulation and Convergent Media report, it is possible to infer that understanding of the R 18+ or X 18+ symbols could be also be improved through an update of the classification categories/consumer advice, or through a program of community education.

4.4 Understanding of consumer advice – Australia

As outlined in the *Classification - Content Regulation and Convergent Media* report, 'consumer advice' refers to the words that appear alongside the classification symbols. Consumer advice is designed to give specific information about the content of the film/ computer game – examples include 'Strong violence' or 'Moderate course language'. The *Classification Act* currently required the Classification Board to provide consumer advice for all films and computer games it classifies, with the exception of content classified G (for which consumer advice is optional) and RC (for which consumer advice is unnecessary, as it is illegal to sell, exhibit, or otherwise distribute this content).

Evidence has consistently suggested that the Australian publics' understanding of the consumer advice that accompanies classification symbols is limited (see for example Galaxy Research, 2007; Urbis, Keys and Young, 2004). Most notably, the public appears to have a confused and often incorrect understanding of the term 'Themes', which is included in selected consumer advice (e.g. Supernatural themes, Drug themes). For example, only around one in four film consumers interviewed for the *Classification Decisions and Community Standards 2007* study were able to provide, unprompted, an accurate or near-accurate definition of the term 'Themes', and only 7% gave specific example of themes.

Qualitative research undertaken by Urbis Keys Young (2004) further noted public confusion about the relationship between classification symbols and consumer advice (p.34):

> *Panellists were not always clear on whether consumer advice is based on standards operating in each classification category, or whether there is a wider framework that all advice fits into. To illustrate, some people did not know that 'Medium Level' depends on the acceptable standards within each classification range, and that the impact of 'Medium Level Violence' varies according to the classification of the film or game in question.*

It should, however, be noted that despite the confusion noted above, community members have consistently expressed a preference for consumer advice via both qualitative and quantitative research (see for example Galaxy Research, 2007; Urbis Keys Young 2004; 2012; see also Chapters 5 & 6, below). For example, participants in the *2004 Community Assessment Panels* generally agreed that consumer advice is useful, with many expressing a desire for it to be more detailed and descriptive. Stakeholders consulted as part of the ALRC review of classification and censorship were also broadly supportive of the maintenance of consumer advice; however, many noted that a reassessment of terminology was required. Some industry submissions which expressed concern about changing the classification categories also pointed to consumer advice as the preferable mechanism for improving the clarity of classification information.

4.5 Noteworthy findings from comparable jurisdictions

General awareness of classification and rating systems varied considerably across the jurisdictions examined:

- As part of a survey of the general public undertaken by TNS Media for the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) in 2004[5], respondents were asked to indicate how often they noticed the classification of a film or video or DVD before deciding whether the watch it. Forty per cent of respondents indicated that they always check the classification, 43% indicated that they sometimes check the classification, and 17% indicated that they never check (BBFC & TNS Media, 2005).

- The Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE) runs the Pan European Game Information (PEGI) computer game rating system, and commissions periodic research into Europeans' understanding and perceptions of the system. The results of the most recent survey revealed that while unprompted awareness of the PEGI scheme was limited – 52% of gamers and 44% of non-gaming parents had some awareness of the system – prompted recognition of the classification symbols was moderate, with 75% of gamers and 55% of non-gaming parents indicating that they recognised at least one symbol (GameVision, 2010).[6]

- The US Federal Trade Commission (US FTC) regularly undertakes reviews and produces reports (entitled *Marketing Violent Entertainment to Children*) for the United States Congress on industry practices in the motion pictures, music, and games industry (e.g. US FTC, 2007; 2009). Among numerous other topics, these reviews assess the effectiveness of industry-run age rating systems. For the 2007 and 2009 reports, the FTC carried out an 'undercover shopper' survey to assess the extent to which retailers were abiding by the rating labels assigned by industry-run groups such as the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB, for games) and the Classification and Rating Administration (CARA, for films). In 2007, the FTC also surveyed parents and children to assess their familiarity with and use of games ratings (US FTC, 2007)[7].

  o Nearly nine in ten parents (87%) and three quarters of children (75%) indicated that they were aware that the ESRB rating system (compared to 61% of parents and 73% of children in a comparable survey undertaken in 2000).

  o Three quarters (75%) of parents claiming familiarity with the computer game rating system correctly indicated that the system includes both an age rating and content descriptors (up from 53% in 2000).

  o Half of parents claiming familiarity with the computer game rating system named, unaided, three ESRB ratings (E, T, or M).

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[5] 1,239 interviews were undertaken with members of the British public aged 18+. Quotas were placed on the sex, age, class, and working status of respondents. Respondents were recruited at 24 locations: two in Wales, three in Scotland, one in Northern Ireland, and the remained spread throughout England.. People who had been recruited ten attended a local hall, which was used as an interview centre, where they were given the BBFC Classification Guidelines and a self-completion questionnaire. The data was not weighted.

[6] Interviews were undertaken with 5,685 European video gamers aged 16-49 in the Spring of 2010 – data was weighted by age, sex, hours of play, and gaming spend. A further 2,931 interviews were undertaken with European non-gaming parents aged 16+ in the Spring of 2010 – this data was not weighted a population data for the group was unavailable. No further details of the methodology were included in the final report of this study.

[7] For this survey, the strata were constructed such that the resulting sample would provide a nationally representative statistical sample of U.S. households in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Telephone interviews were undertaken with 1,342 parents of children aged between 8 and 16 years. Of the 1,342 parents interviewed, 543 gave permission to interview their child and 354 children were interviewed.

- The 2011 research *Understanding the Classification System: New Zealanders' Views* concluded that awareness of the New Zealand classification labels was near universal, with only .04% surveyed members of the general public indicating that they had never seen the labels (Colmar Brunton & NZ OFLC, 2011)[8].

Research undertaken in comparable jurisdictions has provided further evidence that film and computer game consumers find mid-level classification to be the most confusing, especially when similar labels are used across multiple categories (see for example Colmar Brunton & NZ OFLC 2011, 2011a; IFCO, 2013). For example, a recent survey of the New Zealand public undertaken by Colmar Brunton for the OFLC suggested that understanding of the M classification among New Zealanders is limited, with only 61% of respondents correctly labelling this classification when faced with three possible definitions (Colmar Brunton & NZ OFLC, 2011)[9]. Nineteen per cent of respondents incorrectly selected 'Only people 16 years and over can watch the film' and 15% incorrectly selected 'People under 16 years can only watch the film with parents or guardians'. The results of this survey further suggest that understanding of the New Zealand RP classification is limited: slightly over two thirds of respondents correctly classified the RP13 and RP16 as meaning that people under 13 or 16, respectively, cannot view the film without an accompanying parent or guardian. This finding was supported by the results of a recent qualitative study with the New Zealand public (Colmar Brunton & NZ OFLC, 2011a, p.19):

> *Participants felt RP was not as 'clear cut' as other classifications in terms of what sort of content to expect, and who it was suitable for. It was described as something of a 'grey area'.*

Confusion about the exact definition of mid-level classifications has also been observed amongst the general public in the UK and in Ireland. Qualitative research undertaken for the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) in 2009 found that attitudes to and comprehension of the newly introduced 12A classification category were mixed, with some participants confused about the necessity and meaning of the classification (Hardie, Goldstone, & Slesenger, 2009, p.34):

> *I don't understand what the differences are. I am completely confused really.*
> (Male with children aged 5-12)

> *It doesn't make sense. What's a PG then?*
> (Male with children aged 5-12)

In the *Film Classification – Parental Attitudes 2013 survey* final report, the IFCO noted that level of parental understanding of individual ratings – especially with regard to 12A and 15A categories – has been an area of habitual concern for the Office.[10] With this concern in mind, parents were asked to outline their understanding of the 12A film classification rating. Only 63% of parents provided the following accurate definition of the 12A classification – suitable for those aged 12 and above, but parents/ guardians can accompany younger children if they deem the material appropriate (IFCO, 2013).

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[8] An online survey of 2000 New Zealanders aged 18 years and over was carried out between 7 and 23 February 2011. The final data was weighted to align it with Statistics New Zealand population counts for region by age and by gender.
[9] The correct definition for M is as follows: Anyone can watch the film but it is more suitable for people aged 16 years and over.
[10] An online survey was distributed to Irish parents nationally via the National Parents Council – there were a total of 267 respondents. No further details of the methodology were included in the final report of this study.

Finally, recent qualitative research undertaken with the movie-going public (including parents, non-parents, and youths aged 12-18 years) for the Government of Alberta, Canada by Leger Marketing concluded the following (Leger Marketing, 2009):

- While the age limits for the G and R rating were clearly understood by movies-going adults, this participant group was less certain about the restrictions for the PG, 14A, and 18A ratings.

- Similar to the adult group, movie-going youth were able to name the ratings used in Alberta but were unclear on the age restrictions assigned to the PG, 14A, and 18A ratings.

5. Public perception of classification categories and consumer advice

5.1 Overview of findings

- There has been a consistently high level of support for the existence of a classification system in Australia, with few members of the general public (including academics and engaged stakeholders) disputing the benefits of system that allows individuals to make fully informed decisions about the media they (and their children) consume.

- Despite broad community and stakeholder support for the existence of a classification system, opinions are far less unanimous regarding specific elements of the system; most notably, the RC category.

  o Qualitative research suggests that the general public have mixed views on what (and indeed whether) material should be banned or restricted (Urbis Pty Ltd, 2011).

- Surveys have regularly shown that members of the Australian general public tend to agree with the classifications and advice assigned to films and computer games (see for example Galaxy Research, 2005; Galaxy Research, 2007; Newspoll, 2002).

  o International studies suggest that disagreement with classification decisions is most common for mid-level classifications (Hardie, Goldstone, & Slesenger, 2009; Lansdowne Market Research, 2004).

- Parents (and other primary caregivers) appear to be more supportive of classification and rating systems when compared to the general public, both in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions (see for example Newspoll, 2002, US FTC, 2007; 2009).

- Public opinion research suggests that young people across jurisdictions are generally supportive of classification systems; however many youth believe that assigned classifications are too strict (see AC Nielsen, 2002; Dublin City University & Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology, 2005).

5.2 Perceptions of classification systems as a whole

There has been a consistently high level of support for the existence of a classification system in Australia, with few members of the general public (including academics and engaged stakeholders) disputing the benefits of system that allows individuals to make fully informed decisions about the media they (and their children) consume (Dalton & Schubert, 2011). For example, research undertaken by Newspoll for the Australian OFLC in 2002 suggested an almost universal recognition of the benefits of classification advice, with 94% of surveyed members of the general public agreeing with the following statement: It's useful to have classification symbols for movies and computer

games.[11] In addition, 85% of respondents agreed that the OFLC played an important role in providing classification advice on movies and computer games, and 75% agreed that they have confidence in the office's rating decision making abilities (Newspoll, 2002). More recently, the *2005 Classification Study* concluded: 'Nine in 10 Australians agree that the OFLC plays an important role in providing classification advice on movies and computer games' (Galaxy Research, 2005, p.31)[12].

The findings of these relatively recent and empirically sound Australian studies are supported by similar research internationally, with findings consistently suggesting strong backing for and confidence in classification and rating systems. In particular, quantitative research for the UK report *Public Opinion and the BBFC Guidelines 2009* found that just over 6 in 10 (62%) members of the general public, and 82% of BBFC website visitors, felt that the BBFC was effective in its role of proving reliable film classification and advice (Hardie, Goldstone, & Slesenger, 2009)[13]. In addition, accompanying qualitative research concluded (p.25):

> *The BBFC was thought to be fallible and did not always get decisions right;*
> *however this was seen as inevitable given the diversity of views on the subject*
> *and the credibility of the organisation was never questioned. Whilst*
> *respondents do not always agree with every classification decision, on the*
> *whole the BBFC were thought to be doing a difficult job well.*

The IFCO's *Film Classification Survey – Parental Attitudes 2013* provided further evidence of public confidence in classification systems: 85% of the parents interviewed indicated that the IFCO is effective in providing film classifications that could be relied upon (IFCO, 2013).[14] Further to this, as part of the US study *Marketing Violent Entertainment to Children 2007* surveyed parents were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with ESRB rating system: 33% indicated that they were 'very satisfied', 51% indicated that they were 'somewhat satisfied', 9% indicated that they were 'somewhat dissatisfied', and only 3% indicated that they were 'very dissatisfied'.[15] Finally, the 2011 research, *Understanding the Classification System: New Zealanders' Views*, concluded that public perceptions of the New Zealand OFLC were, on the whole, positive, with 75% of adults (weighted to the New Zealand population) indicating that the classification office was doing either a 'good' (60%) or 'excellent' (15%) job (OFLC, 2013).

5.3 Perceptions of the RC classification category

Despite broad Australian community and stakeholder support for the existence of a classification system, opinions are far less unanimous regarding specific elements of the system; most notably, the RC category (see Hartley, Green, & Lumby, 2010). As noted in the *Classification - Content Regulation*

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[11] A national consumer survey was conducted using Newspoll's telephone omnibus with adults aged 18 years and over. In addition, a sample of N=398 teenagers aged 13 – 17 in Sydney and Melbourne was interviewed by telephone on Newspoll's Youth Omnibus. Adult (aged over 18) and youth (13-17 years) samples were weighted to reflect the Australian population distribution (national for adults; Sydney/ Melbourne for youth) on age, age left school, sex, and area.

[12] See Footnote 3, above, for overview of methodology.

[13] 3,102 interviews were conducted by GfK with the general public aged 16+ as part of the GfK weekly national face-to-face omnibus. The survey adopted random location recruitment, with nationally representative quotas placed on age, gender, working status, and region. The data was not weighted. 1,104 interviews were conducted with adults aged 16+ who had watched at least one of a list of recently released films and DVDs in the past four weeks. Nationally representative quotas set by region (124 sampling points), with guideline quotas on age, gender, social class, and ethnicity.

[14] See Footnote 10, above, for over view of methodology.

[15] See Footnote 7, above, for over view of methodology.

and Convergent Media report, RC is the highest classification that can be given to media content in Australia at present. Access to such content is restricted by way of prohibitions on sale and distribution contained in State and Territory classification laws. Put simply, content classified as RC is effectively 'banned' and may not be sold, screened, provided online, or otherwise distributed.

The issues surrounding the relationship between classification and censorship are complicated and varied, especially in a convergent media environment (see Crawford and Lumby, 2012 for overview of issues; see also Chapter 6, below). There appears to be no one reason why an individual or group is for or against the capacity of government to ban selected media content, including media accessed online. There are, however, some consistent arguments on both sides of the debate. One of the most common arguments for restricting access is the view that certain media (especially films and computer games) may be harmful – both at the individual and community level. It is also commonly argued that that restrictive classification helps to protect children from possible harm. A widespread case put forward for the abolishment of the RC classification category (and similar) is that Australia is essentially a free society where adults should be able to see, hear, and read what they like, as expressed in the Classification Act (see for example Hartley, Green, & Lumby, 2010).

It is not possible to reach a conclusion about community attitudes to the RC classification (or more broadly to the capacity of the Australian government to ban or restrict access to certain material) as it has not been recently assessed via quantitative research with a representative sample of adult Australians. Qualitative research undertaken by Urbis Pty Ltd for the ALRC, however, suggests that members of the general public have mixed views on what (and indeed whether) material should be banned or restricted. For example, after viewing film scenes including explicit sex and fetishes, a minority of participants felt that the material should be restricted to those aged 21+ and only a few felt that it should be banned. In contrast, there was a general consensus that a piece of content that included online solicitation of a child should be banned, but participants expressed concern about how such material could be banned (Urbis Pty Ltd, 2011).

International studies examining community attitudes toward the capacity of a governing body to ban material have produced mixed results. As part of the questionnaire completed by parents for the IFCO's study, *Film Classification Survey – Parental Attitudes 2013*, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: 'There is no longer a need for film censorship (i.e., the banning of films)'.[16] The results of the survey revealed that 82% of respondents disagreed with this statement, suggesting support amongst Irish parents for the capacity of the IFCO to ban films (IFCO, 2013). In contrast, a 2005 survey of public opinion commissioned and published by the BBFC found that a clear majority of British community members were against any form of film censorship, with 66% of respondents agreeing with the following statement: 'Adults (over 18) should be able to watch whatever they want on film and video/DVD' (BBFC & TNS Media, 2005).[17] This finding is further supported by more recent qualitative research commissioned by the BBFC in 2009 (Hardie, Goldstone, & Slesenger, 2009, p.38):

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[16] See Footnote 10, above, for over view of methodology.

[17] See Footnote 5, above, for over view of methodology.

> *Whilst respondents had very mixed ideas about film classification they agreed*
> *with two key principles; that films should continue to be classified and that*
> *there should be no censorship of film in a free and democratic society. In short,*
> *there was a great deal of support for the premise that adults should be free to*
> *choose their own entertainment, providing it is legal.*

Stakeholders consulted as part of the review of the Australian National Classification Scheme criticised the RC classification for being vague and too broad. This view is echoed in relevant academic and 'grey' literature (see for example Dunstan, 2009). As noted in Crawford and Lumby (2012; see also Hartley, Green, & Lumby, 2010), Peter Leonard – a partner at Gilbert and Tobin – argues that RC material is a porous category that is subject to political whim and 'scope creep'. Crawford and Lumby (2012) further question the definition of RC included in the Commonwealth Classification Act, which, as noted above, makes reference to items that 'offend against the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally acceptable to reasonable adults'. The researchers note (p.46):

> *In this scenario, it is only the opinion of the Classification Board that is taken*
> *into consideration – and what constitutes standards of morality, decency and*
> *propriety are not properly defined. Moreover, much of the material deemed as*
> *RC in Australia would not be refused classification in other Western democratic*
> *liberal countries.*

As with all aspects of the RC classification, the extent to which these views exist in the broader community remains unclear.

5.4 Perceptions of assigned classifications – General

Surveys have consistently shown that members of the Australian general public tend to agree with the classifications and consumer advice assigned to films and computer games.

- For example, the *Classification Usage and Attitudes Study* found that 72% of adults, 77% of parents, and 80% of young people agreed with the following statement: 'The OFLC has good perspective on movies for different ages' (Newspoll, 2002). It should, however, be noted that a significant minority (22% of all respondents) disagreed with this statement, suggesting that there was an imperfect match between community attitudes and board decisions.[18]

- Relatively consistent results were observed in the more recent *Classification Study*, with 76% survey members of the general public agreeing that the Australian OFLC has good perspective on movies for different ages (Galaxy Research, 2005).[19]

- Further, the 2007 research *Classification Decisions and Community Standards* concluded that that majority (77%) of film consumers believe that the classifications for films are about right, leading the authors to suggest that 'classification decisions on films reflect community standards and any changes to the classification system to bring it in line with consumer perceptions should be incremental rather than large (Galaxy Research, 2007, p.29).

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[18] See Footnote 11, above, for overview of methodology.
[19] See Footnote 3, above, for overview of methodology.

Broadly comparable results were also reported for computer game consumers, with 70% of interviewed consumers indicating that classifications for computer games are about right.[20]

It should be noted that in the three studies listed above, men were more likely to report that film and game classifications are too strict. For example, in the 2002 study 26% of male respondents disagreed that the OFLC has a good perspective on movies for different ages (compared to 19% overall) (Newspoll, 2002).

Similarly, members of the general public surveyed in comparable jurisdictions mostly agreed with classifications or ratings assigned to films and computer games. As part of the 2005 study *Public Opinion and the BBFC Guidelines 2005*, members of the general public were asked to indicate how frequently they disagreed with a film's classification.[21] Around two thirds of respondents (66%) indicated that they had either never or rarely disagreed with a classification decision, 30% indicated that they had disagreed quite often, and 3% indicated that they always or almost always disagreed (BBFC & TNS Media, 2009). This question was again included in the survey undertaken for the 2009 study *Public Opinion and the BBFC Guidelines 2009* – on this occasion, 38% of surveyed members of the general public indicated that they had never disagreed with a classification decision, 44% indicated that they sometimes disagreed, and 18% indicated that they disagreed either quite often or always (Hardie, Goldstone, & Slesenger, 2009).[22] While changes in the response scale make it difficult to compare across survey waves with certainty, taken together the results of the 2005 and 2009 studies suggest that frequent disagreement with classification decisions has decreased over time, with around a third of the general public sample indicating that they frequently disagreed in 2005 compared to around one fifth of the sample in 2009.

Further findings of note from comparable jurisdictions include the following:

- In the US, the study *Marketing Violent Entertainment to Children 2007* found that agreement with the ESRB ratings was high amongst parents who were aware of the ratings: 21% of surveyed parents indicated that they agreed with the game ratings 'all of the time', 45% indicated that they agreed 'most of the time', 24% indicated 'some of the time', and 8% indicated 'never' (US FTC, 2007).[23]

- Research undertaken in 2011 suggested that a clear majority of New Zealanders (69%) were of the view that 'the classification system for films, videos, DVDs and games was 'about right'. Twenty-three per cent viewed the system as too lenient and 8% viewed the system as 'too strict' (Colmar Brunton & NZ OFLC, 2011).[24]

- More recently, 74% of surveyed Irish parents indicated that they were happy with the current classification system in Ireland. Of those who indicated that they were not happy with the

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[20] See Footnote 1, above, for overview of methodology.
[21] See Footnote 17, above, for overview of methodology.
[22] See Footnote 5, above, for overview of methodology.
[23] See Footnote 7, above, for over view of methodology.
[24] See Footnote 8, above, for over view of methodology.

current classification system, 41% further reported that they did not agree with the current classification categories (IFCO, 2013).[25]

5.5 Parents' and young peoples' perception of classification and rating systems

Parents

Public opinion research has consistently shown that parents (and other primary caregivers) are more supportive of classification and rating systems when compared to the general public. Indeed, parents are so widely acknowledged to be engaged stakeholders that some regulatory agencies only survey this respondent group for views on classification or rating systems.

The *Classification Usage and Attitudes Study* reported that 98% of Australian parents agreed that it is useful to have classification symbols for movies and computer games, compared to 94% of adults and 93% of youths (Newspoll, 2002).[26] Parents were also significantly more likely to agree with the following statement*:* 'Classification symbols are one of the ways to decide on the suitability of movies and computer games for yourself'(88% of parents agree compared to 71% of adults). Broadly comparable results were also reported by the BBFC in 2009: 76% of surveyed parents (compared to 62% of the general public sample) rated the BBFC as (very or quite) effective in its role of providing reliable film classification advice to consumers (Hardie, Goldstone, & Slesenger, 2009).[27]

In 2007 the US Federal Fair Trade Commission (US FTC, 2007) undertook a telephone survey of parents and children to assess awareness and efficacy of the ESRB system (US FTC, 2007).[28] Although more than half of parents familiar with the system (60%) indicated that the rating system does a 'good' or 'excellent' job informing them about the level of violence in a computer game, 36% indicated that it does a 'fair' or 'poor' job. Parents reported similar levels of satisfaction for the levels of sexual content and profanity included in games. As noted in the final report, the Commission's survey also included items designed to measure parents' general level of agreement with ratings assigned to games with which they are personally familiar. Among parents familiar with the ESRB system, 64% agreed that most or all of the time computer game ratings match their personal view of whether a game may be suitable for children in the age group indicated in the game's rating.

The US Federal Trade Commission undertook further relevant research with parents in 2009 – this survey of approximately 1,000 parents of children between the ages of 7 and 16 focussed on parents' awareness of and attitudes toward the practice of releasing unrated DVDs (US FTC, 2009).[29] A majority of interviewed parents expressed some concern about the release of unrated DVDs with more violence or other adult content than the rated theatrical version, with 58% of parents indicating that they had some concerns, 20% indicating that they had no concerns, and 22% indicating that they did not have an opinion either way. This suggests that US parents generally have a preference for

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[25] See Footnote 10, above, for over view of methodology**.**

[26] See Footnote 11, above, for overview of methodology.

[27] The sample size for this study was 2,143 British adults (1,329 parents). Fieldwork was undertaken 9 – 11 February 2009. The survey was carried out online. The data was weighted to be representative of all British adults aged 18+. No further details of the methodology were included in the final report of this study.

[28] See Footnote 7, above, for overview of methodology.

[29] For this survey, the strata were constructed such that the resulting sample would provide a nationally representative statistical sample of U.S. households in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Telephone interviews were undertaken with 1,000 parents of children aged between 7 and 16 years. Post-stratification weighting was conducted after the survey fielding period.

classification markings on all DVDs, and best-practice approach to classification should take this preference into consideration.

Young people

Public opinion research suggests that young people across jurisdictions are generally supportive classification systems; however many youth believe that assigned classifications are too strict. The *Classification Usage and Attitude Study* undertaken for the Australian OFLC in 2002 included a representative survey of youth aged 13-17 years residing in Sydney and Melbourne (AC Nielsen, 2002).[30] The results of this survey suggested that the youth segment largely felt that classification symbols were useful, with 93% of respondents agreeing with the following statement: It's useful to have classification symbols for movies and computer games. In addition, 80% of respondents agreed that OFLC has good perspective on what kinds of movies/ computer games are suitable for people of different ages. It should, however, be noted that only around 6 in 10 respondents agreed that the classification symbols assist them to ascertain the suitability of movies and computer games for personal viewing.

In 2004 the IFCO surveyed a broadly representative sample of secondary school students on their film-related experiences, including attitudes to and views on the current classification system (Dublin City University & Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology, 2005).[31] The results of this survey revealed the following relevant findings:

- 40% of adolescents were of the view that film classification is a good idea for their own age group and 92% were of the view that it is a good idea for younger age groups.

- 59% of adolescents reported that they have used the IFCO classification system when selecting films – 74% of these adolescents further indicated that they were either 'very satisfied' or 'quite satisfied' with the system.

- Surveyed adolescents were far more likely to indicate that they used the classification marking to seek out specific types of material (65% of respondents who reported using the classification system) rather than to avoid seeing challenging material (35% of respondents who reported using the classification system).

- Consistent with the results of the 2002 *Classification Usage and Attitude Study*, more than half of surveyed adolescents felt that IFCO classifies films too strictly and only around one in five (19%) felt that classifications were sometimes too lenient.

- While some surveyed adolescents advocated removing film classification completely, or at minimum stopping their enforcement, most respondents felt that it was important to retain a system for under 12s and some also felt that it was important for under 15s.

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[30] A national consumer survey was conducted using Newspoll's telephone omnibus with adults aged 18 years and over. In addition, a sample of N=398 teenagers aged 13 – 17 in Sydney and Melbourne was interviewed by telephone on Newspoll's Youth Omnibus. Adult (aged over 18) and youth (13-17 years) samples were weighted to reflect the Australian population distribution (national for adults; Sydney/ Melbourne for youth) on age, age left school, sex, and area.
[31] A random sample of 12 secondary schools was selected from a listing of secondary schools provided by the Department of Education. This selection process was designed to provide a representative sample of schools (in terms of geographic area, socio-economic grouping, gender, and religious composition). A total of 1,045 adolescents were surveyed during the early summer of 2004.

More recently, the New Zealand OFLC undertook an online survey with 507 young people aged 16-18 (Colmar Brunton & NZ OFLC, 2013).[32] Views on the classification system reported via this survey were mixed, with 47% of respondents indicating that, in their view, the system was 'about right', 40% indicating that the system was 'too strict', and only 5% indicating that the system was 'too lenient'. Of those who felt that that the current system was too strict, only 5% believed that it was 'much too strict'. It should, however, be noted that more than 8 in 10 respondents (85%) were of the view that restrictions are at least 'quite a good idea' for people their own age (i.e. 16-18 years), and 90% believed the same for those younger than themselves.

5.6 Perceptions of mid-level classifications

As noted above, research from a number of agencies found a relatively poor understanding of mid-level classifications or ratings. This issue appears to be especially pronounced when similar symbols or terms are adopted for mid-level classifications – examples of such practices include M and MA 15+ (in Australia), 12 and 12A (in the UK), and PG, 12PG and 15PG (in Ireland). Along with being less understood, research suggests that members of the general public are less satisfied with mid-level classifications, especially when compared to lower-level classifications. For example, research undertaken with Irish parents in 2004 showed the following (Lansdowne Market Research, 2005):[33]

- Around 1 in 4 respondents reported that the PG classification was too strict (versus 17% who reported that it was not strict enough).

- 12PG was reported to be 'too strict' on occasion by more than 4 in 10 respondents (versus around a quarter of respondents who reported that 12PG was 'not strict enough' on occasion).

- 15PG rated films were reported as being 'often' or 'sometimes' too strictly rated by almost half (45%) of respondents (versus 38% of respondents who reported that 15PG classification was 'often' or 'sometimes' not strict enough).

There is also evidence of dissatisfaction with mid-level classifications amongst the British public. As part of a 2009 survey of the general public, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with films included in the various classification categories.[34] Only 59% of the general public sample indicated that they usually or always agreed with 12A classifications (compared to 80% for U, 72% for PG, 61% for 16, 72% for 18, and 63% for R18) (Hardie, Goldstone, & Slesenger, 2009). Regarding mid-level classifications more generally, the researchers concluded (p.39-40):

> *Interestingly, the most difficult and potentially controversial classification*
> *category was '12A'; teenagers were thought to mature very differently and*
> *respondents could also have quite diverse views about was and was not*

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[32] Parents of 16 to 18 year-olds (ie, panellists aged 35 to 65) were randomly selected from Colmar Brunton's online panel, and a young person in their home was invited to take part in the survey. Where there was more than one 16 to 18 year-old in the home, we asked for the person with the next birthday. Quotas were applied at the sampling and selection stage, and cell weighting was used so the final results are representative of young people by gender (male and female) and by age (16, 17, or 18).

[33] A survey was conducted among a representative group of parents with children at post-primary schools. No further details of the methodology were included in the final report of this study.

[34] See Footnote 27, above, for overview of methodology.

*appropriate viewing for this age group. '15' was another area of concern,
partly because this was recognised as being a vulnerable group where the peer
group could lead the child astray and partly because once again, respondents
had different views about how 'adult' a teenage was at this age. The
Guidelines around these two key age groups were scrutinised and the BBFC was
not always thought to have got it right.*

*By contrast the issues around 'U' and 'PG' and '18' seemed clearer cut. At the
lower end, film rarely challenged and the parent felt that he or she was still in
control. At '18', respondents were relaxed about the Guidelines and how film
could impact an adult audience who were free to make their own decisions.*

6. Public use of classification categories and consumer advice

6.1 Overview of findings

- Use of classification and rating information amongst the general public appears to be relatively high across the jurisdictions included in this review.

  - o For example, research undertaken with the Australian public in 2005 concluded that around three quarters of Australians (76%) use classification symbols to decide on the suitability of movies, up from 71% in 2002 (Galaxy Research, 2005).

- There is significant cross-jurisdictional evidence to suggest that parents and other primary caregivers use classifications and ratings when choosing (or assisting in choosing) media for children and young people – this is especially true when children are younger (see for example Colmar Brunton, 2011; Newspoll, 2002; US FTC, 2007).

  - o Evidence of the use of consumer advice when choosing for children and young people is more limited; however advice is most often used by parents and other primary caregivers when it is comprehensive and easily understood.

- Research undertaken directly with children and young people has produced mixed results, with some studies providing further evidence of parental use of classification symbols and ratings information and other studies suggesting that use (and especially enforcement practices) may be overestimated by parents (see Dublin City University & Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology, 2005; US FTC, 2007).

6.2 General use of classification systems

Use of classification and rating information amongst the general public appears to be relatively high across the jurisdictions included in this review. For example, quantitative research undertaken with the Australian public in 2005 concluded that around three quarters of Australians (76%) use classification markings to decide on the suitability of movies, up from 71% in 2002 (Galaxy Research, 2005).[35] Broadly comparable results were also obtained for the UK general public, with 46% of the national representative general public sample indicating that they always checked the film/ DVD classification before deciding whether to watch (or allow others to watch) a film. Further, 25% of respondents indicated that they checked some film/ DVD classifications (Hardie, Goldstone, & Slesenger, 2009).[36]

The results of this survey of the British public suggested less scrutiny of game classifications among UK computer game players, with less than half of surveyed players (46%) indicating that they checked some (18%) or all (28%) classifications (Hardie, Goldstone, & Slesenger, 2009). More promising results were, however, obtained in quantitative research conducted in 2010 for the Integrative Software

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[35] See Footnote 3, above, for overview of methodology.
[36] See Footnote 27, above, for overview of methodology.

Federation of Europe by GameVision Europe.[37] This research found that 76% of European Gamers (and 89% of non-gaming parents) who were aware of the PEGI rating system reported that they found the system quite (29%), very (25%), or extremely (18%) useful (GameVision Europe, 2010).

The general usefulness of classification markings has also been assessed using qualitative research. For example, recent qualitative research with the New Zealand public found the following (Colmar Brunton, 2011a, p.13).

> *Participants also thought that the New Zealand classification labels were useful as an instant indicator of a film's content, particularly the use of the 'traffic light' colours – red (R18, R16, etc) signifying 'stop – not everyone can have this', yellow (M, PG) meaning 'slow down, caution', and green (G) signifying 'go anyone can watch or play this'.*

Despite the evidence of limited understanding of consumer advice outlined above, there is some, admittedly dated, research that suggests Australians find the advice useful. More than nine in ten members of the general public surveyed for the *Classification Study* reported that the advice was useful, with 46% indicating that it was 'Useful' and 46% indicating that it was 'Very useful' (Galaxy Research, 2005).[38] Again, broadly comparable results have been observed in the UK. The survey undertaken as part of the *Public Opinion and the BBFC Guidelines* study in 2005 asked members of the general public who reported that they had 'noticed' consumer advice to indicate the extent to which they found the advice useful.[39] Forty-two per cent of respondents indicated that they found the advice very useful ('I always look at the consumer advice'), 44% indicated that they found it quite useful ('I use when deciding what my children should watch'), and only 11% indicated that they did not find it useful (BBFC, 2005).

6.3 Use of classification categories when choosing for children and young people

There is significant evidence to suggest that parents and other primary caregivers use classifications and ratings when choosing (or assisting in choosing) media for children and young people – this is especially true when children are younger. As part of the *Classification Usage and Attitude Survey*, parents were asked to select sources of influence (including the most influential factor) when choosing a film for their child. [40] The results of this survey suggested that classification plays a key role in influencing choice of film for children, with 61% of parents including 'classification rating' in their list of sources of influence, and 18% listing it as their most influential factor in film section (Newspoll, 2002).

This conclusion is further supported by the results of empirically sound, more recent international research:

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[37] See Footnote 6, above, for overview of methodology.
[38] See Footnote 3, above, for overview of methodology.
[39] See Footnote 5, above, for overview of methodology.
[40] See Footnote 11, above, for overview of methodology.

- Research undertaken by Colmar Brunton for the New Zealand OFLC in 2011 found that two thirds of respondents who had chosen (or helped to choose) a film, DVD, video, or game for a child or young person indicated that the classification is 'very important' and 58% indicated that the descriptive note is 'very important'.[41]

  o The vast majority of these respondents also gave a rating of at least seven out of 10 when it came to the importance of classification (92%) and descriptive notes (90%) in their decisions for children and young people (Colmar Brunton & NZ OFLC, 2011).

- The US FTC survey conducted as part of the *Marketing Violent Entertainment to Children 2007* study suggested that a significant proportion of US parents rely on classification information when choosing computer games for their children, with 61% of surveyed parents indicating that they used the ESRB rating icons 'most or all of time' when choosing games for their children (US FTC, 2007).[42]

- The survey conducted as part of the more recent *Marketing Violent Entertainment to Children 2009* assessed parental use of the MPAA's CARA rating system.[43] Consistent with 2007 result for computer games, parents' reliance on the ratings when making movie selections for children was high, with just over three quarters of surveyed parents (76%) reporting that they used the rating system all or most of the time when deciding whether to let their child buy, rent, or watch a movie for the first time. Only 9% of surveyed parents indicated that they rarely or never use the CARA rating system (US FTC, 2009).

- When asked about deciding whether to see a film in the company of young people as part of study undertaken on 2004, more than three quarters (77%) of a nationally representative sample of the British public indicated that they found ratings useful – this was in line with the result of a comparable survey undertaken in 2000.[44]

  o Among those with children, 85% indicated that they found the ratings useful (compared with 73% of those with no children).

  o The overall results were almost identical when respondents were asked deciding what to view with young people on video or DVD, with 74% of respondents indicating that they found ratings useful (BBFC & TNS Media, 2005).

- Citing the results of a 2010 survey undertaken with European parents, the *Video Gamers in Europe 2010* report concluded that 89% of non-gaming parents who are aware of the system find the PEGI age rating symbols quite (21%), very (35%), or extremely (36%) useful (GameVision Europe, 2010).[45]

- Recent surveys of Irish parents suggest a consistently high use of classification markings and rating information amongst the group:

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[41] See Footnote 8, above, for overview of methodology.

[42] See Footnote 7, above, for overview of methodology.

[43] See Footnote 29, above, for overview of methodology.

[44] See Footnote 5, above, for overview of methodology.

[45] See Footnote 6, above, for overview of methodology.

o In 2013, 90% of surveyed parents indicated that they always check the age classification before allowing their children to watch a film (IFCO, 2013)[46].

o In 2004, 70% of surveyed parents indicated that they always check the classification rating on a video/ DVD before allowing their children to watch it (Lansdowne Research, 2005).[47]

Research undertaken directly with children and young people has produced mixed results, with some studies providing further evidence of parental use of classification markings and ratings information and other studies suggesting that use (and especially enforcement practices) may be overestimated by parents. As part of a survey administered in 2004, a broadly representative sample of Irish secondary students were asked to indicate whether their parents had (and continued to) check the classification certificate on films prior to permitting viewing.[48] The results of this survey revealed the following (Dublin City University & Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology, 2005):

- 85% of respondents indicated that their parents had, at some point, checked classification certificate on films when they were younger – a result broadly consistent with the findings of survey of Irish parents undertaken in 2005 (93% of parents reported that they regularly check DVD/ video ratings).

- The mean age at which parents ceased to check classifications, as reported by the surveyed adolescents, was approximately 11 years.

- While a sizeable minority of adolescents (41%) indicated that they were annoyed their parents checked the certificate, and only a very small number (3%) were happy that they checked the certificate, the majority (56%) reported that didn't mind either way.

The results of surveys conducted by the US FTC in 2007 suggest that American parents and children differ in their opinion of how well ratings are enforced in the home (US FTC, 2007).[49] Most notably, 85% of surveyed parents reported that they restrict the computer games that their child can play, while only 65% of children reported that their parents place restrictions on their game playing. Further, while 40% of parents familiar with ESRB system reported that they sometimes or generally allow their child to play M-rated games, 57% of children reported that they are sometimes or generally allowed to play M-rated games. This suggests that parental self-report of classification system use (and subsequent enforcement) should be interpreted with caution, as parents may exaggerate use, possibility due to a social desirability effect (i.e. parents completing questionnaire want to appear to be 'good parents').

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[46] See Footnote 10, above, for overview of methodology.
[47] See Footnote 33, above, for overview of methodology.
[48] See Footnote 31, above, for overview of methodology.
[49] See Footnote 7, above, for overview of methodology.

6.4 Use of consumer advice when choosing for children and young people

Participants in the Australian OFLC qualitative research, *2004 Community Assessment Panels*, generally reported that they found consumer advice on films and games to be useful when selecting films and computer games for their children (Urbis Keys Young, 2004, p.34):[50]

> *Consumer advice was regarded as particularly important in selecting material for younger people or family viewing… However, most Panellists noted that when choosing films or games for their personal use, their selection is often based on reviews and the plot outline.*

However, qualitative research conducted in 2002 suggested that awareness and use of consumer advice by Australian parents may be limited, with most parents reporting that they were unaware of the consumer advice that accompanies film classification. In addition, in only a few instances was the consumer advice reported as being used to help decide on the suitability of a film.

In 2009, the BBFC commissioned an online survey with British adults and parents assessing views on video game regulation in the UK.[51] As part of this survey, respondents were shown two images: Image 1 showed the BBFC labels including age symbol and content descriptor and Image 2 showed the PEGI age and content symbols. For each image, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: *'I find/ would find content advice like this useful when choosing games for children'*. For Image 1, 41% of parents indicated that they strongly agreed with the statement and 47% indicated that they agreed. For Image 2, 29% of parents indicated that they strongly agreed with the statement and 40% indicated that they agreed. Taken together, these results suggest that British parents find consumer advice useful for choosing computer games for children, and that they have a particular preference for comprehensive content descriptions (BBFC & YouGov, 2009).

The results of two further international studies are worthy of note:

- The US FTC study conducted for the report *Marketing Violent Entertainment to Children 2007* concluded that 54% of US parents were familiar with and used RSRB content descriptors 'most or all of the time' when choosing games for their children. As noted above, it is possible that this figure is overestimated due to a social desirability effect (US FTC, 2007).[52]

- Qualitative research undertaken with British parents for *Public Opinion and the BBFC Guidelines 2009* study suggested that fathers are particularly sensitive to sexual content and sought labeling advice accordingly: *'Fathers were sensitive to the embarrassment of watching sexual content or references with teenage offspring and used classification and consumer advice to avoid this situation'* (Hardie, Goldstone, & Slesenger, 2009, p. 26).

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[50] Panel members were recruited using professional recruitment firms. Recruiters were instructed to select people with a range of characteristics, across such criteria as age, gender, family status, and Aboriginality, resulting in broadly representative samples.

[51] The sample size for this study was 2,143 British adults (1,329 parents). Fieldwork was undertaken 9 – 11 February 2009. The survey was carried out online. The data was weighted to be representative of all British adults aged 18+. No further details of the methodology were included in the final report of this study.

[52] See Footnote 7, above, for overview of methodology.

6.5 Use of classification categories and consumer advice when choosing for self

As noted above, participants in the Australian study *2004 Community Assessment Panels* felt that consumer advice was particularly important when choosing films or games for children and young people; however, they also acknowledged that advice was '…important for people who wish to avoid, or who seek, films or games with significant amount of a classifiable element such as violence or sexual activity' (Urbis Keys Young, 2004, p.29). Quantitative research undertaken with the British public in 2004 provided further evidence that classification symbols and consumer advice can guide the choices of adults: when surveyed members of the general public were asked about deciding whether to watch films alone or in the company of other adults, 64% indicated that they found the rating useful, 20% indicated that they did not find the rating useful, and 15% indicated that the questions did not apply to them, as they seldom or never went to films. Asked the same question of videos and DVDs, slightly fewer respondents (60%) indicated that they found the rating useful (BBFC & TNS, 2005).[53]

There is Australian and international research to suggest that young people may use classifications and ratings when selecting media to consume. For example, when a sample of young Australians were asked to list the factors they taken into account when deciding on a film for personal viewing, 38% of those aged 13 to 15 nominated classification rating (compared to 24% of those aged 16 to 17 years)(Newspoll, 2002).[54] In addition, 59% of a broadly representative sample of Irish adolescents surveyed in 2005 indicated that they use IFCO classification system when selecting films. It should, however, be noted that of those who reported using the system, only 35% further stated that they used the system to avoid seeing certain challenging films (compared to 65% who used the classification to seek out material). Despite reported use of the classification system, 70% of surveyed young people reported viewing films for age groups older than their own – most notably, 19% reported that they had seen a film restricted to over 18s when they were under 12 (Dublin City University & Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology, 2005).[55]

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[53] See Footnote 5, above, for overview of methodology.
[54] See Footnote 11, above, for overview of methodology.
[55] See Footnote 31, above, for overview of methodology.

7. Classification categories and consumer advice: Alignment with current community standards

7.1 Overview of findings

- The potential harmful effects of media exposure have been examined in an extensive literature, including experimental and longitudinal studies.

  o Evidence suggesting harm (or lack thereof) should be taken into account when assessing community attitudes and preferences toward media content.

- Participants in qualitative research studies (both in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions rarely indicated that they find general sexual content offensive, and many noted that sexual content is treated in an overly restrictive way by regulators, especially when compared to violence (see for example Urbis Pty Ltd, 2011; Urbis, Keys, Young, 2004).

  o Australians and International studies have provided evidence of broad community support for the inclusion of selected fetishes in higher-level, restricted content BBFC & TNS Media, 2005; Urbis Pty Ltd, 2011).

  o Community support for allowing depictions of sexual violence and solicitation of young people/ pedophilia in higher-level, restricted films/ computer games is limited, with several caveats being placed on suggested acceptable content (Galaxy Research, 2007; Ipsos MediaCT, 2012; Urbis Pty Ltd, 2011; Urbis Keys Young, 2004).

- Evidence suggests that violence continues to be a major worry for members of the general public, with research participants (both in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions) consistently expressing concern about the potential negative impact of screen violence on individuals and society (see for example BBFC & TNS Media, 2005; Colmar Brunton, OFLC, & BSA, 2008; Urbis Pty Ltd, 2011).

- The general public remains concerned about depictions of drugs and drug-taking, with a number of research studies suggesting that the public believe that it is one of the most important, if not the most important, element for classifiers to consider (see; BBFC & TNS Media, 2009; Lansdowne Market Research, 2004; Urbis Pty Ltd, 2011; Urbis Keys Young, 2004).

- While on the whole community members felt that offensive language was not as impactful as other classifiable elements, the impact of this element was generally thought to increase with frequency (BBFC & TNS Media, 2005; Urbis, Keys, Young, 2004).

- There are concerns that exposure to gambling and non-illicit drug use (i.e. alcohol and tobacco) via films and computer games may be harmful, both at an individual and societal level. It is therefore worth considering (a) the inclusion of a specific ' Gambling' element within the NCS, and (b) the expansion in the scope of the 'Drug use' element to including portrayals of smoking and alcohol consumption.

7.2 Can media exposure be harmful?

The potential harmful effects of media exposure (especially prolonged exposure to violent computer games) has been examined in an extensive literature, including experimental, cross-sectional, and longitudinal studies (see for example Anderson et al, 2010; Barlett and Rodeheffer, 2009; Bushman & Anderson, 2009; Ferguson 2007; Ferguson & Kilburn, 2009; Mitrofan, Paul and Spencer, 2009). The task of the current literature review is not reach a conclusion regarding the potential harmful effects of media exposure, including exposure to violent content. It is, however, worth noting that there exists empirical evidence to suggest that exposure to certain types of media *may* (or indeed *may not*) be harmful, and therefore community attitudes and preferences should be interpreted with this literature in mind. Put simply, general acceptance of subject matter amongst the community is not enough for material to be deemed acceptable for government support and distribution (and/ or classification); rather evidence of potential harm to the community should also be considered.

7.3 Current perceptions on what should be restricted

Sexual content

General

Australian community attitudes to sexual content have been assessed via quantitative and, more recent, qualitative research. A survey commissioned by the Australian OFLC in 1992 found that 79% of a representative sample of Australian adults agreed with the following statement: 'Sex and nudity, if handled sensitively and if screened on television at adult viewing times, is perfecting acceptable'. It should, however, be noted that 38% of that same sample agreed with the following statement: 'For me, sex and nudity is a personal and private thing and should not be shown on TV'. As part of this study, respondents over 18 were also asked whether X-rated material containing scenes of actual sex between consenting adults should be available to Australian adults: 71% indicated that it should be available, 8% indicated that it 'depends', and 22% indicated that it should not be available (Frank Small & Associates, 1992).[56] A more recent study undertaken AC Nielsen (2005) produced comparable results, with 76% of a representative sample of Australian agreeing with the following statement: 'Films and videos primarily involving various forms of actual sex, including close-ups, should be available (on a restricted basis) to people aged over 18 who wish to view or purchase it'.[57]

In order to better inform itself about community standards relevant to classification, the ALRC commissioned Urbis Pty Ltd to conduct a series of forums to assess community attitudes to content that falls within the higher-level classification categories (Urbis Pty Ltd, 2011). Participants (including members of the general public and an expert reference group) were recruited for a one-day forum where they viewed and responded to content that ranged from MA 15+ to RC. Content in the 'sex and nudity' category included the following two-minute scene from the film Shortbus:

> *A male and female are having sex, depicting very brief and partially obscured*
> *instance of vaginal penetration while she is astride him on a piano bench*
> *supporting herself with her hands on the piano. This is followed by her stroking*

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[56] 1,016 adults over 16 years were interviewed across Australia. The resulting data set was weighted by sex, age, presence of dependent children, socioeconomic status, and location to be representative of the Australian population.
[57] See Footnote 2, above, for overview of methodology.

> *his penis. Within a montage of brief visuals, a male appears to ejaculate over*
> *his mouth, shot from the side view at eye level. There is another very brief*
> *image of a male depicted ejaculating on his chest.*

Of the 19 members of the general public who participated in the forums, only four indicated that they found this scene offensive (compared 19 who indicated that it was not offensive and seven who were unsure). The expert reference group members were also, on the whole, not offended by the scene, with five expert participants indicating that they found the scene offensive (compared to 23 who indicated that it was not offensive). Similar results were reported for non-interactive sexual content in a computer game, with only five members of the general public and six experts indicating that they found a scene from *Grand Theft Auto: the Ballad of Gay Tony* to be offensive.

A more mixed response to sexual content was observed in the qualitative research *2004 Community Assessment Panels*[58], which was also undertaken by Urbis Keys Young for the Australian OFLC (Urbis Keys Young, 2004). As part of this research, members of the general public were shown film and game clips and asked their views on whether and how different elements should be classified. Regarding opinions on depictions of sexual activity, the final report noted 'significant division across all the panels', but concluded:

> *Panellists identified sex and sexual references as an important consideration for*
> *classification purposes, but sometimes felt that the Board was more sensitive*
> *than necessary to the impact of sexual content in individual films.*

The observation limited offense amongst the general public to some sexually explicit material has also been observed in international studies undertaken in common law countries with broadly comparable classification systems. For example, a 2011 qualitative research project undertaken with the New Zealand public found that (Colmar Brunton & NZ Office of Film and Literature Classification, 2011, p.15):

> *There was a perception that sex and violence are treated inconsistently by the*
> *Classification Office – while sexual content receives high restrictions, violence is*
> *allowed through more readily. Participants felt that a reversal in this situation*
> *could be beneficial, with violent depictions thought to be more harmful than*
> *(most) sexual content.*

Further, in a 2004 survey undertaken for the BBFC, a sample of the British general public were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement*: 'People over 18 have a right to see graphic portrayals of real sex in films and videos/ DVDs'.* The results revealed that half of respondents agreed (compared to 46% in 2000), 22% disagreed (compared to 31% in 2000), and almost a third expressed a neutral attitude (30%, compared to 23% in 2000), suggesting that the majority of the British public are supportive (or neutral) of a right to consume sexually explicit material, regardless of whether or not they choose to consume it themselves (TNS & BBFC, 2005).[59]

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[58] See Footnote 50, above, for overview of methodology.
[59] See Footnote 5, above, for overview of methodology.

Fetishes

The *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games* provides that 'gratuitous, exploitative or offensive depictions of sexual activity accompanied by fetishes or practices which are offensive or abhorrent' are to be classified as RC. The Guidelines also provide that the X 18+ classification for films cannot accommodate fetishes such as body piercing; application of substances such as candle wax; 'golden showers'; bondage; spanking; or fisting. The *Classification - Content Regulation and Convergent Media* report concluded that Australians may be open to the X 18+ category accommodating additional mild fetishes, and that this one area in which the RC classification category could be narrowed. With these observations in mind, it is worthwhile specifically considering past and current community attitudes toward the depiction of fetishes, both in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions.

As noted in the *Classification - Content Regulation and Convergent Media* report, the results of the of the qualitative study undertaken by Urbis Pty Ltd (2011) are not incompatible with the suggestion that mild fetishes could be incorporated into the X 18+ classification category without causing offence to the majority of Australians. As part of this research, participants were shown a series of brief scenes showing actual sexual activities (including fetishes such as bondage and 'golden showers') among consenting adults. While reported level of offense differed significantly depending on specific content, the majority of general public and expert participants were of the view that the material should not be banned (but perhaps restricted to people 16+, 18+, or 21+).

With regard to Australian community attitudes to fetishes, two further points are worthy of note:

- As noted in Bennett (2013), while fetishism has historically been considered to be a disorder of psychosexual development, medical opinion has shifted and it is now only diagnosable as a mental health disorder if it causes the fetishist 'clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning'. This observation led Bennett to suggest the following (p.90): *'If fetish activities are a normal (perhaps natural) non-pathological aspect of human sexuality, banning their depiction within sexually explicit films is highly problematic'.*

- There is also evidence to suggest that a significant number of Australians actively engage in some of the sexual fetishes limited by the X 18+ classification – for example, in a recent survey 1.8% of sexually active Australians indicated that they had engaged in sadomasochistic activities in the previous year (Richters et al, 2008).

International studies provide further evidence of broad community support for the inclusion of selected fetishes in higher-level, restricted content. For example, as part of a 2005 survey of the British public, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagreed with the following statement: *'There should be no limits on what can be shown in R18 videos/ DVDs, providing they do not contain sexual violence or break the law'.*[60] Just over half (52%) of respondents indicated that they agreed with this statement, 17% were neutral, and 31% disagreed. It should, however, be noted that only 23% of respondents agreed with the following statement (compared to

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[60] See Footnote 5, above, for overview of methodology.

60% who disagreed): *There should be no limits on what can be shown in R18 videos/ DVDs).* Taken together these results suggest that while the majority of the British public would not advocate the banning of fetish material, they would not allow the inclusion of sexual violence or other illegal material.

Violence

General

Respondents in the Australian study *Classification Decisions and Community Standards 2007* were asked their opinion on the level of violence in a film that they had recently watched.[61] One in ten surveyed film consumers indicated that the amount of violence in a recently viewed MA15+ film was more than should be allowed. This was higher than was reported for the M (5%), PG (5%), and G (2%) categories (Galaxy research, 2007). Violence was, however, a major concern for members of the general public who participated in the *2004 Community Assessment Panels*.[62] The researchers noted that 'a variety of issues were seen to have a bearing on the impact of on-screen violence', and that (Urbis Keys Young, 2004, p.29):

> *Of all the classifiable elements, violence generated the most discussion and was the subject of most concern from Panellists. While feedback on other elements was highly variable, Panellists generally agreed that violence – and particularly graphic or prolonged violence – was inappropriate for viewing by younger people.*

Consistent with the findings for sexual violence, many panellists felt that the impact of violence (both in film and computer games) varied depending on motivation, with 'menacing violence and threatening behaviour regarded as adding impact' (p.25). Another issue noted by the panellists was the consequences of the violence (p.25):

> *Blood, injury, or death were all deemed to add to the impact of a violent scene and regarded as inappropriate for children to witness. Scenes in which the depiction of the consequences of violence is prolonged or graphic were viewed as having a greater impact.*

It was, however, the following was further noted by panellists (p.25):

> *…if a film ended happily, and the eventual consequences of the violence were less serious, Panellists appeared to be more lenient in their assessments.*

Violence was also considered to be more impactful by panellists if it was (a) committed by someone in a position of authority, especially a policeman (b) committed against vulnerable victims – violence by men against women, animals, and children was all regarded as having relatively high impact, and (c) explicit (blood, distress) and unexpected.

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[61] See Footnote 1, above, for overview of methodology.
[62] See Footnote 50, above, for overview of methodology.

When asked specifically about computer games, panellists expressed specific concerns about imitability, leading the researchers to note (p.28):

> *…the dangers of children imitating the behaviour that they 'perform' through gaming were raised in relation to virtually every computer game used for the research.*

In addition to being shown scenes from film, participants (including members of the Australian general public and experts who took part in the *2011 Community and Reference Group Forums* (Urbis Pty Ltd, 2011) were asked to view and respond to brief footage from three computer games, including the following:

> *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare – In this game you are an undercover operative with a terrorist group. The activity occurs in an airport lounge. Passengers in the lounge are fired upon with machine gun fire.*

Around half of general public (50%) and expert (57%) participants indicated that they found this material offensive, and the final report further noted:

> *The airport content in Call of Duty was identified as being as most offensive, generally noted as being due to it portraying violence directed at innocent people, e.g. 'it's too close to reality'.*

As part of the survey undertaken for the *Public Opinion and BBFC Guidelines 2005*, surveyed members of the general public were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that violence was more acceptable (a) in a comic setting, (b) in historical or fantasy settings, or (c) in a 'terror' setting.[63] Forty-four per cent of respondents indicated that they thought violence is more acceptable in a historical or fantasy setting, compared to 38% who felt it was more acceptable in a comic setting and 39% who thought it was more acceptable in a terror setting.

In 2008 the New Zealand OFLC and Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA) undertook qualitative research (including online bulletin boards, focus groups, and in-depth interviews with the general public) to assess audience perceptions of violence in an audio-visual environment. Consistent with Australian studies, the results revealed community concerns regarding the potential for exposure to violent media to negatively alter attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour (Colmar Brunton, OFLC & BSA, 2008, p.33):

> *A few participants talked about changed attitudes or beliefs and gave some examples. There was concern that younger viewers did not have the maturity or capacity to differentiate between right and wrong. If they were presented with a situation on screen, they may be likely to develop anti-social attitudes.*
>
> *There was concern from many participants about imitation. This was particularly mentioned in relation to younger viewers, who again, were*

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[63] See Footnote 5, above, for overview of methodology.

*perceived as lacking the ability to differentiate right from wrong, and to be less
likely to differentiate violent audio-visual depictions from real life.*

Sexual violence

Research has consistently indicated that support for real and fictional depictions of sexual and sadistic violence in higher-level, restricted films/ computer games amongst the Australian community (and community members in comparable jurisdictions) is limited, with several caveats being placed on suggested acceptable content. As part of a survey of the general public undertaken in 1992, a representative sample of the Australian public were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: *'Explicit sex scenes and sexual violence should not be shown on TV at any time'.*[64] Around three quarters (72%) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, suggesting a high level of disapproval for showing sexual violence at the time the survey was undertaken (Frank Small & Associates, 2002). Although it should be noted that this statement makes reference both to explicit sex and sexual violence, and therefore the results cannot be used to draw conclusions about sexual violence alone. More recently, 51% of a representative sample of Australian adults indicated that sexual violence should not be allowed in films classified R 18+, and a further 10% indicated that it should be allowed once only (Galaxy Research, 2007).[65]

Recent qualitative research has also suggested that the Australian community continues to view sexual violence as a particularly important factor for the classification of films and computer games, with the final report for the *2004 Community Assessment Panels* research noting (Urbis Keys Young, 204, p44):[66]

> *Panellists thought that the depiction of and even references to sexual violence
> to be highly confronting. Sexual violence was also generally thought to be an
> 'adult' theme and not suitable for younger people, even if hinted and not
> explicitly shown.*

As noted above, participants (including members of the general public and an expert reference group) in the study of higher-level media content undertaken by Urbis Pty Ltd (2011) as part of the ALRC review of Censorship and Classification viewed and responded to content that ranged from MA15+ to RC. Content in the 'violence' category included the following two and a half minute scene from the film A Serbian Film:

> *A fully nude female is led to a bed and, spreadeagled on her belly, is forcibly
> cuffed by her wrists and ankles. The lead character, implicitly drug-affected,
> engages in realistically simulated rear-entry sexual intercourse with her.
> Through his earpiece, he hears a command: 'Hit the bitch!'. He thrusts
> aggressively while explicitly slapping, and then forcefully punching, the
> female's back. Bruising appears on the female's back in immediate post action
> visuals. He is handed a machete and, through a succession of detailed*

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[64] See Footnote 56, above, for overview of methodology.
[65] See Footnote 1, above, for overview of methodology.
[66] See Footnote 50, above, for overview of methodology.

> *depictions, implicitly hacks the female's head off. Blood and gore noted. He*
> *continues thrusting vigorously behind the headless female's corpse before*
> *being pulled away by two males.*

After viewing, the vast majority of forum participants indicated that they found the material offensive, with all members of the general public (bar one) and experts (bar two) selecting 'Yes, offensive' when asked about their personal response to the material. Further, the majority of participants felt that the film should be banned, but a minority were unsure.

Qualitative research undertaken for the Public Opinion and the BBFC Guidelines 2005 found that sexual violence was consistently viewed as offensive, with even participants who claimed to be desensitised to violence admitting that they found sexual violence disturbing, primarily because (TNS & BBFC, 2005, p.12):

> *…it related to the power relationship between men and women. It was*
> *disturbing for women because it felt too real, and because they saw it as*
> *something that might happen to them. Respondents thought the offensiveness*
> *of sexual violence was unlikely to be mitigated by fantasy or comic contexts.*

More recent, qualitative research with the British public undertake for the BBFC in 2009 also addressed the issue of sexual violence. For films classified as 12A/12, the research found (BBFC, 2009, p.43):

> *There was some resistance to the idea of briefly implied / discretely indicated*
> *sexual violence at '12A'. It depended on what respondents imagined the*
> *content to be. Many accepted that it could be a fleeting, verbal reference and*
> *easy for younger children to miss. However others were anxious that a child or*
> *younger teenager might pick up on sexual violence references and felt quite*
> *strongly that they did not want to embark on a discussion about this theme*
> *with their child.*

Parents included in this research were also worried about the BBFC Guidelines stipulating that at the '15' level 'scenes of sexual violence must be discreet and brief' (p.43):

> *The clips shown in the research to illustrate just how brief these moments in a*
> *film could be did little to assuage these anxieties and it was clear that sexual*
> *violence has the potential to shock, irrespective of how discreetly it is handled.*
> *Respondents did accept that context can be a mitigating factor and that verbal*
> *references would be easier to dismiss than visual ones – however brief.*

The BBFC recently commissioned Ipsos MediaCT to undertake comprehensive qualitative research to inform a review of its sexual and sadistic violence policy. As noted in the final report the research was commissioned because 'the BBFC consider an important determinant for identifying potential harm in the viewing of films with sexual and sadistic violence content, to be insights, opinions and attitudes of the adult general public aged 18 years and over' (Ipsos MediaCT, 2012, p. 1). The methodology for this project included viewing selected films (including films that received a 'Rejected' classification),

in-depth interviews, and discussion groups (in which additional material was viewed). The following relevant research findings were reported:

- Possible emotional and psychological harm from watching films with sexual and sadistic violence was noted by many participants.

- There were four key issues that impacted on whether participants felt scenes showing sexual and sadistic violence could be justified within a film:

    1. This context of a meaningful and/ or credible storyline: *'If there is a good storyline, I'm definitely accepting of sexual violence'* (Male, 38, Bristol).

    2. Realistic storytelling, particularly if based on a true story*: 'There was a tipping point where I was just thinking "Really?!" – it's impossible to take seriously because it would never happen'* (Female, 45, London).

    3. A moral message: *'The clip is so isolated that it's hard to judge, if they go to jail at the end it would change it. It makes it unacceptable if they get away with it in the end'* (Male, Bristol).

    4. Short duration: *'I don't feel the violence, rape scenes need to be more than a few minutes… I feel enough violence and rape and torture scenes are out there and do not wish to see these things being prolonged'* (Male, 44, Dundee).

Based on the results of the research the authors concluded (p.5):

> *The research findings suggest that there is public concern for the depiction of sexual and sadistic violence in films and their potential to contribute to harmful behaviour and attitudes in society and consequently a desire for the BFFC to intervene when appropriate. Primary concerns focused on the endorsement or normalisation of rape, the sexualisation of violence which could offer a distorted view of women and 'normal' sex, and presence of children in any sexual or violent scene.*

Drugs, alcohol, and crime

Participants in the *2004 Australian research study Community Assessment Panels* generally agreed that 'material featuring prolonged alcohol and (legal and illicit) drug use' were not suitable for younger viewers. Consistent with the results obtained for violence, panellists were especially concerned about scenes in which alcohol and drug use were presented without negative consequences, suggesting that these scenes send the 'wrong' message to young people.[67] Based on these observations, the authors concluded (Urbis Keys Young, 2004, p.32):

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[67] See Footnote 50, above, for overview of methodology.

> *Panellists expressed concern over depictions over depictions of the excessive or dependent use of alcohol and emphasised the need for such depictions to be taken into account for classification purposes and in consumer advice.*

It should be noted that the Panellists' views on drugs and drug-taking were aligned with broader views on criminal activity more generally, with the final report noting (p.31):

> *The portrayal of criminal activity was regarded in most cases as unsuitable for younger viewers, particularly where the perpetrators remain unpunished. The impact of criminal activity was considered particularly great in 'Intermission', in which crime was seen to be portrayed as a normal way of life.*

Participants (including members of the general public and experts) in the more recent *Community Attitudes to High level Media Content study* were also shown and asked to comment on a number of scenes involving drug use (Urbis Pty Ltd, 2011). Amongst these scenes was the following two-minute excerpt from the French drama TV series 'Spiral':

> *A man a women in an intimate relationship use heroin. The man has an apparent overdose and the woman flees the flat to call for help.*

The scene was generally reported to be minimally offensive; however, the explicit showing of the preparation and use of 'hard' drugs was seen by some to be impactful. Other participants regarded the footage as potentially positive as, in contrast the scenes viewed as part of the *Community Assessment Panels*, the drug use was not glamourised and the consequences of the drug use were shown. Participants in this study were also shown footage of 'a drug attic and his friends injecting heroin and reciting aspects of his life' from a documentary entitled 'Life in Loops'. No participants reported that they found this material offensive, and it was again noted that viewing such footage (especially by teens) could be potentially beneficial, with the final report stating (p.44): 'Many found the characters pitiful or miserable and for some this strengthened their view that the footage was potentially not harmful to young people, but could serve as a deterrence'.

Despite this finding, international evidence suggests that members of the general public (especially parents) in comparable jurisdictions are concerned about graphic displays of illegal drug-taking in films and computer games, with studies consistently indicating that the public believe it is one of the most important elements (if not the most important element) to consider when classifying a film. For example, as part of the *Parental Usage & Attitudes Survey of Film Classification*, Irish parents were asked to indicate how important different types of content should be when the IFCO decide on a film's classification, and 'Drugs and drug-taking' topped the list of concerns (Lansdowne Market Research, 2005, p.9):[68]

> *Parents believe that drugs/drug-taking and violence, followed by racial references and underage drinking of alcohol, contained in films, are of greatest importance when IFCO are rating a film.*

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[68] See Footnote 33, above, for overview of methodology.

Research undertaken with the British public for the *Public Opinion and the BBFC Guidelines 2005* study similarly found that 'Drug and drug-taking' to be the most important element for a films classification, with 75% of respondents considering it to be 'very important' (compared to 65% for violence, 56% for 'sexual activity', 49% for swearing and strong language, 46% for 'racial references which might be offensive to some people', 34% for 'religious references which might be offensive to some people'[69]. In line with the results from Australian research, qualitative research with British general public in 2009 found that while community members generally acknowledge that most 15-year olds have been exposed to drugs (or at least knew about them), it was important not to glamourise drugs, with the final report noting: '…drug taking may be shown but the film as a whole must not promote or encourage drug misuse' (Hardie, Goldstone, & Slesenger, 2009, p.48).

Offensive language

Attitudes toward and concerns about offensive language were explored in the 2004 Australian research study *Community Assessment Panels*.[70] While on the whole Panellists felt that offensive language was not as impactful as other classifiable elements, the impact was thought to increase with frequency. In addition, the impact of offensive language was considered more pronounced when spoken (a) by an authority figure, (b) in the presences of children, and (c) with an aggressive tone. Regarding the type of language acceptable at different classification levels, the final report noted the following (Urbis Keys Young, 2004, p.30):

> *Words such as 'turd', 'bum', and 'bastard' were regarded as acceptable within the PG category, providing they are used in context and not aggressively. The Board's ruling on language in this category were generally thought to be reasonable or even a little conservative. Meanwhile, the Panel were not greatly concerned with the impact of language at the MA15+ category, and did not think that course language, in itself, should push a film into a R18+ Classification.*

In a survey of the general public undertaken by the BBFC in 2004, respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought the language standards included in the then current BBFC Guidelines were 'Too strict', 'About right', or 'Not strict enough'(BBFC & TNS media, 2005).[71] Just over half of respondents (51%) indicated that, in their view, the language standards were about right (compared to 43% who felt they were not strict enough and only 5% who felt they were too strict), suggesting that the British public were not concerned about the level of course language in films.

The accompanying qualitative research revealed the following relevant findings (BBFC & TNS Media, 2005):

- Participants generally agreed that 'bad' language was becoming more prevalent.

- The reported impact of offensive language was considered greater among women than men, and greater among older people than younger people.

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[69] See Footnote 5, above, for overview of methodology.
[70] See Footnote 50, above, for overview of methodology.
[71] See Footnote 5, above, for overview of methodology.

- Consistent with the results of Australian research, offensive language was felt to be most impactful when accompanied by aggression or violence.

- Amongst participants it was widely acknowledged that there was place for 'bad language' in film, but that its use should reflect reality, and not glamourise such language.

- Again consistent with Australian research, participants noted that the acceptability of 'bad language' was influenced by the characters speaking (and being spoken to), with 'bad language' being deemed more acceptable when protagonists were the same gender, or age, or race, or were friends, but less so when it was from a man to a women, an adult to a child, or an aggressor to a victim.

More recent qualitative research undertaken with the British public further revealed the following relevant findings (Hardie, Goldstone, & Slesenger, 2009):

- Mild 'bad language' was viewed as being potentially acceptable for younger viewers, depending on context and storyline.

- The word 'cunt' appears to still have the power to shock, with many participants stating that they disliked even seeing the word in the BBFC Guidelines at '15', and that they could not bring themselves to accept why it would be used by film-makers at all. This led the researchers to conclude that 'the word cunt is the last taboo for strong language and provokes a strong visceral response in many people' (p.41).

- Providing further evidence that the impact of offensive language can be intensified by frequency and violence, the final report noted (p.42): *Respondents agreed with sentence 'continued aggressive use of the strongest language is unlikely to be acceptable. Whilst they recognised that most 15 year olds would have been exposed to strong language by this age, repeated use of the strongest words was thought to have an impact on the overall tone and feel of a film, especially if it was accompanied by violence.*

The view that the context of offensive language is important is also reflected in findings from qualitative research undertaken with the New Zealand public, with the Viewing Violence study final report stating that (Colmar Brunton, OFLC & BSA, 2008, p.34-35):

> *Participants considered the language used in some clips and, more importantly, how it was used, either enhanced the perceived degree of violence, or caused offence. Participants did not generally consider that the offensive language in the clips was harmful. They thought that in some cases the language added to the degree of violence, and was a factor that increased or decreased the perceived level of violence.*

7.4 Other areas of concern

Under the current NCS, there are six classifiable elements forming the basis of classification criteria: Themes, violence, sex, language, drug use, and nudity. Recommendation 9–4(c) in *Classification - Content Regulation and Convergent Media* report specify that consideration should be given to additional classifiable elements. A number of international classification bodies consider additional elements under their classification schemes, including fear or scariness, gambling (including interactive gambling), animal cruelty, and health warnings for issues including tobacco and alcohol use. As an alternative, the scope of the existing elements could be refined or expanded. Note that prior to the addition or alteration of elements, a comprehensive program of quantitative and qualitative public opinion and stakeholder research (including a review of existing literature) is required – this will ensure that the elements are supported, understood, and aligned with current community standards and stakeholder expectations. Drawing on the existing literature only, the following two potential changes are explored, by way of example, below:

- The addition of a specific 'Gambling' (or 'Simulated Gambling') element; and

- The expansion of the 'Drug use' element to include smoking and alcohol consumption. Note that the current 'Drug use' element references the use of proscribed dugs only.

Gambling

Empirical research studies carried out over the past five years suggest that children and young people are increasingly engaging in online gambling activities via digital devices including personal computers, smartphones, and portable tablets (e.g. Griffiths & Parke, 2010; McBride & Derevensky, 2009; Allen Consulting Group, 2009). For example, in recent study of British adolescents, 1% of surveyed 11-15 year olds reported that they had gambled on the internet in the seven days prior to completing the questionnaire (Ipsos MORI, 2009 as cited in King et al, 2012). There is also evidence to suggest that youth gambling represents a growing social problem, with up to 4% of youth in developed countries reporting a major gambling problem (see for example Volberg et al, 2010).

Accompanying this expansion in online gambling, a diverse range of 'gambling-like' activities have become increasingly available on smartphones, social networking sites, and computer game technologies (see Owens, 2010). Gambling-like activities, according to King and colleagues (2012, p232), 'refer to simulations of gambling activities that provide players with opportunities to practice or become more familiar with gambling activities without involving the spending of actual money' (see also King et al., 2010). Although robust data on the use of such activities is not yet available, it is possible to estimate popularity based on download and use rates, which suggest high take-up – for example, at the time of writing, Zygna Poker had more than 6 million daily users.

The link between engagement in gambling-like activities and uptake of (and indeed interest in) gambling with money has been examined in recent years (see for example Forrest et al, 2009; Ipsos MORI, 2011). For example, Forrest, McHale, and Parke (2009) used statistical modelling to conclude that gambling in money-free mode was best predictor of whether a child would gamble for money. Further, Hardoon, Derevensky, and Gupta (2002) reported that 25% of youth with gambling problems also play on 'free play' or practice gambling sites. It should, however, be recognised that gambling in

adolescence (including money-free gambling) does not necessary lead to gambling during adulthood. Delfabbro, Winefield, and Anderson (2009), for example, tracked over 500 adolescents from age 15 through to adulthood and found no statistically significant association between gambling at 15 and during early adulthood.

As noted above, current classifiable of computer games are themes, violence, sex, language, drug use, and nudity. Gambling content in Australia is classified within the category of 'themes', and consumer advice can be used to further describe the content as 'simulated gambling' or 'gambling content'. Other rating systems such as the PEGI in Europe include 'gambling' as a separate category, in a similar manner to 'sex' and 'violence' – it has been suggested that this approach could also be adopted in Australia (see for example King et al, 2013). It should, however, be noted that despite evidence of potential harm, recent survey-based research suggests that the Australian community are not overly concerned about exposure (either by adults or children) to gambling-like activities via computer games:

- Of the 2400 Australian adults interviewed as part of the DA14 Research, only 479 (or around 20%) indicated that they were concerned being exposed to gambling via computer games (compared to, for example, 634 for 'animal cruelty' and 580 for 'sexual predators').

- Of the 800 Australian parents interviewed as part of the DA14 Research, only 186 (or around 25%) indicated that they were concerned about their children being exposed to gambling via computer games (compared to, for example, 255 for 'violence' and 226 for 'sex').

A systematic review of research examining the effect of exposure to gambling-like activities via computer games and more comprehensive public opinion and stakeholder research is required prior to implementation any changes to the way this content is classified, including the inclusion of 'gambling' as a separate element.

Smoking and alcohol

Smoking

In the ongoing public health fight against tobacco use, explicit or implicit pro-smoking messages in mass media are often cited as a cause of concern. Importantly, there is a growing body of empirical research to suggest that this concern is not unwarranted – this research includes both cross-sectional (see for example Dalton et al, 2003) and longitudinal (see for example Gidwani et al, 2002) studies. However, the most compelling evidence of this proposed media influence has come from a series of studies documenting the influence of portrayals of smoking in popular films (e.g. Dalton et al., 2003; Sargent et al, 2001; 2002). As noted by Thomson and Gunther (2007), these studies are distinguished by rigorous exposure measures. Typically, investigators first analyse the incidence of smoking in current films, then ask survey respondents to review a list of 50 recent films, and check off the ones they have seen. Data from these studies consistently suggest that exposure to smoking in films is associated with to increased smoking susceptibility.

While a number of researchers and, especially, advocacy groups have used the evidence outlined above to argue that depictions of smoking should be banned from all films, it is more commonly suggested that all smoking scenes should cause a movie to be restricted – even when smoking in

scenes is only implied. Relatively recent US survey-based research has provided evidence that placing restrictions on movies containing smoking in the manner described above has substantial community support. For example, a national representative survey of American adults revealed the following relevant findings (McMillen et al, 2006):[72]

- 80% of US adults agree that smoking in movies influences teens to smoke.

- 70% of US adults agree that movies that show smoking should be automatically rated 'R', unless the film clearly demonstrates the dangers of smoking or it is necessary to represent the smoking of a real historical figure.

- Two-thirds of US adults agree that movies should be required to show an anti-smoking advertisement before any film that includes smoking.

The extent to which these views exist amongst the Australian public is currently unclear, and extensive research with the public (and stakeholders) is required prior to the inclusion of 'Smoking' within the 'Drug use' element.

Alcohol

Academics and policy-makers are in general agreement that alcohol misuse is a prominent problem worldwide, and one of the major risk factors for burden of disease and social harm (see for example Osterberg, 2006). Evidence suggests that adolescents in particular are adopting harmful patterns of alcohol consumption and are at high-risk of alcohol-related harm (see Schmid et al, 2003). For example, a recent survey of Australian secondary students revealed that 21% of 12 year olds had consumed alcohol in the past year (Cancer Council Victoria, 2011). During adolescence, alcohol consumption can lead to structural changes in the hippocampus (a part of the brain crucial to the acquisition of new information)(De Bellis et al, 2000) and at high-levels of consumption can permanently impair brain development (Spear, 2002). Drinking by adolescents and young adults is also associated with the following: automobile crash injury and death, suicide and depression, missed classes and decreased academic performance, loss of memory, blackouts, fighting, property damage, peer criticism and broken friendships, date rape, and unprotected sex (Bonomo et al, 2001).

It has been widely suggested that effective, efficient interventions and policies in this area require an understanding of the multiple personal, social, and cultural influences on adolescent alcohol use and the influences most amenable to change (i.e. the most promising targets for intervention) (see for example Dal Cin et al, 2008). As a source of observational learning (Bandura, 1986), films provide information about the prevalence, acceptability, and function of alcohol in social life. There is therefore a possibility that exposure to alcohol via films could influence adolescents' drinking-related beliefs and behaviour. Importantly, there exists substantial empirical evidence to support this claim – indeed the vast majority of studies examining the relationship between alcohol portrayals in films and subsequent alcohol consumption has focused solely on adolescents.

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[72] The Social Climate Survey of Tobacco Control was administered to samples of 1,500-3,000 US adults who were interviewed by telephone between July and September 2004 (3,011 respondents), 2005 (1,510 respondents), and 2006 (1,812 respondents). Samples from all years represent the civilian, non- institutionalised adults population over age 18 in the United States. The resulting data set was weighted by race and gender within each census region, based on the most recent US Census estimates.

For example, two systematic reviews of prospective cohort studies found an association between exposure to alcohol advertising or promotional activities (including product placement in films) and the initiation and amount of alcohol consumed by adolescents (Anderson et al, 2009; Smith & Foxcroft, 2009). Further, Sargent and his colleagues (2006) used a prospective cohort of 2400 never-drinking adolescents to show that exposure to alcohol in films was an independent risk-factor for the onset of alcohol use (see also Hanewinkel & Sargent, 2009).

While the research outlined above assessed the long-term effects of alcohol depictions in films, a growing number of studies have directly examined the temporaneous effects. Researchers in this area have suggested that exposure to alcohol depictions via films may cue alcohol consumption in the same way that exposure to food commercials cues eating behaviour (Koordeman et al, 2010). For example, Engels et al (2009) exposed 40 pairs of males to two film conditions (many versus few alcohol depictions) for 60-minutes in a 'bar-laboratory' setting in which they had access to alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. Males who watched the movie containing many depictions of alcohol drank on average 1.5 more glasses of alcoholic beverages when compared to those who watched the film containing few depictions of alcohol. This led the researchers to conclude that exposure to alcohol depictions in films can lead to increased alcohol consumption while watching in males. It should, however, be noted that a more recent study failed to replicate this finding for female participants (see Koordeman et al, 2010).

In conclusion, there is substantial empirical evidence (including rigorous meta-analyses and controlled experimental studies) to suggest that viewing films with alcohol consumption can increase likelihood and level of drinking in adolescents, both immediately and in the longer-term. Indeed, it has even been suggested that alcohol depictions in films may be more powerful than direct advertising because the message is not perceived as advertising (see for example Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In the majority of developed countries (including Australia), alcohol advertising is jointly regulated by government and industry. In contrast, few restrictions are placed on alcohol depictions in films and evidence suggests that depictions are commonplace across all classification levels. For example, a recent study calculated the total number of alcohol appearances in 300 films, comprising 15 highest grossing films at the UK Box Office each year over a period of 20 years from 1989 till 2008. The research found that at least one alcohol appearance occurred in 86% of films and at least one episode of alcohol branding occurred in 35% of films (Lyons, McNeil, Gilmore, & Britton, 2011).

Researchers have suggested that the inclusion of alcohol warnings before the start of a film (including via classification information) could be a way to create more awareness and allow for informed decision-making. However, these researchers also acknowledge that the inclusion of alcohol warning icons may attract people (especially adolescents) to watch a particular film, and subsequently suggest that further empirical research is required in this area (see for example Koordeman et al, 2010). As with smoking, the extent to which the Australian public (and stakeholders) are supportive of the inclusion of alcohol in classification information (including via the 'Drug use' element) remains unclear and an extensive program of targeted research is required.

7.5 Current perceptions of 'R 18+' and 'X 18+' categories

Australian research has supported the conclusion that the general public are, on the whole, satisfied with the material included in high-level classification categories. For example, as part of the survey

undertaken for the *Classification Decisions and Community Standards study* (Galaxy Research, 2007), respondents who were able to comment on the X18+ classification (i.e. 58% of the sample) were asked to indicate whether they thought this classification category was too permissive, too strict, or about right. Almost 9 in 10 respondents (88%) felt that the classification is about right, with only 9% of respondents reporting that it was too permissive and 3% reporting that it was too strict.[73]

The perceived acceptable limits for R 18+ films was also assessed as part of the Classification Decisions and Community Standards study (Galaxy Research, 2007). As noted in the final report, this part of the research sought to assess the level of actual sex and violence that the community considers is acceptable in films classified R18+. Respondents were firstly asked to list elements that should not be allowed in R18+ films: the majority of surveyed adults (57%) were not able to name anything that should not be in a movie rated R18+. Amongst those respondents who were able to name an element two themes emerged: violence (which was mentioned by 31% of respondents) and sex (which was mentioned by 25% of respondents). Respondents aged over 18 years were then asked their opinion on (a) the current amount of violence permitted in R18+ films, and (b) whether actual sex should be permitted in R18+ films:

- Around two in five respondents were of the view that less violence should be permitted in R18+ films, compared to 29% who felt it current levels were 'about right' and 4% who felt that more violence should be permitted. The remaining 26% of respondents indicated that they were unsure.

- Respondents were fairly evenly split on whether they thought that actual sex should be allowed in films rated R18+, with 48% of respondents indicating that it should be allowed and 46% of respondents indicating that it should not be allowed. The remaining 5% of respondents selected 'Don't know'.

Consistent with findings on sexual violence outlined above, around half (51%) of respondents felt that sexual violence should not be allowed in films classified R18+, with a further 10% indicating that it should only be allowed once, and 27% believe that it is appropriate to include in films only occasionally.

Perceptions of R18 content has also been addressed in research undertaken in the UK. Respondents in the Public Opinion and the BBFC Guidelines study were informed that 'Videos/ DVDs given the special R18 (Restricted 18) contain explicit, real sex between consenting adults. These films are only available through licensed sex shops, and can only be obtained by adults aged over the age of 18'. As noted above, respondents were then asked the extent to which they agreed with the following two statements (BBFC & TNS Media, 2005, p.11):[74]

- There should be no limits on what can be shown in R18 videos/ DVDs, providing they do not contain sexual violence, or break the law.

- There should be no limits on what can be shown in R18 videos/ DVDs.

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[73] See Footnote 1, above, for overview of methodology.
[74] See Footnote 5, above, for overview of methodology.

Around half (51%) of respondents agreed with the first statement while only 23% of respondents agreed this the second statement, suggesting that certain non-illegal material may need to be excluded from R18 DVDs to be in line with UK community standards.

7.6 Young people's perceptions of current classification system

As part of the Irish study *Adolescents and Film: Attitudes to Film Classification*, young people were asked about how films with specific content should be classified.[75] The research found that young people consider the use of hard drugs to be the single most important element in terms of what should be restricted, with 10% of respondents indicating that it should never be shown and a further 34% indicating that it is only suitable for over 18s (Dublin City University & Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology, 2005). It is worth recalling at this point that evidence has suggested that depictions of hard drug use are also a concern for British (BBFC & TNS Media, 2005) and Australian (Urbis Keys Young, 2004) adult community members, especially parents. Other content that the surveyed Irish adolescents felt should be restricted to adults included: explicit sex (18%), violence rewarded (13%), nudity (15%), and implied sex (12%). Further, just over half of respondents (51%) were of the view that explicit sex should be given the 15PG classification.

In contrast to adults, evidence from this survey suggests that young people generally had more liberal views about violence than sexual content. The majority thought that stylised violence (93%), realistic violence (62%), and violence seen as normal (62%) should be classified as 12PG or lower. Support for sexual content at the 12PG level was more limited, with 60% indicating that it was acceptable talk about sex at this level (and below), 41% indicating that it was acceptable to show implied sex, and 30% indicating that it is acceptable to show explicit sex. It should, however, be noted that the majority of the young respondents agreed that a 15PG (or lower) restriction was deemed a sufficient restriction for all possible content included in a film.

Young people were also asked for their opinion about what classifiable elements their parents' were most concerned about. Sex was the most popular element, with 88% of respondents selecting this option, followed by violence (59%), drugs (58%), and bad language (56%). Consistent with reporting regarding parental control of viewing, there was evidence of a discord between the opinions of parents and children, with the final report noting (p.10):

> *While adolescents might be most concerned about the depiction of hard drug use, they believe that their parents are primarily concerned with sexual content. Parents themselves [in an accompanying study: IFCO/Lansdowne, 2004] as fifth place as a cause for concern.*

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[75] See Footnote 31, above, for overview of methodology.

8. Conclusions

8.1 Review conclusions

There is broad backing for and confidence in classification systems, both in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions.

There is broad backing for and confidence in classification systems, both in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions – the general model of age-restrictions or recommendations and content advice is an expected, and highly-valued, component of media distribution. Two further points are worthy of note: first, backing for and confidence in classification does not appear to differ significantly depending on whether the system is administered by a government or non-government organisation; and second, there is little evidence of confidence or backing waning over time, suggesting the public continue to see a role for classification in a convergent media environment.

There is a high awareness of the NCS and categories/ markings amongst the Australian public; however, quantitative research undertaken in this area is dated.

Awareness of classifications and ratings amongst the general public varied considerably across jurisdiction. Due to significant differences in methodological approaches (including sampling) and fieldwork dates, it was not possible to directly compare the performance of the jurisdictions included in this review; however it appears that the Australian public has a particularly high (and consistent) awareness of the different classification symbols. Most notably, an admittedly dated survey of the Australian public revealed (Galaxy Research, 2007):

- **Very high unprompted awareness of existence of a classification system:** 93% of film consumers indicating that they were aware that films carry classifications and 89% of computer game consumers indicating that they were aware that computer games carry classifications.

- **Very high unprompted awareness of classification symbols:** Nine in 10 consumers (90%) were able to name (or imply knowledge of), unprompted, at least one correct classification.

Understanding of classification categories and markings amongst the Australian public (and amongst the public in comparable jurisdictions) appears to be limited, with significant variation observed across categories/ markings.

- **Understanding of mid-level classifications amongst the Australian public is especially problematic, and sometimes compares unfavourably to the levels observed in comparable jurisdictions.**

Recognition of a classification symbol does not necessarily equate to an understanding of that symbol, and understanding a symbol's meaning is essential to ensuring a classification system is successful. In contrast to awareness, reported understanding of film classification categories amongst the Australian public (and amongst the public in comparable jurisdictions) appears to be limited, with significant variation observed across symbols. In particular, while lower- and higher- level classifications are

generally well understood, there is consistent cross-jurisdictional evidence to suggest that members of the public are confused about the meaning of mid-level classifications, with a significant proportion of qualitative and quantitative research participants either expressing confusion or demonstrating that they possess incorrect knowledge. This issue is especially pronounced when similar symbols or terms are adopted for mid-level classifications – examples of such practices include M and MA15+ (in Australia), 12 and 12A (in the UK), and PG, 12PG and 15PG (in Ireland).

The Australian publics' understanding of the consumer advice that accompanies classification symbols is incomplete, and sometimes compares unfavourably to the level of understanding observed in other jurisdictions.

Members of the general public (especially parents) do not have time to research the content of all movies and value consumer advice – in addition to classification symbols – as a way of helping them to avoid undesired, inappropriate, and potentially disturbing material. That being said, evidence suggests that there are two significant gaps in consumer understanding of the advice that accompanies classification symbols in Australia:

- Australian consumers appear to have a confused and often incorrect understanding of the term 'Themes', which is included in selected consumer advice (e.g. Supernatural themes, Drug themes).

- The relationship between classification and consumer advice is poorly understood by a significant proportion of consumers, with research consistently showing confusion about whether the advice is based on the standards operating with each classification category, or whether there is a wider framework that incorporates all advice.

Using separate classifications for sexually explicit films and other 'adults only' films can cause confusion.

Unlike in selected comparable jurisdictions, the Australian classification system includes two classifications which place a legal restriction on people under the age of 18. These are expressed by the symbols R18+ and X18+, the latter applying to films that contain only sexually explicit content and which are not screened in cinemas. Evidence suggests that there is significant and ongoing confusion amongst Australian public (including consumers and non-consumers of this material) about the difference between these symbols. Two particular points of concern are (a) whether the symbols signify that the material is 'legally restricted to adults' or 'suitable for adults' and (b) whether or not X 18+ films include violence.

Despite broad community and stakeholder support for the existence of a classification system, views on the RC category (and similar) are mixed.

Few people dispute the benefits of a classification system that allows individuals to make fully-informed decisions about the media they (and their children) consume; however, there is ongoing debate about whether the government should have the capacity to assign an RC classification, which effectively bans the selling, public screening, and distribution of content. One of the most common arguments for restricting access is the view that certain media (especially films and computer games) may be harmful – both at the individual and community level. It is also commonly argued that that

restrictive classification helps to protect children from possible harm. A widespread case put forward for the abolition of the RC classification category (and similar) is that Australia is essentially a free society where adults should be able to see, hear, and read what they like, as expressed in the Classification Act. Representative quantitative research is required to reach a conclusion about the extent to which these (and more moderate) attitudes toward RC classification exist in the Australian community; however, qualitative research undertaken by Urbis for the ALRC suggested that members of the general public have mixed views on what (and indeed whether) material should be banned or restricted. International studies examining community attitudes toward the capacity of a governing body to ban material have also produced mixed results, providing further evidence that additional robust research is required in this area.

Classification decisions for films and computer games are broadly aligned with community standards, both in Australia and in comparable jurisdictions.

Members of the Australian general public (and members of the public in comparable jurisdictions) tend to agree with the classifications and advice assigned to films and computer games, suggesting broad alignment between classification decisions and community standards. The following should, however, be noted:

- As noted above, disagreement with classification decisions (and accompanying advice) is most common for mid-level classifications – it therefore appears that along with being less understood, members of the general public are also less satisfied with mid-level classifications.

- Australian research has consistently found that men are more likely than women to report that film and game classifications are too strict.

- Alignment between Classification Board decisions and the attitudes of the Australian community has not been quantitatively examined since 2007 and, therefore, it is not possible to reach a conclusion about current alignment; however comparisons across research undertaken in 2002, 2005, and 2007 suggests that there has been little change in level of alignment over time.

Parents (and other primary caregivers) are more supportive of classification and rating systems when compared to the general public.

Higher engagement and support amongst parents (and other primary caregivers) is to be expected – these groups consistently state in qualitative and quantitative research that they do not have the time to research the content of all movies, and that they value movies classifications (and accompanying advice) as a way of helping them avoid inappropriate, and possibly disturbing, material. Indeed, parents are so widely acknowledged to be engaged stakeholders that some regulatory agencies only survey this respondent group for views on classification or rating systems – the operation of classification and rating systems therefore are sometimes more likely to reflect parents' views rather than the views on the general public. In order to avoid this situation, and help to ensure that a classification system is useful to all members of the general public, it is important that research include all segments of society, although it may be worthwhile to survey parents and other engaged stakeholders more often. Surveys undertaken with parents should, at minimum, be treated with

caution, as their views on and use of the classification system will be systematically different to other members of the general public.

Young people across jurisdictions are, on the whole, knowledgeable and supportive of classification systems; however, self-reported support may not translate into actual use of the system to avoid (or prepare to view) material, especially amongst older children and adolescents.

Public opinion research has provided evidence that young people across jurisdictions are generally supportive of classification systems; however many youth believe that assigned classifications are too strict and that classification information is only relevant to children younger than themselves, suggesting that self-reported support may not translate into actual use of the system to avoid (or prepare to view) material, especially amongst older children and adolescents. Evidence further suggests that teens may more commonly use classification information to seek out, rather than avoid, specific material.

Use of classification and rating information amongst the general public (especially parents) appears to be relatively high across jurisdictions, with Australia comparing favourably; however use amongst parents may be overestimated.

Use of classification and rating information amongst the general public appears to be relatively high across the jurisdictions included in this review. Despite the evidence of limited understanding of consumer advice outlined above, there is also some, admittedly dated, research to suggest that Australians find the consumer advice that accompanies classification useful when selecting media. Use of classification systems appears to be higher amongst females and, not surprisingly, parents and other primary caregivers – this is especially true when children are younger.

It should, however, be noted that research undertaken directly with children and young people has produced mixed results, with some studies providing further evidence of parental use of classification symbols and ratings information and other studies suggesting that use (and especially enforcement practices) may be overestimated by parents. It is, of course, also possible that children and young people underestimate parental use of classification systems. The inclusion of a Social Desirability Scale (such as the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale) in future survey-based research projects will allow for an assessment of the extent to which respondents (including parents and children) are honestly answering items assessing the use of classification systems.

Empirical evidence assessing potential for harm should be critically considered in conjunction with data assessing community standards.

There is an extensive academic and non-academic literature (which includes experimental, cross-sectional, and longitudinal studies) examining the potential harmful impact of certain media content. The task of this review is not reach a conclusion regarding the potential harmful effects of media exposure, including exposure to violent content. A brief overview was included simply to remind readers that there exists empirical evidence to suggest that exposure to certain types of media *may* (or indeed *may not*) be harmful, and therefore community attitudes and preferences should be interpreted with this literature in mind. Put simply, general acceptance of subject matter amongst the community is not enough for material to be deemed acceptable for government support and

distribution (and/ or classification); rather evidence of potential harm to the community should also be considered.

There is widespread agreement amongst community members that certain content is likely to be harmful (especially to children and young people); however the relative potential for harm is thought to be mediated by:

Frequency;

Duration; and

Context.

Sexual activity: International and Australian studies have suggested that the limits placed on sexual content in films could be relaxed, with members of the general public rarely indicating that they found general sexual content offensive (even at high-level classification levels), and many noting that sexual content is treated in an overly restrictive way by regulators, especially when compared to violence. It is, however, very important to note that support for depictions of sexual violence and solicitation of young people/ paedophilia in higher-level, restricted films/ computer games amongst the Australian community (and community members in comparable jurisdictions) is limited, with several caveats being placed on suggested acceptable content.

Violence: Evidence suggests that violence continues to be a major concern for members of the general public, with research participants consistently expressing concern for the potential negative impact of screen violence on individuals and society. Violence is generally considered to be more impactful if it is (a) committed by someone in a position of authority, especially a policeman (b) committed against vulnerable victims – violence by men against women, animals, and children was all regarded as having relatively high impact, (c) explicit (blood, distress) and unexpected. Members of the general public felt that depictions of violence were especially problematic when the consequences of the violence were either not shown or inaccurately depicted.

Drugs, alcohol, and crime: The general public remains concerned about depictions of drugs and drug-taking, with a number of research studies suggesting that the public believe that it is one of the most important, if not the most important, element for classifiers to consider. As with violence, the public is especially concerned about depictions of drug-taking that either show no consequences or inaccurately depicted consequences. It was, however, noted that depictions of drug-taking that show negative consequences could positively impact children, and therefore should not be classified as strictly as depictions that do not show these consequences. Attitudes toward drug taking mirror broader attitudes toward crime, with community members suggesting that depictions of crime without punishment/ consequences are unsuitable for younger viewers.

Offensive language: While on the whole community members felt that offensive language was not as impactful as other classifiable elements, the impact was thought to increase with frequency. In addition, the impact of offensive language was considered more pronounced when spoken (a) by an authority figure, (b) in the presences of children, and (c) with an aggressive tone. International research suggests that the word 'cunt' still has the power to shock and should not be included in films/ computer games assigned mid-level classifications.

There is broad community support for the inclusion of selected fetishes in higher-level, restricted content.

While reported level of offense differed significantly depending on specific content, Australian and international studies with the general public and expert stakeholders have consistently shown broad community support for the inclusion of additional fetishes (excluding sexual violence) in higher-level, restricted content. With regard to Australian community attitudes to fetishes, two further points are worthy of note:

- Fetishism is no longer considered to be a mental health disorder unless it causes the fetishist 'clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning'.

- There is also evidence to suggest that a significant number of Australians actively engage in the sexual fetishes prohibited from the X 18+ classification.

There are concerns that exposure to gambling and non-illicit drug use (i.e. alcohol and tobacco) via films and computer games may be harmful, both at an individual and societal level. It is therefore worth considering (a) the inclusion of a specific ' Gambling' element within the NCS, and (b) the expansion in scope of the 'Drug use' element to including portrayals of smoking and alcohol consumption.

There is evidence to suggest that depictions of smoking and alcohol have the potential to be harmful both at an individual and societal level, especially to children and adolescents. In addition, commercial video gaming technologies provide young people with unrestricted access to realistic (but money-free) gambling and gambling-like activities, which may promote further interest in gambling and increase the likelihood of gambling with real money. There is, therefore, solid evidence that these themes should be incorporated into the Australian NCS, either through the inclusion of additional elements (as is the case for 'Gambling') or through the expansion in scope of existing elements (as is the case for depictions of smoking and alcohol consumption). Specific warnings about gambling have been successfully incorporated into classification systems in comparable jurisdictions, and although it has not been comprehensively (or recently) examined, there appears to be broad community and stakeholder support (at least in the United States) for the inclusion of public health warnings, including smoking, within classification systems.

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10. Appendix A: Summary of classification systems

Australia

The Australian Classification Board (the Board) applies the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995 (the Act), the National Classification Code and the Classification Guidelines (the Guidelines). The Guidelines set out a hierarchy of impact from 'very mild' to 'very high'. The consideration of impact and context are essential principles in the use of the Guidelines.

The Board takes into account the context and impact of six classifiable elements that are; themes; violence; sex; language; drug use; and nudity. This includes their frequency and intensity and their cumulative effect. It also takes account of the purpose and tone of a sequence, and how material is treated.

Films and computer games

The classification ratings for films and computer games in Australia consist of the following:

Rating	Symbol	Guidelines
G		The impact of the classifiable elements for material classified G should be very mild only.
PG		The impact of the classifiable elements for material classified PG should be no higher than mild.
M		The impact of the classifiable elements for material classified M should be no higher than moderate.
MA 15+		The impact of material classified MA 15+ should be no higher than strong.
R 18+		The impact of material classified R 18+ should not exceed high.
X 18+ (only for films available in the ACT and parts of the NT)		Contains consensual sexually explicit activity. (Restricted to adults 18 years and over*) *Available only for sale or hire in the ACT and Northern Territory.* *Note: This classification is a special and legally restricted category which contains only sexually explicit material.*
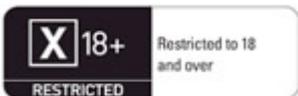
		That is material which contains real depictions of actual sexual intercourse and other sexual activity between consenting adults.
RC	Refused Classification	*Note: Films that exceed the R 18+ and X 18+classification categories will be Refused Classification.*

Publications

The classification ratings for publications in Australia consist of the following:

Rating	Guidelines
Unrestricted	May contain the classifiable elements of sex and nudity with some detail but the impact should not be strong. Consumer advice may be given not recommending the publication for readers under 15. Covers must be suitable for public display.
Category 1 Restricted (cannot be sold in Qld)	Can only be sold to adults. May include detailed realistic depictions of nudity, realistic depictions of sexual excitement and detailed descriptions of sexual activity between consenting adults. Covers must be suitable for public display and, if not, a condition may be imposed that the sealed wrapper is made of opaque material.
Category 2 Restricted (cannot be sold in Qld)	Can only be sold to adults. May include realistic depictions of actual sexual activity involving consenting adults. May only be displayed in premises restricted to adults.
RC	Publications which contain elements which exceed those set out in the above classification categories. RC publications cannot be legally imported or sold.

New Zealand

The Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) is the government agency responsible for the classification of all films, videos, publications, and some video games in New Zealand. It was established under Section 76 of the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993 (FVPC Act).

Under the FVPC Act, films are required to carry New Zealand classification labels. In order to obtain classifications, films are first submitted to the Film and Video Labelling Body (FVLB). Where the film or game requires restriction (for example if it has been classified MA15+ in Australia), FVLB will forward the film or game to the Classification Office for classification.

Classification ratings in New Zealand consist of the following:

Rating	Symbol	Guidelines
G – General		Suitable for general audiences.
PG – Parental Guidance		Parental guidance recommended for younger viewers.
M – Mature		Suitable for (but not restricted to) mature audiences 16 years and over.
13 - Restricted		Restricted to persons 13 years of age and over.
13 - Restricted		Restricted to persons 13 years and over unless accompanied by a parent or guardian.
15- Restricted		Restricted to persons 15 years of age and over.
16 - Restricted		Restricted to persons 16 years and over unless accompanied by a parent or guardian
16- Restricted		Restricted to persons 16 years of age and over.
18- Restricted		Restricted to persons 18 years of age and over.

R- Restricted		Restricted to a particular group or purpose.

United States of America

The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) promotes and supports American motion picture, home video and television industries in the United States and around the world. The MPAA's rating system is administered by the Classification and Ratings Administration (CARA) which makes independent decisions. The US classification rating system is a voluntary scheme that is not enforced by law. Films can be exhibited without a rating although the majority of cinemas refuse to exhibit non-rated or NC-17 rated films.

MPAA classification ratings consist of the following:

Rating	Symbol	Guidelines
G – General	**G**	All Ages Admitted.
PG – Parental Guidance	**PG**	Parental Guidance Suggested – Some Material May Not be Suitable for Children.
PG13	**PG-13**	Parents Strongly Cautioned – Some Material May be Inappropriate for Children Under 13.
R	**R**	Restricted – Under 17 Requires Accompanying Parent or Adult Guardian
NC-17	**NC-17**	No One 17 and Under Admitted.

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) ratings provide information about the content in video games and apps. ESRB ratings have three parts:

- **Rating Categories** suggest age appropriateness.

- **Content Descriptors** indicate content that may have triggered a particular rating and/or may be of interest or concern.

- **Interactive Elements** inform about interactive aspects of a product, including users' ability to interact, the sharing of users' location with other users, or the fact that personal information may be shared with third parties.

As a supplementary source of information, boxed video games have Rating Summaries that provide a more detailed description of the content that factored into the rating assigned.

ESRB classification ratings consist of the following:

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Content is intended for young children.

EVERYONE

Content is generally suitable for all ages. May contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.

EVERYONE 10+

Content is generally suitable for ages 10 and up. May contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language and/or minimal suggestive themes.

TEEN

Content is generally suitable for ages 13 and up. May contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling and/or infrequent use of strong language.

MATURE

Content is generally suitable for ages 17 and up. May contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language.

ADULTS ONLY

Content suitable only for adults ages 18 and up. May include prolonged scenes of intense violence, graphic sexual content and/or gambling with real currency.

RATING PENDING

Not yet assigned a final ESRB rating. Appears only in advertising, marketing and promotional materials related to a game that is expected to carry an ESRB rating, and should be replaced by a game's rating once it has been assigned.

NOTE: Rating Category assignments can also be based upon a game or app's minimum age requirement.

United Kingdom

The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) is an independent, non-government body that was established in 1912. The BBFC has classified cinema films since its inception and since the Video Recordings Act was passed in 1984 it also classifies videos and DVDs. In 1985 the BBFC became the statutory authority for age rating videos under the Video Recordings Act 1984.

The BBFC base classification decisions on the Guidelines. The Guidelines are updated regularly with the help of extensive public consultation, research and BBFC staff experience. The Guidelines reflect current views on film, DVD and video game regulation.

BFCC classification ratings consist of the following:

Rating	Symbol	Guidelines
U		Suitable for audiences aged **four** years and over
PG		Parental Guidance
12A		Cinema release suitable for 12 years and over
12		Video release suitable for 12 years and over

15		Suitable only for 15 years and over
18		Suitable for adults only
R18 – restricted		Adults works for licensed premises only

Canada

The classification of computer games is the responsibility of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) Canada. Classification of films is the responsibility of provinces in Canada and each has its own legislation; and for home video purposes, the Canadian Home Video Rating System provides general categories even though various provinces have different rules on display and sale for videos and DVDs.

Computer games

ESRB ratings for computer games consist of the following:

Rating	Symbol	Guidelines
EC		**EARLY CHILDHOOD** Titles rated EC (Early Childhood) have content that may be suitable for ages 3 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate.
E		**EVERYONE** Titles rated E (Everyone) have content that may be suitable for ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.
E10+		**EVERYONE 10+** Titles rated E10+ (Everyone 10 and older) have content that may be suitable for ages 10 and older. Titles in this category may contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language and/or minimal suggestive themes.
T		**TEEN** Titles rated T (Teen) have content that may be suitable for ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humour, minimal blood, simulated gambling, and/or infrequent use of strong language.
M		**MATURE** Titles rated M (Mature) have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language.

AO		**ADULTS ONLY** Titles rated AO (Adults Only) have content that should only be played by persons 18 years and older. Titles in this category may include prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity.

Films

There are currently the following film classification offices rating films in Canada, each an agency of a provincial government:

- British Columbia – Consumer Protection BC is responsible for all film classification activities conducted under the Motion Picture Act.

- Alberta Film Ratings.

- Manitoba Film Classification Board.

- Ontario Film Review Board.

- Régie du cinéma du Québec.

- Maritime Film Classification Board – run by the Nova Scotia Alcohol and Gaming Authority, this Board provides ratings for Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island (and some theatres in Newfoundland and Labrador though it is not compulsory).

- Saskatchewan Film and Video Classification Board.

For home video purposes, the voluntary Canadian Home Video Rating System generally consists of the following categories, even though various provinces have different rules on the display and sale for videos and DVDs.

- **G** - General Audience - Suitable for all ages.

- **PG** - Parental Guidance - Parental guidance advised. There is no age restriction but some material may not be suitable for all children.

- **14A** - 14 Accompaniment - Persons under 14 years of age must be accompanied by an adult.

- **18A** - 18 Accompaniment - Persons under 18 years of age must be accompanied by an adult. In the Maritimes and Manitoba, children under the age of 14 are prohibited from viewing the film.

- **R** - Restricted - Admittance restricted to people 18 years of age or older.

Some Canadian provinces have the following additional category:

- **A** - Adult - Admittance restricted to people 18 years of age or older. Sole purpose of the film is the portrayal of sexually explicit activity and/or explicit violence. In Alberta, the A category is used only for sexually explicit products. Manitoba and Ontario do not have this category. Manitoba uses a barcode labelling system for Adult home videos while Ontario has a Restricted-Adult Sex (RX) rating for home video products. In British Columbia, the A symbol is a red octagon rather than a blue diamond.

The ratings are different in Quebec and consist of the following categories:

- **G** **Visa général** (General Rating): May be viewed, rented or purchased by persons of all ages.
- **13+** **13 ans et plus** (13 years and over): May be viewed, rented or purchased by children 13 years of age or over. Children under 13 may be admitted only if accompanied by an adult.
- **16+** **16 ans et plus** (16 years and over): May be viewed, rented or purchased by children 16 years of age or over.
- **18+** **18 ans et plus** (18 years and over): May be viewed, rented or purchased by adults 18 years of age or over.
- **Le refus de classement** (Refusal of Classification): The showing, sale or rental of the film is prohibited.

Europe

The Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE) represents the video game industry. It aims to protect the industry against the threat of piracy and promotes the Pan European Game Information (PEGI) ratings system for consumers.

PEGI has the following classification categories:

Rating	Symbol	Guidelines
3		Suitable for ages 3 and older. May contain mild violence in an appropriate context for younger children, but no explicit language is allowed.
7		Suitable for ages 7 and older. May contain mild, cartoon violence, sports, or elements that can be frightening to younger children.
12		Suitable for ages 12 and older. May contain violence in a fantasy setting, coarse language, mild sexual references or innuendo, or gambling.

16		Suitable for ages 16 and older. May contain explicit violence, strong language, sexual references or content, gambling, or drug use (encouragement).
18		Suitable for ages 18 and older. May contain graphic violence, including "violence towards defenseless people" and "multiple, motiveless killing", strong language, strong sexual content, gambling, drug use (glamorisation), or discrimination.

Ireland

The Irish Film Classification Office (IFCO) is a statutory body responsible for examining and certifying all cinema films and videos/DVDs distributed in Ireland. Computer games classifications rely on the PEGI system.

The aim of the classification system is to:

- protect children and young persons;

- have regard for freedom of expression; and

- have respect for the values of Irish society.

Cinema

The ratings system for cinema is as follows:

General: suitable for children of a school going age.

PG: Parental Guidance: Suitable for children aged eight and over. Parents are advised to accompany younger children.

12A: Suitable for children aged 12 and over. Younger children can be admitted if accompanied by an adult.

15A: Suitable for persons aged 15 fifteen and over. Younger children can be admitted if accompanied by an adult.

16: Suitable for persons aged 16 and over. Persons under 16 not admitted.

18: Suitable for persons of eighteen and over. Persons under 18 not admitted

DVDs/Videos

The ratings system for DVDs/Videos is as follows:

General: Fit for viewing by persons generally.

PG: Parental Guidance – Parents are advised to watch with children under 12 years old.

12: Suitable for people aged 12 and over, and not to be supplied to someone below that age.

15: Suitable for people aged 15 and over, and not to be supplied to someone below that age.

18: Suitable for people aged 18 and over, and not to be supplied to someone below that age.