



Australian Government

Classification Review Board

Date: 14 September 2022

Members: Susan Bush (Acting Convenor)
Adam Davy (Acting Deputy Convenor)
David Toll

Applicant: This is Arcadia Pty Ltd

Interested parties: This is Arcadia Pty Ltd
Alexandra Burke (Partner/Head of Acquisitions and Distribution)

Business: To review the Classification Board's decision to classify the film *Sissy*, **R 18+ (Restricted)** with the consumer advice '**High impact injury detail**'.

Decision and reasons for decision

1. Decision

The Classification Review Board (the Review Board) unanimously classified the film MA 15+, with the consumer advice 'Strong themes and violence, blood and gore'.

2. Legislative provisions

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

The Review Board

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

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

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

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

Classification of films under the Classification Act

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

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

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

The National Classification Code

Relevantly, the Films Table of the National Classification Code (the Code) provides that:

Films (except RC films, X 18+ films and R 18+ films) that depict, express or otherwise deal with sex, violence or coarse language in such a manner as to be unsuitable for viewing by persons under 15 are **to be classified MA 15+**, and the Code also sets out various principles to which classification decisions should give effect, as far as possible:

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

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

The Guidelines

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

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

3. Procedure

Three members of the Review Board met on 14 September 2022, in response to the receipt of an application from This is Arcadia Pty Ltd on 2 September 2022, to conduct the review of the film, *Sissy*, which had previously been classified **R18+ (Restricted)** with consumer advice of '**High impact injury detail**' by the Classification Board. The Review Board determined that the application was a valid application.

The Review Board was provided a written submission from the Applicant.

The Review Board viewed the film.

The Review Board heard an oral submission from the Applicant.

The Review Board then considered the matter.

4. Evidence and other material taken into account

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

- (i) This is Arcadia Pty Ltd application for review
- (ii) This is Arcadia Pty Ltd written and oral submissions
- (iii) the film, *Sissy*

- (iv) the relevant provisions in the Classification Act, the Code and the Guidelines, and
- (v) the Classification Board's report.

5. Synopsis

Sissy is an independent Australian horror film in which Cecilia, a popular influencer, is invited to the hen's weekend of a former friend. Old rivalries are quickly reignited, with increasingly violent consequences.

6. Findings on material questions of fact

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

- (a) Themes—the film contains themes that have a strong sense of threat and menace, and are justified by context.

The impact of this element is no higher than strong and can be accommodated at the MA 15+ classification level. This classifiable element includes injury detail, bullying, mental health, triggering and trauma.
- (b) Violence—the film contains violence that is strong in impact and mitigated by exaggerated and stylized production techniques.

The impact of this element is no higher than strong and can be accommodated at the MA 15+ level.
- (c) Sex—The film contains sexual references that are moderate in impact.
- (d) Language—Can be accommodated within the M classification

The impact of this element is no higher than moderate.
- (e) Drug Use—Within the PG classification

The impact of this element is infrequent and justified by context
- (f) Nudity—Not applicable

7. Reasons for the decision

In making the decision, the Review Board has applied the *Classification (publication, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995* (the Classification Act), the National Classification Code (the Code) and the Guidelines for the Classification of Films 2012 (the Guidelines).

In the Review Board's opinion, this film warrants an MA 15+ classification as, in accordance with item 4 of the films table of the Code, the impact of the classifiable elements does not exceed strong.

The film explores the use and impact of social media and the trauma of high-school bullying, and its long-term effect on mental health, in a contrived and exaggerated setting. The themes and violence are inextricably linked, with injury detail including post-action visuals that are strong in impact. However, the deliberate use of highly stylised production techniques such as incongruous sound effects and juxtaposition of discordant imagery mitigate the impact of the film, particularly the themes and violence.

The film contains coarse language and sexual references that can be accommodated at a lower classification.

In the Review Board's view, the film warrants an MA 15+ classification, in accordance with item 4 of the Films table of the Code.

8. Summary

Pursuant to the Guidelines, the impact of the classifiable elements is no higher than strong. It is therefore the unanimous view of the Review Board that the film warrants a classification of MA 15+ with the consumer advice of 'Strong themes and violence, blood and gore'.