



**ACT DEMOCRATS**

**A Submission from the Australian Democrats (ACT Division)**

**to**

**ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT**

**CLASSIFICATION REVIEW**

**Should the Australian National Classification Scheme include  
an R 18+ classification category for computer games?**

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Classification Review  
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## **THE QUESTION**

***Should the Australian National Classification Scheme include an R18+ classification category for computer games?***

**YES**

***The ACT Democrats believe that Australia should have an R18+ classification for videogames.***

The ACT Democrats strongly agree with the statements:

*“Adults should not be prevented from playing R 18+ level computer games simply because they are unsuitable for minors;”*

and

*“The R 18+ classification category sends a clear, unambiguous message to parents that the game material is unsuitable for minors;”*

In this submission we argue that video (and computer) game classification should be brought into line with film classification to assist consumers in obtaining accurate information about video game content.

An R18+ classification is needed as video games suitable for ages 18 and up are currently banned outright in Australia. The ACT Democrats believe that adults are entitled to make their own, informed decisions about media consumption.

### **Comparison with films:**

Video games in Australia, whilst subject to a classification scheme administered by the Classification Board, do not have access to an R18+ classification. However, the same material in a video or DVD (film) form does. There is a need to bring the video games into line with film classifications in a manner that allows mature adults to make an informed decision about their content and allows parents to be clearly informed that the material is for adult consumption only.

In relation to films, the Classification Board is able to issue six classifications, being G, PG, M, MA15+, R18+, and X18+. Films that do not fall into these categories are refused classification. Most material that would be refused classification is already illegal in Australia under our criminal law.

In relation to videogames, the Classification Board has four classifications, being G, PG, M and MA15+. Games that are deemed unsuitable for people under the age of 18, are refused classification.

There is no evidence to suggest that video games should be treated any differently to films. They should have the same classifications and the same enforceable

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restrictions on sale and hire availability. Consistent classification categories for films and video games are far easier for consumers to understand. The demonstrated need is that video games classifications should be brought into line with film classifications.

**International:**

Over recent years a range of games have been refused classification which have been legal in other Western countries, most recently Silent Hill 5. Other prominent titles include Fallout 3, Mark Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure, Dark Sector, and Shellshock: Vietnam.

Australia requires an R18+ rating for games to bring Australia into line with other English-speaking countries and to allow mature Australians to make informed decisions about their media consumption.

As other classification systems internationally have an adult rating for computer games, it is desirable for Australia to participate in a system of international parity.

Consumers can already access games that have R18+ classifications overseas illegally. Prohibition does not work. It would be far better if they were legally available, so appropriate restrictions and controls could be regulated.

**Australian not State:**

Creating an R18+ classification for games currently requires agreement of Federal and State Attorney-Generals under the Intergovernmental Agreement on Censorship. With such agreement currently blocked by State laws eg. South Australia; it is time for uniform national legislation on this matter.

It is estimated that the average age of an Australian gamer is over the age of 30. Videogames are not a niche hobby, nor the sole province of children. Video gaming is a rapidly growing leisure activity among Australians and is an industry that generates a lot of income for the providers.

**Availability:**

The same restrictions on videogame availability and access to minors should apply as for films. This would prevent any likelihood of minors being more at risk of exposure to computer games that are unsuitable for them.

Censorship for adults is wrong and we oppose it. But we do believe in some level of control of access for young people. What we are proposing is equal treatment of all age-restricted products, with access to R18+ videogames restricted to minors but freely available to adults through appropriate outlets, in a similar way to cigarettes, alcohol, gambling and film products.

**Family Responsibility:**

The ACT Democrats believe that freedom of speech is a right of all Australians; We believe that mature Australians should be able to make their own informed

decisions about media consumption.

We believe that the decision as to what games are suitable for children is a decision that should be made by families, not governments. Parents regularly make decisions as to what their children can or cannot watch. Therefore, it would not be difficult for parents to enforce age restrictions for video games, particularly if the availability was related to proof-of-age via an appropriate outlet.

The role of government is to provide accurate, useful classification information to support families in those decisions.

The ACT Democrats thank you for your consideration of our submission.

Yours sincerely,

*D. M. Churchill*

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