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Submission on R18+ computer games by Members of the Parliament of Western Australia

To:

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Working Hard for our Community

The electorate of Mount Lawley

contains all or a portion of: Coolbinia, Dianella, East

Perth, Highgate, Inglewood, Maylands, Menora, Mount Lawley, Perth and Yokine.

This submission is endorsed by the following members of the Parliament of Western Australia:

Hon Graham Jacobs MLA, Minister for Water and Mental Health

Mr Michael Sutherland MLA, Member for Mount Lawley

Hon Helen Bullock MLC, Member for Mining and Pastoral

Hon Nick Goiran MLC, Member for South Metropolitan

Hon Helen Morton MLC, Member for East Metropolitan

Hon Liz Behjat MLC, Member for North Metropolitan

Mr Frank Alban MLA, Member for Swan Hills

Mr Joe Francis MLA, Member for Jandakot

Mr Tony Krsticevic MLA, Member for Carine

Hon Michael Mischin MLC, Member North Metropolitan Region

Mr Vincent Catania MLA, Member for North West

Mr Peter Abetz MLA, Member for Southern River

Mr Ian Britza MLA, Member for Morley

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The civility of our society is adversely affected when violence and explicit sexual content pervade our communications media and entertainment industry.

Violence and explicit sexual content in computer and video games raise particular concerns due to the interactive nature of these games.

The proposal to introduce an R18+ classification for computer games has already been rejected repeatedly by the Standing Committee of Censorship Ministers because of these concerns.

We are dismayed to find that the Commonwealth Attorney-General is unilaterally pursuing this proposal by issuing a consultation paper.

As legislators responsible for the peace, order and good government of the people of Western Australia we are conscious of the impact that the ready availability of R18+ computer games could have on Western Australians, including children and adolescents.

We urge all ministers responsible for censorship matters – Commonwealth, State and Territory – to abandon any further consideration of the proposal for an R18+ classification for computer games and to re-affirm the wisdom of the national classification scheme in limiting computer games to no higher than the MA15+ classification.

IMPACT OF VIOLENCE

We note that the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games* allow for violence in the MA15+ classification that is considered to have an impact “no higher than strong”.

The R18+ classification allows for violence which is considered to have a “high impact”.

Research evidence appears to support the view that exposure to violence in computer or video games has both immediate and long-lasting effects on aggressive behaviour, aggressive cognition, and aggressive affect.¹

Allowing computer games that would warrant a classification of R18+ because they contain violence that is considered to be of “high impact” would therefore seem likely to contribute to an increase in violence in our community.

Indeed leading researchers in this field have reported recently that “the long term effect of video game violence on later aggression and violence is larger than most known risk factors for adolescent violence, such as abusive parents, poverty, and antisocial parents”.²

¹ Anderson, C.A. et al. (2008) “Longitudinal Effects of Violent Video Games Aggression in Japan and the United States”, *Pediatrics*, 122, e1067-e1072; Moller, I., & Krahe, B. (2009), “Exposure to violent video games and aggression in German adolescents: A longitudinal analysis”, *Aggressive Behavior*, 35, 75-89; Wallenius, M., & Punamäki, R. (2008), “Digital game violence and direct aggression in adolescence: A longitudinal study of the roles of sex, age, and parent-child communication”, *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 29, 286–294

² Bartlett, C.P., & Anderson, C.A. (2009). “Violent Video Games and Public Policy”, in Tobias Bevc & Holger Zapf (Eds.) (pp. 227-240), *Wie wir spielen, was wir werden: Computerspiele in unserer Gesellschaft*. Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft

ENGAGING IN VIOLENCE

Researchers have also identified reasons for considering that the violent content in computer games is likely to have more profound effects on players than the violent content in films and television programs has on viewers:

- in computer games the player often identifies with the aggressor;
- the player actively rehearses the whole sequence of aggression; and
- the proportion of the game devoted to violence is higher than for most films.³

This research lends support to the commonsense approach adopted by the national classification scheme of limiting the highest classification for computer games to MA15+ while allowing an R18+ classification for films.

RECOMMENDATION

The proposal to give further consideration to the introduction of an R18+ classification for computer games should be abandoned and the wisdom of the national classification scheme in limiting computer games to no higher than the MA15+ classification be re-affirmed.



22/2/10

³ Swing, E.L., & Anderson, C.A. (2008), "How and what do video games teach?" in T. Willoughby & E. Wood (Eds.) Children's Learning in a Digital World (pp. 64-84). Oxford, UK: Blackwell, pp.75-76