

**Submission from the Sporting Shooters' Association of  
Australia, Inc to the Attorney-General's Department  
Regarding the Introduction of an R18+ Classification Category  
for Computer Games**

**Who we are**

The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia, Inc (SSAA National) is Australia's premier sports shooting and hunting organisation representing more than 120,000 shooters from all states and territories. SSAA National is dedicated to promoting and protecting the shooting sports and by necessity regularly communicates with state and federal governments as well as the United Nations network to ensure that the shooting sports are safeguarded and that legislation does not have an adverse affect on the sport. SSAA National is also an accredited NGO with the United Nations.

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

No. SSAA National believes that the introduction of an R18+ computer games category will hinder positive social interaction and adversely affect community safety. Baroness Susan Greenfield, a professor at Lincoln College, Oxford and a recent Thinker in Residence of the South Australian Government, said that more and more gamers are spending up to six hours a day playing video games, meaning they have "less time to live in three dimensions, to learn how to talk to other people by judging their voice and their body language and by their pheromones and thinking in real time about how your empathising or otherwise with them."<sup>1</sup>

By allowing this classification category, the Australian Government will be simplifying and legalising the way in which gamers obtain material that the government has currently labelled too violent and offensive. Regarding games that are currently prohibited in Australia, a representative for the then-Minister for Home Affairs Bob Debus said that 'gamers' "can get the games on the Internet anyway". One could argue that child pornography is available on the Internet as well, but society has agreed that it is not acceptable and we have legislation that supports this view.

SSAA National is concerned about the introduction of an R18+ classification category for computer/video games because of the growing body of research stemming from the psychiatric fraternity that links violent video game play to aggressive cognitions, attitudes, and behaviours (see pg 3, Relevant Research, for supporting data). The research shows that a small percentage of maladjusted people in society are latching on to the violence portrayed in computer/video games. Like South Australian Attorney-General Michael Atkinson, SSAA National believes that today's video games are too violent and that there is a strong link between interactive video game violence and real-life crime.

There is sufficient evidence to show that ultra violent computer games, such as those that will receive an R18+ rating, can be the source or basis of the plans of would-be criminals who are often young men with psychiatric issues.

Quite often, the profile of someone who turns against society is of a young male with a mental health issue. Often dubbed a 'loner', this is just the type of individual prone to prolonged periods of game playing and who is most vulnerable to the desensitisation these games can cause. Several of the perpetrators of recent mass murders utilising firearms and other equipment in the USA and Finland fit this exact profile.

History has shown that those who carry out antisocial behaviour and vengeance mass murder have often practiced their acts using violent video games or used these games to act out and foster their anger.

In their study, Psychologists Craig Anderson and Karen Dill note (cited Holmes 2005) that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold enjoyed playing violent video games - and they speculate that these games played a role in their violent acts at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado in April of 1999.<sup>2</sup> The *Belfast Telegraph* (23 September 2008) reported that Finish villain Pekka-Eric Auvinen had a fascination with Hitler and Stalin and an obsession with weapons, internet war games and revolutionary history.<sup>3</sup> According to the website [www.timesonline.co.uk](http://www.timesonline.co.uk) (23 March 2009), Tim Kretschmer, the 17-year-old who murdered 15 students in a German school in 2009, often played a violent video game called Counter-Strike.<sup>4</sup>

SSAA National also believes that often when these social misfits and the criminally mentally ill carry out violent crimes using firearms and often other tools to harm, a simplistic media and legislative response is to call for further restrictions on firearms that, in fact, only hinder shooters who have undergone strict police checks and are intent on abiding by the laws of this country.

According to the Australian Institute of Criminology, more often than not, those who perpetrate violent crimes do not have a firearms license and commit their crimes using an unregistered gun.<sup>5</sup>

Professor Greenfield also said that “the brain is sensitive to the environment” and SSAA National believes that R18+ video games will not provide a healthy environment for Australian gamers and that they will create a broader public safety risk.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our concerns and opinions regarding the introduction of an R18+ classification category for computer games. We are available to further discuss our position at any time.

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## Relevant Research

Baroness Susan Greenfield, a professor at Lincoln College, Oxford, believes that people who play video games put themselves in an “environment that is strongly sensory”. During this game play, she says that a number of “chemicals are released in the brain, ones that can cause, in some people, addictive-type behaviour”. The chemicals, one of which is dopamine, can dampen the frontal part of the brain, which is the body’s emotional control centre.

SSAA National believes that violent games can reinforce the urge for violence. Professor Greenfield agrees. She says, “So my own view, and I think the literature does bear this out, is that it [a violent video game] can encourage violence ... , it can make people more pre-disposed to living in a world of ... strong sensations, of extreme sensations, and perhaps the most extreme sensation is someone being shot or bleeding”.<sup>6</sup>

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman is an internationally recognised scholar, author, soldier, and speaker who is one of the world's foremost experts in the field of human aggression and the roots of violence and violent crime. Col. Grossman, who co-authored *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill: A Call to Action Against TV, Movie and Video Game Violence*, has described many video games as “murder simulators”. In his book *On Combat*, he writes: “Through violent programming on television and in movies, and through interactive point-and-shoot video games, modern nations are indiscriminately introducing to their children the same weapons technology that major armies and law enforcement agencies around the world use to “turn off” the midbrain “safety catch” that Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall discovered in World War II.”<sup>7</sup>

Psychologists Craig Anderson and Karen Dill (cited in Holmes 2005) published results of two studies on the effects of violent video games in the lab and in real life in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. In it they state:

“The present research demonstrated that in both a correlational investigation using self-reports of real-world aggressive behaviors and an experimental investigation using a standard, objective laboratory measure of aggression, violent video game play was positively related to increases in aggressive behavior. In the laboratory, college students who played a violent video game behaved more aggressively toward an opponent than did students who had played a nonviolent video game. Outside the laboratory, students who reported playing more violent video games over a period of years also engaged in more aggressive behavior in their own lives. Both types of studies—correlational—real delinquent behaviors and experimental—laboratory aggressive behaviors have their strengths and weaknesses. The convergence of findings across such disparate methods lends considerable strength to the main hypothesis that exposure to violent video games can increase aggressive behavior.”(Anderson & Dill, 2000)<sup>8</sup>

Vince Mathews, a researcher at the Indiana University School of Medicine (cited in Kalning 2006), says that brain scans of kids who played a violent video game showed an

increase in emotional arousal – and a corresponding decrease of activity in brain areas involved in self-control, inhibition and attention.<sup>9</sup>

Robert E. McAfee, M.D., a past president of the American Medical Association, said that “although there has been less research on the effects of violence in video games and the Internet because they are new and changing technologies, there is little reason to doubt that findings from other media studies will apply here too. Young children instinctively imitate actions they observe, without always possessing the intellect or maturity to determine if such actions are appropriate. Due to their role-modelling capacity to promote real world violence, there is deep concern that playing violent video games, with their fully digitalized human images, will cause children to become more aggressive towards other children and become more tolerant of, and more likely to engage in, real-life violence.”<sup>10</sup>

In another study done on the effects of violent video game habits on adolescents found that adolescents who expose themselves to greater amounts of video game violence were more hostile, reported getting into arguments with teachers more frequently, were more likely to be involved in physical fights, and performed more poorly in school.<sup>11</sup>

References:

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