



13 March 2008

The Hon Bob Debus
Minister for Home Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir,

Young Media Australia— Computer games and the R18+ classification

Young Media Australia is the peak body representing the needs and interests of parents, children and youth in Australia in relation to the media. Our core business is the collection, review and dissemination of research and information about media impact (including that of computer games) on the young.

We write because we note that, yet again, there are proposals to allow R18+ classified computer games to be legally available within the sale and hire system in Australia. YMA is strongly opposed to this proposal and supports the continuation of the commendable position of caution held by Federal, State and Territory Ministers responsible for classification over the past years.

The reasons for our opposition are as follows:

1. Indicators of both long and short term harm from violent games have been found by multiple research teams in many countries, and are now supported by longitudinal studies in 3 countries. Statements of concern about the impact of violent games have been issued by bodies such as the American Psychological Association (2005).
2. YMA surveys and experience demonstrate that the present regulation designed to keep R18+ DVDs and videos out of the hands of minors has been largely ineffectual (YMA 1986). This creates a difficult situation for responsible parents wishing to protect their children from material potentially harmful to them.
3. There is no reason to believe that similar enforcement provisions for R18+ games would be effective in protecting minors from games more extreme than they are presently exposed to.

Some of the reasons advanced by those wishing to allow more extreme games into the sale and hire system in Australia include:

- a. A reliance on research by Bond University showing the average of gamers as 28, with 50% of gamers over 18, as though this supports the case for an R18+ classification.

YMA discounts this statistic as irrelevant.

If we were to take the average age of drinkers to be say 50, with the large majority of drinkers over 18, would that support an argument that drinking rules should be eased in a way that makes access to alcohol by minors any easier? Further, the fact that 50% of gamers are under the age of 18 is the worrying statistic here.

In addition we note that game playing is a very popular activity with boys aged between 9 and 15 years, who average 59mins per day in game play. (Olds 2008). This is an increase of 15 mins per day over figures reported in 2006 (Olds et al 2006). The need to protect this group must outweigh the desire for access to more violent games by adult players.

b. A claim that no definitive research has shown that interactive games have more of an impact than other violent media.

YMA argues that reliable research in many countries has shown that violent video games have at least the same types of harmful short-term and long-term effects on aggression that 50 yrs of research on television and films has found for these media.

Further, there is mounting evidence that computer games may be more harmful. Recent developments in brain research have shed new light on the ways in which the brains of the young respond to viewing violence. The studies recently done show that video game violence activates specific areas of the brain known to be involved in recognising, remembering, rehearsing or activating aggressive behaviour. (for summaries of the research see the attached papers by John P Murray, and Craig A Anderson)

We note that the industry has not provided convincing evidence of no harm from violent games for the young.

c. A survey conducted by the IEAA in 2005 showed that 88% of adults believe that there should be an R rating for games.

YMA argues that participants were not asked directly whether games with higher levels of violence, sex and coarse language should be sold or hired in Australia. If such a question were asked it is unlikely that 88% of respondents would be in agreement.

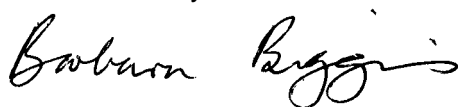
Further, recent research by the Australian Communications and Media Authority showed that only 4% of parents thought that playing videogames was mostly beneficial to their children, with parents generally finding them harder to manage than TV or mobile phones. YMA believes that management would be easier if fewer games were developed with glamorised violence as themes, and R18+ games stayed out.

d. Very violent games are presently being "squeezed" into the MA15+ category, and some of these would be shifted to an R18+ category if available.

YMA argues that if the Classification Board is correctly applying the MA15+ classification criteria, then this should not be the case. There is certainly a strong case for being very careful about the level of violence that is allowed in the MA15+ category.

Young Media Australia concludes that the present industry push to introduce an R18+ classification for games will increase young Australian's access to violence, not reduce it.

Yours sincerely



Barbara Biggins, OAM
Hon. CEO

Attachments:

Update from Prof John P Murray, Center on Media and Child Health
Letter from Prof Craig Anderson, Iowa State University
Press release from American Psychological Association

REFERENCES:

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