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Media Release

Children and consumers shortchanged by ALRC classification proposals

The President of the Australian Council on Children and the Media (ACCM) and Professor of Law (Flinders University), Elizabeth Handsley, has expressed grave concern about the new National Classification Scheme (NCS) proposed by the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC).

She said, "The system proposed is overly complex, and will be confusing to consumers and ineffective in protecting children".

She continued, "The ALRC is proposing to push most of the processes for classifying media content into the hands of the industry. This significantly reduces the impact of the present federal system's much valued independence. The independent government regulators would be required to classify only a very limited range of media content, and the rest would be open to industry judgments of what needs to be classified, and what the classification should be."

"Further, while on the one hand the ALRC is proposing the use of a uniform set of symbols for classifying content in all media, its system provides for multiple points of classification, and different consequences of classification, for different types of media."

"Such a system would be unnecessarily complex and would promote inconsistency in standards of classification. Consumers would not know who classified particular materials and would be confused about where to lodge complaints."

Prof Handsley said, "The Council is particularly concerned that the proposed NCS would result in much material to which children are exposed being industry-classified. Computer games under the level of MA15+ would be voluntarily classified by industry; the MA15+ classification would lose its legal force; and it appears that the quality quota C and P classifications would be lost."

The ACCM will be putting to the ALRC the need for stronger processes to ensure that classification criteria and decisions are based on the best evidence about children's developmental needs. This has to mean a strong government regulator with the resources to monitor the scene actively, not reliance on consumers to notice breaches and complain.

Prof Handsley urged the community to read the ALRC proposals and to take the opportunity to respond to them by the closing date of 18 November. She said, "When you consider the costs to society in implementing a system that is ineffective in protecting children and in providing consumers with clear and consistent information, government investment in an independent system of classification is well justified."

The Australian Council on Children and the Media is a national not-for-profit community organisation promoting healthy choices and stronger voices in children's media. For more information visit www.childrenandmedia.org.au or call 08 8376 2111.

For media interviews please contact:

Prof Elizabeth Handsley on 0448 898 185 or 08 8272 1170 - available for interviews on Thursday 10th November, 2011 (morning).