

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL ON CHILDREN AND THE MEDIA

Media release 17 March 2011

MA15+ guidelines for games are the real issue; R18+ a red herring

"Some Ministers and members of the public seem to be labouring under the false belief that simply adding an R18+ classification for computer games will protect children better from exposure to high impact depictions", Prof Elizabeth Handsley, President of the Australian Council on Children and the Media, said today.

"Many well informed people believe that children's access to very violent games should be limited because of the evidence of potential harm", she continued. "However, the present push to force State and Territory Ministers to legalise R18+ level games by July will simply result in higher-impact games in the system and therefore accessible to minors, unless there is a complete review of the whole classification system for games. The real problems occur because the MA15+ guidelines have permitted 'strong violence' for the past 8 years. The very violent games now classified as MA15+ do fit within those guidelines. The classifiers have been doing their jobs, but the guidelines they have had to use are not sufficiently restrictive."

Council Board member and developmental psychologist Dr C Glenn Cupit said "Any revision of the games system should be based on the fact that games are interactive, rewarding players for being best at the violence, and providing practice in shooting people with no regard to the human nature of the victims. The evidence is that repeated playing of such games increases the risk that young people will be desensitised to the use of violence in real life, will lack empathy and be more prone to risk taking and aggression. They should therefore be classified differently from films at all levels. Simply making one classification unavailable does very little to address the impact of interactivity."

Prof Handsley called for the draft new guidelines for games, which are under review by the Ministers in each State and Territory, to be released for public discussion. She said "Those of us concerned with children's mental health and wellbeing want to ensure that children are more effectively protected than now, and that means a complete revision, not just adding R18+."

For media interviews please contact

**Prof Elizabeth Handsley, mobile 0448898185, Bus 08 8201 5256, AH 08 8272 1170
Dr C Glenn Cupit, mobile 0468632643, Bus 08 8302 4580, AH 08 81771990**

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. Information website www.childrenandmedia.org.au. 08 8376 2111