



**CHILDREN
& MEDIA
AUSTRALIA**

Thriving in a digital world

Australian Council on Children and the Media

**Incorporating
Children and Media Australia
ABN: 16 005 214 531**

Annual Report 2023-2024

Children and Media Australia

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The **Australian Council on Children and the Media (ACCM)** is Australia's peak body representing children's interests as digital and screen media users. Since 2022, ACCM now uses its registered business name **Children and Media Australia (CMA)** in its transactions.

Vision

Children's safety, wellbeing and rights as users of digital and screen media are paramount.

Mission

To support children's healthy development and protect their rights and interests as digital and screen media users by assisting families and children's professionals, and by influencing decision-makers.

Values

- Child-centred: children's rights and healthy development are everybody's business (It takes a village ...).
- Research-led: children's interests are best supported from a strong evidence base.
- Parent-friendly: parents deserve significant support in giving their children a good start as digital and screen media users.
- Access-equality: all children deserve free access to quality digital and screen media; all parents should have free access to CMA's services.

Mandate

As Australia's peak body representing children's interests as digital and screen media users, CMA provides information, tools and resources to empower families to nurture their children in a safe and stimulating environment, while being a voice for evidence-based policy and practice at the societal level.

Our Slogan

Thriving in a digital world.

ACCM:

- is a national not-for-profit community organisation, structured as a company limited by guarantee, and incorporated in Victoria (1957).
- is registered for GST, has tax deductible status and is a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR).
- has a national Board representative of all Australian States and Territories and its corporate membership.
- has a comprehensive organisational membership.
- Board members are volunteers and receive no remuneration for their contribution to the organisation.

What ACCM does as CMA:

- collects and reviews research and information related to children and the media.
- provides information and advice on the impact of print, electronic and screen-based media on children and young people.
- advocates for the needs and interests of children in relation to the media.
- conducts and acts as a catalyst for relevant research.

How CMA does it:

Both directly and via its information and parenting arm, CMA:

- provides information including movie and app reviews to parents and caregivers via the Children and Media website www.childrenandmedia.org.au. Fact Sheets relating to children and media use are also available via the website.
- represents community concerns about the impact of print, electronic and screen-based media on children and young people to legislators, regulators and the media.
- promotes discussion and debate via Facebook, Twitter and media interviews.

Organisational Structure

Patrons



Baroness Susan Greenfield CBE



Steve Biddulph AM

Board of Directors 2023 - 2024

| | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| President | Professor Elizabeth Handsley | |
| Vice President | Professor Wayne Warburton | |
| Directors (State) | Prof. Wayne Warburton | New South Wales |
| | Dr Anthea Rhodes | Victoria |
| | Prof. Elizabeth Handsley | South Australia |
| | Linda Savage to 16/05/2024; Noni Walker from 16/05/2024 | Western Australia |
| | Dr Catherine Page Jeffery to 24/02/2024; now vacant | Australian Capital Territory |
| | Vacant | Northern Territory |
| | Kevan Goodworth | Queensland |
| | Dr Catherine Page Jeffery from 24/02/2024 | Tasmania |
| Directors (Corporate Membership) | Richard Kwan | Kiratech |
| | Vacant | second corporate position |

Appointments:

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Honorary CEO | Barbara Biggins OAM CF |
| Company Secretary | Kate Martin |
| Treasurer | Vacant |
| Auditor | Ascensio Accounting |

President's Message: Prof. Elizabeth Handsley FAAL

The 2023-24 year for CMA has put a point on the expression 'careful what you wish for'.

Yes, we have long wanted reform on classification, gambling advertising, children's privacy, social media – and the *Online Safety Act* is definitely in need of review – but did they all have to happen at once? Luckily there are some other excellent people and organisations working on these issues, which has led to some great opportunities to build relationships with them. (We've even added a couple of new corporate members!) But running to keep up with the demands of all the submissions we've needed to prepare has made it harder to do some of the long-term, strategic thinking that's been needed at this point in CMA's development and the environment we find ourselves in.

Luckily, we were able to catch our breath in September this year, and run a half-day planning session for Board members and other key people. We came away with a fresh sense of purpose and a plan for getting the resources and personnel in place to continue our mission into the future.

One important part of the plan is our monthly news review *small screen*. Having recently celebrated its second year of publication in its revamped online format, *small screen* is now a more effective vehicle than ever to serve some of CMA's key constituencies. The revamp was enabled by a grant from the Churchill Trust to our Hon CEO, Barbara Biggins OAM (a former Churchill Fellow), and facilitated by Stuart Baulk from *Sleeping Bear*. We've also benefited from contributions of content from a range of friends and associates of the organisation. Our thanks to all concerned.

We're also very proud of having been able to maintain our award-winning, child-development-based movie review service *Know Before You Go*, now in its 23rd year. Among other things, *KBYG* is a cornerstone of [Outside the Screen](#), the podcast I have been producing, which recently put out its 50th episode. CMA has maintained its relationship with movie-finding service *Flicks*, which carries CMA's age recommendations for movies likely to attract child audiences. The *KBYG Weekly* newsletter, which notes CMA's latest movie reviews, and is edited by movie review coordinator Debra Dickinson, commenced publication in December. All of this is made possible by the untiring efforts of our volunteer office coordinator and Company Secretary, Kate Martin.

Since the cancellation of our regular government funding in 2019, all of the above activities are conducted using resources drawn from volunteer labour, donations, memberships and some licence fees. Working towards a sustainable funding model has always been a difficult path, and it's not getting any easier. Still, we have a plan, and much to be grateful for: our landlords, the Romeo family, have strongly supported us over recent years; we've had some wonderful student interns from UniSA and Macquarie, who have helped us to modernise our content and communications; our Board and advisory panel have been unfailingly generous with their time and expertise; and of course we've got the best bunch of staff and volunteers you could hope for. As always, the deepest and most heartfelt thanks go to Barbara, whose energy and insight continue to amaze me.

My hope for 2025 is that CMA can establish a firm foundation from which to keep supporting families in finding screen experiences that enhance children's development and avoiding the rest.

Highlights of 2023-2024

Know Before You Go

CMA has delivered its flagship service *Know Before You Go* for 22 years. These child-development-based reviews were designed to supplement the National Classification Scheme by providing detailed information about the content of movies likely to attract children and to make a recommendation as to age suitability. The number accessing these reviews is rising steadily, and includes a significant proportion of overseas clients.

***KBYG Weekly* begins**

Building on the success of the *Know Before You Go* service, and wanting to develop a more effective promotional vehicle for movie reviews as they were produced, CMA began publishing a new newsletter *Know Before You Go Weekly* in December. This focuses on recent reviews, and other movies, events and tips for choosing age-appropriate movies.

small screen entered its 39th year of publication, and continues to grow with its well informed commentary on developments in children's media environment, and supported by guest editorials commissioned from experts in the field.

Submissions on Australian law and regulation

CMA's expertise in regulatory aspects related to children's use of media supported the development of 6 submissions to government agencies in this past year.

CMA's Knowledge Base

CMA's knowledge base is developed from its ongoing reviews of the research in this field, its years of experience with Australia's media regulatory system, and feedback from the community. This underpins CMA's services, activities and advocacy including the following:

Research collection and review

This continues to be a core activity of CMA with current research findings providing the evidence base for CMA projects and articles, parent strategies, and advocacy. The latest research is reported in *small screen*. World-wide research studies continue to support CMA's platform that screen use, particularly in early childhood, needs to be managed with considerable care, not only to provide enjoyment, but also to promote healthy development and prevent the risk of harm to children's cognitive, social and emotional, and physical development.

Children and Media Website

The CMA website has continued to provide its latest *Know Before You Go* reviews of movies both in cinemas and on streaming; information for parents about managing media; and details of CMA's latest campaigns and how to take action. CMA is constantly reviewing the structure of its website and welcomes feedback from users. Nick Fedorowysch of [go create](#) provides website support.

The movie review section of the website continued to be the most frequently visited during the year, with the highest visits being for movies suitable for 4 and 5 years old, and for movies classified G and M. Movies with the highest [and almost equivalent] search rates were *Barbie* (PG), *Cats in the Museum* (G), *Dune Part 2* (M), *Elf* (G), *IF* (PG), *Migration* (G), *One Life (2023)* (PG), *Paw Patrol Mighty Movie* (PG) and *Wonka* (PG).

The number of monthly website visits fluctuated from a low of 17,148 Users and 34,976 Page Views in August 2023 to a high of 30,178 Users and 53,715 Page Views in June 2024.

Averaged User visits from July 2023 to June 2024:

- Australia: 8,188 [range: 5,633 – 10,024] with the majority split almost equally between Melbourne and Sydney
- USA: 5,703 [range: 3,657 – 7,769, this latter figure being an increase of almost 2500 Users on previous year's highest figure.]
- United Kingdom: 1,582 [range: 1,041 – 2,195]

Canadian Users continued to be consistently fourth, while India and Indonesia vied for fifth highest User throughout the year.

New Zealand's monthly User figures ranged from 284 [February 2024] to 685 [July 2023]; average of monthly visits over the year was 424.

Social media (Facebook, Instagram, Linked-in)

CMA has used its *Facebook* page extensively this year to draw attention to movie reviews, events and current issues, to engage with parents and professionals, and to raise its profile. *Facebook* followers now number 4000 up from 3600 in 2022. Offers of tickets for school holiday movies, provided by distributors, were also posted this year. *Facebook* posts are linked to *Instagram* and therefore are published simultaneously. *Linked-in* is also being used as a platform to engage and promote. In December, our *Facebook* movie review posts were revamped with a new, more appealing image template and a different format, offering readers a little more content to engage them in the reviews.

small screen

Published monthly, this unique review of developments in children's media in Australia and overseas has been continuously published for 38 years. The revamp of *small screen*, made possible by a grant from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust to its editor, Barbara Biggins, enabled a full scale review and overhaul of its format and content. *small screen* is now solely published online, and contains new sections such as a monthly Talking Point, as well as guest editorials on current issues, the latest resources and research citations. *small screen* is now distributed to approx. 1500 recipients – CMA members, subscribers, politicians and media representatives. It is also sent to researchers and libraries overseas.

Know Before You Go Weekly

In December, CMA launched a new weekly bulletin, *KBYG Weekly*. This replaced the monthly listings of movie reviews formerly carried in *small screen* and is aimed at reaching an audience who are looking for this current information but not the news review topics which feature in *small screen*.

KBYG Weekly contains news of the latest movies reviewed from a child development perspective, and other movies related to specific themes and compilations, as well as ticket competitions, events and tips for choosing age-appropriate movies. It also promotes the *Outside the Screen* podcast and highlights its accompanying movie reviews. Building on community feedback, *KBYG Weekly* has been developed to be both PC and mobile friendly.

CMA services

Know Before You Go movie review service (KBYG)

This award-winning service has celebrated its 22nd anniversary this year.

CMA's team of reviewers, all with tertiary child development qualifications, reviews all new G, PG, and those M and MA15+ movies promoted to or likely to appeal to children. The provision of this detailed information, which enables parents to make age-appropriate choices for their children and to avoid potential harm, is unique in Australia.

The database of movie reviews now holds over 1600 movies, ranging from golden oldies to the most recent titles released in cinemas, or hosted on streaming services.

Since the cessation of the SA Government's funding for the movie and app review services in June 2019, raising funds to keep these services available and free to all has been a constant struggle. Public donations have been critical in supporting their continuing provision.

A total of 97 movies were reviewed in the past financial year. These movies consisted of 78 cinema releases and 19 from streaming services, which were predominantly from Netflix (9) and Disney+ (5), with 4 from other streaming providers. We received 'screeners' and movie passes, and ran ticket competitions on Facebook and from December in *KBYG Weekly*, for *Headspace* (PG); and *Inspector Sun and the Curse of the Black Widow* (PG). The 97 movies reviewed included: 10 G-rated, 62 PG-rated, 24 M-rated, and 1 rated MA15+.

The M-rated movies chosen for review were those likely to appeal to children or teens, or which contained child characters, and included superhero and popular franchise movies such as *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*; *Blue Beetle*; *The Marvels*; *Madame Web*; *Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire*; *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*; *Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One*; *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*; and *Five Nights at Freddy's*. The characters from these films are well known to young children through books, toys and other associated merchandise, and the films often include popular actors. The majority of reviewed M rated movies were assessed by CMA as unsuitable for children up to the ages of 12-15, with parental guidance recommended for those in the 12-15 age range in most cases. One M rated movie was judged to be unsuitable for children under 16: *Sound of Freedom*. The reasons for this recommendation included its themes, sexual references, violence, and language.

The one MA15+ movie review was *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga*, which was reviewed due to it having popular actors, child characters, and being widely marketed with a massive promotional campaign was likely to generate wide appeal. The film was also promoted during the televised Saturday afternoon football. The US classified the film as R=restricted for “sequences of strong violence, and grisly images” and requiring accompanying parent or adult guardian for under 17s. CMA deemed *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga* was not suitable for children under 15 and parental guidance was recommended for ages 15 to 16 due to extreme violence and themes.

Two films which received some controversy around their release were *Barbie* and the musical version of the original *Mean Girls* film. Both films were rated PG. Whilst *Barbie* was heavily marketed and appealing to children, CMA deemed it was not suitable for children under 11 and parental guidance was recommended to 13 due to themes, innuendo, sexual references, language and violence. *Mean Girls* was found to be more risqué and to push more boundaries than the original, even though the 2024 version was classified PG, compared to the original which was classified M. CMA deemed the film not suitable under 12 and parental guidance to 13 due to themes, coarse language, sexual references.

CMA’s *Special Movie Collections* content continues to grow, with lists of reviewed movies under themes for various occasions, including School Holidays, Christmas, Easter, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Family Favourites, Musical, Australian, and Halloween. In addition, abbreviated reviews are posted on CMA’s Facebook site, and all new reviews and selected older ones are included in CMA’s *KBYG Weekly*.

The importance of the *KBYG* service has been reflected in the following testimonials received this year:

- *I find your reviews to be the most informative and reliable source when considering whether movies are appropriate for my 11 year old twins. Thank you for a fantastic free service.*
- World renowned Australian author, family activist and psychologist Steve Biddulph - *There's nothing worse than streaming or going to a movie that ends up terrifying, or disturbing, our kids. Everyone has had it happen. Know Before You Go is so user friendly and above all, has an Australian take on how to match child to media so it will not end in tears, or nightmares. (Nightmares are now known to be a risk factor in several mental illnesses in adult life, including suicidality, they are not something to be taken lightly). This service is loved by the parents I talk to in my social media community of 170,000 Australian mums and dads.*
- Parenting expert, Dr Justin Coulson - *For over two decades, KBYG has been a trusted resource, empowering families to make informed decisions about what their children watch. I fully endorse the importance and value of KBYG, a service my own family relies on for navigating age-appropriate entertainment choices and safeguarding our children's well-being.*

- Advertiser April 12 2024 Letters to editor:

Timely warning

We should be thankful for the timely warning from Barbara Biggins about student and teen violence and aggression, which reflects what they continuously view on their screens (Letters, The Advertiser, 9/4).

Of course, parents have a major part to play, teachers too, but they are hard pressed to adequately counter the incessant influence of on-screen violence, where the star gets into serious trouble then always quickly solves matters by glamorous and extreme aggression.

Over past decades, Barbara has rightly drawn attention to the direct causal link between on-screen violence and real life for young people. So, we do well to support her call for a review of our film and game classifications.

CMA has continued to supply movie reviews to the Raising Children Network (RCN).



Know Before You Load app review service (KBYL)

The *Know Before You Load* service is now 10 years old, and its database holds over 1000 apps. The database also holds a total of 208 apps with Privacy Checks, published to the website as a result of a two year project with the US-base AppCensus research group in 2021/22.

The original focus in 2014, as commissioned by the then SA Government, was on simulated gambling behaviour, and on age suitability. Following the loss of SA Government funding for this service in 2019, CMA gained funding from ACCAN to develop and run a research project with the US-based AppCensus group to provide parents with a list of apps tested for whether they tracked and gathered children's details.

With no funding for reviewing apps, CMA has been unable to continue to review apps in any significant way. However, high numbers sought to access reviews of *Avatar World Games for Kids* and *Stickman Hook*.

CMA contributing to the community

CMA's age recommendations for movies continue to appear on Flicks websites in Australia, NZ and the UK

CMA's partnership with Flicks' content finding service from May 2023 enables CMA's age-based movie review service to reach a wider audience, giving viewers access to more information about movies' suitability for their children than other classification systems.

Partnering with ARC Centre of Excellence

CMA has committed to providing in-kind information and research input to the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence, *Digital Child*, based at Queensland University of Technology.

Hon CEO Barbara Biggins, an Associate Investigator, has provided *Digital Child* researchers with access to curated weekly *Web of Science* searches.

President Elizabeth Handsley has contributed to *Digital Child* roundtables and the Industry Partner session at the *Digital Child* Annual Meeting.

SA 0-3 Child Development Taskforce

CMA President Prof Elizabeth Handsley, Advisory Committee member Dr C Glenn Cupit, and Hon CEO Barbara Biggins all contributed to this government funded project to promote the optimal development of infants in their early years. This campaign, [Words Grow Minds](#), continues successfully this year.

UniSA research project on classification

CMA has been consulted by UniSA's Dr Fae Heaselgrave in the development of her research project investigating what type of classification system would help parents most.

Food for Health Alliance

Elizabeth Handsley works with this alliance to protect children from unhealthy food marketing.

Australian Child Rights Taskforce

This Taskforce has been active in the area of children's rights to privacy online, and CMA has worked with ACRT and supported its submissions to government.

Advocacy

Classification of films, television and their trailers

The Federal Government's *Review of classification regulation* has proceeded very slowly since December 2019, through the long awaited release of the reviewer's report in May 2023, and to the end of this financial year.

The need remains for the National Classification Scheme to be changed to make it evidence-based, and to provide more age-based ratings under the age of 15 years. The Scheme should also be extended so that it applies to all commercial screen material on and offline, so that consumers have a consistent and reliable system to deal with.

The classification of TV trailers for films remains a significant problem for parents whose children have been made anxious by unexpected exposure to scary trailers during family-style programs and weekend sport on TV.

No action in these chief areas of concern has yet been taken by government.

Privacy law and protections for children online

Federal Attorney General's review of the *Privacy Act 1988* commenced in October 2020, and CMA lodged its first stage submission in late November of that year. CMA's second stage submission was lodged in Jan 2022. CMA has collaborated with Reset Tech Australia in campaigns urging significant change to the Act to more effectively protect minors.

As of the end of June, the Government is yet to act in any significant way to protect children.

Gambling and loot boxes

After the issue of the report of House Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into online gambling, [You win some, you lose more](#), CMA has continued to push for the implementation of this thorough review and its excellent recommendations, particularly in relation to the elimination of sports betting ads.

However, as at the end of June, the only action taken by government has been to classify games with loot boxes M, and casino-type gambling games as R18+.

Social media use by young people

CMA has noted and participated in the growing debates over appropriate ages to use these platforms.

Submissions to media inquiries

CMA made the following submissions this year:

- [Submission to Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society - *Social Media and Australian Society*](#), July 2024
- [Submission to Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts - *Response to Public Consultation Paper on the Statutory Review of the Online Safety Act*](#), June 2024
- [Position Statement on the *Public Consultation Paper: Modernising Australia's Classification Scheme – Stage 2 Reforms*](#), May 2024
- [Submission to Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts - *Response to Public Consultation Paper: Modernising Australia's Classification Scheme – Stage 2 Reforms*](#), May 2024
- [CMA supports the development of a *Children's Privacy Code*](#), April 2024
- [Joint Open Letter to the Attorney General, Minister for Families and Social Services, and Minister for Communications - calling for bold privacy reform of *Australia's Privacy Act*](#), February 2024
- [Submission to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts - *Proposed amendments to the Online Safety \(Basic Online Safety Expectations\) Determination 2022*](#), February 2024

Media Interviews

Throughout the year, CMA President Professor Elizabeth Handsley, Vice-President Associate Professor Wayne Warburton, Advisory Committee member Dr C. Glenn Cupit, and Hon CEO Barbara Biggins took part in interviews on a diverse range of topics, for ABC radio and TV, commercial TV, and for both state and national newspapers.

Administration

Board of Directors

The Board of the Australian Council on Children and the Media has met monthly by teleconference/ Zoom. Members of CMA's Advisory Committee attend the meetings as observers. The Board is chaired by Professor Elizabeth Handsley (R) and supported by Company Secretary Kate Martin and Hon CEO Barbara Biggins.



President, CMA
Prof. Elizabeth Handsley

Barbara Biggins OAM CF - Honorary Chief Executive Officer

Barbara has been a volunteer with the organisation since 1973. After periods as President of both the South Australian and Australian Council for Children's Films and Television, she now coordinates the day-to-day activities and projects of CMA, utilising her extensive knowledge and background in Australian broadcasting and regulation.



Kate Martin - Company Secretary, Administration and Resource Officer

Kate started at CMA in January 2019 after a decade as SAPPA's representative on the Executive Committee and a project volunteer. She is a retired teacher and principal, with a 47-year career with the SA Education Department.



Dr Debra Dickinson - Reviews Coordinator and Project Officer

Debra started with CMA in June 2019, taking on the role of Reviews Coordinator. Debra is also an early primary teacher with a PhD in Education. Before joining CMA, Debra undertook contract work with the Australian Association for Environmental Education.



Reviewers

CMA has maintained a team of movie and app reviewers.

Finance Officer

Accounting services have been provided by Paul Rugari of Savant.

Acknowledgements

Accommodation

CMA's office is located on the first floor on the corner of Partridge and Bath Street, Glenelg. CMA greatly appreciates the support given by the Romeo family this year.

Support

CMA thanks the many persons and institutions which have provided support over the last year. CMA could not survive as an organisation without this.

- Thanks to CMA Patron Steve Biddulph who has shared CMA information and surveys on his Facebook sites.
- Thanks to Justin Coulson who has shared CMA information and surveys on his Facebook sites.
- Thanks to the donors big and small who have enabled CMA to continue operating after the cessation of SA government grants. CMA is grateful to the many individuals who have provided tax-deductible donations to support its work.
- Judy Bundy of SAASPC has provided hours of volunteer support.
- Tim Nicholls of *User Friendly Computers* provides essential IT support.
- Nick Fedorowytch of *GoCreate* supports the development and maintenance of CMA's website.
- Kiratech Company hosts CMA's websites.
- Stuart Baulk of *Sleeping Bear* has supported the development of the new-look *small screen*.
- Quynh Anh has designed images and provided advice on marketing.
- Many more individuals give their expertise, advice and time to assist CMA to promote healthy choices and stronger voices in children's media.

Grants

CMA gratefully acknowledges the grant provided by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust.

