



**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 2022-2023

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.
- conducts community seminars and occasional national conferences on current issues.
- 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 2022 - 2023

President	Professor Elizabeth Handsley	
Vice President	Assoc. Prof. Wayne Warburton	
Directors (State)	Assoc. Prof. Wayne Warburton	New South Wales
	Dr Anthea Rhodes	Victoria
	Prof. Elizabeth Handsley	South Australia
	Linda Savage	Western Australia
	Dr Catherine Page Jeffery	Australian Capital Territory
	Dr Donna Odegaard AM (resigned Oct)	Northern Territory
	Kevan Goodworth	Queensland
	Vacant	Tasmania
Directors (Corporate Membership)	Beth Blackwood (resigned October)	AHISA
	Richard Kwan	Kiratech

Appointments

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

President's Message: Prof. Elizabeth Handsley FAAL

There have been some exciting developments for CMA this year, especially regarding our flagship publication, *small screen*, our flagship information service, *Know Before You Go*, and support in promoting our knowledge and resources.

You have probably already seen the revamped *small screen*, of which we are immensely proud. The project leading to those changes has made us all even more conscious of what we can do as an organisation, if we can secure the material support necessary. In this case the project was made possible by the award of an Impact grant from the Winston Churchill Trust of Australia to our Hon CEO Barbara Biggins, who has been a Churchill Fellow since 1989. She has edited *small screen* from its inception in 1986.

Partnerships can be immensely helpful too, and we were delighted to be approached by Flicks, a movie-finding service who wanted to provide more information for families about movies suitable for children. They could see the value in our award-winning reviews and age-based recommendations, and because Flicks has websites for NZ, Australia and the UK, these now have international promotion.

CMA has also been able to secure agreements with Macquarie University and the University of SA, to supervise placements for advanced students. Under these arrangements, we can now access the skills and person-hours needed to review and update our image and website, and expand our social media presence.

The staff time needed to build these relationships and projects has only been possible due to a generous donation from an anonymous donor. Such valuable funds for infrastructure development are rarely otherwise available. We're deeply grateful for the support we've received – but can't help thinking how much more we could do with even more support!

Through all these developments, CMA has continued in its role as a leading advocate for children's rights as media consumers, consistently making submissions to media inquiries and reviews, and acting as a conduit for the day-to-day concerns of parents about media industry practices that make their task of providing a safe, healthy and happy screen environment very difficult.

On a personal note, I have been delighted to launch a new podcast, *Outside the Screen*, in partnership with child psychiatrist and stand-up comedian Dr Kim Le. The podcast is hosted on *Substack*, and for the time being subscriptions are free, but we plan to introduce paid options soon, with a significant proportion of any revenue going to CMA.

We continue to wait for significant government action on the outcomes of reviews and inquiries into major issues affecting children's welfare, such as privacy law, the National Classification Scheme, and online gambling.

My personal thanks go to the Board, our staff, all the reviewers, our volunteers and all who have supported us through the year. Special thanks to our anonymous benefactor and to the Romeo family for their support of our office base. And an even more heartfelt thanks to our Hon CEO, Barbara Biggins, who continues to bring immense energy and deep knowledge to the huge range of tasks she undertakes. CMA would be nowhere without her.

Highlights of 2022-2023

Flicks links with CMA's movie reviews

Flicks is a movie and series search service operating in Australia, NZ and the UK, which helps viewers find something good to watch and where to find it - in cinemas or at home on streaming. During the year, Flicks commenced negotiations with CMA to use CMA's age recommendations on its websites flicks.com.au, flicks.co.nz, and flicks.co.uk.

These age recommendations are signified by a 'green tick', and since late May, now appear on all movie titles which have been reviewed by CMA.



small screen reviewed and revamped

Long-time Churchill Fellow, Barbara Biggins, and editor of *small screen* since first published in 1986, was awarded a 12 month Impact grant from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust to enable her to have *small screen* reviewed and redesigned, and expand its circulation. CMA has greatly appreciated this opportunity and thanks the Trust for its support for the project.

Long awaited release of Stevens report into Australia's classification system

In March, the federal government finally made public the findings of the Stevens review of Australia's National Classification Scheme (which the then Liberal government had received in May 2020).

However, the government has chosen to reserve its acceptance or otherwise of many of the review's main recommendations. This is of great concern to CMA as the introduction of an evidence-based classification scheme (recommended by Stevens) is well overdue.

CMA's Knowledge Base

CMA's knowledge base has 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*, and in CMA's regular *e-Bulletin*. 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 the latest news about children and screens from around the world, lists of relevant research, information for parents about managing media, and details of CMA's latest campaigns and how to take action. The website also carries the *Know Before You Go* movies reviews, and *Know Before You Load* app reviews. A *Top Tips* section was added this year in an effort to make access to key topics much more direct. CMA is constantly reviewing the structure of its website and welcomes feedback from users. Nick Fedorowysch of [go create](#) has provided 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. The Special Movie Selection Guides for the upcoming school holidays generated a Users' spike on 6th, 7th and 8th December, 2022. Specific movies with high search rates included *Little Monsters* (PG) and *Mummies* (PG).

The number of monthly website visits fluctuated from a low of 14,730 Users and 31,702 Page Views in February 2023 to a high of 25,777 Users and 52,307 Page Views in April 2023.

[NB: Peak of Page Views was 53,374 in July 2022.]

Averaged User visits from July 2022 to June 2023:

- Australia: 7,955 [range: 5,860 – 10,924] with the majority being from Sydney
- USA: 4,214 [range: 3,663 – 5,332]
- United Kingdom: 1,112 [range: 943 – 1,551]

Canadian Users were consistently fourth, while India and New Zealand vied for fifth highest user throughout the year. New Zealand's monthly user figures ranged from 215 [November 2022] to 589 [April 2023]; average of monthly visits over the year was 327.

Social media (Facebook, Instagram, Linked-in)

CMA has used its *Facebook* page extensively this year to draw attention to movies reviews, events and current issues, to engage with parents and professionals, and to raise its profile. *Facebook* followers now number 3,900 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.

small screen

Published monthly, this unique review of developments in children's media in Australia and overseas, has been continuously published for 37 years. A grant from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust to its editor, Barbara Biggins, has 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 and compilation of the latest movie reviews, 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.

CMA e-Bulletin

This free email-based publication is sent fortnightly to over 1400 subscribers, who have nominated to receive its listing of the latest news articles, research, reviews, events, due dates for submissions and more.

CMA services

Know Before You Go movie review service (KBYG)

This award-winning service has celebrated its 21st 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 1550 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 100 movies were reviewed in the past financial year. These movies consisted of 72 cinema releases and 28 from streaming services, which were predominantly from Netflix (13) and Disney+ (11), with 4 from AppleTV. We received 'screeners' and movie passes, and ran ticket competitions on Facebook, for *My Sweet Monster* (PG); *Best Birthday Ever* (G); *Little Monsters* (PG); *The Nutcracker and the Magic Flute* (PG); *My Fairy Troublemaker* (G); *Mavka: The Forest Song* (PG); and *Cats in the Museum* (G). The 100 movies reviewed included: 17 G-rated, 56 PG-rated, 26 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 *Thor: Love and Thunder*; *The Flash*; *Transformers: Rise of the Beasts*; *Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania*; *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*; *Black Adam*; and *Fast X*. The characters from these films are well known to young children through books, toys and other associated merchandise. 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. Four M rated movies were judged to be unsuitable for children under 15: *Three Thousand Years of Longing*; *Champions*; *Love Actually*; and *A Man Called Otto*. The reasons for the recommendations included: sex scenes, sexual references, nudity, coarse language, and a suicide theme.

Whilst released in 2003, *Love Actually* is often shown in cinemas and promoted each year over the Christmas period, subsequently with many children viewers. CMA deemed *Love Actually* was not suitable under 15 and parental guidance recommended to 15 due to sex scenes and references, nudity and coarse language.

Another M rated movie which gained much publicity and formed the creation of our first *small screen* 'Talking Point' was *M3GAN*. The movie is about a lifelike AI doll with long blonde hair (who can talk and dance) that is gifted to an 8 year old girl. Its M rating is in stark contrast to classifications by Kijkwijzer in the Netherlands at 16+, and the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) at 15+, both of which have legal force. The Australian Classification Board's M classification was justified in their Decision report, citing that much of the horror in *M3GAN* is implied, ie "implicit", "indistinct" and "discreet", and therefore, in the Board's view, of "moderate impact". CMA, however, deemed *M3GAN* was not suitable under 15 and parental guidance recommended for 15 year olds due to violence and scary scenes.

The one MA15+ movie review was *The Princess*, which was reviewed due to its release on streaming platform Disney+, amidst some discrepancy over its classification. Not your typical Disney Princess movie, it appeared Disney+ in Australia had given it an M rating, as that was the classification shown on its trailer during the televised Saturday afternoon football. Also, on the Disney website they called it an "action comedy" – very different to the US, which classified it as R=restricted under 17 for "Strong, Bloody Violence and Some Language" and requiring accompanying parent or adult guardian. To date the film classification is still not provided on the Australian Classification Board website, however, on viewing, it was cited online as MA15+. CMA deemed *The Princess* was not suitable for children under 15 and parental guidance was recommended for ages 15 to 16 due to violence, themes and language.

CMA's *Special Move Collections*, which contains lists of reviewed movies with themes for various occasions, includes: School Holidays; Christmas; Easter; Mother's Day; Father's Day; Family Favourites; Musical; Australian; and Halloween. In addition, abbreviated reviews have been posted on CMA's Facebook site, and listed in fortnightly *e-Bulletins* and the monthly *small screen*.

The importance of the *KBYG* service has been reflected in unsolicited emails of appreciation.

Testimonials received this year include:

- *I'm glad I've discovered CMA, my boys love watching movies so I always check your reviews before we agree to watch something.*
- *We love using your media website to ensure that we pick the right age-appropriate movies and programs for the little one to enjoy. Thanks for all your work.*
- *I was impressed by your organization's movie reviews and the assessment regarding its appropriateness against children of variety of ages. I particularly like the part about the "morals of the story" section which is why I had no hesitation to support the cause that you are doing. It provides a good conversation starter with children about matters that may be relevant to the children of that age. I was first attracted to your website because of the movie review on "Sing a bit of Harmony" and later "Suzume". Very impressed with this because these movies are actually Japanese animation movies so I am impressed by your willingness to review not just Western movies but also other country children movies too.*

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 9 years old. Its original focus, as commissioned by the then SA Government, was on simulated gambling behaviour, and on age suitability. Of particular concern for CMA has been the steady growth of the use of persuasive design techniques in children's apps that keep children overly-engaged with their screen entertainment. The loss of funding for this service in 2019 has led to a significant drop in the number of apps that can be reviewed.

The database holds over 1000 apps. There are a total of 208 AppCensus Privacy Checks published to the website. Included in the list of apps with AppCensus Privacy Checks are 23 School-Home Communication apps.

In April 2023 the app review, *Dress Up Games – Dress Up Makeover Girls Games*, drew the most traffic to the CMA website, with 3,972 visits. In March 2023, it drew over 700 visits.

The importance of the *KBYL* service has been reflected in concerned members of the public contacting us with review requests, as well as unsolicited emails of appreciation. Testimonials received this year include:

- *You do amazing work! I was happy to find your site. We have deleted a lot of inappropriate games as a result.*

CMA contributing to the community

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

CMA's partnership with Flicks' content finding service from May, has enabled CMA's age-based movie review service to reach a much wider audience. This gives viewers access to more information about movies' suitability for their children than most classification systems do.

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 as an Associate Investigator provides Digital Child researchers with access to curated weekly Web of Science searches.

President Elizabeth Handsley has contributed to Digital Child roundtables and to 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. The pilot phase of this campaign, [Words Grow Minds](#), was successfully completed this year.

UniSA research project on classification

Elizabeth Handsley and Barbara Biggins have 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 has worked with this alliance on the protection of children from unhealthy food marketing.

Early Years Strategy: Federal Government

Elizabeth Handsley has participated in roundtables on this topic.

Australian Child Rights Taskforce

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

Advocacy

Classification of films, television and their trailers

Review of classification regulation: since actively participating in the federal government's review of Australia's classification regulation between December 2019 and March 2020, CMA has been waiting for its outcome.

The Reviewer's report was finally released by the Minister for Communications at the end of March 2023. CMA was then consulted by classification policy staff as to our chief concerns.

CMA's view remains that the National Classification Scheme must 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 of children who have been upset by unexpected exposure to scary trailers in family-style programs and weekend sport on TV.

No action in these chief areas of concern have 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 Australia in campaigns urging significant change to the Act to more effectively protect minors. 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 consulted with federal politicians with regard to their support for the thorough review and its excellent recommendations.

Submissions to media inquiries

CMA made the following submissions this year:

2023

- [Submission to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts - Gambling and Classification of Computer Games](#), June 2023
- [Submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment - Inquiry into the issue of increasing disruption in Australian school classrooms](#), April 2023
- [Submission to the Department for Social Services - Early Years Strategy Discussion Paper](#), April 2023
- [Submission to the Senate Economic References Committee - Inquiry on The Influence of International Digital Platforms](#), March 2023

2022

- [Submission to the House of Representatives - Inquiry into online gambling and its impacts on those experiencing gambling harm](#), November 2022
- [Submission to the Digital Platform Services Inquiry – March 2023 Report On Social Media Services](#), September 2022
- [Submission to the AANA Code on Advertising and Marketing Communications to Children Review](#), August 2022

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 a registered 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 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.
- Stuart Baulk of *Sleeping Bear* has supported the development of the new-look *small screen*.
- 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.

