

# Position Statement on the *Public Consultation Paper: Modernising Australia's Classification Scheme – Stage 2 Reforms*

As leading organizations and professionals working on behalf of Australia's children, young people and families, we express our broad support for the Government's proposed Stage 2 reforms to the National Classification Scheme (NCS). In particular, we welcome the proposal for a single body to oversee classification, advised by a well-qualified consultative committee. Such a structure offers the best prospects for the development and application of a robust evidence-based and age-specific classification scheme that is long overdue. We further support the proposal to extend the NCS to additional platforms such as streaming services and online game stores.

The NCS recognises, correctly, that some content is likely to harm or disturb children and young people. According to credible research evidence, the harms can include desensitisation to violence, exaggerated fears and sleep difficulties (with flow-on effects for a range of aspects of development and wellbeing, for example academic performance). Currently the Scheme does not provide adequate avenues for such evidence to be taken into account in the formulation of guidelines.

Parents and carers have consistently expressed their dissatisfaction with the current NCS because it offers no guidance for different age groups under 15. This is at odds with research-based knowledge about child development where, for example, a 4-year-old and a 14-year-old have very different needs and vulnerabilities.

In light of moves under Stage 1 towards further automation of classification decisions, it is more important than ever to have robust criteria that are regularly reviewed in light of new knowledge.

Another shortcoming of the current dated NCS is that the vague and non-age specific advice it offers is easily undermined by marketing. Every day we see techniques used that can create a false impression of suitability for young children. An NCS that is calibrated according to age groups could be considerably more effective in resisting this effect.

Public debates about the NCS tend to focus on the higher classifications; this is understandable because these have legal force and can restrict the access of adults to material. To the people affected, these naturally seem like the most pressing issues. The proposed Stage 2 reforms represent an opportunity to shift some of the focus onto the needs of children and young people, which have been overlooked for too long.

Many of the signatories to this Statement will be making individual submissions on particular matters discussed in the Consultation Paper. Therefore this Statement should not be read as an expression of agreement with every detail of what is being proposed. Rather it is an endorsement of the general thrust of the proposals, and an expression of appreciation that the Government is giving children's and young people's needs and rights as media users the attention they deserve.

See over for signatories.

## Organisations



South Australian Association of School Parent Communities Inc

## Individuals

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