



3 September 2016

The Convenor

Classification Review Board

By email: crb@classification.gov.au; Karina.Laurance@classification.gov.au

Subject: Review of the film *Blair Witch* (MA15+) 2016

ACCM notes that the CRB is to conduct a review of the classification assigned to the 2016 film *Blair Witch*. This film was classified MA15+ by the Classification Board on 17 August with the consumer advice “Strong supernatural themes”.

ACCM understands that the applicant for review is seeking to have the film reclassified M.

ACCM requests that the CRB accept its submission below as from an interested party.

ACCM is an interested party by virtue of its long and active involvement in classification issues as they relate to children. ACCM’s views are well informed by virtue of its 14 years of providing reviews related to the age–appropriateness of current films, and through its ongoing study of the research relating to the impact of the content of films on children.

ACCM has been unable to see the film as the release date in Australia is September 15, but wishes the CRB to take the following points into account in making its decision.

1. ACCM has read the Classification Board’s report on the movie and we believe that the scenes and themes described in the Board report have significant potential to cause harm and to disturb children under the age of 15 years.
2. ACCM has consulted with an overseas contact who has detailed knowledge of the film, and has given us this opinion from a child development perspective.
The film has realistic ruthless/intrusive violence which leads to serious injuries. This realistic-looking violence is acted out by a merciless/harsh perpetrator and the serious effects on the victim are shown.
The film also contains intense horror effects in combination with people who are very frightened, serious (bloody) injuries and people who are undergoing serious suffering. The fearful elements happen in a realistic setting, and while there are some unrealistic characters, the intense horror effects make them scarier.
The combination of fearful elements in this film is too intense for children under the age of 16, who would find it hard distance themselves from them.
The level of fear and violence in this film could lead to long lasting fears and anxieties.

If the film is inappropriate for children under 16, it is certainly inappropriate for children under 15 to see unaccompanied.

3. ACCM has viewed the trailer for the movie, and notes the strong emphasis on horror and on the impacts on the victims.

The trailer carries the slogans “a new beginning for horror films”, “a truly terrifying experience”, and “one of the scariest films ever made”. ACCM notes the contradiction here, and asks why the distributor would therefore consider it appropriate to request a review designed to lower the classification of “one of the scariest films ever made”, when this would result in the removal of the legal restriction on children under 15 seeing the film.

4. ACCM notes that this film has received classifications with legal force in both the UK (**15** for *horror film “for strong language and fear”*) and the Netherlands **16** (for violence and fear). The US classification is **R** (under 17 requires parent/ guardian) for *language terror and disturbing images*. ACCM acknowledges that overseas classification schemes differ in their criteria, and comparisons in classifications are not always helpful, but these classifications do seem to represent a consensus about the film’s unsuitability for children and younger teenagers.

5. ACCM notes that the Classification Act requires that:

1. Classification decisions are to give effect, as far as possible, to the following principles:...

(b) minors should be protected from material likely to harm or disturb them;

The Code also requires that films that depict, express or otherwise deal with sex, violence or coarse language in such a manner as to be unsuitable for viewing by persons under 15, should be classified MA15+.

If the CRB lowers the classification of this film to M, many young children will undoubtedly see it. Those children need the protection from harm or disturbance that only the MA15+ classification can provide.

6. The M classification requires that the treatment of themes must be justified by context and have no more than a moderate sense of threat or menace.

ACCM has formed the view, given the information it has received above, that the horror themes and violence in this film have an impact that is more than moderate. Further the film contains themes and scenes that are likely to harm or disturb children under 15 years.

The film should not therefore be classified M, and is appropriately classified MA15+.

Yours sincerely



Barbara Biggins OAM
Hon CEO