

To whoever it is concerned,

I am a 17-year-old young person who would like to express their pleasure to see that the Classification Board is considering reforms to the rating system, including changing MA 15+ to MA 16+, creating an intermediate classification between PG and M, and adding additional context regarding the “themes” element. I consider these reforms to be entirely appropriate and generally agree with the suggestions already made by the government. I am writing to provide, from a young person’s perspective, concerns and recommendations about the Classification Board and how it could be reformed for the benefit of media consumers across Australia. These concerns and recommendations are listed below.

1) The ratings need to be recalibrated so they each cover an even spectrum of content

The PG and M classifications are too broad regarding the content which they encompass, making it confusing for parents and younger viewers to understand what sort of content is and is not suitable. Children’s films such as *Smallfoot* (2019) can receive, for a singular use of “crap”, the same PG classification as a comparatively stronger adult film with much cruder words such as “bitch” and “dickhead” or even discriminatory slurs such as “retard” and “nigger” (this language is warrant of a 12 or 12A certificate in the UK). Similarly, certain M-classified films such as *Star Wars – Episode IX: The Rise of Skywalker* (2019) can have violence which, whilst considered too impactful for a PG classification, is still considerably more mild than bloodier M-classified films such as *Marty Supreme* (2025).

This broadness creates confusion for parents trying to understand the suitability of content (who may or may not be able to access detailed content advice on the Classification website), and for children or young teenagers who may be allowed to watch certain PG or M films but not others. This confusion is compounded by the fact that currently, the PG, M and MA 15+ classifications all suggest that the content is unsuitable for people under 15 in general to view unaccompanied, an issue raised by the Classification Board’s submission to the 2020 Review of Australian Classification Regulation (the Stevens Review). I certainly do not think that the Classification Board wants to imply that a 14-year-old may still need to watch PG family films like *Encanto* (2020) with parental guidance but that as soon as they turn 15, they are suddenly mature enough to view strong adult films like *300* (2007) unaccompanied.

The broadness of these classifications also contrasts with the constraints of the modern G classification, which many parents have observed to have gotten stricter in recent years. Going back to the example of *Smallfoot* (2019) used before, the film’s PG classification for a singular use of “crap” contradicts the G classification received by

Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs (2009), which also had a singular use of “crap”, ten years earlier. Meanwhile, *The Lion King* (2019) received a PG for “mild themes and violence” despite having largely the same content as the G-classified 1993 film on which it was based, with the only major difference being the 2019 film’s photorealistic CGI style. Other recent family films such as *The Wild Robot* (2024) and *Hoppers* (2026) have received PG classifications which contrast with the G-equivalent U certificates they received from the BBFC in the UK.

To address these apparent discrepancies, I believe that the range of content covered by each of the classification ratings should be recalibrated so that they are more even and precise in what elements they accommodate.

2) A new “Adolescent” classification should be created between the PG and M ratings

A new classification, which I would call “Adolescent” or A, should be created in between the PG and M classification for content of mild-moderate impact in order to address the broadness of each of the two ratings, which has been described above in Section 1. This aligns with recommendations made by the Classification Board’s aforementioned submission to the 2020 Stevens Review, which proposed a “Young Person” or YP rating for content of “mild+ impact”, and the 2025 Update to Modernise and Harmonise the Classification Guidelines, which proposes a “PG13” rating. This would cover films which often appeal to young adolescent audiences, such as *Jurassic World Dominion* (2022) and *Mean Girls* (2024), and often have content which sit either on the high end of the PG classification or the low end of the M classification. The A rating would also clearly separate films currently classified M such as *Jurassic World: Rebirth* (2025), which have significant appeal to young teenage audiences, from more adult M-classified films such as *One Battle After Another* (2025).

3) The M classification should be changed to the restricted M 12+ so that children under 12 must require accompaniment from a parent or guardian

In separating softer M content (roughly equivalent to the BBFC’s 12/12A certificate and the MPA’s PG-13 rating) into the A classification, it now becomes apparent that the unrestricted M classification is considerably accommodating of content given 15 certificates in the UK or R ratings in the US, such as *Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy* (2025) and *Wuthering Heights* (2026). These films are meant for mature audiences, and it is unlikely that the average adult would be as permissive of letting an 8-year-old view them unaccompanied as they would be of them viewing one of the films cited as eligible for the proposed A classification. Restricting the M classification so that primary school-aged children under 12 require accompaniment from a parent or guardian would set a clear indicator of the impact of the content classified M 12+, and in tandem with

an A classification, would more firmly establish that the M 12+ classification is meant for mature audiences.

4) The MA 15+ classification should be adjusted to MA 16+

I agree with the recommendation made by the 2025 Update to Modernise and Harmonise the Classification Guidelines, which proposes to adjust the MA 15+ classification to MA 16+. This would align with the restrictions of the social media ban, even out the classifiable ranges of the other ratings, and be distinct from the proposed A and M 12+ ratings. As previously established, there is currently little delineation between the M and MA 15+ classifications, which are both stated to be unsuitable for under 15s despite the M classification being unrestricted and covering a far broader range of content than the MA 15+ classification.

5) MA 15+ films should be retroactively updated to MA 16+, and retailers should apply the restrictions for the MA 16+ classification to physical media which still bears the MA 15+ rating

The 2025 Update to Modernise and Harmonise the Classification Guidelines makes no explicit mention of how structural changes to the ratings themselves, such as the change of MA 15+ to MA 16+, will affect how content is managed in practice. It is not stated whether the MA 16+ rating will be automatically applied to all media previously classified MA 15+ in the Classification Database, the way films classified M 15+ had their ratings updated to M in 2005, or if the MA 16+ classification will appear separately in the Classification Database.

Either way, retailers such as JB Hi-Fi will still have to manage old stock of physical media, such as DVDs and Blu-rays, which still bear the MA 15+ logo. I believe that all media in the Classification Database currently classified MA 15+ should have their ratings updated to MA 16+. In accordance with this, retailers should enforce the regulations for MA 16+ media regardless of if they still bear the old MA 15+ rating – that is, a 15-year-old will have to wait until they're 16 or older to purchase a piece of physical media with an old MA 15+ label.

6) The classifiable element of “themes” should be split into elements of crude humour, discrimination, injury detail, sexual and family violence, theme and sadness, and threat and horror

The classifiable element of themes has long been infamous for its nondescript vagueness. Under current regulation, themes encompass “social issues such as crime, suicide, drug and alcohol dependency, death, serious illness, war, family breakdown and racism,” as well as “depictions of animal cruelty or predatory animal behaviour, gambling, crude humour, horror and scary content.” Without detailed content advice, which is not always provided, this range of content, and which of these elements are

actually present in a piece of media, is not evident to consumers, who often have to make their own inferences regarding what “themes” refers to, and may be caught unaware by specific moments not specified in the content advice.

For example, *Dead Poets Society* (1989) contains a dramatic scene where a teenage character is seen taking out a handgun and carrying it with him into a room, before we cut to his parents waking up and becoming horrified to find that he has committed suicide, as we see the handgun lying on the floor and his body is implied to be lying behind a desk. The film, last classified in 2012, has a PG classification with the content advice, “mild violence and adolescent themes”, with no explicit mention of suicide being notified to audiences, who can otherwise only infer that the film might contain some kind of upsetting moments based on it being a drama. Meanwhile, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), based on the 1959 novel commonly read in secondary school classrooms, is classified PG for “mild violence, mild themes”, with no specific mention in the content advice to the film’s verbal references to rape or featuring of racist behaviour, including use of slurs like “nigger”. Even though they are justified by context, these elements, particularly the use of the highly offensive “nigger”, can still be jarring for viewers unaware of the specific content, especially secondary school students who are likely to view the movie alongside reading the book it is based on.

The BBFC categorises theme, threat, discrimination, disturbing images, injury detail, rude humour, sexual threat and violence, and suicide and self-harm as individual issues in their content advice. All of these elements are encompassed under themes by the Classification Board. I believe that the Classification Board should have specific elements for crude humour, discrimination, injury detail, sexual and family violence, theme and sadness, and threat and horror when classifying media. This would provide specific information about certain elements of films which are not presently detailed under current content advice standards and allow consumers to make more informed choices about what they watch and what they want children viewing.

7) Accredited classifiers should regularly review and update the classification of films ten or more years old for rereleases and redistribution, based on updated community standards

In the UK, the BBFC often updates the certificates of older films to align with modern classification standards and public concerns, meaning that old films sometimes receive new ratings upon review for rerelease. For example, *Mary Poppins* (1964) had its certificate updated from U to PG in 2024 for “discriminatory language,” referring to infrequent use of the dated term “Hottentot” by the character Admiral Boom. One year later, the Australian film *Babe* (1995) similarly had its BBFC certificate changed from U to PG for “mild threat, injury detail, violence, upsetting scenes.”

In Australia, however, most old films released before major Classification revisions do not have their ratings updated for rereleases, effectively being grandfathered in by any reforms to classification. This can result in such films being rereleased on DVD and Blu-ray formats or on streaming services with outdated classifications and content advice that does not reflect modern standards. For example, some films classified before 2005 may carry content advice such as “medium level violence”, “low level coarse language” or “adult themes” that do not reflect modern classification guidelines addressing a film’s impact level. Additionally, many films classified G before 2005, which do not carry content advice, have elements which would warrant a PG classification in modern films. This can create a double standard for older G content compared to newer G content (creating the disparaging belief among many consumers that, when applied to family films, the PG rating now stands for “practically G”) and unintentionally expose very young children to potentially distressing content.

The Classification Board’s submission to the Stevens Review raises this issue regarding outdated G classifications, citing an instance where a parent expressed concern about *The Road to El Dorado* (2000) maintaining the G classification it received upon its initial release, despite content which, upon conducting a review-like process without actually change the classification, the Board found would now warrant a PG classification for “mild themes, animated violence, sexual innuendo and coarse language.” A similar example is *The Prince of Egypt* (1998), which has maintained its old G classification on a 2026 UHD Blu-ray release despite containing thematic content and frightening moments, in a Biblical context (which is no doubt why it originally received its G classification), that would certainly warrant a solid PG classification today. Disney+ has maintained the G classifications for almost all of its animated films from before 1995, with exception of *The Black Cauldron* (1985), despite many of these films containing frightening moments, animated violence, underage tobacco usage and dated racial depictions that would warrant a PG classification today.

I believe that accredited classifiers should be able to regularly review and update the classifications of films ten or more years old in order to bring their classifications in line with modern standards and properly inform audiences and consumers. It will also help audiences understand how classification standards have changed over time and consider why these classifications may have been updated.

8) The Classification website should be made more friendly for consumers and audiences and include more helpful educational resources

There is much confusion among consumers regarding what exact type of content may warrant certain classification. This is brought about and compounded by general misconceptions (e.g., that the Classification Board continues to actively discriminate against LGBTQ+ content by giving it higher ratings than heteronormative media), confusion over media with outdated classifications (as discussed above in Section 7),

and contradictory guidelines from other entities such as the UK BBFC, the US MPA, and social media content policies. The resources currently available through the Classification website are generally unhelpful in providing specific and detailed information about how particular forms of content are classified, and consumers and parents can be easily put off by the jargon and formatting of much of these resources, which are usually intended for government ministers rather than the consumers they are meant to serve. The Classification website needs to be overhauled so as to be more friendly to consumers and audiences, who may be dissatisfied with the current layout of the site as a government website for cataloguing media rather than an informative site to help public understanding. It should include more educational features explaining how classification decisions are made, how elements of content are considered, and how parents and consumers can determine a piece of media's suitability based on the standards of the Classification Board.

9) The Classification Board should work with the eSafety Commissioner to require that social media companies with video-sharing capacities such as YouTube and TikTok explicitly align their content policies with the standards of Classification

Where the Classification Scheme has quickly become irrelevant to many people, particularly young Australians and others whom the Classification Scheme is meant to help and protect, is on social media. Overseas-based platforms like YouTube and TikTok operate their own content policies for videos uploaded to their site, and these are often unevenly applied, implemented without warning, and confusing for users and uploaders. Harmful content can easily slip through moderation and be promoted to vulnerable audiences, whilst platforms can become overzealous and restrict lower impact videos inappropriately. The diversity of content on these platforms and the inconsistency of moderation can easily result in misconceptions regarding what is and isn't allowed and can result in (typically unnecessary) self-censorship which scholars and researchers have observed and raised concern about.

For example, thematic elements such as death, suicide, and racism, even when they are handled in a way that the Classification Board would consider very mild in impact, are often self-censored in ways that can often undermine or even contradict the messages they convey, often using "algospeak" terms such as "unalive" (instead of "die" or "kill") and "sewer slide" (instead of "suicide"), or symbols incorporated into words such as "r@c!st" (instead of "racist") and s3x (instead of "sex"). These methods are often used to avoid algorithmic demotion, demonetisation of monetised posts, or platform restrictions and bans, and create a culture of censorship made to comply with the commercial operations of corporations rather than free conversations within society. Self-censorship methods such as algospeak can make social media users feel uncomfortable discussing important topics such as racism, mental health, domestic

violence and abuse, and potentially less willing to call out genuine instances of these issues occurring. For example, an anti-racist video showcasing racist comments online which censors the word “racist” itself not only neuters the main argument but accidentally implies through its selective self-censorship that it is better to be explicitly racist online than it is to explicitly call out racism online. Sometimes, these euphemisms can be used to mask or make light of actual abuse, such as the term “MAP” (“minor-attracted person”) self-applied by online groomers to present their sexual interest in underage people as a normal variation of human sexuality whilst avoiding content moderation more likely to flag terms like “paedophile.”

The eSafety Commissioner currently only has the authority to submit certain videos highlighted for concern to the Classification Board. I am not proposing that every video uploaded online be manually submitted for Classification, but rather I believe that the eSafety Commissioner should make online platforms such as YouTube and TikTok reform their content policies to align with the guidelines of the Classification Board. This is so that users of these platforms can consult with both the platform guidelines and the Classification guidelines when educating themselves about what is and is not allowed to be uploaded online. I believe it should be the decision of these platforms as to what content rating level at which they allow user-uploaded content to be posted, but I believe that these content moderation standards should be brought in line with the same standards applied to other media in Australia.

Australian Classification Board. (2020). *Review of Australian Classification Regulation – Classification Board Submission*.

<https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/submissions/classification-board.pdf>