

Submission to the Classification Review

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed reforms to Australia's classification system. After reviewing the *Update to Modernise and Harmonise Classification Guidelines 2025* report, it is clear that the current system no longer functions effectively in a modern media environment.

The report itself acknowledges that *“the media environment has changed... streaming, interactive content and global platforms now shape how Australians encounter media, and the current guidelines were not designed for this reality”* and that the system is hindered by *“fragmentation, inflexibility, and outdated technology”*. These are not small issues—they are structural failures.

Today's media landscape includes thousands of global content producers, automated distribution platforms, and user-generated ecosystems. It is simply unrealistic—and increasingly embarrassing—to maintain the pretence that a centralised Classification Board can meaningfully “oversee” the volume, speed, and diversity of content being produced. Even the report notes that *“a significant proportion of content is still classified by the Classification Board—a process that is both time-consuming and costly”* and that industry perceives the Board's decisions as inconsistent and influenced by individual interpretation.

If the government is serious about modernisation and cost-efficiency, the logical path is clear: **transition to an AI-driven, industry-run classification model**, supported by transparent guidelines and regulatory oversight. The report already proposes expanding automated tools (C14) and shifting to self-classification as the default (C12). This should not be a tentative step—it should be the foundation of the new system.

An AI-based model would classify content rapidly, consistently, and at scale. It would reduce the financial burden on taxpayers, eliminate bottlenecks, and allow adults to access the content they choose without unnecessary interference. Adults should not require government permission to watch or play lawful material. The report itself highlights the need to *“protect without overreach”* and to move away from moral judgement toward evidence-based assessment.

Meanwhile, attempts to regulate youth access through outdated mechanisms are failing. The recent social-media age restrictions are widely ignored; anyone with a smartphone can see that children remain active on Instagram, TikTok, and similar platforms. Classification cannot fix what is fundamentally an enforcement and parenting issue.

The government's own reform agenda emphasises efficiency, modernisation, and reduced duplication. Maintaining a legacy Board structure—originally designed for a 20th-century media environment—runs counter to these goals. The report

acknowledges the need for “*streamlined processes*,” “*modern technology*,” and “*harmonised, evidence-based guidelines*.” An AI-enabled, industry-led system is the only model capable of meeting these objectives at scale.

In summary:

- The current Board model is outdated, inefficient, and unable to keep pace with modern media.
- AI-driven, industry-run classification—supported by clear guidelines and oversight—is the only scalable solution.
- Taxpayer funds should not continue to support a system that cannot realistically perform the role it claims to fill.
- Adults should have the freedom to access lawful content without unnecessary government intervention.
- Youth-protection strategies must reflect real-world behaviour, not idealised assumptions.

I urge the Department to adopt a bold, future-focused approach and transition fully to automated and industry-led classification.