

3a) What aspects of the current Code, Films Guidelines or Computer Games Guidelines are working well and should be maintained?

The Computer Games Guidelines should be brought in line with the Films Guidelines.

From the Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games:

Due to the interactive nature of computer games and the active repetitive involvement of the participant, as a general rule computer games may have a higher impact than similarly themed depictions of the classifiable elements in film, and therefore greater potential for harm or detriment, particularly to minors.

This statement is presented as fact, even though there is little evidence to support it. But even if the statement was presumed to be true, that does not mean that the “higher impact” is always high enough to warrant a classification refusal.

As an example, if a film portrays a character taking a performance-enhancing drug, the film could be given an MA15+ rating, perhaps even an M rating. If a computer game gives the player character the option to take a drug that enhances their in-game performance, it is automatically Refused Classification, regardless of the context or realism of the action. Even if the impact of the action is diminished by an overall cartoony aesthetic or by giving the action undesirable side effects, the current guidelines cannot account for these details.

Game developers are sometimes blindsided by these parts of the guidelines, since no other classification system from around the world has restrictions of this specific nature. If the developers are not able to dedicate resources to altering their game to meet the guidelines, then the game will likely be published without modifications in every region except Australia, which goes against the classification principle that “*adults should be able to read, hear, see and play what they want.*”

The parts of the Computer Games Guidelines that differ from the Films Guidelines are primarily concerned with potential harm or detriment to minors, which was logical when the guidelines did not have a classification restricted to adults. With the introduction of the R18+ rating in 2013, the guidelines are now ready to be adapted to allow the same content that appears in film and television.

Beyond this answer to the discussion question, I stand by the recommendations made in the 2012 ALRC report.

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