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## Modernising Australia's Classification Scheme - Stage 2 Reforms

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. In this submission we outline how we approach age appropriate content across our services, and respond to select consultation questions.

There are over 500 hours of content uploaded to YouTube every minute, from all around the world. Beyond this high volume of content, there is breadth of content styles and themes. Australian audiences are incredibly diverse and so is the content they watch. Every day, millions of people come to YouTube to be informed, inspired or just have fun.

We are committed to maintaining a safe and positive experience for our users. Our approach is centred around the following key principles:

- **Implementing policies, protections and programs to keep users safe online**

We have strict content and privacy policies in place to protect our young users, including for the ads kids see. We regularly review and update these policies and roll out product improvements.

- YouTube:

- Our [Community Guidelines](#) outline the types of content that are not allowed on YouTube, including cyberbullying, suicide and self harm, and content that endangers the emotional and physical well-being of minors.
- They also include guidance on [age-restriction](#), which requires users who want to view the content to be signed-in and for their account age to be 18 or older. For those over 13, YouTube recognises that some content may align to our Community Guidelines, and yet not be suitable for those under 18. To deploy age restriction, we ask creators to apply the relevant settings in accordance with [the guidance](#) in our Community Guidelines. In addition, our reviewers apply age restrictions if, in the course of reviewing content, they encounter a video that isn't appropriate for

viewers under 18. We also use machine learning to detect content to help us automatically apply age restrictions where appropriate. Uploaders can appeal a decision if they believe that it was incorrectly applied.

- In addition, we have content policies for [YouTube Kids](#) and [account supervision](#) that help guide which content is eligible to be included in the different content settings available for families.
  - Finally, we've worked with third-party experts to develop [kids quality principles](#), which we use to guide how we surface content in YouTube's recommendations, include content in the YouTube Kids app, and shape our monetisation policies.
  - Ads: We do not allow personalised advertising to children under 13, and we [restrict sensitive ads categories](#) (e.g., tobacco and alcohol, dangerous activities, weight loss, sweepstakes, etc.). In addition, for our youngest users on [YouTube Kids](#), [Made for Kids content](#) and in [Supervised Experiences on YouTube](#), we prohibit ads in additional categories such as foods and beverages, religion, or politics, as well as ads with inappropriate content such as scary imagery, crude humour, or sexual innuendo.
- **Building age-appropriate products that align with kids' and teens' developmental stages and needs**
    - We have led the way in designing products specifically for kids and families (e.g., [Family Link](#), [YouTube Kids](#) and [Supervised Experiences on YouTube](#), [Teacher Approved Apps](#), and [Google Kids Space](#)).
    - [Family Link](#) is a downloadable app that helps parents set the digital ground rules for their children, including through app management, activity reports, and location tracking.
      - Parents using Family Link can also supervise their child's experience across Google's products by enabling parental controls over the content to which their children have access on the platform.
      - Family Link [allows parents and caregivers](#) to set downtime for their children's devices and enables time limits for apps to encourage a healthy balance. It also empowers parents to approve or block apps prior to download.
      - Additionally, Family Link allows parents to make meaningful choices about their children's data. Parents can view and manage permissions for websites and extensions accessed through Chrome as well as apps downloaded on a child's device. This tool also gives parents access to manage children's accounts and data settings, including resetting a child's password, editing personal information, or deleting their account if necessary.
    - [YouTube Kids](#) is a stand-alone app built from the ground up to be a safer and simpler experience for children to explore. This app gives tools for parents and caregivers to guide the journey of young users, including approving the specific content they allow their children to watch and controls over screen time. Videos on YouTube Kids include popular children's videos, educational content, and content from trusted partners. We have invested heavily over the years to make YouTube Kids a safer, family-friendly place for kids to explore their imagination and curiosity.
    - We also offer [Supervised Experiences](#) on the main YouTube platform, where a parent or caregiver creates and links a child's account to their own. This

experience comes with three tailored content settings for parents to choose from, as well as digital well-being and privacy protections, parental controls, and limited features.

- **Offering settings and tools that give families flexibility to manage their unique relationships with technology**
  - Settings & Tools: For our flagship products that are built for everyone, we have a number of automatic protections in place for younger users. On YouTube that includes:
    - Autoplay is turned off by default for all users younger than 18 across all of YouTube's products. On YouTube Kids and in Supervised Experiences, a parent can completely disable autoplay.
    - "Take a Break" reminders pause a video until a user dismisses or resumes playing the video. This feature is turned on by default for users younger than 18 on YouTube and YouTube users with supervised experiences.
    - Bedtime reminders, which let users set a specific time to receive a reminder to stop watching videos and go to bed, are turned on by default for users younger than 18 on YouTube and YouTube users with supervised experiences.
    - For users under 18, we set the default upload, livestream, and livechat settings to the most private setting available, and use transparency notices to remind them who can see their content with each setting option.

## Responses to specific questions

*Clarifying the scope and purpose of the Scheme - Do you support the proposed criteria that defines what material should be classified under the Scheme?*

We support the proposed criteria to define the material that should be classified under the Scheme. Specifically, classifiable content being content that is:

- professionally produced – content with higher quality production values
- distributed on a commercial basis – to capture organisations or individuals that distribute media content as part of their business, as opposed to individuals or community groups whose main purpose is not to distribute media content for commercial gain; and
- directed at an Australian audience – a selection of content is specifically made available for Australia or marketing is specifically directed at Australians.

In particular, we support the proposal that "online content is only classifiable where it is uploaded - by the service provider itself to clarify that user-generated content that is professionally produced and distributed on a commercial basis does not require classification."

The Stevens Review also noted that "online content would continue to be regulated under the

Online Content Scheme, in addition to the consumer protection mechanisms provided by video platforms themselves.”

Importantly, the Classification Scheme interacts closely with the *Online Safety Act (OSA)*. Under the OSA, approaches to classes of content depend on their likely classification. Specifically, what is or is likely to be R18+ must be behind a Restricted Access System. It also informs obligations around what is or is likely to be X18+ and Refused Classification.

Earlier, the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) review into Classification in 2012 acknowledged limited community expectation that user generated content should be classified and proposed that classification should only be required if it is both: made and distributed on a commercial basis, and likely to have a significant Australian audience.

Hence two successive reviews have recommended this approach to classifiable material - both the Stevens Review and the ALRC review. We believe this is a sound approach.

Lastly, we note that at page 9 of the Consultation Paper it states:

“classification is the responsibility of the service provider who makes the content available in Australia, regardless of who originally makes the content.”

We question whether this sentence should in fact read:

“*display of classification information* is the responsibility of the service provider who makes the content available in Australia, regardless of who originally makes the content.”

This would better reflect current industry practice. At present, the service provider is responsible for ensuring classification information is displayed to audiences and frequently, the content creator obtains the classification for the relevant film, particularly where it is going to be distributed across multiple services. This allows for more efficient classification of films, so that a movie can be classified once by the Classification Board, rather than being classified by each service provider who may make the film available in Australia.

*Ensuring the classification guidelines continue to be aligned with, and responsive to, evolving community standards, expectations and evidence - Do you support the establishment of an independent Classification Advisory Panel or similar body?*

In principle, we support the establishment of an independent Classification Advisory Panel. It would be appropriate for their advice to be informed by empirical evidence, community research, international best practice and consultation with stakeholders.

In terms of the composition of that Panel, we support the Stevens Review recommendation that it comprise experts from academic fields relevant to classification (including psychology, child development and media studies) as well as representatives from community organisations and those with industry experience.

We also support the proposal that the Panel not be a decision-making body, but would rather provide advice on possible updates to classification criteria.

Whilst updating the Guidelines is important, it is also important to provide industry with a degree of regulatory certainty. To that end, we suggest that parameters are put around how often the Guidelines can be updated. This way, flow on effects from Guideline changes can be absorbed and implemented appropriately by industry rather than there being a constant state of flux.

This is important for user generated content too, as although not directly regulated by the Scheme, there is a link between any change made to the Classification Act and how the OSA operates in practice. Under the OSA, approaches to classes of content depend on their likely classification.

Further, with the review of the OSA currently underway, it is important to tread carefully in any changes to Classification in parallel as these will not be able to be considered as part of the OSA Review.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide these comments.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rachel Lord', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rachel Lord  
YouTube Government Affairs and Public Policy