

Review of Australian classification regulation

When it comes to classification regulation the typical justification is to protect children from harmful or upsetting content, to provide a guide to parents so that they may understand what they are showing to their children.

These are reasonable, even respectable, reasons to have a classification system in place. And here comes the inevitable “but”.

But the Australian Classification Board has the ability to do more than just that don't they? By refusing classification they can functionally censor materials, they can ban it unless the material is changed such that they are willing to grant it classification. Refused classification means banned lets not pretend, one can face massive penalties for distributing material that has been refused classification.

Luckily we live in a relatively open and free country and the censorship has largely been based on objections to sexual/violent rather than criticism of the government. I do not wish to argue that censoring media because of its sexual/violent content is the beginning of some slide into an autocracy I believe that to be an absurd claim.

My point is that a piece of media can be banned simply because it offends the sensibilities of a board member rather than because it actually presents some danger to children. There are multiple instances of media that no child should ever see anyway are refused classification until edits are made which do nothing to the fact that no child should ever see it.

For example in 2011 the human centipede II was refused classification until a mere 30 seconds of footage was cut. The human centipede will 30 seconds less footage is still a film that no child should ever see. So who is this protecting? What was the point? Classify the film as 18+, and let the capable adults make decisions for themselves, adults do not need to be coddled or protected.

This type of censoring brings to mind the moral panic of the 1980s when multiple rock musicians has to defend themselves against the idea that their music was “corrupting the youth”. Or in the 1990's when it was Dungeons and Dragons was called satanic and was “teaching children to worship the devil”, in the 2000's rap musics was “leading kids into a life of crime”.

I would ask when reviewing the classification regulation you would ask yourselves, who benefits when a piece of media is censored? Because it certainly isn't the children who were never going to see it anyway.

Thank you for you time.