A modern classification scheme for video games

We recognise the vital role that Australia and New Zealand's classification schemes play to help game players and parents make informed choices about what to play. Our industry supports these schemes through strict compliance and dialogue with regulators. However, as these classification laws and policies were design in a pre-digital age, we encourage reforms to modernise how games are classified, including the expanded use of classification tools and a greater role for industry.

How are video games classified?

Classification in Australian and New Zealand involves the assigning of an age rating and often a further consumer advice or descriptive note to video games which are displayed on the game's box or at the point of download. In both countries, the government is responsible for classifying video games (as well as films, home media and publications). This function is performed by the Classification Board in Australia, and by the Office of Film & Literature Classification in New Zealand, with the cost of classification largely funded through fees from game publishers.

Does the industry still support classification?

Absolutely. We believe classification plays an important role in the community and is particularly vital for children and their parents and carers by helping them to choose the right video games to buy or play, and to avoid content that may not be age-appropriate. We also know that many adults, who comprise around four out of every five game players in Australia and New Zealand, also find classification information useful. Our industry also uses trained assessors to support the Australian Classification Board's decision-making, a scheme that we strongly support.

Why does the classification system need to change?

The legislation that underpins Australia's classification system is 25 years old, while the equivalent legislation in New Zealand is 27 years old. These classification laws were drafted for a pre-internet era and use community standards from the 1990s that do not necessarily reflect society's views today. For example, the Australian classification guidelines treat video games more harshly than film for the exact same content. Australia and New Zealand are also among the only advanced economies that still use government-run classification systems and still rely on legal restrictions and enforcement. This kind of regulation is becoming less useful and effective in our digital age.

What should classification look like in the future?

We urge reforms to modernise these classification systems and we particularly support a co-regulatory model that allows video games to be classified quickly, flexibly, and cost-effectively. We support greater self-classification by industry, under government oversight, including by trained assessors and through the International Age Rating Coalition (IARC) classification tool. We support the ongoing and increasing use of this tool, which was built by our industry and is successfully being used in Australia, and recommend that it be adopted for use in New Zealand.

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