

## FILM CLASSIFICATIONS

### *Grievance*

**MRS C.L. EDWARDES** (Kingsley) [9.09 am]: I wish to raise a matter of concern to every parent in Western Australia. I do that on the basis of one decision and one proposal: the decision of the Office of Film and Literature Classification to change the definition of G rating; and the move by Commercial Television Australia to change the G-rating time zones. The combination of these issues means children will be exposed to an increased level of undesirable material and parents will be deprived of even one classification that is free of drug use, nudity, sexual reference and violence. In my official capacity, I have already written to the federal and state Attorneys General and I will make sure a copy of that letter goes to the minister before she attends the next censorship meeting, because I believe this is very important. Previous classification guidelines directed that any reference to drug use should attract a PG rating and that there should be no nudity in G-rated films. That is what the overwhelming majority of parents want. That is the way the classification should remain. Where our children are concerned there should be a zero tolerance in this area. Parents should be able to trust the G rating knowing that there are proper safeguards in place and that they can rely on the classification without qualification. Those guidelines have changed and they have destroyed that trust. Worse, they have opened the door that should have been closed. It could be opened even wider in the future. I support the current time zones for G-rated programs on television. Although commercial television stations do not adopt the OFLC guidelines specifically and directly, they generally use them in their code. Under the current time zones parents have at least a modicum of control over the programs their children watch after school and to the end of the evening meal, even if that control is somewhat less than it was before the guidelines were changed. The proposed new time zones expand the PG time zone and make the system impossible to implement because the rating requires responsible parents to supervise the program. The proposed amendments include an expansion of the PG-classification time zones to allow PG-classified programs to be broadcast between 5.00 and 7.30 pm on weekdays and between 8.30 am and 7.30 pm on weekends. The reason given is that the expansion will allow a greater diversity of programming on commercial television and better reflect current community viewing patterns. As examples, reference is made to pay television, the Internet, computer games, DVDs, and VCRs etc. It is claimed that parents monitor their children's viewing in interaction with a range of electronic media now available in the home environment. We are talking about parents with young children; we are not talking about teenagers. Mum comes home from work and prepares the evening meal while feeding the dog and the cat at the same time. She is also taking out the rubbish. While she is doing all these things her children are in front of the television. She has put on Channel Seven, Nine or 10 - she has not put on pay TV for the children to watch. She knows what they are watching. It is claimed that the time zone for the rating can be expanded on weekends because PG-rated programs are run through the day during school holidays. What parent leaves primary school-aged children at home on their own during school holidays? They do not. Teenage children might be at home on their own during school holidays but parents organise programs for their primary school-aged children. They are not left at home otherwise the Department for Community Development would be on to the parents quick smart. A mother said to me that the proposal has been developed by a childless Commercial Television Australia executive who is totally unaware of the reality of parenting. I agree with that absolutely. He obviously has no idea what happens around the time of the evening meal. As I heard one broadcaster say during the week, the executive was probably finishing off his game of golf! The executives have no idea what happens during school holidays. The specific example raised with me by the concerned parent concerned her five-year-old daughter. She was shown a PG-rated film without her mother's knowledge and became disturbed and frightened without being able to explain what had upset her. The mother rented the movie from her local video shop only to discover that the first 10 minutes contained scenes of a woman carrying a baby being chased by a pack of frightening dog-like creatures and being torn to pieces. That is not the only example. I have heard similar experiences from mothers with young children. The proposed new code will make it even harder for parents to have some comfort in the programming on commercial television.

The other proposal that I totally and absolutely disagree with - I am sure the minister will as well - is to allow more alcohol advertising on television at a time when it would be seen by children. The draft code wants alcohol advertising during all sports programs. Since all sports programs are rated G, the effect would be to allow alcohol advertising while children are watching during the day on weekends. We already have a problem with binge drinking by children. We must ensure that they are protected. Where our children are concerned there cannot be enough protection. Media Standards of Australia stated -

If commercial TV broadcasters genuinely want to give Australian families the quality programming that they desire, they will retain the current G rating time zones and encourage the production of more high quality, child friendly, G-rated programs that Australian families can enjoy without concern about possible harmful effects on their children.

I hope the minister takes this up with her national colleagues.

**MRS M.H. ROBERTS** (Midland - Minister for Justice) [9.15 am]: Mr Speaker -

Several members interjected.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Did the member for Nedlands say that the federal Attorney General did not know what he was doing?

The SPEAKER: Order, members! It is all very entertaining to have interjections across the Chamber but the minister must have her full seven minutes in which to reply. I direct that the clock be reset.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am sure I will not need the full seven minutes. The member for Kingsley has shown a very strong interest in censorship for some time, both in government and in opposition. I understand it is an interest she is continuing. I thank her for raising this matter today. As I understand it, Commercial Television Australia is proposing changes that will reduce the amount of G-rated programming on television and increase the amount of PG-rated programming. It is calling for public submissions. The Australian Broadcasting Authority must be satisfied that community standards are met before registering any amendments to the code of practice. The Australian Broadcasting Authority is also conducting a review of C and P classifications. Those programs are designed specifically to meet children's needs whereas G programs contain nothing unsuitable for children. The standards for children's television require commercial television licensees to broadcast minimum annual quotas of children's programming. That is the situation in which we find ourselves. Submissions are required by 19 September. I will be very pleased to receive a copy of the submission made by the member for Kingsley to Commercial Television Australia.

A few things need to be considered. The types of programs that fit into the G and PG classifications are not widely understood. I will put a few examples on record for the benefit of members and the community. I am advised that examples of G-rated programs include *Home and Away*, *Neighbours*, *Oliver's Twist*, *Frasier* and sports events. On the other hand, PG-rated programs include *JAG*, *Stargate*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Australian Idol*, *Friends*, *Malcolm in the Middle*, *Becker* and *The Simpsons*. *The Simpsons* is usually rated G but some episodes are rated PG. It is difficult sometimes for the public to ascertain the differences between G and PG-rated programs. I am not a regular watcher of any of those programs. I have not even seen most of them. No doubt, they are watched by a lot of children. I suggest they are watched very infrequently by my children mainly because they are not the sort of educational or enlightening programs that assist children. It is a shame that more children do not spend more time reading, whether it is classical literature or reading for enjoyment. There is a lot more to be said for broadening children's horizons through reading and progressing language skills. I am a former English teacher and I obviously have a great love of literature. However, it is sad that, as time goes by, fewer and fewer children are reading and, as a result, literacy standards are slipping. That is happening without the impact of text messaging, e-mails and so on, which will cause further decline in literacy standards. As the member for Kingsley said, it is becoming more and more difficult for parents to supervise what their children access on the Internet. I am not sure what percentage of homes have computers now. I suspect that, if it is not the majority, it will be the case very soon. Most children have access to a computer whether it is at home, school, the library or the like. The vast array of what they can view and participate in on the Internet is amazing. The issue of controls in that regard is something to be considered.

The member for Kingsley made a good point about the number of G-rated programs that are available. She also made a good point about the type of advertisements that are allowed to be shown during screening of G-rated programs. She referred particularly to advertisements for alcohol aired during sports events. Some programs that are not suitable for children are advertised also during some of those times, which solicit children's interest in them.

The Office of Film and Literature Classification has a difficult job. Commercial Television Australia must ensure that its proposal satisfies community standards, albeit ascertaining those standards is a difficult task. I encourage other people to make submissions. As the member for Kingsley has asked me to do, I will take the points she has made into account when I attend later this year the meeting of ministers responsible for censorship.