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**CLASSIFICATION (PUBLICATIONS, FILMS AND COMPUTER GAMES) ACT 1995**

**GUIDELINES FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF COMPUTER GAMES 2023**

I, Michelle Rowland, Minister for Communications, determine the following legislative instrument under subsection 12(1) of the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995*.

Dated 24/10/2023.

MICHELLE ROWLAND, Minister for Communications.

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**1 Name**

This instrument is the *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2023*.

**2 Commencement**

This instrument commences on 22 September 2024.

**3 Authority**

This instrument is made under subsection 12(1) of the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995*.

**4 Definitions**

Note: A number of expressions used in this instrument are defined in the Act, including the following—

- (a) participating Minister;
- (b) Board;
- (c) Code;
- (d) computer game.

In this instrument—

**Act** means the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995*.

**5 Determination of guidelines**

With the agreement of each participating Minister, the guidelines specified in Schedule 1 to this instrument are determined to assist the Board in applying the criteria in the Code when classifying computer games.

**6 Repeal**

This instrument repeals the *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2012*.

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**Schedule 1—Guidelines**

**GUIDELINES FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF COMPUTER GAMES**

**Introduction to the Guidelines**

***Background***

The *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games* (the Guidelines) are a tool for classifying computer games. They help explain the different classification categories, and the scope and limits of material suitable for each category. They are revised from time to time, with extensive community input.

***The legal context***

The National Classification Scheme (the Scheme) is based on—

- the Commonwealth *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995* (the Act), and
- a cooperative agreement between Commonwealth, State and Territory governments.

Under the Scheme, the Commonwealth makes the classification decisions, and the States and Territories enforce them.

The Act contains a National Classification Code (the Code). It also allows Guidelines to be made. By agreement, the Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers can vary the Code and the Guidelines.

The Act requires films and computer games to be classified, using the Code and the Guidelines, before they are released or advertised.

Classification decisions are made by the Classification Board or by other methods authorised under the Act (for example, using an approved classification tool). There are avenues for review of certain decisions, including by the Classification Review Board. Administrative support for both Boards is provided by the Australian Government, currently by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.

### ***Classification categories***

The Act names the classification categories for computer games, and the Code describes them. The categories are—

- G
- PG
- M
- MA 15+
- R 18+
- RC

### **Classification criteria**

#### **The Act**

Under the Act, each of the following matters must be taken into account in classifying computer games—

- (a) the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults;
- (b) the literary, artistic or educational merit (if any) of the computer game;
- (c) the general character of the computer game, including whether it is of a medical, legal or scientific character;
- (d) the persons or class of persons to or amongst whom it is published or is intended or likely to be published.

#### **The Code**

Under the Code, classification decisions are to give effect, as far as possible, to the following principles—

- (a) adults should be able to read, hear, see and play what they want;
- (b) minors should be protected from material likely to harm or disturb them;
- (c) everyone should be protected from exposure to unsolicited material that they find offensive;
- (d) the need to take account of community concerns about—
  - (i) depictions that condone or incite violence, particularly sexual violence; and
  - (ii) the portrayal of persons in a demeaning manner.

### **Consumer advice**

The Act requires the provision of consumer advice about the content of computer games that are classified by the Classification Board or in accordance with a different method authorised under the Act. This information helps consumers make informed choices.

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## **The Guidelines**

### ***Using the Guidelines: Essential principles***

Three essential principles underlie the use of the Guidelines—

- the importance of context
- assessing impact
- the six classifiable elements

Each classification category takes a similar form. It begins with an “impact test” that determines the threshold for the category. It then lists the six classifiable elements, with a statement limiting the content of each element.

#### ***Importance of context***

Context is crucial in determining whether a classifiable element is justified by the story-line or themes. In particular, the way in which important social issues are dealt with may require a mature or adult perspective. This means that material that falls into a particular classification category in one context may fall outside it in another.

#### ***Assessing impact***

The Guidelines use the following hierarchy of impact—

- |             |   |        |
|-------------|---|--------|
| • very mild | - | G      |
| • mild      | - | PG     |
| • moderate  | - | M      |
| • strong    | - | MA 15+ |
| • high      | - | R 18+  |
| • very high | - | RC     |

Assessing the impact of material requires considering not only the treatment of individual classifiable elements but also their cumulative effect. It also requires considering the purpose and tone of a sequence.

*Impact may be higher* where a scene or game-play sequence

- contains greater detail, including the use of close-ups and slow motion
- uses accentuation techniques, such as lighting, perspective and resolution
- uses special effects, such as lighting and sound, resolution, colour, size of image, characterisation and tone
- is prolonged
- is repeated frequently
- is realistic, rather than stylised
- is highly interactive
- links incentives or rewards to high impact elements.

Impact may be lessened where reference to a classifiable element is verbal rather than visual. Also, some visual impacts have less impact than others: for example, an incidental depiction may have less impact than a direct one.

*Interactivity and computer games*

Interactivity is an important consideration that must be taken into account when classifying computer games. This is because there are differences in what some sections of the community condone in relation to passive viewing or the effects passive viewing may have on the viewer (as may occur in a film) compared to actively controlling outcomes by making choices to take or not take action.

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.

Interactivity may increase the impact of some content: for example, impact may be higher where interactivity enables action such as inflicting realistically depicted injuries or death or post-mortem damage, attacking civilians or engaging in sexual activity. Greater degrees of interactivity (such as first-person gameplay compared to third-person gameplay) may also increase the impact of some content.

Interactivity includes the use of incentives and rewards, technical features and competitive intensity. Except in material restricted to adults, nudity and sexual activity must not be related to incentives or rewards.

Computer games will be Refused Classification if they contain—

- (i) illicit or proscribed drug use related to incentives or rewards;
- (ii) interactive drug use which is detailed and realistic.

The classifiable elements

The six classifiable elements in a computer game are—

- themes
- violence
- sex
- language
- drug use
- nudity

The classification takes account of the context and impact of each of these elements, including their frequency and intensity, and their cumulative effect. It also takes account of the purpose and tone of a sequence, and how material is treated.

### ***Classification Board's application of the Guidelines***

Classification decisions are made by the Classification Board or by other methods authorised under the Act (for example, by using an approved classification tool). There are avenues for review of certain decisions, including by the Classification Review Board.

In making classification decisions, the Board is required to apply these Guidelines.

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## **The Categories**

### **G – GENERAL**

Impact test

The impact of the classifiable elements for material classified G should be very mild only.

*Note: The G classification is for a general audience. However, it does not necessarily indicate that children will enjoy the computer game. Some G games contain themes, story-lines or game play that do not interest children.*

Classifiable elements

#### THEMES

The treatment of themes should have a very low sense of threat or menace, and be justified by context.  
In-game purchases linked to elements of chance and simulated gambling are not permitted.

#### VIOLENCE

Violence should have only a low sense of threat or menace, and be justified by context.  
Sexual violence, implied or otherwise, is not permitted.

#### SEX

Sexual activity should be very mild and very discreetly implied, and be justified by context.  
Sexual activity must not be related to incentives or rewards.

#### LANGUAGE

Coarse language should be very mild and infrequent, and be justified by context.

#### DRUG USE

Drug use should be implied only very discreetly, and be justified by context.  
Drug use related to incentives or rewards is not permitted.  
Interactive illicit or proscribed drug use is not permitted.

#### NUDITY

Nudity should be infrequent and justified by context.  
Nudity must not be related to incentives or rewards.

*Note: Some of the terms used in this category are defined in the List of Terms at the end of these Guidelines.*

### PG – PARENTAL GUIDANCE

Impact test

The impact of the classifiable elements for material classified PG should be no higher than mild.

*Note: Material classified PG may contain material which some children find confusing or upsetting, and may require the guidance of parents or guardians. It is not recommended for playing by persons under 15 without guidance from parents or guardians.*

Classifiable elements

#### THEMES

The treatment of themes should generally have a low sense of threat or menace and be justified by context.

In-game purchases linked to elements of chance and simulated gambling are not permitted.

#### VIOLENCE

Violence should be mild and infrequent, and be justified by context.  
Sexual violence, implied or otherwise, is not permitted.

#### SEX

Sexual activity should be mild and discreetly implied, and be justified by context.  
Sexual activity must not be related to incentives or rewards.

#### LANGUAGE

Coarse language should be mild and infrequent, and be justified by context.

#### DRUG USE

Drug use should be infrequent and justified by context.  
Drug use related to incentives or rewards is not permitted.  
Interactive illicit or proscribed drug use is not permitted.

#### NUDITY

Nudity should be infrequent and justified by context.  
Nudity must not be related to incentives or rewards.

*Note: Some of the terms used in this category are defined in the List of Terms at the end of these Guidelines.*

### M – MATURE

Impact test

The impact of the classifiable elements for material classified M should be no higher than moderate.

*Note: Material classified M is not recommended for persons under 15 years of age. There are no legal restrictions on access.*

Classifiable elements

#### THEMES

The treatment of themes may have a moderate sense of threat or menace, if justified by context.  
In-game purchases linked to elements of chance are permitted.  
Simulated gambling is not permitted.

## **VIOLENCE**

Moderate violence is permitted, if justified by context.

Sexual violence, implied or otherwise, is not permitted

## **SEX**

Sexual activity should be discreetly implied, if justified by context.

Sexual activity must not be related to incentives or rewards.

## **LANGUAGE**

Coarse language may be used.

Aggressive or strong coarse language should be infrequent, justified by context, and not gratuitous, exploitative or offensive.

## **DRUG USE**

Drug use should be justified by context.

Drug use related to incentives or rewards is not permitted.

Interactive illicit or proscribed drug use is not permitted.

## **NUDITY**

Nudity should be justified by context.

Nudity must not be related to incentives or rewards.

*Note: Some of the terms used in this category are defined in the List of Terms at the end of these Guidelines.*

## **MA 15+ – MATURE ACCOMPANIED**

### **Impact test**

The impact of material classified MA 15+ should be no higher than strong.

*Note: Material classified MA 15+ is considered unsuitable for persons under 15 years of age. It is a legally restricted category.*

### **Classifiable elements**

#### **THEMES**

The treatment of strong themes should be justified by context.

In-game purchases linked to elements of chance are permitted.

Simulated gambling is not permitted.

#### **VIOLENCE**

Violence should be justified by context.

Strong and realistic violence should not be frequent or unduly repetitive.

Sexual violence, implied or otherwise, is not permitted.

#### **SEX**

Sexual activity may be implied.

Sexual activity must not be related to incentives or rewards.

#### **LANGUAGE**

Strong coarse language may be used.

Aggressive or strong coarse language should be infrequent, and not exploitative or offensive.

#### **DRUG USE**

Drug use should be justified by context.

Drug use related to incentives or rewards is not permitted.

Interactive illicit or proscribed drug use is not permitted.

#### **NUDITY**

Nudity should be justified by context.

Nudity must not be related to incentives or rewards.

*Note: Some of the terms used in this category are defined in the List of Terms at the end of these Guidelines.*

## **R 18+ – RESTRICTED**

### **Impact test**

The impact of material classified R 18+ should not exceed high.

*Note: Material classified R 18+ is legally restricted to adults. Some material classified R 18+ may be offensive to sections of the adult community.*

### **Classifiable elements**

#### **THEMES**

There are virtually no restrictions on the treatment of themes.

In-game purchases linked to elements of chance and simulated gambling are permitted.

## VIOLENCE

Violence is permitted. High impact violence that is, in context, frequently gratuitous, exploitative and offensive to a reasonable adult will not be permitted.

Actual sexual violence is not permitted.

Implied sexual violence that is visually depicted, interactive, not justified by context or related to incentives or rewards is not permitted.

## SEX

Depictions of actual sexual activity are not permitted.

Depictions of simulated sexual activity may be permitted.

Depictions of simulated sexual activity that are explicit and realistic are not permitted.

## LANGUAGE

There are virtually no restrictions on language.

## DRUG USE

Drug use is permitted.

Drug use related to incentives and rewards is not permitted.

Interactive illicit or proscribed drug use that is detailed and realistic is not permitted.

## NUDITY

Nudity is permitted.

*Note: Some of the terms used in this category are defined in the List of Terms at the end of these Guidelines.*

## RC – REFUSED CLASSIFICATION

*Note: Computer games that exceed the R 18+ classification category will be Refused Classification.*

Computer games will be refused classification if they include or contain any of the following—

### CRIME OR VIOLENCE

Detailed instruction or promotion in matters of crime or violence.

The promotion or provision of instruction in paedophile activity.

Descriptions or depictions of child sexual abuse or any other exploitative or offensive descriptions or depictions involving a person who is, or appears to be, a child under 18 years.

Depictions of—

- (i) violence with a very high degree of impact which are excessively frequent, prolonged, detailed or repetitive;
- (ii) cruelty or realistic violence which are very detailed and which have a very high impact;
- (iii) actual sexual violence.

Implied sexual violence related to incentives and rewards.

## SEX

Depictions of actual sexual activity are not permitted.

Depictions of simulated sexual activity that are explicit and realistic are not permitted.

Depictions of practices such as bestiality.

Gratuitous, exploitative or offensive depictions of—

- (i) activity accompanied by fetishes or practices which are offensive or abhorrent;
- (ii) incest fantasies or other fantasies which are offensive or abhorrent.

## DRUG USE

Detailed instruction in the use of proscribed drugs.

Material promoting or encouraging proscribed drug use.

Computer games will also be Refused Classification if they contain—

- (i) illicit or proscribed drug use related to incentives or rewards;
- (ii) interactive drug use which is detailed and realistic.

*Note: Some of the terms used in this category are defined in the List of Terms at the end of these Guidelines.*

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## LIST OF TERMS

*Note: Words which are used in the Guidelines but which are not contained in this List of Terms take their usual dictionary meaning. Refer to the latest edition of The Macquarie Dictionary.*

**Coercion:** The use of threat or power to force agreement to sexual activity.

**Demean:** A depiction or description, directly or indirectly sexual in nature, which debases or appears to debase the person or the character depicted.

**Elements:** Themes, violence, sex, coarse language, drug use and nudity.

**Exploitative:** Appearing to purposefully debase or abuse for the enjoyment of others, and lacking moral, artistic or other values.

**Fetish:** An object, an action or a non-sexual part of the body which gives sexual gratification.

**In-game purchases linked to elements of chance:** Digital goods or services determined by chance, including Paid Loot Boxes, that can be acquired within a game—

- (a) using real world currency; or
- (b) using in-game virtual currency, items or credits that can be purchased using real-world currency.

**Intensity:** Strength of the treatment or subject matter; strength of engagement or involvement.

**Interactivity:** The quality of being interactive. Providing or capable of providing for user participation that enables some measure of control in relation to user action, data input and commands. The user's participation may influence outcomes that in turn, may affect what options are available to them for subsequent interaction.

**Offensive:** Material which causes outrage or extreme disgust.

**Paid Loot Box:** A virtual container, however described—

- (a) that can be purchased or unlocked using real world currency or using in-game virtual currency, items or credits that can be purchased using real world currency; and
- (b) that rewards players with an in-game digital item or items, where the exact reward the player is to receive is not disclosed to the player prior to purchase.

Note: Paid Loot Boxes may be known by other names in the computer game industry including but not limited to prize crates and card packs.

**Real World Currency:** Real world physical and digital currency, including cryptocurrency.

Note: This does not include tokens, credits or other in-game items and currencies that cannot readily be redeemed or exchanged for value outside the game environment.

**Sexual Activity:** Matters pertaining to sexual acts, but not limited to sexual intercourse.

**Sexual Violence:** Sexual assault or aggression, in which the victim does not consent.

**Sexualised Violence:** Where sex and violence are connected in the story, although sexual violence may not necessarily occur.

**Simulated Gambling:** Interactive activity within a game that—

- (a) resembles or functions like a real world age restricted betting or gambling service; and
- (b) does not provide rewards that can be redeemed for real world currency or traded to other players in-game for real world currency.

Note: For example, interactive activity within games that resembles or functions like real world commercial casinos, slot machines, lotteries, sports betting services or other betting services will be simulated gambling.

**Themes:** Social issues such as crime, suicide, drug and alcohol dependency, death, serious illness, family breakdown and racism.

**Treatment:** The way in which material is handled or presented.

**Violence:** Acts of violence; the threat or effects of violence.