

Senate Legal & Constitutional Affairs Committee  
Supplementary Budget Estimates 2008-2009  
20-21 October 2008

Tabled Document No 9

By: Attorney-General's Department

Date: 20/10/08 5:19 pm

Hansard - 6 March 2008 - South Australian Parliament

**COMPUTER GAMES CLASSIFICATION**

Mr RAU (Enfield) (14:32): My question is to the Attorney-General. Can the Attorney-General inform the house whether he will support moves to introduce an R rating classification for computer games sold in Australia, or will games that are unsuitable for minors continue to be refused classification?

The Hon. M.J. ATKINSON (Croydon—Attorney-General, Minister for Justice, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (14:32): The Interactive Entertainment Association of Australia has repeatedly put to attorneys-general that there ought to be an R18+ classification for computer games. Unlike films for which there are R18+ and X18+ classifications, the highest classification for computer games that depict, express or otherwise deal with sex, violence or coarse language in such a manner as to be unsuitable for viewing or playing by persons under 15 years is MA15+. I do not know what Cheech and Chong's *Up in Smoke* rating was when it was released, but it is certainly being played out here by the member for Heysen, as she is trying to save the bong. She is bonging on. But that is something for the next Liberal Party meeting when parliament comes back. I wonder how the Hanna amendment will go down in the Liberal party room.

Mr Hanna: You better be careful what you say outside the parliament.

The Hon. M.J. ATKINSON: Chong has always been a vexatious litigant: he cannot help himself.

Mr Hanna interjecting:

The Hon. M.J. ATKINSON: It is the vibe. It is just the vibe, for the member for Mitchell. Computer games that exceed the criteria needed for an MA15+ classification must be refused classification and cannot be sold, hired, demonstrated or advertised in Australia. Nevertheless, thousands of games are available to computer game buyers and only a few are completely banned under this system. I have consistently opposed an R18+ classification for computer games.

Mr Pisoni interjecting:

The Hon. M.J. ATKINSON: Well, member for Unley, they can download child pornography if they want to; it will just be against the law. I am concerned about the harm of high impact, particularly violent computer games, to children. Games may pose a far greater problem than other media, particularly films, because their interactive nature could exacerbate their impact. The risk of interactivity on players of computer games with highly violent content is increased aggressive behaviour.

I do not want children to be able to get their hands on R18+ games easily. I understand that the lack of an R18+ classification denies some adults the chance to play some games; however, the need to keep potentially harmful material away from children is far more important.

Proponents for the classification say the latest technology allows gaming platforms and computers to be programmed to allow parental locks. Today's children are far more technologically savvy than their parents. It is laughable to suggest that they could not find ways around parental locks if R18+ games were in the home.

I have mentioned that, despite there being thousands of computer games available to consumers—more computer games than you can play in a lifetime—only a handful are banned. I want to give some examples of games refused classification in Australia, because I am certain that fair-minded people would not want the kind of content in them to be available to children.

*Blitz: The League* was banned in January 2007. It is an American football game in which players prepare teams and play through a season. It was banned because in the course of the game the player may use illegal performance enhancing drugs for the members of his or her team. The player can also fake urine samples to avoid positive drug tests.

*Reservoir Dogs* was banned in June 2006. This game is based on the *Reservoir Dogs* movie, and players are participants in a bank robbery. They can blow the heads off hostages and police, as well as execute hostages at point blank range with a gunshot to the head. They can

also torture hostages by pistol whipping the side of the head, burn the eyes of a hostage with a cigar until they scream and die, or cut the fingers of hostages. There are blood bursts as the victims scream in pain.

*50 Cent: Bulletproof* was banned in November 2007, and I notice that some of the Gang of 49 wear 50 Cent T-shirts when they are on their escapades. The game's central character is the rap star, 50 Cent, and he seeks revenge for the killing of his former cell mate. It was banned because the killing in the game was prolonged and took place in close up and slow motion. It included a lot of on-screen blood spatter when the killing was done with knives. Just to show, for the member for Unley, that the system does work, a censored version of the game was released later with an MA15+ classification.

*Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure* was banned in February 2006. In this game players make names for themselves by using graffiti. They join gangs and compete with rival gangs and the police force. This game was banned because it promotes breaking the law by vandalising public buildings with graffiti. Worse, the central character acquires his knowledge of graffiti tips, techniques and styles from real graffiti vandals who pass on those details. It actually instructs players on how to become graffiti vandals.

*Narc* was banned in April 2005—no, not narc, member for Unley, as in narcotics. In this game players try to defeat an underground drug trafficking and terrorist organisation. Nevertheless, the game contains frequent drug use. Players can choose to take illegal drugs including heroin, speed, LSD, marijuana and ecstasy, and those drugs provide the player with benefits in progressing through the game. For example, when a player takes an ecstasy tablet, opponents will stop attacking and allow the player's character to escape. Similarly, taking speed allows the player's character to run faster and catch opponents. I have not been persuaded by arguments for an—

Dr McFETRIDGE: A point of order, Mr Speaker: I am concerned for the Attorney's reputation. He might be providing an online catalogue for people who want to buy these games.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.