

18 April 2008

Committee Secretary
Community Affairs Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary

**INQUIRY INTO PROVISIONS OF THE FAMILIES, HOUSING, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND
INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (EMERGENCY RESPONSE
CONSOLIDATION) BILL 2008**

ASTRA appreciates the opportunity to provide a brief submission on the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Emergency Response Consolidation) Bill 2008 (the **Bill**) as part of the Senate Community Affairs Committee's (the **Committee**) inquiry into the provisions of the Bill.

ASTRA represents the interests of subscription television operators and channels. A complete list of ASTRA's members is available at www.astra.org.au/members.asp.

ASTRA's members create and distribute hundreds of thousands of hours of original audio-visual content via the broadcasting of distinct channels of programming on cable and satellite platforms. The subscription television industry is generating an increasingly larger slice of the total Australian audio-visual content including sports, news, documentaries, film, drama, infotainment and magazine style programming.

ASTRA's interest in this Bill relate to the implications for its members, and in particular AUSTAR, the subscription TV service provider for rural and regional Australia.

By way of background, the key elements of content regulation for all audio-visual services, including television, are that adults should be able to watch what they choose and children should be protected from material that may be harmful to them. The protection of children is an object of the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (the **Act**) under which subscription television operates. It is this object that underpins the codes of practice of the various television and radio sectors in Australia. This principle is also the basis of Australia's classification system for film, computer games and publications.



ASTRA's members offer television broadcasting and narrowcasting services all of which offer as a feature disabling devices (usually achieved through a pin coded access) to protect children from harmful content. However, R18+ content is permitted only on subscription narrowcast services. X18+ content is not permitted.

ASTRA's codes of practice, which are developed through public consultation and approved and registered by the Australian Communications and Media Authority, cover subscription television broadcast services, subscription television narrowcast services, open television narrowcast services and subscription radio. Matters covered in these codes include general program rules, classification of programming, provision of disabling devices, complaints handling, captioning, subscriber management (in the case of subscription services) and advertising.

ASTRA supports the submission provided to the Committee by AUSTAR which discusses the specific issues and impact for the provision of subscription television narrowcast services in the Northern Territory.

ASTRA would be pleased to appear before the Committee, together with AUSTAR to provide any clarification or further information regarding the impact of the Bill for ASTRA's members. This includes a demonstration of relevant equipment of AUSTAR's service.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debra Richards". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Debra Richards
Chief Executive Officer