



SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS

INQUIRY INTO THE SEXUALISATION OF CHILDREN MAY 2008

Young Media Australia wishes to make some additional comments in relation to our submission and oral evidence to this inquiry.

These supplementary notes have been prepared for Young Media Australia by Associate Prof. Elizabeth Handsley (Vice President) and Barbara Biggins OAM (Hon CEO) on behalf of the Board of the Australian Council on Children and the Media (trading as Young Media Australia (YMA)). For further information, please contact Barbara Biggins.

The following two issues were canvassed during the hearings, and YMA made comment on them there, in addition to what had already been set out in our submission.

1. **The recommendation that there be a unit to oversee the regulation of media accessed by children.**

YMA supports the establishment of such a unit, believing that such a unit, staffed by persons with child development, health and welfare credentials should oversee all media to which children are exposed, and associated regulation. This would

- a) ensure that such regulation was established on a real understanding of impacts on children's development, and
- b) provide an umbrella approach to all media, instead of the present fragmented systems.

During the hearings and in relation to the establishment of such a unit we were asked (at page 100) what age group of children we were referring to. At the time we suggested the age of 14 yrs (that being the age used in broadcasting regulation to define "children").

However, our considered response is that the unit should, given the wide range of regulation that should come under its purview, be constructed to support the legal definition of children, ie those under the age of 18 yrs. This is the definition that applies to classification regulation for example, which should be included in this proposal. There may be some issues dealt with by such a unit where it may be appropriate to consider impacts on children under 16 years, and for others, such as C programming where 14 yrs is appropriate.

2. The need for a one-stop shop for information about media impacts, codes and complaints.

Young Media Australia has long argued that such a service is needed to encourage public participation in shaping media, and particularly for parents seeking information about media impacts on children. YMA argued for such supports at section 3.2 of our written submission to this inquiry, and also in our recent submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts Inquiry into the effectiveness of the broadcasting codes of practice May 2008 sections 3.3 and 4.1.

YMA reinforced the need for funding for such a service during our evidence at the hearings on April 29 at page 99 (Elizabeth Handsley).

We note the supplementary submission from Prof Catharine Lumby and Kath Albury which at section 2 (p3) says “we believe that the Federal Government could play an important role by hosting a website that centralises information about various complaints mechanisms, offers advice on how to make and structure complaints, ... functions as a central system for delivering relevant public private and community sector information about media and young people , including downloadable resources....”

YMA wishes to bring to the attention of the Committee, that a website with all of the aspects quoted above, was established by Young Media Australia in 2002 with the aid of a grant from the Federal Government’s Stronger Families Initiative.

YMA’s web site (www.youngmedia.org.au) contains guides to :

- who does what in media regulation in Australia
- what the various media codes require
- the several classification systems in operation
- complaints processes, and how to be effective

The site also contains a wealth of current research, and research-based information and strategies (developed by YMA) for parents to help them find the best in media for children and young people, and how to avoid age-inappropriate media. YMA’s *Know before you Go* movie reviews are accessible from this site.

YMA also acts as a guide and a conduit for many in the community about where community concerns and complaints. Some of these reach us via our national freecall Young Media Australia Helpline, also established in 2002, and which allows access to the above information for those with no internet access, or who want to discuss issues with a trained children’s professional.

This website is popular, and attracts over 1000 visits per day, with little or no promotion.

However, despite the success of the site, no further infrastructure funding has been available from the federal government (or other sources) since 2003.

YMA has kept the site alive and with basic updates for currency (eg in changed regulation) from its own slim resources.

Using its own resources, in August 2007, YMA added a new Fact sheet, *Too sexy, too soon: the sexualisation of children in the media*, and added a new button to the home page to keep visitors informed about the debate,

Further, new content is added as a side benefit delivered from other projects conducted by YMA. Thus, the resources that have been developed with project funding and strong community support, become available from the YMA website. See recent additions of the new resource packages for parents: *Choosing Fright-Free Fight-free Viewing* (funded by the Federal Attorney General's National Community Crime Prevention Program and the *Healthy Viewing for Healthy Eating* funded by the Telstra Foundation. Both initiatives offer short DVD and booklet resource packages, supported by Parent Information Session notes for use by children's professionals. The SA AG's funding for the *Know before you Go* service supports ongoing new movie review content.

This existing site could offer so many benefits to the general public, and parents in particular, if it were directly and properly funded, and well promoted.

Let's have a one-stop shop, but let's not reinvent the wheel. YMA already provides such a service and is a trusted and independent source of information for an increasing number of parents and professionals.

Barbara Biggins OAM

Hon CEO

Young Media Australia