



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Australian Catholic Office for Film and Broadcasting

Submission from the

Australian Catholic Office for Film and Broadcasting

in response to the discussion paper

“Material That Advocates Terrorist Acts”

23rd May 2007

Attorneys-General are aware of the Australian Catholic Office for Film and Broadcasting’s (ACOFB) concerns about the nature and accessibility of films, videos, computer games, Internet sites and other media material that demean humanity and do not promote human or social dignity. We have spoken on many occasions about the moral questions involved in the portrayal of violence, sexuality, language, marriage and family life which go beyond public opinion or changing community attitudes.

As defined in the discussion paper we support the proposal to amend the Classification Code and guidelines so that publications, films and computer games that advocate terrorist acts are refused classification.

The value of freedom of speech in a liberal democracy is a critical one. This right carries with it great responsibilities for the implications of what is said and promoted. Furthermore, freedom of speech does not operate as an isolated value, but operates in concert with several other values, including:

- Informed Consent;
- Common good, subsidiarity and functionalism;
- Human dignity in community.

The principle of *Informed Consent* makes explicit the contract between the producer, distributor, OFLC and the consumer/spectator. As Australian society becomes more litigious, there may be significant legal ramifications and challenges in the future for the OFLC in regard to the nature and content of its consumer advice in regard to terrorist activities. However some of the worst material is accessible via the internet which, because it is created in other countries, is beyond the Commonwealth to police and ban.

Allied to informed consent is the equally important principle of the *Common good, Subsidiarity and Functionalism*. This principle counters the tendency to bureaucratic intervention, but alerts us to the critical role played by consumer education, academic studies on the effects of exposure to harmful forms of media and having clear and easily accessible channels for the community to give feedback to Government about censorship issues. It reminds us that the value of free speech and access to all forms of media is a relative right that must be regularly revised in the light of studies that show how the common good is affected by the choices made by its individuals. This is especially true in regard to the impact some material advocating terrorism has on the young and the vulnerable.

The principle of *Human Dignity in Community* holds that film censorship should aim for “the maximum integrated satisfaction of the innate and cultural needs of every human person (especially the most vulnerable) including their biological, psychological, ethical, and spiritual needs as members of the world community and national communities which exist for this purpose only” (Ashley and O’Rourke: 1979:26). Material promoting acts of terrorism, some of it in the name of religion, debases humanity. The right to free speech and access to material chosen by a reasonable adult must be weighed up against the protection or promotion of human dignity (even that of the adult viewing the material) and the common good. We recognise the tension in the changes to the censorship guidelines between due process (individuality) and equal protection (society).

The growing convergence between DVDs and computer games means that the line between all audiovisual media is blurring. The most vulnerable members of our community are our children and adolescents. Their needs and the needs of their parents must be given the highest priority in deciding the content, application and defence of the classification guidelines.

For the sake of easier consumer identification, consistent recognition, understanding of the categories and their meanings, and easier administration we support the proposed amendments to the national classification code.