

## PAY TV COMMUNITY STANDARDS RESEARCH

The ABA is conducting attitudinal research on community standards of taste and decency in regard to the possible broadcast of R rated programs on pay TV.

The conditions set out in the Broadcasting Services Act for subscription television services rule out entirely the broadcast of X rated material on pay TV. Whether or not R rated material is to be broadcast on pay TV services depends on two things. Firstly, no R classified program can be broadcast until the ABA has completed extensive Australia-wide research on community standards of taste and decency and on what levels of violence and depiction of sex should be allowed. The ABA will then make a recommendation to Parliament on whether or not they should be allowed. If R material is allowed, pay TV licensees must then ensure access to R classified programs is limited by disabling devices, such as PIN numbers or 'smartcards'. These devices must be acceptable to the ABA.

The Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC), another Commonwealth body, classifies movies for cinema and video release. The R classification operates through various State and Territory

laws to restrict the viewing of such films to adults 18 years and over. The OFLC sets out its criteria for film and video classification in its published guidelines. For the existing commercial television industry, program classification is done by the broadcasters themselves in line with ABA guidelines. Once the ABA registers an industry code of practice broadcasters will classify programs according to this code. The ABC and the SBS also have their own codes. As pay TV is not yet an established industry with licensed broadcasters, industry codes of practice have yet to be established.

In the meantime, the ABA is conducting its research. In January this year, market and social research consultancies were invited to tender for a two stage project embracing qualitative and quantitative research. The brief covered such things as the limits of acceptability of pay TV content and the nature of any concerns about the content. In March a contract was awarded to the research firm Keys Young to conduct a qualitative stage involving 100 people in focus group discussions followed by a quantitative stage involving a national survey of 1600 people.

The focus groups conducted in March

and April involved discussions about pay TV, the R classification, disabling devices and people's concerns both for themselves and for children or teenagers. Selected clips from R rated movies were shown to participants to stimulate discussion on the issues. This stage of the research was not intended to produce representative results but only to explore the issues and inform the next stage which will require the development of a national attitudinal survey.

Officers from the ABA and an executive from the consultant Keys Young have appeared before the Senate Select Committee on Community Standards Relevant to the Supply of Services Utilising Electronic Technologies to brief the Committee on the design and conduct of the research. The Committee has a brief under its terms of reference to look at the quality and adequacy of this particular ABA research project. The ABA will continue to liaise with the Committee to invite input into and comment on the research and any recommendations arising from it. The ABA is reviewing its timetable for the next stage of the project but it is envisaged that it will be completed and a report will be published in the later this year.



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- ance mechanism, designed to allocate airtime fairly;
- 4. the flexibility of programming policy and format sufficient to allow new sources of programming to be incorporated, and
- 5. the right of the community to take part in a range of activities involved in the operation and management of the service.

The ABA will further look to the constituting documents of the applicant (and any other material on which the applicant relies) for evidence of a consistency with the purposes for which the sixth channel has been or will be made available, that is, community and educational non-profit use.



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