



Results of a major research project by the ABA indicate the majority of Australians think adults should have the option of watching R-rated programs on pay TV.

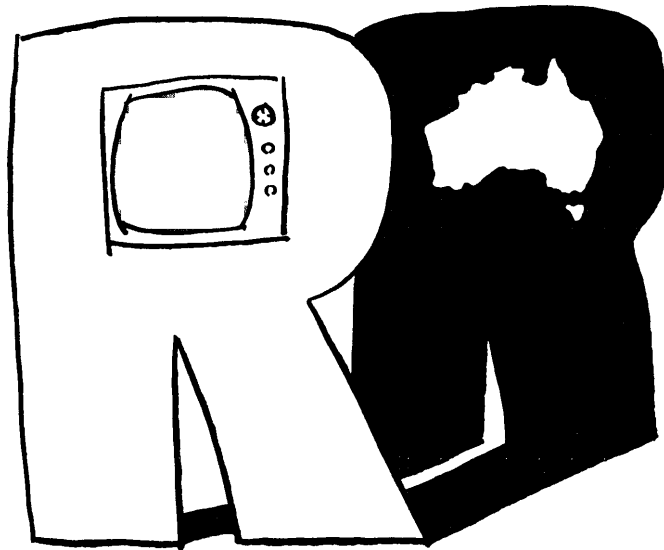
ABA research shows majority support R-rated programs on pay TV

Over four-fifths (82 per cent) of respondents in a national survey of 2440 Australian adults agreed with the idea that adults should have the option of watching R-rated programs on pay TV. Majority support was apparent across all segments of the population as defined by age, gender, parental status, state of residence and area of residence.

The greatest difference was apparent between different age groups. Agreement varied from a high of 93 per cent (respondents 18 to 24 years of age) to a low of 73 per cent (respondents 65 years and over).

Respondents were informed that availability of R-rated material was conditional on the ABA accepting forms of disabling devices (such as those which use personal identity numbers) which were to be installed in the set top box provided by pay TV operators.

While R-rated programs are currently available at the cinema and on video, this category of program cannot be broadcast on pay TV until the ABA has presented its research findings



to Parliament and Parliament has approved its broadcast.

The ABA's research was tabled in Parliament on 7 December 1994 in a report titled *R Classified Programs on Pay TV*. The report contains a recommendation that Parliament approve the broadcast of R-rated programs by subscription television broadcasting licensees.

'We have asked the community what it thinks about the availability of R-rated programs on pay TV and our recommendation is based on its answer,' said Mr Brian Johns, ABA Chairman. 'However, the research shows people are uncomfortable about

the unrestricted availability of R. People want controls and limitations to be put in place should R-rated material be approved for broadcast on pay and are keen to have information about the content of programs.'

The research also found that there was more concern about the availability of R-rated sexual violence than there was about R-rated sexual content or R-rated violence.

These findings raise important issues for the subscription television industry to consider in the development of their codes of practice. The Confederation of Australian Subscription Television (CAST), which

represents the pay TV industry, has drafted codes of practice which are available for public comment.

Codes of practice

The draft codes provide for consumer advice on the reasons for an M, MA or R classification to be given prior to the commencement of an M, MA or R program. Pay TV operators have made a commitment to abide by the draft codes pending their registration by the ABA.

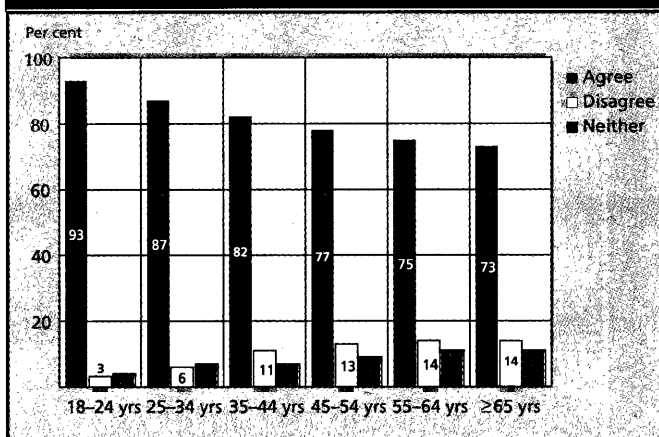
The ABA must be satisfied the codes provide appropriate community safeguards and the public have had adequate opportunity to comment before registering them.

Should the broadcast of R-rated programs on pay TV be approved, subscription television licensees have to ensure that access to these programs is restricted by disabling devices acceptable to the ABA.

The ABA has drafted guidelines for the assessment of these disabling devices and is currently consulting with the industry before finalising them. The draft guidelines are contained in the report to Parliament.



Figure 1
Belief that adults should have the option of watching R on pay TV (by age)



The ABA's report will be considered by Parliament in the New Year. Should Parliament approve the broadcast of R-rated material on pay TV and the ABA has accepted disabling devices developed by the operators, R-rated programs may then be broadcast on pay TV.

Legislative requirements

The ABA's report *R Classified Programs on Pay TV* presents a recommendation to Parliament regarding the broadcast of R-rated programs by subscription television broadcasting licensees. The legislative basis for the recommendation is set out in Schedule 2, Part 6, Clause 10(1)(g) of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*.

Clause 10(1)(g) prevents subscription television broadcasting licensees from broadcasting R-rated programs until:

- the ABA has completed extensive, Australia-wide qualitative and quantitative research on community standards of taste and decency in relation to classifications for pay TV and on what levels of violence and depiction of sex should be allowed;
- the ABA has recommended the broadcast of such programs; and

- the Parliament has, by resolution of each House, approved the broadcast of such programs.

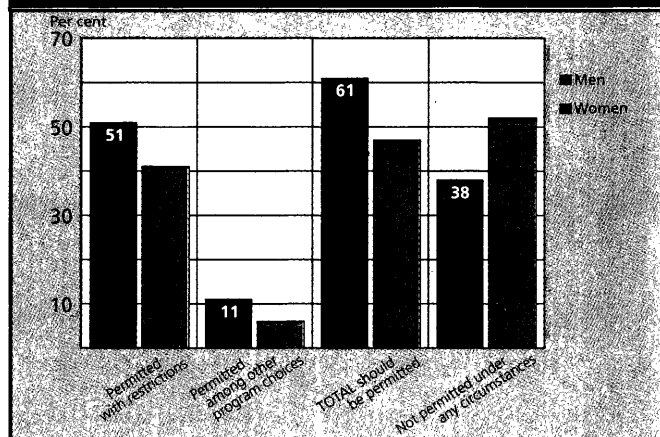
Research design

The ABA's extensive Australia-wide research involving a qualitative and quantitative stage. The qualitative stage consisted of ten focus group discussions involving a total of 100 people. The discussions took place in Sydney, Adelaide and two regional centres—Bega, New South Wales and Mt Gambier, South Australia—between 31 March and 16 April 1993. Three focus groups were conducted in Sydney and Adelaide and two groups in Bega and Mt Gambier.

The quantitative stage consisted of a national face-to-face survey of 2440 people aged 18 years and over. The survey was conducted between 21 November and 23 December 1993. Each interview was of approximately 18 minutes duration.

The ABA engaged an independent academic consultant, Dr Kevin Durkin of the University of Western Australia, who assisted in the evaluation of proposals by research organisations for the conduct of the research, as well as providing advice on the research

Figure 2
Attitudes to the availability of R-rated sexual violence (by gender)



design of the questionnaire for the national survey. The field work for the research was carried out by Keys Young, a social research organisation with over 20 years experience in social policy research.

Availability of R-rated material on pay TV

A majority of the 2440 adult Australians who participated in the national survey thought that R-rated programs should be available to adults on pay TV in the home:

- 82 per cent agreed with the idea that adults should have the option of watching R-rated programs;
- 69 per cent agreed with the idea that R-rated movies provide entertainment which is of interest to many adults and should be available to them.

While there was some variation in the level of support across different segments of the sample, for example, a greater proportion of men than women supported the availability of R-rated programs, majority support was apparent across all segments as defined by age, gender, parental status, state of residence and area of residence (capital city versus other). The largest variation in level of support was across age groupings:

- agreement with the idea that adults should have the option of watching R-rated programs varied from a low of 73 per cent (respondents 65 years and over) to a high of 93 per cent (respondents 18 to 24 years of age);

- agreement with the idea that R-rated movies provide entertainment which is of interest to many adults and should be available to them varied from a low of 58 per cent (respondents 65 years and over) to a high of 79 per cent (respondents 18 to 24 years of age).

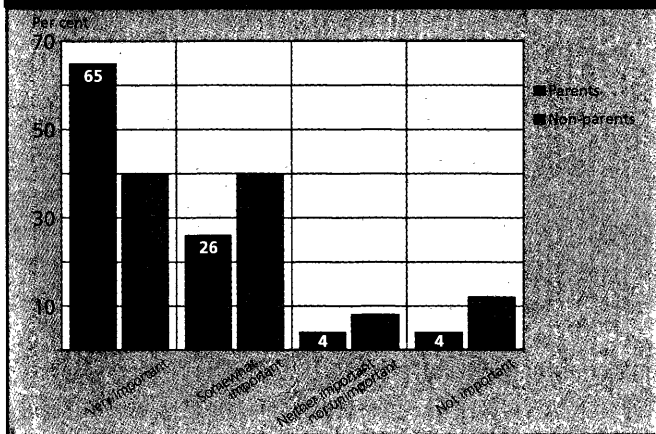
Availability of R-rated sex, violence and sexual violence

The level of support for the availability of R-rated material on pay TV depended on the content of the material. There was less support for the availability of R-rated sexual violence than there was for the availability of R-rated sexual content or R-rated violence:

- 54 per cent of respondents thought that R-rated sexual violence should be permitted on pay TV;
- 69 per cent of respondents thought that R-rated violence should be permitted;
- 70 per cent of respondents thought that R-rated sexual content should be permitted.



Figure 3
Importance of pre-screening information (by parental status of respondents under 45 years of age)



There was strong support for controls and restrictions to be put in place if R-rated material becomes available on pay TV, for example, there was strong support for limitations on the times when R-rated material could be broadcast:

- 54 per cent of respondents nominated 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. as an acceptable time for pay TV channels to broadcast R-rated programs;
- 50 per cent nominated 9 p.m. to 11 p.m. as an acceptable time;
- 10 per cent said 'never/no time';
- 8 per cent said 'any time of day' (respondents could give more than one response).

There was also strong support for information about R-rated programs to be provided in conjunction with their broadcast:

- 85 per cent of respondents said that, if R-rated program were to be shown on pay TV, it would be important to receive some information about them before they were broadcast;
- 63 per cent said they would like to receive a warning that the program is R-rated.

Control of children's viewing

Controls such as 'start-up' cards

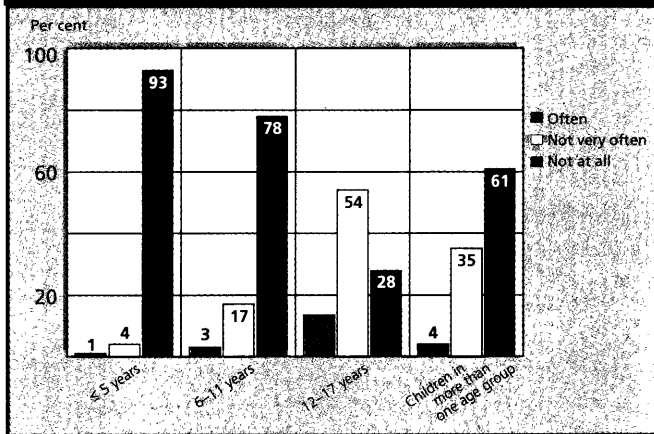
and PIN numbers were considered by a majority of parents to be a secure way of preventing children and teenagers from watching R-rated programs on pay TV and many parents said that they were likely to use them. For the purpose of this study, a parent was defined as a person with one or more children under 18 years of age:

- 67 per cent of parents agreed that these controls were a secure way of preventing children and teenagers from watching R-rated programs;
- 86 per cent of parents said that they were likely to use these controls to restrict their children from watching R-rated programs.

■ most parents indicated that they used some form of parental intervention to try to influence their children's viewing of free-to-air television services:

- 89 per cent of parents indicated that one or more of a number of methods of parental intervention applied in their households;
- only 19 per cent of parents indicated that their children were able to select their own programs—7 per cent gave this as their only response and 12 per cent nominated this response along with one or

Figure 4
Children's frequency of watching R-rated movies (by age group of children)



more of the methods of parental intervention.

A third of all parents who participated in the survey indicated that their children had watched R-rated movies on video or at the cinema. Parents with older children were much more likely to say this than those with younger children:

- 67 per cent of parents who only had teenage children said their children had seen R-rated movies, while 5 per cent of parents who only had preschool aged children indicated this was so.

Disabling devices

The Act requires subscription television broadcasting licensees to ensure that access to R-rated programs be restricted by disabling devices acceptable to the ABA.

The ABA has sought information about the characteristics and operation of disabling de-

vices. As well, the ABA has developed a process for the determination of the acceptability of disabling devices. See the Innovations section on page 18 for more information about disabling devices.

Recommendation

In all the circumstances, and taking into account:

- the findings of the ABA's commissioned research; and
 - the regulatory regime provided by the Broadcasting Services Act, including the mandated use of disabling devices, and the application of industry codes of practice developed in a publicly consultative way;
- the ABA recommends that programs classified as 'R' by the Office of Film and Literature Classification be approved by Parliament for broadcast by subscription television broadcasting licensees. ☐

Need more information?...

Copies of the Confederation of Australian Subscription Television codes can be obtained by calling CAST on (02) 319 7538, with comments to be returned to CAST by 7 January 1995.

Copies of the ABA's publication *R Classified Programs on Pay TV* are available from the ABA for \$10 each. The 24-page booklet, *Edited Extracts and Summary of Findings*, is also available, free of charge. Telephone (02) 334 7881 for a copy.