

Australia is ahead of other nations in developing strategies to deal with community concern about Internet content. This was the feedback from the International Conference on Screen Violence, London where Ms Lesley Osborne, ABA Manager, Standards presented the findings of the ABA's recent investigation into on-line services.

## International interest in ABA on-line services investigation

The International Conference on Screen Violence was organised by the British Board of Film Classification and held in London in September. Representatives of film classification boards and television regulators from 31 countries attended. From Australia were ABA General Manager, Gareth Grainger and ABA Standards Manager, Lesley Osborne; John Dickie, Director of the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC); Douglas Stewart, SBS Classification Officer; and Richard Lyle,

the potential to undermine the safeguards provided by government regulation and industry self-regulation.

The introductory session on new media emphasised the ready availability of unsuitable material, especially pornography, on the Internet. Also discussed was the apparent ineffectiveness of regulators to prevent children accessing such material. Other researchers emphasised the gulf in technological competence between today's children and their parents also limits the extent to which parents can supervise children's use of the technology. Research presented questioned whether parents were motivated to perform this role.

The ABA/OFLC study of *Families and Electronic Entertainment* offered conference delegates a more encouraging picture, at least in relation to Australian families. The study showed that while television was the most popular activity for children, electronic entertainment had not taken over from more traditional leisure pursuits. It also showed that parents were actively engaged in the supervision of their children's use of television, videos and computer/video games. Parental technical expertise, including computer literacy, was not found to be a factor influencing the ability or willingness to supervise.

### **Regulation and Internet**

The role of parents and supervisors is even more important in relation to the Internet where traditional censorship approaches are not practical. This is acknowledged by the ABA in its on-line services report, in which proposals for regulating on-line content are supported by recommendations for community



Photo: L to R . Kathryn Paterson, Office of Film and Literature Classification, New Zealand; Joan Graves, Classification and Rating Administration, Motion Picture Association of America; John Dickie, Office of Film and Literature Classification, Australia; Lesley Osborne, ABA, at the Museum of the Moving Image, Southbank, London.

National Nine Network's classification officer.


Violence in film, video and television was the main topic of discussion at the conference. The proliferation of electronic media in the home, including computer games and the Internet, was seen as challenging the traditional role of classification bodies. This trend had

education. For many conference delegates the ABA proposals for self-regulatory codes of practice for Internet service providers represented a workable approach; proposals include incorporating practical steps that may be taken in relation to material such as child pornography, or material which is unsuitable for children. There was discussion at the conference about the ABA's recommendation for a purpose-built labelling scheme utilising the set of standards incorporated in the Platform for Internet Content Selection (PICS). The scheme will enable the selective blocking or accessing of sites on the basis of Australian community and cultural values. Delegates appreci-

ated the Australia's practical approach, which recognises limitations for regulating in the home environment, while identifying options for managing children's safe use of the Internet.

**Media violence**

Given the current focus on media violence in Australia and the recent commitment in the United States by broadcasters to develop a ratings system in conjunction with the introduction of the V-chip, the conference provided a timely opportunity to examine relevant research. The findings of extensive television content analyses provided

few surprises for those involved in television classification and regulation, with Hollywood movies, promotional material and some of the toy-related children's programs being most problematical. Other research focused on the violence in factual programs such as news, which can distress children. Argument continues about the effects of viewing this material on different types of audiences in different contexts. There was no single approach to these issues by conference delegates. However, there was a shared view that enhanced media literacy should be encouraged, and that it should include an understanding by parents of children's use of new media. 

**ABA's on-line audience**

While overseas recently, Ms Kaaren Koomen, ABA Manager, On-line Services met with a number organisations to discuss on-line issues.

These organisations included the World Wide Web Consortium and the Federal Communications Commission in the United States, the Conseil Supérieur de L'Audiovisuel, the OECD and UNESCO in France, the European Commission in Brussels, British Telecom and the Internet Service Providers Association in the United Kingdom and the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority in Hong Kong.


Whilst in France, Ms Koomen also met with Mr Peter Harter, the Co-Chair of the Internet Law and Policy Forum (ILPF).

The ILPF is a new international organisation which includes representatives from government, industry and academia and is based in Montreal, Canada.

During these discussions the ABA's report on its *Investigation into the content into on-line services* was highly praised as being one of the leading studies on on-line services and regulatory issues.

Ms Koomen discussed the development of the Platform for Internet Content Selection (PICS) with the various organisations. The way in which internationally accepted labelling schemes might be developed to address concerns about Internet content was also raised. Ms Koomen also outlined the ABA's proposal for a substantially self-regulatory framework for

the on-line industry based on codes of practice for service providers.

Over the last month the ABA has invited each of the organisations to engage in a regular exchange of on-line issues with it and to establish a framework for international co-operation in the area. The ABA has also written to the Secretary of the ILPF expressing its wish to participate in the activities of the Forum. 

The ABA's report on its *Investigation into the Content of On-line Services* is available from the ABA by calling (02) 9334 7881 or on freecall 1800 226 667. Cost \$20. The report is also available at ABA's On-line services Web site: <http://www.dca.gov.au/aba/invest.htm>

**Programs granted C or P classification**

**Programs granted P or C classification between 8 October 1996 and 18 November 1996. Producers interested in submitting programs for classification should contact Liz Gilchrist on (02) 9334 7840.**

Title	Origin	Class.	New/ Renwal	Decision date	Applicant
TERROR TOWERS,	Australia	C	new	24.9.1996	Becker Group Limited
THE ADVENTURES OF THE BUSH PATROL (SERIES 3)	Australia	CAD	new	18.10.1996	Rosenbaum Whitbread Film Productions
THE LONG ROAD HOME	USA	C	new	18.10.1996	Southern Television Corporation Pty Ltd
THE MAGIC SCHOOL BUS	USA	C	renewal	10.11.1996	Southern Television Corporation Pty Ltd
THE MAGICAL MAKEOVER	USA	C	new	16.10.1996	Southern Television Corporation Pty Ltd
WIND IN THE WILLOWS	UK	C	new	21.10.1996	Nine Network Australia