

Young Media Australia, the national children's media lobby group based in Adelaide, held its 40th annual general meeting in November 1996. YMA Project Officer Toni Jupe reports on the organisation's anniversary celebrations, including a half-day seminar, *Violence, the Media and Children*, and the contribution YMA has made to the children's media environment in the past 40 years.

Young Media Australia - 40 years on

Previously known as the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television, YMA claims to be the largest organisation of its kind in Australia. It represents the views of Australian parents, children's professionals and other concerned individuals.

YMA is a non-profit organisation largely funded by special project grants and supported by the South Australian Film Corporation and Australian Film Commission.

It is significant that the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television, publicly known as Young Media Australia, has existed for 40 years, as long as television in Australia.

During YMA's 40th anniversary celebrations, executive director Barbara Biggins listed some of the organisation's achievements. She said YMA is proud to have had a major role in maintaining the children's television quota, the Australian children's drama quota, the 100 per cent pre-school programs quota, the universal classification of home videos and a number of other decisions relating to children's media regulation.

In the past year, in the wake of the Port Arthur massacre, community concern about violence in the media and its impact on children and families has had a strong and powerful voice. YMA has been at the forefront of the debate, and the standard of papers presented at the *Violence, the Media and Children* seminar attests to the organisation's ability to produce up-to-date and relevant comment and research on this issue of ongoing concern.

Speakers at the seminar were Mr John Dickie, the Director of the Office of

Film and Literature Classification (OFLC), Mr Chris Miles, Parliamentary Secretary (Cabinet) to the Prime Minister, who was on the Ministerial Committee on the Portrayal of Violence and Adelaide University PhD candidate, Mr Alexander Ask, who has been researching the impact of video games on teenagers.

Mr John Dickie provided an overview of the history and current status of the classification systems for films, videos and computer games. He also spoke about on-line services and developments in technology which might help parents regulate children's access to offensive material.

Mr Dickie said the computer games classification categories differed from those for films and videos, mainly in that there is no R category, because when they were first devised, computer games were seen to be played mostly by children. He went on: 'Approximately 52 per cent of all games classified by the (Classification) Board have been classified G and 27 per cent have been classified PG. Only 14 per cent are at M level and only 6 per cent are at MA15+ level.'

Mr Ask said: 'recent findings from the OFLC's video games research project *'Computer Games and Australians Today'*, which suggested that violent video games do not have a negative impact on people, were very encouraging for the industry'. He added: 'an implication of these findings is the notion that either the classification system should be relaxed or that there shouldn't be a system at all'.

However, Mr Ask outlined more recent evidence from psychology studies which seemed to contradict, in part, the OFLC's findings. He argued that any



Mr John Dickie, Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) speaking at the YMA 40th anniversary celebration.

policy recommendations from the OFLC research should be treated as tentative as there is evidence that violent video games can make people hostile and aggressive.

Mr Miles gave a summary of the history of the violence in the media debate as it unfolded after Port Arthur. He reported on the Ministerial Committee recommendations, their endorsement by Federal Cabinet in July and their progress since then.

He said that the Government was aware that the timeframe for submissions had been compressed. The Committee, therefore, had recommended that matters arising from the submissions be referred to the Senate Select Committee on Community Standards Relevant to the Supply of Services Utilising Electronic Technologies.

Although not a formal speaker at the seminar, Ms Liz Gilchrist, Assistant Manager ABA Children's Television subsection, outlined the ABA's responsibility in relation to the issue of violence in the media and its impact on children. She said the ABA will ensure the proposed new Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice takes community concerns into account. 