

# Communication **LAW**

## B·U·L·L·E·T·I·N

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## Violence and the mass media

**Last October, Senator Michael Tate set up the National Committee on Violence to find ways of tackling the apparently increasing violence in Australian society. Here Janet Strickland assesses the likely effectiveness of the committee that must examine the controversial problem of violence and the media.**

**A**t last the Federal Government has decided to tackle the immensely difficult problems related to violence in Australian society.

Following the "Inquiry into Strategies to Deal with the Issue of Community violence" conducted by the Social Development Committee of the Victorian Parliament (established soon after the Queen Street and Hoddle Street massacres), the new Commonwealth and state-funded National Committee will examine and report on the following:

- the contemporary state of violent crime in Australia;
  - related social, economic, psychological and environmental aspects;
  - gender issues in violence;
  - the impact of the mass media, including motion pictures and videotape recordings, in the incidence of violent behaviour;
  - the association of violence with the use of alcohol and other drugs;
  - factors instilling attitudes to violence among children and adolescents;
  - the vulnerability to violence of particular groups;
  - the development of specific strategies to prevent violence, including strategies to propagate anti-violence values throughout Australia, reduce violence involving young people, and promote community education programs;
  - the need for support and assistance to victims of violence; and
  - the need for special measures in the treatment of violent offenders.
- In my view, this holistic approach is likely

to be much more productive and constructive than any inquiry that has hitherto been conducted, and could well result in the current inquiry by the ABT into the issue of violence on television, becoming an expensive and irrelevant side-show - as was the inquiry of the Joint Select Committee on Video Material.

**T**he danger with side-shows is that they tend to distract attention from the main event - the nub of the problem - and may lead the public to falsely believe that "something is being done", whereas all that "is being done" is to nibble

away at the edges - create new guidelines here; impose a little more censorship there; invite submissions; analyse existing research; write endless reports on reports and generally appear to be addressing the problem!

Both the Inquiry by the Joint Select Committee on Video Material and the more recently established ABT Inquiry into Violence on Television were a response, in part, to the perceived public concern about depictions of violence on film and television.

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## CAMLA Annual general meeting

The fourth annual general meeting of the Media Law Association of Australasia will be held in Sydney on February 9 when the company will be re-named the Communications and Media Law Association.

Early last year the Media Law Association and CAMLA were formally merged bringing together a wide range of professional people in law and public policy areas, the arts, communications and the media.

The AGM will resolve to have the merger approved and will elect office bearers and other members of the new committee. The AGM will be held in the Albert Room of the Intercontinental Hotel in Bridge Street, Sydney at 6.30pm.

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Names or no names?  
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