

**19 November 2013**

**23-33 MARY STREET
SURRY HILLS, NSW**

MEMBERS: Ms Victoria Rubensohn (Convenor)

Ms Jane Smith

Mr Peter Attard

Dr Melissa de Zwart

Ms Fiona Jolly

APPLICANTMinister for Justice as requested by the South Australian Attorney-General

INTERESTED
PARTIES IGEA, ACCM and Australian Family Association

(WA Branch) (AFA)

BUSINESSTo review the Classification Board’s (the Board) decision to classify the computer game *God Mode* MA 15+ and consumer advice ‘Strong violence, Gaming experience may change online’.

## DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION

**1. Decision**

The Classification Review Board (the Review Board) unanimously classified the computer game MA 15+, with the consumer advice ‘Strong violence, Gaming experience may change online’.

### 2. Legislative provisions

The *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act* *1995* (Cth) (the Classification Act) governs the classification of computer games and the review of classification decisions.

*The Review Board*

Part 5 of the Classification Act outlines the provisions relevant to the Review Board and its procedures.

Section 42(1) of the Classification Act sets out the persons who may apply for review of a decision:

1. the Minister
2. the applicant for classification of the computer game, or the likely classification of the computer game under section 33
3. the publisher of the computer game, or
4. a person aggrieved by the decision.

Section 42(2) provides that if a participating Minister asks the Minister, in writing, to apply for a review of a decision, the Minister must do so.

Section 43 sets out the conditions regarding the manner and form of applications for review, including time limits. Under section 44, the Review Board must deal with an application for review in the same way that the Board deals with an application for classification of a computer game.

*Classification of Computer Games under the Classification Act*

Section 9, subject to Section 9A, provides that computer games are to be classified in accordance with the National Classification Code (the Code) and the classification guidelines. Section 9A states that a computer game that advocates the doing of a terrorist act must be classified RC.

Section 11 of the Classification Act requires that the matters to be taken into account in making a decision on the classification of a computer game include:

1. the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults; and
2. the literary, artistic or educational merit (if any) of the computer game; and
3. the general character of the computer game, including whether it is of a medical, legal or scientific character; and
4. the persons or class of persons to or amongst whom it is published or is intended or likely to be published.

*The National Classification Code*

Relevantly, the Computer Games Table of the Code under paragraph 3 provides that:

Computer games (except RC and R 18+ computer games) that depict, express or otherwise deal with sex, violence or coarse language in such a manner as to be unsuitable for viewing or playing by persons under 15 are to be classified MA 15+

The Code also sets out various principles to which classification decisions should give effect, as far as possible:

1. adults should be able to read, hear, see and play what they want;
2. minors should be protected from material likely to harm or disturb them;
3. everyone should be protected from exposure to unsolicited material that they find offensive;
4. the need to take account of community concerns about:
	1. depictions that condone or incite violence, particularly sexual violence; and
	2. the portrayal of persons in a demeaning manner.

*The Guidelines*

Three essential principles underlie the use of the *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2012* (the Guidelines), determined under section 12 of the Classification Act:

* the importance of context
* the assessment of impact, and
* the six classifiable elements – themes, violence, sex, language, drug use and nudity.

A further consideration in classifying computer games is interactivity. Due to the interactive nature of computer games and the active repetitive involvement of the participant, as a general rule computer games may have a higher impact than similarly themed depictions of the classifiable elements in film, and therefore greater potential for harm or detriment, particularly to minors.

### 3. Procedure

Five members of the Review Board met on Tuesday 19 November 2013 in response to the receipt of an application from the Minister on 7 November 2013 to conduct the review of the computer game *God Mode*, which had previously been classified MA 15+ by the Classification Board. The Review Board determined that the application was a valid application.

The Review Board was provided a written submission from IGEA, ACCM and AFA.

The Review Board received an oral submission from Ron Curry and Joshua Cavaleri from IGEA.

The Review Board received an oral submission by telephone from Professor Elizabeth Handsley, Chair of the ACCM, on behalf of the ACCM and a subsequent supplementary written submission from Professor Handsley on behalf of ACCM.

The Review Board viewed recorded gameplay footage.

The Review Board then considered the matter.

### 4. Evidence and other material taken into account

In reaching its decision, the Review Board had regard to the following:

1. the Minister’s application for review
2. IGEA’s written and oral submissions
3. ACCM’s written and oral submissions
4. AFA’s written submissions
5. the computer game, *God Mode*; and
6. the relevant provisions in the Classification Act, the Code and the Guidelines.

### 5. Background

The Review Board noted the Board’s decision report of *God Mode.*

### 6. Synopsis

*God Mode* is a third-person shooter game; a player controls a descendant of an ancient god who has been banished from Mount Olympus. In order to escape a life of eternal damnation, the player has to complete tasks and fight hordes of mythological enemies in the Maze of Hades. An online multiplayer co-op mode is available.

### 7. Findings on material questions of fact

The Review Board found that the computer game contains aspects or scenes of importance under various classifiable elements:

(a) Themes – The game’s themes can be accommodated within the MA 15+ level.

The impact of this element is no higher than strong and can be accommodated at the MA 15+ level.

(b) Violence – The game is stylised as the player’s character has to fight against Minotaurs, Cyclopes, skeletal soldiers and other monsters, all inspired by Greek mythology, in various underground locations in the Maze of Hades. The player’s avatar is a cadaver which can be customised to include elements such as sores, his exposed brain and body staples. A narrator provides sarcastic and witty comments guiding the player throughout the game.

In each level, the player encounters waves of creatures and needs to eliminate them to proceed further into the game. The player may choose to be armed with various weapons. Melee weapons, such as a spinning blade, are also available. When enemy characters are hit by the spinning blades they are chopped into pieces and when killed, their bodies explode in an unrealistic spray of blood and their body parts (including limbs, heads and torsos) scatter and bounce along the ground. These scenes are viewed from a distance. Headshots can sometimes result in decapitation, with exaggerated ragdoll effects, and post mortem damage causes unrealistic blood-spray and can result in the dismemberment of enemy characters.

The impact of this element is no higher than strong and can be accommodated at the MA 15+ level.

(c) Sex – There is no sex in the game.

(d) Language – The game does not contain any coarse language.

(e) Drug Use – There is no drug use in the game.

(f) Nudity – There is no nudity in the game.

### 8. Reasons for the decision

The Review Board unanimously decided that the impact of the classifiable elements is no higher than strong and can be accommodated within the MA 15+ classification.

The Review Board considered that the violence in the game is justified by the fantasy context of escaping a range of beasts in the Maze of Hades.

The Review Board also considered that the impact of the frequent violence in the game is significantly mitigated by its context and fantasy setting. The Review Board considers that whilst the violence is strong in impact it is unrealistic and therefore can be accommodated within the MA 15+ classification.

### 9. Summary

The Review Board decided that the computer game should be classified MA 15+.