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Censorship Ratings Scheme Hangs on Saddam

The Eros Association is considering a move to classify the controversial three minute film showing the hanging of Saddam Hussein, in an effort to expose the hypocrisy and immorality of Australia's National Classification Code and the state Classification Enforcement Acts.

Under the current system, the film depicting the hanging of the former Iraqi dictator, (freely available on the internet), would receive an R rating if submitted for classification and would then be available to adults in all states of Australia, through family outlets like suburban video libraries and petrol stations.

In stark contrast to this scenario, a film which showed no violence or non-consent of any kind but only actual scenes of adult sexuality was refused an R rating in a controversial decision by the Classification Review Board (CRB) last month. The CRB's decisions and rationale for classifying the film, *Viva Erotica*, have just been released (<http://www.oflc.gov.au/special.html?n=262&p=66>) and it has stated that the film 'would cause offence to a reasonable adult' and therefore must carry the most restrictive X rating at a federal level and a ban in every state. The film's distributor, Adultshop.com. - a listed company on the Australian Stock Exchange - has vowed to take the issue into the Federal Court (<http://censorship.adultshop.com/Default.aspx>).

Eros CEO, Fiona Patten said that the 1995 UK film called *Executions* which showed a series of real-life, state-sponsored executions, almost identical to the Saddam film, had been given an R Rating by the Classification Board which had set a precedent for these types of films. "The CRB is basically saying to the Australian public that the film of Saddam's execution cannot be said to 'cause offence to a reasonable adult' while *Viva Erotica* can. This determination is so far from the reality of what Australian public opinion is on these issues, that the federal Attorney General needs to urgently intervene and conduct an enquiry", she said.

While not wanting to ban documentaries on any subject, Ms Patten said that films depicting real murders or executions and real or overly-intense simulated acts of violence, should be the most restricted films under the current censorship scheme. Currently this is not the case because films which show non-violent and actual sex acts between consenting adults are the most restricted and can draw fines and jail sentences for sale in all states.

"State Attorney's General need to be aware of the fact that they are supporting state regulation which could allow the Saddam film to be sold from convenience stores while at the same time sending an adult

shop owner to jail for selling *Viva Erotica* through an adults-only premises”, she said. “This is not a popular or a logical approach to censorship in Australia and defies every opinion poll ever carried out on the issue.”

She also cautioned Federal Communications Minister, Helen Coonan, about where she will draw the line on mobile phone content later this month. “At present the Minister is indicating that she will allow adults to download the hanging of Saddam Hussein and the film Executions on a mobile phone with a PIN but not allow other adults to download *Viva Erotica* with the same PIN. If she allows this regime to go ahead she will be telling the Australian public to effectively ‘make war not love’ and will reinforce the notion within Australian youth that violence is somehow more acceptable or less offensive than consenting sexuality”.

Ms Patten said the issue was not about legalising pornography but was about governments setting moral agendas that were truthful and representative. “We all engage in sex acts throughout our adult lives”, she said. “But very few of us will be involved in killing or seriously assaulting someone. Our censorship ratings should follow these sort of precepts and in fact should mirror the criminal codes rather than the outmoded moral codes of religious groups or the dictates of political extremists”.

She called on the State and Commonwealth Attorney’s General to change the Classification Code to reflect killing and violence as the most restricted depictions with non violent erotica and sex being less restricted.

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