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Australian Censorship History

"When one pauses to consider how thoroughly corrupted our censors must be by this time, it is difficult to have any faith whatever in their judgement of what is and is not corrupting to others. If to the pure all things are pure, it may well follow that to the corrupted all things are corrupt."

- Judith Wright, 1970 (in "The Age of Aquarius - and Queensland" in [Australia's Censorship Crisis](#))

Chronology of Events

- [Films, Publications & Computer Games: 1920-1995](#) | [1996-1999](#) | [2000 on](#)
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Films, Publications & Computer Games

[1920 - 1969](#) | [1970 - 1979](#) | [1980 - 1989](#) | [1990](#) | [1991](#) | [1992](#) | [1993](#) | [1994](#) | [1995](#) | [1996 - 1999](#) | [2000 to present](#)

1920-1969

- [Extracts from OFLC Annual Reports 1925-1963](#). This document was originally made available by the OFLC on their web site prior to the OFLC site being revised in 1999.
- [Censorship, citizenship and democracy: the regulation of literature, c.1930 - 1960](#), Patricia Holt
- [The way it happened: A timeline of Australian Censorship - November 1915...May 1999](#), The Age, 26 May 99

1956:

The Film Censorship Board was established, a full-time statutory board headed by the statutory office of Chief Censor. [Ref: Merrin Mason, Parliamentary Library Issues Brief, 20 Oct 92]

1970-1979

November 1971:

Following the Minister for Customs, Don Chipp, announcing the government intended to introduce legislation for an R classification for films, the new classifications: G, NRC, M and R, came into effect and R-rated films opened in cinemas around Australia.

1973:

A review of the practical implementation of the Government's previously announced censorship policy, that:

- * it shall be a person's right to be free to read or view whatever he may wish, and
- * persons (and those in their care) be not exposed to unsolicited material offensive to them.

was conducted relative to Customs Regulation 4A. This regulation prohibited import of any literary or other work or matter that:

- "(a) are blasphemous, indecent or obscene; or
- (b) unduly emphasize matters of sex, horror, violence or crime, or are likely to encourage depravity..."

15 June 1973:

Following the review, the Department of Customs and Excise issued a memorandum stating, inter alia, that:

"Customs resources engaged in screening imported goods should be primarily concerned with the detection of prohibited imports other than material which offends Regulation 4A...For the time being there are to be no prosecutions under the Customs Act for offences involving pornography."

1980-1989

1 February 1984:

The Classification of Publications Ordinance 1983 (ACT) came into effect, establishing the new "national" censorship classification scheme covering the sale and hire of printed matter and videotapes. The amendments created an additional rating called extra-restricted or X to cover explicit sex. The Ordinance

was developed as model legislation for the States and Northern Territory. Amendments to the Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations and the Customs (Cinematograph Films) Regulations, also came into effect. [[More info](#)]

6 April 1984:

Censorship Ministers met and agreed in principle to amendments requiring compulsory (instead of voluntary) classification of all videotapes. Also new classification guidelines further restricting the portrayal of violence were approved. [[More info](#)]

May 1984:

The Victorian Films Act was proclaimed, introducing an X-rating for sexually explicit films. [[The Age, 12 May 99](#)]

29 May 1984:

The A.C.T House of Assembly endorsed a for compulsory (instead of voluntary) classification of videotapes and rejected an amendment to delete the X category from the operation of the law in the A.C.T. The Senate voted against disallowing the Classification of Publications Ordinance 1983 (ACT) and Regulations, a topic that had been under debate since early April. [[More info](#)]

7 June 1984:

The Labor Premier of Western Australia, Mr Burke announced an absolute prohibition on any X-rated material in Western Australia from 1 September 1984. [[More info](#)]

27 August 1984:

The NSW Premier, Mr Wran vowed to ban hard core pornography or "video porn". [[More info](#)]

3 October 1984:

The Victorian Government announced that it proposed, at least for the time being, to ban X-rated material. [[More info](#)]

4 October 1984:

By 4 October, the Western Australian, New South Wales and Victorian Governments had announced they intended to ban X-rated videos. Queensland and Tasmania maintained their original position of not permitting X-rated videos. South Australia had not announced any change to their legislation permitting the sale of X-rated videos, which had been in place prior to the Commonwealth/A.C.T. "model" legislation. By March 1985, South Australia had joined the ban, at which time X-rated videos could only be sold legally in the A.C.T. (and perhaps N.T.). [[More info](#)]

17 October 1984:

The Senate passed a motion calling for a moratorium on the availability of X-rated videos. On the same day, the Senate Select Committee on Video Material was established to conduct an inquiry into, among other things, "the likely

effects upon people, especially children, of exposure to violent, pornographic or otherwise obscene material". [[More info](#)]

October 1984:

Censorship Ministers endorsed revised classification guidelines, in response to alleged widespread community concern about permissible levels of violence in "M", "R" and "X" classified films. [[More info](#)]

December 1984:

The classification guidelines for the X classification were amended to prohibit all depictions suggesting coercion or non-consent of any kind. [[More info](#)]

19 March 1985:

The Joint Select Committee on Video Material was established to conduct a further inquiry, with the same terms of reference as the prior Senate Select Committee. [[More info](#)]

28 March 1985:

The Report of the Senate Select Committee on Video Material was issued. [[More info](#)]

28 April 1988:

Three years after its establishment, The Joint Select Committee on Video Material issued its report. [[More info](#)]

April 1988:

The Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC), a non-statutory office within the Attorney-General's portfolio, headed by John Dickie in the position of Chief Censor/Director of the OFLC, was established.

29 June 1988:

State Attorneys General (Censorship Ministers) met and considered the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee. The Ministers did not approve Recommendation 1, that is, the creation of a new "Non-Violent Erotica" category to replace the "X" classification. Instead, they recommended to the Federal Government that it place a ban on X-rated material. The Federal Government did not act on this recommendation [[More info](#)]

1990

May 1990:

Censorship Procedure Recommendations, Australian Law Reform Commission.
"With the approval of the State and Territory governments the federal Attorney General asked the Commission [in May 1990] to report on how the laws relating to the censorship and classification of film and printed