CI 250 Arts Access Australia (AAA)

7 July
The Executive Director
Australian Law Reform Commission
GPO Box 3708, SYDNEY NSW 2001

By email to: classification@alrc.gov.au

7th July 2011

To whom it may concern,

RE: Response to the ALRC National Classification Scheme Review (IP40)

Arts Access Australia (AAA) is the national peak body for arts and disability.

As representative of Australia's artists with disability and disability-led companies, AAA is a strong advocate for freedom of expression and for the right of artists to communicate their work as widely and freely as possible.

The purpose of classification is primarily to enable adults to make an informed choice as to what they want to see, hear and read, and what to allow their children to have access to. It is not and should not be used as a means to censor material that is otherwise legal.

However, the ongoing calls for the classification of artworks over the past few years, largely based on responses to the work of just one artist, has already had the disturbing effect of some artists choosing to avoid controversial themes. This is particularly relevant to those artists with disability who work within a disability arts context, where themes relating to their own or a collective experience of impairment can be potentially confronting for some audiences.

This not only presents a threat to freedom of expression but also presents a direct risk the development of our creative sector and the livelihood of the artists working within it. It also presents a risk to Australia's international reputation when calls to expand the range of materials that should be banned, restricted or classified creates the danger of Australia being seen as a producer of bland, meaningless content that does not fully reflect the breadth of our diverse experience.

AAA supports the suggestion of the Arts Law Centre of Australia that the ALRC should take a practical approach to developing a standardised national classification framework that acknowledges it is not possible, nor necessary to classify all content, which values freedom of expression, places a much greater onus on industries to self regulate within Government-mandated guidelines, and that supports the education of Australians that they can take responsibility for the content that they and their children access. We are happy to support all of the recommendations outlined by the Arts Law Centre of Australia in their submission to the ALRC National Classification Scheme Review of July 2011.

The arts – whether making it, attending it, or coming across it accidentally as part of our everyday engagement with public and private spaces – provide an invaluable means of expressing and understanding the wide variety of opinions and beliefs vital to the development of Australia's collective culture.

Arts Access Australia calls for a national classification system that helps the arts flourish in Australia and that provides audiences with information about the arts content they want to access, rather than censor or restrict access to something that discerning Australian adults should be educated to do for themselves and for their children.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like any more information about this submission.

With best regards,

Kate Larsen
CEO
Arts Access Australia