List of Questions

Approach to the Inquiry

Question 1. In this Inquiry, should the ALRC focus on developing a new framework for classification, or improving key elements of the existing framework?

Develop a new framework. The current one, which focusses on what the classifier deems to be an "appropriate" audience for the material, is based on a design reflecting content, capabilities, attitudes and technology of a century ago. It is

- indirect,
- judgemental,
- inflexible,
- labour intensive,
- expensive,
- static (the classification remains fixed even if society's viewpoint has moved – how relevant nowadays are the classifications issued by the Hayes Office?)
- opaque (the producer has no way to know in advance how any classification will come out)
- unable to retroactively respond to changing societal views (once categorised it stays that way) and
- unable to reflect the views of any sub-groups within society (a movie rated for Children might be an anathema to a religious group).

(As a systems architect) a more appropriate framework would be to identify the characteristics that might be taken into account by individuals when choosing whether to view the material and which are less likely to change.

(Not being an expert in the field) off the top of my head:

- Sex
- Humour
- Violence
- Profanity
- Horror
- Adult themes
- Children's themes

Each of these then would be published on (say) a percentage scale.

These numbers would be relatively invariant over time while their interpretation as to suitability for any given person or persons can be changed on the fly.

For those for whom this would be too complex, you could publish a recommended mapping (e.g. for children Sex < 10, Humour <= 100, Horror < 5, Violence < 10, Adult themes < 5, Children's themes <=100).

And interactive displays could display the recommended classification (e.g. Children) but with a button allowing the user to see the underlying "raw" values.

So if I'm violence-adverse but more accepting of sexual content I might choose to allow my child to see a film rated PG on the basis of its sexual content but refuse to let her go to a "Children" rated movie with high horror or violence.

Of course browsers could then be set to reject material based on the user's settings.

And there exists a possibility that at least part of the material could be processed by computer to come up with these figures.

And it is reasonable to demand that producers of the material provide these figures .. which can then be audited at random to check their validity. This is actually cheaper for the producers of the material since they can do it once per production then run the numbers through models of the various classification bodies to come up with an estimate of the outcome of having the material assessed by them.

All of these combine to remove the load from the government and replace it with an auditing role .. much less costly and more do-able to more material.

Why classify and regulate content?

Question 2. What should be the primary objectives of a national classification scheme?

To provide potential consumers with the information need to make an informed decision.

What content should be classified and regulated?

Basically all of it – all the above system requires is that the producers of any sort of material attach a (pre-specified) list of the content.... sort of a precis. Hardly a big ask since each should have that knowledge available as part of their production anyway.