



**Campaigning for a
better media**

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

BROADCASTING STANDARDS AUTHORITY

LEVEL 2, 119 GHUZNEE STREET

WELLINGTON 6011

Dear Sir

Media Matters in NZ (incorporating Children's Media Watch) was founded 25 years ago as a group whose purpose was to advocate to ensure that a safe media environment exists for the children of New Zealand. We have about 250 members and supporters throughout the country who believe that the young and the vulnerable need such protection.

A report in 2013 from Otago University says what Media Matters and other advocacy groups around the world have been saying for 25 years, i.e. that watching repetitive violence on TV encourages the young and the vulnerable to see violence as a solution to their problems. You will doubtless be aware that while overall crime is trending down in NZ, violent crime among young people is going up. (see Susan Edmonds, *Herald on Sunday* February 23, 2014).

The pity is that in the pursuit of advertising dollars, the electronic media continue to expose kids to violence, whether physical or verbal, and disturbing sex acts, without taking account of the research, which dates back 40 years, and which has resulted in growing levels of youth crime involving these various forms of violence in NZ. The fact is that violence is depicted on television out of all proportion to its actual occurrence in real life and it is these repeated acts which desensitise kids to them in real life. This is all well-established in research world wide.

The current Government is seeking to do something about this. Powerful interests are ranged against the Hon Claire Curran and she is to be congratulated on holding firm to her government's

current intention to reform of television regulation . We have taken both the BSA and TVNZ to the high court over their laxness, and have won both times.

We are particularly supportive of government efforts of to create a commercial-free channel which children can watch without being badgered to buy harmful food and drink, and shiny and expensive electronic devices that their parents can't afford. We believe that the worst examples of programmes which encourage and promote sex and violence are the result of the commercial imperative. While it may seem a stretch to link poor diet and lack of exercise with graphic sex and violence, they are all the results of the impoverished lives which many children are living in NZ today.

Your initiative to discover what viewers think about the timing and incidence of watches and warnings is to be commended. So is the fact that your website is much more User-Friendly than the previous one.

However, there is one major inaccuracy in your consultation invitation and that is the statement in your Long Consultation Book on the BSA website, that the Watershed is well and widely understood by parents concerned to protect their children from the worst effects of inappropriate material on television. The simple fact is that most parents don't even know that such a thing exists, for the perfectly understandable reason that it is nowhere visible.

The particular purpose of this letter, therefore, is to draw to your attention the fact that , while most countries in the Western World (including the UK, Canada, the EU, and Australia), operate what is called a Watershed (which internationally takes the form of a notice posted at 8.30 pm each evening, warning viewers that programmes which follow are for adult viewers only and contain sexual or violent content which is unsuitable for the young and impressionable . NZ is an international outlier in that it does not operate any such visible warning system. The Broadcasters have been having things their own way, in that sense, for far too long. They would prefer not to have a classification system at all, but one as confusing and non-sensical as the present one, no doubt suits them very well. It gets in the way of the commercials

The Broadcasters themselves maintain they operate a Watershed system although it is nowhere visible, and they further maintain that they prefer 9.00 pm. As of course they would. It fits very satisfactorily with their system of commercial breaks, which is their only real interest. Anyone coming to NZ from elsewhere and watching television, would be at least bemused, and at worst appalled, by the extent to which the commercial breaks dominate the viewers experience at the expense of the programmes. Result – viewers buy set-top boxes so they can block out all commercials altogether.

NZ has one of the most permissive television regulatory environments in the world. We believe that this situation may be linked to higher youth crime and suicide. Introducing an 8.30 pm Watershed is, therefore we believe, imperative.

A uniform system of classification across both free-to-air and pay-per-view, will work better than the present confusion of different classifications but only if and when the actual classification itself is made visible on the corner of the screen. How busy and distracted parents are expected to know

the content of particular programmes when they are not there to be seen, is unreasonable and unrealistic

We will be forwarding a copy of this letter to the Minister of Broadcasting, the Hon. Claire Curran, and the Minister for Children, the Hon. Tracy Martin, but, as mentioned above, believe that there is an interconnection between the harm which television is doing daily to our more economically vulnerable children, and the lack of better regulation including the lack of a Watershed.

In those circumstances, we do urge you to bring these threads together, to accomplish the desirable outcome.

Yours faithfully

(JOHN TERRIS QSO)

National President, Media Matters in NZ.

31/8/18.