

Copy for Ted

// = yes, I did add these - but I don't think they are anything Council would disagree with.

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9th February, 2001

Communications White Paper Consultation,
c/o CII,
DTI,
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A NEW FUTURE FOR COMMUNICATIONS

The Campaign Against Censorship has the following comments. Comment has been restricted to those points where views were sought and which fall within the Campaign's remit.

Section 4.1. The Campaign supports rules designed to prevent monopoly ownership in the media, preserve diversity of opinion and protect freedom of choice.

Section 4.9.2. The Campaign believes in freedom of opinion and expression and therefore does not support a ban on ownership by religious bodies of terrestrial digital licences.

Sections 5.5.3 and 5.8.8. The Campaign does not wish to comment in detail on the regulatory proposals. However, it believes that where content is concerned self-regulation is preferable to rules imposed on the media from outside. We also wish to record here our conviction that it is for parents and carers, not for the state, to decide what children and vulnerable people are allowed to see and hear.

Sections 6.1 and 6.3. The Campaign takes issue with statements (see especially section 6.3.1) which falsely imply that viewers constitute one homogeneous body and that minorities (eg. homosexuals) do not exist or have no right of access to broadcast material which may be offensive to the majority. This is the philosophy of an authoritarian society, not of the democratic, pluralist state which Britain aspires to be.

Section 6.3.2.link (page 60) describes the result of research showing that viewers' tolerance of material varies with time, context and means of access. This is already recognised by the British Board of Film Classification, whose categories vary depending on the defined audience.

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Section 6.11. The Campaign is opposed to statutory pre-publication censorship of video, DVD and computer games. However, so long as such censorship is practised, it would prefer that the British Board of Film Classification remain responsible for it. We also hold very strongly that the law should be changed so as to make the BBFC in its role as state censor responsible to the Department of Culture, not the Home Office. It is illogical for the BBFC to remain responsible to the Home Office, whereas all other electronic media come within the remit of the Department of Culture.

The change might well lead to the creation of a more consistent framework for content regulation. For example, the 'U' and 'PG' classification for video recordings would apply to terrestrial programmes screened before the watershed, while the 'R18' classification would govern late evening satellite television broadcasts which can only be seen by the use of an adults-only smart-card.

Section 6 raises several issues of importance which, because of the shorter than normal deadline for submission of comments, the Campaign has not been able to address in detail. We would welcome the opportunity to make further representations at a later date.

Regulatory Impact Assessment

Section 2.2.1. The Campaign points out that 'accepted community standards in content' vary from community to community and change over time. Any regulatory body must be flexible and open to variation and change.

Section 2.2.3. Any consumer panel concerned with content ought to include representatives of minority groups (see comment on 6.3.1. above.)

(Signed)

Hon. Secretary, CAC

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