

News Release

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CRC 2010 Urges Greater Tripartite Collaboration and Consumer Empowerment

*Calls for increased industry co-regulation, enhanced public education efforts
and better parental empowerment tools*

Singapore, 15 September 2010 – The accelerating digital revolution and Singapore’s changing social and artistic landscape necessitate a mindset change on the key question of who should be primarily responsible for the regulation of media content. In the new media environment, with ever-increasing content streaming through the largely unregulated Internet, existing gate-keeping methods of media regulation will become less effective. Responsibility must shift further over time towards a tripartite collaboration of government, industry and community, with the populace empowered with relevant skills and tools to enhance their ability to make more informed media choices, for themselves and for their children.

These were among the key observations of the Censorship Review Committee (CRC) 2010, which released its report today.

Led by Mr Goh Yew Lin, Managing Director of GK Goh Holdings Ltd and Chairman of the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, the 17-member Censorship Review Committee (CRC) was appointed in September 2009 by the Acting Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA) to conduct a mid-term review of issues across the spectrum of broadcast media, films, videos, video games, publications, new media and the arts.

The CRC spent nearly a year reviewing the existing regulatory framework; interacting with the public, industry, media and arts practitioners to understand their views and concerns; and undertaking a public survey on key issues. The feedback showed, overall, that a significant majority of Singaporeans is satisfied with current content guidelines, and that there is a broad desire to protect the young from unsuitable content, and to respect racial and religious sensitivities. There have also been calls for greater freedom of artistic expression and creativity, and for the elimination of censorship. Taking note of the various viewpoints, the CRC has proposed about 80 key principles and recommendations hinged on the following five main themes:

- Greater freedom must be allied with a greater acceptance of responsibility, both on the part of artists and media industry players, and on the part of parents;
- A hitherto mostly top-down regulatory structure must evolve towards more open engagement involving a tripartite collaboration among regulators, industry and the community;
- Co-regulation, by which regulatory responsibility is shared with industry players, should be encouraged wherever appropriate;

- Parents must be empowered with sufficient information and simple tools to guide their children’s exposure to content, supported by a systematic programme in schools to increase resilience against the negative aspects of media proliferation;
- The present under-resourcing of media regulation needs to be addressed, and efforts already underway to improve regulatory transparency and public involvement should be accelerated.

Touching on the key recommendations of the CRC report, Mr Goh said: “The pace of change in new media is beginning to outpace our ability to cope from a regulatory perspective. Next-generation broadband services and the growing convergence of television with personal computers will lead to even more consumers accessing films through the Internet, bypassing our local regulatory framework. We need to move away from the prevailing reliance on government as guardian, and focus on the education and empowerment of parents to make appropriate and informed choices for their families.”

Some of the key recommendations by the CRC are highlighted below. The full list of recommendations can be found at [Annex A](#). The terms of reference and the list of CRC members can be found at [Annex B](#).

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Public Education

- A sustained, consistent and up-to-date cyberwellness programme should be incorporated as a compulsory element in the curriculum of all primary and secondary school students.

Parental Empowerment and Informed Adult Choice

- Parents can be better empowered with tools such as an optional Internet filter and easy-to-use parental lock systems for the Internet and TV. Rating systems should be harmonized where possible so that even an occasional user can intuitively grasp the implications of a rating. Advisories should be more detailed and specific to guide consumer choice. The MDA is also encouraged to experiment with new information portals and user-driven services.

Engaging the Community

- Strengthen the role of the various citizen committees advising MDA and allow for direct nominations by the public for appointment to these committees.
- Further develop the existing MDA online database to provide the community with more information on regulatory processes, survey findings and policy reviews, and including an enhanced forum for public feedback and discussion.
- Tap the ideas and hear the aspirations and concerns of young Singaporeans by adding a youth panel to the range of the MDA's citizen committees.

Engaging the Industry

- Improve the channels for dialogue with artists and media industry sectors.
- Explore more avenues for co-regulation, including term-licensing for arts groups, subject to agreed criteria, which would remove the need for pre-vetting of scripts; and to allow video distributors to self-certify G and PG content.

Film and Video Classification System

- A PG13 rating should be introduced to provide a clearer signal to parents on the nature of content and to facilitate a more appropriate rating of films with more mature content.
- Harmonize ratings across platforms.

New Media

- Replace the current symbolic 100-website ban with a transparent server-level filtering service to protect children, combined with a simple and well-highlighted choice to opt in at the point of subscribing to, or renewing, Internet services.

R21 Content on Various Platforms

- Where consumers have the ability to exercise controlled choice, as is the case with Video-on-Demand, R21 content should be permitted. However, its introduction should be carefully calibrated, and only allowed if there are adequate safeguards in place to prevent access by minors.

Arts Entertainment

- Implement term licensing for established arts groups, and review and broaden the categories of arts entertainment exempted from licensing. For performances targeted at niche audiences, such as ticketed poetry recitals, explore co-regulation through an online declaration system for content.

The complete CRC 2010 Report can be accessed at the CRC website:

www.crc2009.sg.

The following information can also be accessed on the CRC website:

- 1. Censorship Review Committee 2010 Survey Report**
- 2. Public Feedback (this comprises feedback from those who have agreed to have their views published)**
- 3. Industry Feedback**

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LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE CENSORSHIP REVIEW COMMITTEE

Principles

Classification Principles

- (i) Classification is a service to guide and empower consumer choice. Policy decisions pertaining to classification should therefore be based on its utility to consumers.
- (ii) To be effective, classification criteria should be simple, consistent and easily grasped even by occasional consumers.
- (iii) Ratings should be accompanied by sufficient and readily accessible information to empower informed decision-making.
- (iv) Classification boundaries must be set according to community standards determined via an engagement process involving the regulator, community and the industry.
- (v) The values and beliefs of minority groups should be respected on the understanding that these are within legal bounds. Consumer advice is the best way to ensure effective audience segmentation, so that those who think they may be offended will be warned away.
- (vi) The consumer has the right to expect excellent service, and key performance indicators for regulators should be developed to reflect this as an objective.
- (vii) There should be increased opportunities for self-regulation and co-regulation over time.
- (viii) Effective enforcement is a necessary part of regulation.
- (ix) Resources commensurate to the needs of a more intensive tripartite engagement should be made available.

Censorship Principles

- (i) Censorship is a necessary tool, but a blunt one. Its application, while with determination, should be with regret.
- (ii) Censorship is a restriction on personal freedoms, imposed by the government but reflecting the will of a substantial majority of the people. To be accepted as valid, it must be seen to fairly reflect widely-held sentiments.
- (iii) The boundaries of censorship, being subjective, should be set through an ongoing engagement with the public.

- (iv) Censorship decisions should be sensitive to context. Depiction is not necessarily promotion, and discussion is not necessarily incitement.
- (v) There should be clear accountability for censorship decisions. The competent authority should be identified when a decision is taken to disallow or censor.
- (vi) The Internet revolution has rendered some forms of censorship ineffective. For example, the proliferation of film content on the Internet has made the disallowing of a film primarily a statement of disapproval rather than an effective means of preventing the film's propagation.
- (vii) Greater emphasis should be placed on education, awareness and parental empowerment. Token gestures should be replaced by more effective tools.

Key Recommendations

Internet and the future Media Landscape

1. The Media Development Authority (MDA) should undertake an in-depth expert-led study to design and eventually implement a robust and consistent regulatory framework that could be applied on any new media forms, and which is clear and transparent to both the industry and consumers.
2. Classification systems and content standards governing the different media platforms should be harmonised wherever possible so that consumers are better able to understand and utilise the ratings to make informed decisions.
3. Existing content codes governing broadcast services should be extended to mobile-only content services. Content that is freely accessible to all mobile service subscribers only via mobile devices and not via the Internet should be subject to free-to-air (FTA) TV content standards.
4. Those offered on a subscription/on-demand basis to mobile service subscribers only via mobile devices and not via the Internet should be subject to subscription TV/Video-on-demand (VOD) standards.
5. The symbolic 100-website ban imposed by the government should be replaced with a transparent, server-level filtering service, combined with a simple and well-highlighted choice to opt in at the point of subscribing to or renewing the Internet service.
6. Government should retain its power to ban websites on the grounds of national security. However, some form of checks should be put in place to ensure transparency and accountability of such government actions.
7. Public education efforts on media literacy and cyberwellness should be enhanced to ensure that the public is equipped with updated information and knowledge to deal with the emergence of new media forms and the attendant evolution of media regulations. This will enable parents to take frontline responsibility for their children's explorations in cyberspace and ensure that children can deal with any undesirable content they may encounter.

Public Education

8. A sustained cyberwellness programme for all primary and secondary students, which is consistent across all schools, should be incorporated into the curriculum by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Such a programme should be made compulsory for all schools.
9. Schools should continue to engage the services of community groups for additional cyberwellness initiatives.
10. A single, permanent and properly resourced body should be tasked to oversee and coordinate all media literacy and cyberwellness programmes across ministries.

Parental Empowerment

11. The aggregating body of public education efforts should work with the National Family Council (NFC) to strategise, coordinate and implement effective outreach programmes for parents to increase their level of awareness, understanding and skills in mitigating potential risks of media on their children.
12. There should be greater promotion of tools such as Internet filters, parental lock mechanisms, the media classification systems and so on through public education to facilitate parents in guiding their children's media consumption.
13. If R21 content is introduced on subscription channels and VOD, operators should set the parental locks on by default.
14. The MDA should simplify the nomenclature of ratings across all classification systems to facilitate intuitive understanding and promote greater usage of the classification systems.
15. For FTA TV and pay-TV programmes, the classification advisory logos should be displayed on screen for the entire duration of the programme.
16. Classification advisories should be accompanied by consumer advice in press/publication/website programme listings as well as during the introduction of the programme.

Engaging the Community

17. Progressively move towards a tripartite engagement involving regulator, community and industry.
18. More resources should be devoted to facilitate this so as to ensure deeper engagement with the community and the industry.
19. A youth panel should be set up to reach out to the younger generation by communicating and garnering their views on content and media issues.
20. Emphasise public consultation as an essential process in policy and regulatory reviews.

21. Increase the transparency of regulatory processes to the community by increasing the information made available to the public. This could include developing a database of public complaint cases and the publication of survey findings, policy reviews and content guidelines.
22. Evaluation and measurement mechanisms should be developed to track the success of community engagement efforts.
23. Improve the transparency of the membership selection process of the various citizen committees advising the MDA on content issues. MICA to take the lead in drawing up a set of principles, objectives and criteria to guide the nomination and appointment process for members of these committees.
24. Broaden public participation in the regulatory process by allowing for public nomination for a proportion of the advisory committee positions. The MDA to have a correspondingly reduced role in the direct selection of citizen committee members so as to enhance the committees' independence and credibility. The MDA should publicise the opportunity to serve on committees through advertisements and on government websites, with sufficient information on the commitment and qualifications required.
25. Increase industry representation on the citizen committees for better sharing of insights and concerns.
26. To eventually distance the MDA from the selection of appeal committee members since the latter is set up to consider appeals against the MDA's decisions.
27. The Broadcasting, Publications and Arts Appeal Committee should be given the final decision-making power to align the powers of this committee with that of the Films Appeal Committee.

Engaging the Industry

28. Regular formal consultations with the industry should be introduced to provide a framework/channel for industry to propose changes to policies and guidelines.
29. Promote greater Industry-Community dialogue and interactions.
30. Increase representation of industry practitioners on content advisory committees.
31. Industry practitioners should be allowed to make direct representations to the advisory committees to facilitate Industry-Community dialogue.
32. An inclusive term licensing scheme for arts entertainment should be introduced expeditiously.
33. An online self-declaration system for niche arts performances should be introduced so that such performances do not have to go through the pre-vetting process.

34. Co-regulation of video content up to a PG13 rating should be introduced.
35. Industry should support the regulatory framework and be encouraged to assist in ensuring greater compliance by all parties.
36. Industry should be encouraged to participate in the setting up and maintenance of a community-wide focused online media portal.
37. For mediums that are not mandated to provide consumer advice such as audio recordings, industry players should be encouraged to take on their social responsibility by voluntarily providing consumer advice on explicit and mature content.

Principles of Classification Framework

38. A simple, consistent and, where possible, harmonised framework for classification should be adopted to better guide parents in making media choices for their families.
39. The Film Classification System should be used as a reference standard for other media.
40. The labellings on ratings for the Film Classification System should be reviewed to make it more intuitively understood by the public.

Film and Video Classification System

41. A PG13 rating should be introduced to provide a stronger signal to parents on the nature of the content and to facilitate appropriate rating of films with some mature content.
42. Industry co-regulation should be introduced for videos meant for distribution, up to a PG13 rating.

R21 Content on Various Platforms

43. The R21 rating should be retained as the highest rating.
44. A calibrated approach should be adopted towards allowing R21 content on various platforms and at Housing Development Board (HDB) estates.
45. R21 content should be allowed at HDB estate cinemas with various mitigating measures such as time-belting and restrictions on advertising.
46. R21 content should be allowed on subscription TV and VOD with a strong caveat that a simple-to-use parental lock mechanism is available.
47. R21 videos should be allowed only when the industry is able to reassure stakeholders of its ability to enforce the restriction of sale to minors.

48. An adequate, transparent and enforceable penalty system should be put in place.
49. A tripartite relationship between the public, industry and the regulator should be strongly encouraged so that better mechanisms can be put in place to guide and protect the young.

Film Festivals

50. Current approach of giving greater leeway for films screened at film festivals to encourage film appreciation and audience development for niche performances should be continued; the films should nevertheless meet the fundamental guidelines of not undermining public order or the nation's security, denigrating race or religion or eroding moral values with extreme content.

Mature Content on FTA TV

51. Standards for TV PG-rated programmes should be aligned with that of PG-rated films. Content rated under the new PG13 rating should be screened on FTA TV after 11pm, with consumer advice. PG films should be screened after 10pm.
52. Further liberalisation of content on FTA TV should be guided by the citizen consultative committees for television programmes following the introduction of PG13 which would make PG-rated films more innocuous than at present.

Video Games Classification System

53. The current Video Games Classification System which has ratings up to M18 should be retained; but continue to monitor need for a R21 rating.
54. A participative forum, with user-driven information system which also provides relevant information to parents and users, should be encouraged; for example, a local version of the Internet Movie Database with information for parents and a local online forum which allows users to edit content.
55. The use of local ratings for online games developed locally should be encouraged for greater social responsibility and effective self regulation.
56. The MDA to work with the industry to provide more information on video games classification systems of other countries at points of sale.

Publications

57. Existing system of co-regulation with the industry for publications should be continued; there is no need for a detailed classification system.
58. Position on adult publications such as *Playboy* should be guided by general social norms. Censorship Review Committee 2010 Survey reflects that a majority continue to oppose the sales of such magazines.

59. Same content guidelines should be applied to both foreign and local magazines, with consistent requirements of shrink-wrapping and prominent display of advisories for racier adult lifestyle magazines.
60. A clear set of guidelines for self-regulation of magazine covers should be developed and published.

Audio Recordings

61. Status quo of self-regulation and voluntary consumer advice for sensitive content for audio recordings should be maintained; online portals should be encouraged to enable user-generated consumer advice.

Content Standards

62. Content standards to continue to be guided by the MDA's citizen committees as judgement on standards requires experience and knowledge.
63. A flexible and contextual approach for homosexual content should be adopted.
64. More emphasis should be placed on context and impact of usage when assessing coarse language in media content and not to censor such content so long as intent is not to denigrate any race or religion.
65. Independent research should be undertaken to establish a firm basis for the full liberalisation of dialect content policies. In the interim, a calibrated approach should be adopted. This could involve allowing for an expansion of the number of subscription and VOD channels with dialect content, and taking a more accommodating approach in approving locally-made films that use dialect in a contextually justifiable way.
66. Where content is banned for reasons of public interest, the competent authority should be named for clearer accountability to help build a collaborative tripartite partnership for classification with regulator, industry and community.

Arts Entertainment

67. A term licensing scheme that will be extended to arts groups based on agreed criteria should be implemented. The criteria would be decided by the regulator in consultation with the consultative panels and arts groups. The scheme should include an effective and transparent compliance system.
68. The information (including rating and consumer advice) provided to consumers to help them make informed choices should be enhanced. This could be done by engaging advisory committee members and the public to provide their inputs on the sort of content they would find useful in the Arts database.
69. The categories of arts entertainment that can be exempted from licensing should be reviewed and expanded. Other means of co-regulation for performances targeted at niche audiences should be explored such as through an online declaration system for content.

70. The Broadcast, Publications and Arts Appeal Committee should be empowered with final decision-making power, as in the case of the Films Appeal Committee.
71. Regulator should further enhance its domain expertise as an arts regulator.
72. Regulator should engage in more active dialogue with the arts groups and make public the basis of their decisions, as the public is ultimately the judge of what constitutes sound decisions.

Ensuring Compliance

73. An effective and holistic regulatory system needs to be supported by measures to encourage compliance. This should be supported by educational outreach programmes.
74. The range of penalties should be calibrated to include deterrent penalties for persistent breaches.
75. The penalty system for each industry segment should be transparent to both industry and the public.
76. The MDA should review the manner in which enforcement activities are undertaken to improve their effectiveness, and seek ways to enhance community oversight.
77. Greater resourcing of enforcement efforts is required to facilitate the introduction of policy changes towards greater co-regulation.
78. Feedback channels should be easily accessible and prominently publicised.

Media Advisory Council

79. MICA to consider the need for a body such as the Media Advisory Council (MAC) to undertake the following efforts:
 - Be the focal point of community participation by subsuming the committees under the MDA, taking on the responsibility of advising the MDA on content regulations and having oversight of the list of government-blocked websites.
 - Aggregate the existing public education efforts and centralise government outreach programmes, acting as a single interface between government and private organisations.
 - Undertake research to assist the MDA's media content policy formulation.

Future CRCs

80. Future CRCs should be renamed to reflect the diverse nature of issues involved in media regulations.

BACKGROUND

The CRC was appointed in Sept 2009 by the Acting Minister of MICA to look into content regulatory policies for the broadcast media, films, videos, publications, arts entertainment and new media. The Committee of 17 members, chaired by Mr Goh Yew Lin, was drawn from various fields of expertise.

CRC TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Terms of Reference of the committee are:

- (i) To recommend refinements to existing content standards and guidelines to reflect societal and technological changes since the last CRC, while recognising the need to protect the young and respect racial, religious and social sensitivities;
- (ii) To study whether there is a need to introduce additional content standards and guidelines that would be relevant to the emergence of new technologies and new media platforms;
- (iii) To recommend ways to encourage industry players, the community and artists to be involved in co-regulation of media content and classification; and
- (iv) To recommend avenues to improve community engagement and public education in content standards and guidelines.

MEMBERS OF THE CENSORSHIP REVIEW COMMITTEE

Name	Designation
Mr Goh Yew Lin Chairman	Managing Director, G K Goh Holdings Ltd Chairman, Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music Deputy Chairman, Singapore Symphonia Company Ltd
Mr Koh Buck Song Deputy Chairman	CEO, Integrative CSR Consulting Pte Ltd Adjunct Faculty, Singapore Management University Author and Poet
Ms Ang Bee Lian	CEO, National Council of Social Service Member, Films Appeal Committee
Dr Azlinda Anwar	Senior Research Fellow, Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School
Mr Vijay Chandran	Director, Elasticity Chairman, Films Consultative Panel
Ms Chua Lee Hoong	Political Editor, The Straits Times
Mr Khiew Voon Kwang	Managing Director, Television (Channel 8), MediaCorp TV Singapore Pte Ltd
Mr Koh Su Haw	Assistant Vice-President, Singapore Exchange Ltd
Mr Gaurav Kripalani	Artistic Director, Singapore Repertory Theatre
Assoc. Prof Lee Cheuk Yin	Associate Professor, Department of Chinese Studies, National University of Singapore Chairman, Advisory Committee on Chinese Programmes
Ms Min Lee	Violinist
Ms Rahayu Mahzam	Partner, Heng, Leong & Srinivasan Advocates & Solicitors
Ms Cheryl Ng	Director, Great Expectations Communications Laboratory Adjunct Lecturer, Ngee Ann Polytechnic Member, Films Consultative Panel Member, Publications Consultative Panel
Mr Ong Peng Tsin	Chairman, InfoComm Investments Pte Ltd Member, Community and Parents in Support of Schools (COMPASS)
Mr Daren Shiau	Partner, Allen & Gledhill LLP Author Member, Films Appeal Committee
Dr Christine Yap	Obstetrician/Gynaecologist Member, Films Consultative Panel
Mr Zainal bin Sapari	Educator