

Media Matters* in NZ

(Incorporating Children's Media Watch)

* Formerly "Viewers for Television Excellence"



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NEW NAME OLD CONCERNS



After 15 continuous years of activism on behalf of the young people of this country for a better media climate and a reduction in the commercial exploitation for sex and violence, VOTE (Viewers For

Television Excellence) has changed its name.

At our AGM in late April, attended by spokes people from all the major political parties President John Terris (*pic above*) said: "Our organization is the only media advocacy group in NZ – after 15 years we need to widen our brief to take account of new technologies like The Internet, Video Games and Mobile Telephony. So we have resolved to become 'MEDIA MATERS IN NZ (Incorporating Children's Media Watch).

The media regulatory landscape in NZ is a Wild and Woolly West. We have the least regulated system in the world, and a half a dozen groups like the Press Council and the Broadcasting Standards Authority, each with differing responsibilities, all applying different guidelines and operating under different pieces of legislation. Other jurisdictions like the UK, Canada and Australia all have in the last five years introduced much stricter controls especially on the Internet, but in NZ, by contrast, Supreme Court Judges and School Principals access porn on their work computers with impunity.

"MEDIA MATTERS" is not about suppressing the free flow of information, but about protecting our more vulnerable kids from coming to believe that porn fantasies are what fulfilling sex is about and that violence is a solution to their problems.

Text bullying, and paedophiles and rapists using the Internet to groom their victims, are all aspects of children's lives which they have a right to expect society will protect them from. The new group kicked off with a Forum which included the Minister of Broadcasting and local MP Trevor Mallard, Sue Kedgley, Green MP, Chris Finlayson, National MP and Gordon Copeland Independent MP.



By and large the politicians appear to have the view that if they ignore the problem it will go away. They can afford indifference because the very people who would be affected by any change, the media themselves, refuse to admit of any debate on the matter because they want to keep the status quo where they can get away with pretty much anything they please.

The Couch

families commission
kōwhiriwhiri ā whānau



This Website of the *Families Commission* has a very important questionnaire about Violence in the Media. If you have access to a computer, you are urged to go online and fill the questionnaire in. Many of the issues are extremely important.

A Report from M.M. Member Betty Gilderdale of Auckland

On 6 May the launch took place in Auckland of the *Broadcasting Standards Authority's* latest research **Seen and Heard; Children's Media Use, Exposure and Response.**

The report documents the findings of a survey of 600 New Zealand children aged 6-13 and their primary care-givers. 99% of them watch television, 86% play computer or video games, 62% use the internet and 40% use a cell phone.

The publication was launched by the Minister of Broadcasting, Hon. Trevor Mallard, and both he and the BSA speakers emphasized the fact that many parents appear to be unaware of the 8.30pm watershed, after which Adults Only programmes may be screened. Their solution to this problem was to have greater advertisement of the Watershed time. Once again, the BSA placed responsibility on

parents rather than on broadcasters. There was no suggestion that the watershed time – one of the earliest in the world – should be raised to 9.30pm – or even later. Nor was there any suggestion that if the watershed remains at its present time there should be some effort made to find programmes that are not all “AO” but have more general family appeal, such as the much praised BBC documentary mini-series *The Choir* recently screened at 9.30pm.

The Broadcasting Standards Authority *might do well to consider the late Prof. Robert Chapman's advice; "We need to make good programmes that are popular, and popular programmes that are good."* The Report may be obtained from the BSA, PO Box 9213 Wellington 6141 or online at www.bsa.govt.nz

For Your Information



BARNARDOS, the child care and advocacy organization whose CEO is Murray Edridge (*photo*) has recently written commending Media Matters for its work. In response to our request for assistance with a parent media literacy education initiative, they wrote “While we may not be able to financially support this initiative at the moment due to our overwhelming programme and complete budget, we would still like to express our support for this initiative and would appreciate being regularly informed of the work your team is doing”.



IT'S NOT ALL BAD NEWS! The new Freeview service provides a commercial free family friendly environment for young viewers and should be commended for doing so. It's the best thing to happen to NZ television in years. Well done Rick Ellis and TVNZ

MEDIA ALERT! Our campaign against the 8.30 pm Watershed (A recent survey reveals that most people in NZ don't even know it exists!) may be bearing fruit. The Broadcasting Standards Authority is considering conducting a review. Every other country has 9pm and some have 9.30 to protect kids from undue sex or violence.

Get involved. Write to the BSA, PO Box 9213 Wellington. Say you want to have the Watershed put back to 9.30 pm.

CHARITIES COMMISSION To conform to their requirements for registration we have to amend our constitution to provide that on winding up, any surplus funds “will be donated to one or more charitable community organizations in NZ that have similar objects to the Society.” This is to remove any opportunity for private benefit. If you have any objections to this change, please advise the Secretary Adrian Cooper in writing by September 15.



Letters

WHO BENEFIT FROM ELECTIONS?

Later this year, we will be given our democratic right to cast our votes at the General Election. Compared to many people in the world today, that in itself is a luxury. And with that 'luxury' comes responsibility – both to exercise the right, and to do so responsibly. Whilst some will vote based on family tradition, some on long standing affiliation, and some on basic distaste for one 'flavour' or another, surely the aim of a democratic society should be to provide the electorate with good information on which to base their decisions.

The Media (by definition, 'a medium to convey information') is the vehicle by which we can be informed. The politicians explain themselves clearly through this medium, and we, duly enlightened, cast our votes according to party policy and our assessment of what is best for ourselves and our country.

Simple ? Yeah Right !

One can foresee the scenario that will play out in the build up to the forthcoming election. Media savvy politicians, eager to get their faces in front of the public, will happily engage in media-hyped events, where verbal gymnastics and the ability to put down opposing views will be the key competencies. Politically savvy media, eager to boost ratings (and associated advertising revenue), will encourage argument and conflict, allowing their own personalities to become the focus of what they hope will become a win/ lose contest.

With the outcome, an election, the key element of our democratic state focused on personalities, character attacks, sound bites and snapshots – largely devoid of intelligent explanation, comment and debate.

- *Mike Horner*
Wellington

Media Matters Survey 2008

Few people would deny that the levels of violence, sex, drugs, and bad language on television are disturbing and too often unacceptable but complaint to the broadcasters brings no relief. Fault is rarely accepted.

Yet responsible parents, teachers, welfare workers, police authorities, and even your next door neighbour see a society in trouble with increasing crime, violent behaviour and social evils spinning out of control - a rising generation influenced by distasteful, dangerous, and negative material. The problems with the internet and the new wave of digital and video games have yet to be addressed.

MEDIA MATTERS has decided to conduct a survey of viewers' opinions and *we need your help.*

On the next page are five questions which we would like you to put to your friends and neighbours. Please ask as many viewers as possible and return the forms to:

MEDIA MATTERS SURVEY
P. O. Box 12054
Christchurch

Further forms are available from this address but we suggest your photostat the form to save postage.

The results will be made known to government and broadcasters.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Are you disturbed by the level of violence portrayed in films and drama on television?

Yes // No //

Do you think the violence should be restricted and also much less explicit?

Yes // No //

Do scenes of brutality, torture and sexual assault upset you because the detail on screen is degrading, offensive and unnecessary?

Yes // No //

2. Do you think that sex scenes and specific intimacy should be shown?

Yes // No //

3. Is swearing, profanity and obscene language acceptable on television?

Yes // No //

4. The sale of drugs and their use is often shown. Would you like to see this stopped in the same way that tobacco advertising is now banned?

Yes // No //

5. Are you worried about digital and video games, their extreme levels of fantasy violence and the irresponsible production of such material?

Yes // No //

This survey is open to all television viewers. Why not make your voice heard even louder by becoming a member of MEDIA MATTERS?

SUBSCRIPTION TO MEDIA MATTERS

While we are full of ideas for more effective media advocacy, we are entirely dependent on the support of our members. Please be generous with your donations if you can and remember that the new Charities Commission act removes the current limit on tax exemptions for charitable donations.

If your subscription is overdue this is indicated by the red dot below.

Name: _____ Singl

Address: _____

Contact No.: _____

Mobile No: _____

Email: _____

Occupation: _____

Single Sub \$ 25 \$ _____

Family Sub \$ 30 \$ _____

Organisation \$ 35 \$ _____

Donation to MM \$ _____

If you would like a receipt, please send a self-addressed and stamped envelope with your subscription and this form to:

Media Matters
P O Box 12054
Christchurch

Thank you very much for your support. We could not keep going without it.

www.viewers.org.nz