

NEW MEDIA WATCHDOG GROUP FORMED

A new media advocacy group which has a particular concern about new digital media like video games, the Internet and mobile telephony as they effect the behaviour of young people, was launched in Lower Hutt last night.

Called *Media Matters*, it was formerly “*Viewers For Television Excellence*” but has widened its brief because of the rapid expansion of new technologies.

“The media regulatory landscape in NZ is a Wild and Woolly West” says the president of the new group, John Terris. “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”.

A good example of this media mayhem is the clearance by the film censor of a video game which depicts a young man on a killing spree and having sex with a prostitute. Called Grand Theft Auto Four it has been allowed into the country with an R18 classification. This is derisory when you consider that because of its portability, the game will be freely available to children in any home with access to the necessary playback device.

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. A report in March this year from the Stout Research Centre at Victoria University highlighted some of these.

The new group kicked off with a Forum which included the Minister of Broadcasting 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.”