Classification Office

**Watch carefully.
Think critically.**

Statement of Intent
2024 – 2028

Contents

Foreword from the Chief Censor

New Zealanders have told us that the classification system is important, particularly when it comes to making choices about what is right for their whānau to watch or play. Our role in empowering New Zealanders to make their own informed choices while preventing exposure to harmful content is one that we take seriously. We're here to strike the right balance between freedom of expression, and prevention of harm to individuals and society.

Our Office is committed to and focused on delivering modern, meaningful and responsive public services within our statutory mandate. We are strengthening our skills and capacity to work closely with enforcement, content producers and media platforms, to deliver value for money for New Zealanders seeking out our services, and to ensure that our decisions make sense for the cultural landscape in Aotearoa. We're using our research capability to not only gauge how New Zealanders are using and understanding the classification system, but we're also researching where the gaps are when it comes to warning for and identifying the things that New Zealand audiences are sensitive to.

We know from research that nearly 60% of New Zealanders are viewing streamed content on a daily basis. Until 2021 this content was largely unregulated, but over the last three years we have focused on strengthening our leadership and stewardship of the classification system by providing the tools for streaming providers to safely self-rate content for local audiences. Their approved self-rating systems generate ratings that are consistent with classifications made by the Office and this model is an excellent example of industry and regulatory bodies working together to better inform audiences about what they're consuming.

The rapidly evolving technological landscape is simultaneously exciting and daunting. A.I. images and video material, and their harmful 'deepfake' spinoffs, are proliferating on online media channels. While this technology presents huge opportunities, the risk to individuals and communities from disinformation and deepfakes is hard to overlook. Thankfully A.I. generated content can be classified and the Classification Act can consider synthetically created images, but the potential volume of material that can be created may challenge all of us.

Through our daily forensic classification work we're seeing the growth of online harms leading to real-world violence. We continue to see the spread of violent extremist and terrorism related material, and the direct inspiration to commit violence coming from online publications. We remain an active member of domestic and international networks of governments and civil society trying to combat this phenomenon through responsive and evidence-based decision-making.

In this Statement of Intent we describe our core priorities, which start with doing our core business well. We aim to constantly build on our service to the New Zealand public by modernising our tools and approaches for maximum impact. We are also focused on better expressing our responsibilities to Te Tiriti o Waitangi as an independent Crown entity, and preparing the Office for a future that is technology and audience safety-focused.

Looking ahead to 2024–2028, we will be keeping an eye on new issues that may challenge us, and our evolving and expanding engagement with audiences will help us to continue to meet their needs. The input from our Youth Advisory Panel, coupled with our research and regular surveys of public concern help inform our classification decisions.

Challenges continue apace and the Office has proven to be responsive, nimble, and resilient in the content environment. We do our best to take modern, reasoned approaches to modern, complex demands. Continuing to listen to the communities about what they need, how they're navigating the tough stuff, and how we can help, will mean a positive future for viewers across the next four years.

Caroline Flora

Chief Censor

Rupert Ablett-Hampson

Deputy Chief Censor

The nature and scope of our activities

Our purpose

We prevent exposure to harmful content while upholding the right to freedom of expression and empowering New Zealanders to make informed choices about what they, and their rangatahi and tamariki, watch.

The role of the Classification Office

The Classification Office - Te Mana Whakaatu is an independent Crown entity focused on keeping New Zealanders safe from content harm.

We are established by the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993 (the Classification Act), to classify publications which may need to be restricted or banned, and to provide information about classification decisions and the classification system as a whole.

As global content consumption habits have changed, so too has our focus and approach.

As well as our traditional forensic and entertainment classification role, we produce research on content harms and we develop practical resources to help New Zealanders think critically about the content they consume and share. We empower whānau and educators to talk with young people about what they're seeing, and to nurture their critical thinking skills.

We remain internationally connected to ensure that our decision-making has a global impact. We learn from other countries, and the New Zealand community benefits from collaborative global efforts to tackle harmful content online.

Upholding freedom of expression is at the heart of what we do. We make decisions that balance this right with keeping the community safe from harm.

Our structure and regulatory functions

The Chief Censor is chief executive of the Classification Office and has special functions under the Classification Act, including the power to 'call in' a publication for classification and to grant exemptions from a restriction. Our current Chief Censor Caroline Flora was appointed in July 2022.

OUR PRIMARY ACTIVITIES:

1. Classifying publications.
2. Producing and distributing information about the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993 (the Classification Act) and the Office.
3. Providing an inquiries and complaints service.
4. Carrying out research which enables the Office to perform its functions effectively.
5. Supporting and facilitating the development of self-rating systems, used by streaming providers.
6. Supporting New Zealand's response to online violent extremist content.

The organisation is structured into two main units to deliver on these activities: an Information Unit and a Classification Unit. These teams work together across key projects and are supported by the Corporate Services Unit.

- The Information Unit's functions under the Classification Act are to engage in research, inform and educate the public, and to manage complaints and enquiries.

- The Classification Unit is a team of experienced classification advisors who are responsible for examining publications that are submitted for classification, called in by the Chief Censor and assessed under the CVoD regime.

Publications submitted to the Classification Office usually include content that deals with sex, horror, crime, cruelty, or violence. They can be submitted to us by the Film and Video Labelling Body of New Zealand, or directly by commercial applicants, by Crown agencies including the Secretary for Internal Affairs, the Comptroller of Customs, the Commissioner of Police, and the Courts, and by members of the public.

The largest category of our Crown classification work deals with child sex abuse and sexual exploitation material, followed by terrorism and violent extremist material. Our advisors assess these publications, and if they determine they are harmful to the public good, they will classify them as restricted or banned. When deciding on a classification they must consider the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act (1990), so that any restriction is reasonable, demonstrably justifiable, and the minimum required to prevent harm. We use the Chief Censor's power to call in publications when we become aware that content may need to be classified as restricted or banned.

In 2021 the Classification Act was amended to require specified commerical video on-demand and streaming platforms to display appropriate New Zealand age ratings and content warnings on films and shows. These providers can self-rate their content if the Chief Censor approves and annually reviews their systems, which must produce ratings and warnings consistent with those of the Classification Office. Following the 2019 terror attacks on two mosques in Christchurch, the Office established a Countering Violent Extremism team. The team works with stakeholders domestically and internationally, conducts research and supports the classification of violent extremism and terrorist publications. If required, the Chief Censor can issue an urgent interim classification of a publication; a final decision on the publication must be issued within the subsequent 20 working days.

Accountability and governance

The Classification Office is an independent Crown entity and is subject to the public management and accountability requirements established by the Crown Entities Act 2004 (CE Act). The Minister of Internal Affairs is the responsible Minister in accordance with the CE Act, and the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) is the monitoring department and is responsible for the administration of the Classification Act. The Chief Censor is constitutionally accountable to the Minister of Internal Affairs for the financial and non-financial performance of the Office. Under the Classification Act, the Chief Censor and Deputy Chief Censor constitute the Board of the Office. In 2023, the Board introduced Te Poari, a strategic governance structure to support the Board to deliver on organisational priorities.

In the context of a challenging fiscal environment, the governance of this small, independent Crown entity is focused on delivering high quality services for New Zealanders and using our resources wisely. The Board is working to ensure we get the best value we can from our investments, and that we take good care of our assets. It is a strategic priority for the Board to set a stable funding and resourcing

path for the organisation. This involves taking an evidenced-based, continuous improvement approach to the delivery of our core business and improving the efficiency and responsiveness of our services. In this Statement of Intent, we have refreshed our purpose statement and impact measures to further focus the organisation on achieving the safety outcomes for New Zealanders that underpin our statutory mandate.

FUNDING OF THE OFFICE

The Classification Office receives Crown funding under Vote: Internal Affairs, Non-Departmental Output Expense 'Classification of Films, Videos, and Publications', as well as fees from the submission of commercial publications for classification, and levies from specified commerial streaming providers.
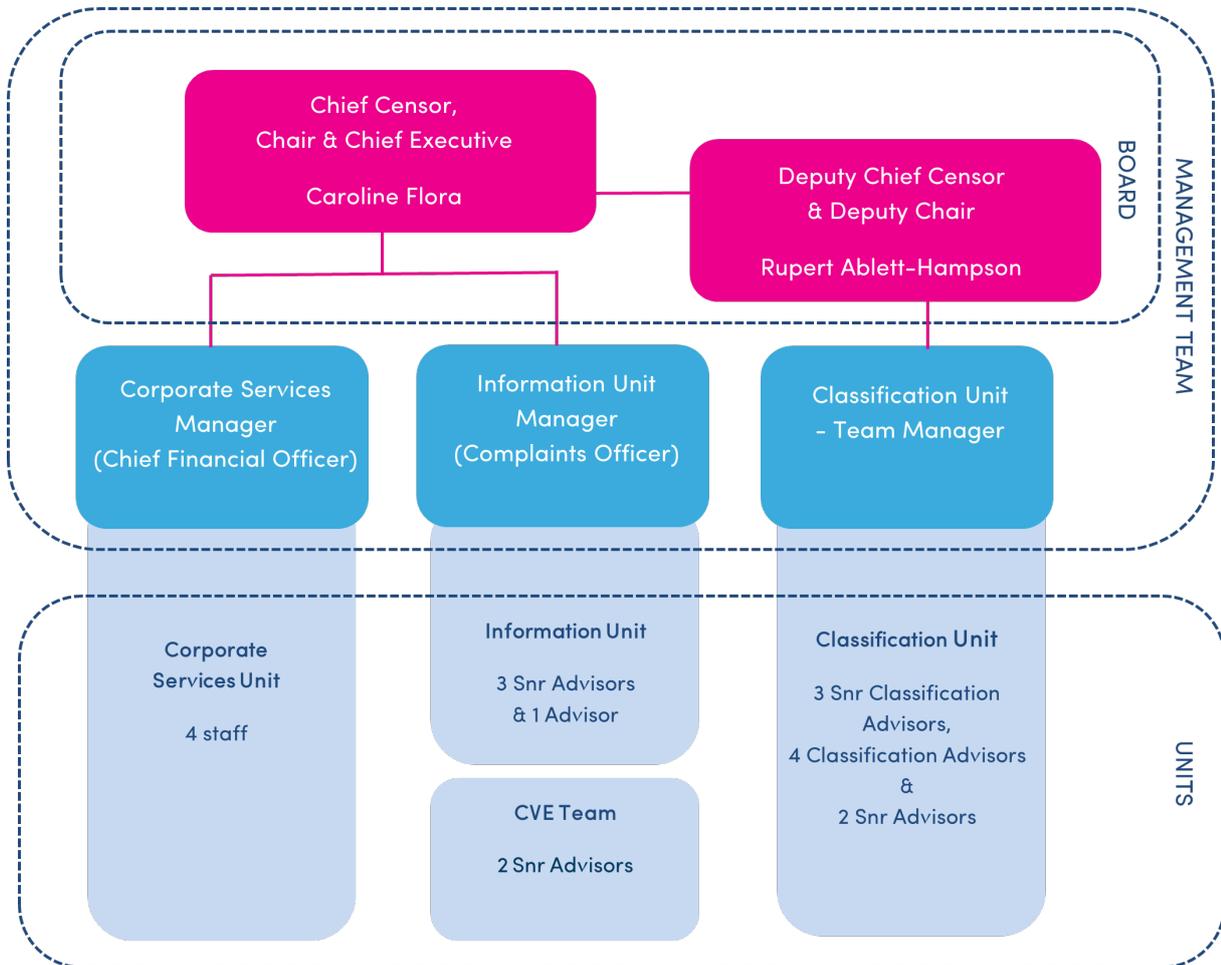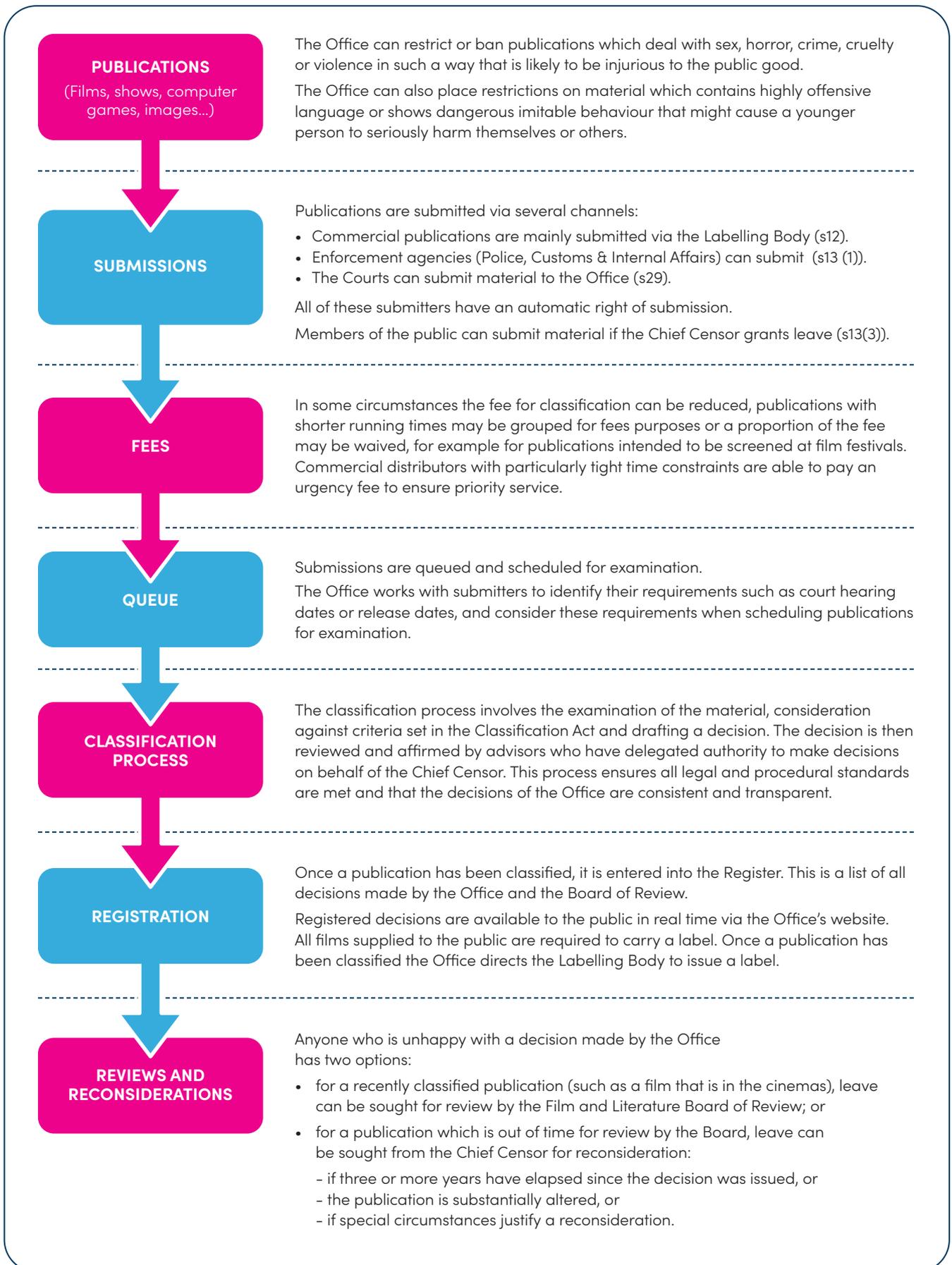
Figure 1: Classification Office Organisational Chart

Figure 2: Explanation of the Classification Process

PUBLICATIONS
(Films, shows, computer games, images...)

The Office can restrict or ban publications which deal with sex, horror, crime, cruelty or violence in such a way that is likely to be injurious to the public good.

The Office can also place restrictions on material which contains highly offensive language or shows dangerous imitable behaviour that might cause a younger person to seriously harm themselves or others.

SUBMISSIONS

Publications are submitted via several channels:

- Commercial publications are mainly submitted via the Labelling Body (s12).
- Enforcement agencies (Police, Customs & Internal Affairs) can submit (s13 (1)).
- The Courts can submit material to the Office (s29).

All of these submitters have an automatic right of submission.

Members of the public can submit material if the Chief Censor grants leave (s13(3)).

FEES

In some circumstances the fee for classification can be reduced, publications with shorter running times may be grouped for fees purposes or a proportion of the fee may be waived, for example for publications intended to be screened at film festivals. Commercial distributors with particularly tight time constraints are able to pay an urgency fee to ensure priority service.

QUEUE

Submissions are queued and scheduled for examination.

The Office works with submitters to identify their requirements such as court hearing dates or release dates, and consider these requirements when scheduling publications for examination.

CLASSIFICATION PROCESS

The classification process involves the examination of the material, consideration against criteria set in the Classification Act and drafting a decision. The decision is then reviewed and affirmed by advisors who have delegated authority to make decisions on behalf of the Chief Censor. This process ensures all legal and procedural standards are met and that the decisions of the Office are consistent and transparent.

REGISTRATION

Once a publication has been classified, it is entered into the Register. This is a list of all decisions made by the Office and the Board of Review.

Registered decisions are available to the public in real time via the Office's website. All films supplied to the public are required to carry a label. Once a publication has been classified the Office directs the Labelling Body to issue a label.

REVIEWS AND RECONSIDERATIONS

Anyone who is unhappy with a decision made by the Office has two options:

- for a recently classified publication (such as a film that is in the cinemas), leave can be sought for review by the Film and Literature Board of Review; or
- for a publication which is out of time for review by the Board, leave can be sought from the Chief Censor for reconsideration:
  - if three or more years have elapsed since the decision was issued, or
  - the publication is substantially altered, or
  - if special circumstances justify a reconsideration.

Management of the Classification Office

This section sets out how the Classification Office will use its resources to do its job in the current environment, and reflect the Government's priorities.

The Government's priorities

While recognising the Classification Office's independence from Government, our Statement of Intent aligns with the Government's priorities. These priorities are to rebuild the economy, restore law and order, and deliver better public services.

The Classification Office will work to support the Government's, and the Minister's priorities, by focusing on doing our core business well today and into the future. We are preparing the organisation, and our services, for future challenges presented by the evolving technological landscape by strengthening our stewardship capability.

We are focused on delivering modern and responsive public services within our statutory mandate, and using our resources prudently to deliver value for money for New Zealanders. We work hard to ensure our functions support families and communities to be safe, whether that means enabling them to make good choices about the content they consume, or by reducing the availability of objectionable content that causes real-world harm.

Regulatory environment

New Zealand's system for regulating content and media has strong foundations and has been incrementally improved over time to respond to emerging challenges. However, it was designed in a pre-internet world, and includes agencies with different mandates and some gaps. It is incumbent on us to find new ways to ensure services are impactful and relevant to New Zealanders with the tools we have. An example of a modern approach to regulation are the changes to how streaming content is regulated. Through trusted relationships, we support collective efforts to prevent and reduce harm with others in the system. Digital and content regulatory settings have been reformed in Europe, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia. We continue to support those regulators as they implement their new regimes, with our research and modern approaches to classification. The challenges of violent extremism and terrorism, child exploitation, Artificial Intelligence and staying safe online are global. We stay connected to bring

the benefits of international efforts to the New Zealand community.

We remain committed to supporting the Government and the Department of Internal Affairs to modernise the Classification Act and other content and media approaches, as opportunities arise. We're investing wisely in capability and tools that will have enduring benefit to the system.

Social, economic and technological environment

The way people engage with and access content evolves over time, and is influenced by global events, market forces and the availability of new and novel technologies.

The challenges to the safety and wellbeing of New Zealanders, especially online, are many. There has been a proliferation of material depicting extreme violence and cruelty, including from active global conflicts.

Disinformation and conspiracy theories can be amplified via engagement algorithms on digital platforms, as well as a concerning rise in violent extremist activity.

Artificial Intelligence presents exciting opportunities, but also dangers to be managed including deep-fakes and the creation of potentially objectionable material at a scale we have never seen before.

Research into how modern content challenges are impacting the community, trusted sources of information, critical thinking and tools to support people to navigate the online world are needed more than ever.

Our key areas of focus

Our priorities are simple and clear, designed to deliver on our purpose within our statutory mandate:

DOING OUR CORE BUSINESS WELL

We'll continue to do our core business well. We'll deliver on what we've said we would, make difficult decisions on important issues, and do that professionally and consistently. In focusing on our core functions, our objective is to maximise the impact of our work, and minimise harm from content, to the public and ourselves. The work we do can be distressing, and our people are our most precious asset.

Doing our core business well means delivering our statutory functions to a very high standard, and making the best use of the resources we have. We will continue to ensure our classification decision-making is evidence- based and transparent, and we will invest in

tools that promote efficiency.

Our research will support the wider system to reduce harm from content, and where we can, we will partner with others to maximise our research and engagement opportunities.

Our community engagement will be centred on the things that matter most to New Zealanders, including supporting parents to make informed choices about content that is right for their whānau. We will continue to work with rangatahi to concentrate our efforts on what matters to them.

TE AO MĀORI

As an independent Crown entity, we're working to better express our responsibilities to te Tiriti o Waitangi. Equity is one of our core values, and that involves thinking about the impact our work has on Māori. We continue to explore options to enhance our advisory systems, and to take steps to introduce te Tiriti o Waitangi and te ao Māori considerations into delivering our core functions including our classification decision-making and communications.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

We know that the current regulatory system doesn't fully cater to new and emerging challenges, however, we can continue to further enhance the impact of our decisions for the benefit of New Zealanders within the mandate we have.

We are focused on modernising our systems, processes and tools, and growing our capability for evolving regulatory functions. Since 2021 we have been an established steward for the commercial video on-demand system, setting standards and approaches to extend the reach of our safety mechanisms through a self-rating framework. We will continue to enhance our stewardship role, by providing evidence-based information and tools so that communities and industry can make positive content choices that are right for them.

As a statutory regulator, we have very specific functions, and we are focused on modernising those to maximise their impact, protect New Zealanders from harm and make them as efficient as possible to represent good value for public money. We are acutely focused on setting a sustainable financial path for the organisation through careful day-to-day management and the implementation of medium-term investment strategies.

We're readying the organisation for change knowing the principles underpinning our work - preventing and reducing harm, protecting young and vulnerable people, empowering New Zealanders, and a commitment to free expression - will remain relevant.

The public's perspective on the classification system

The Classification Office runs a regular survey of the public's understanding of the classification system, including how they view and use it, and their concerns. This was last carried out in 2023, and will be repeated during the course of this Statement of Intent - against a vastly changed media and regulatory environment.

ONLINE SAFETY AND HARMFUL CONTENT

- 41% of New Zealanders find it hard to avoid seeing harmful or offensive content online.

- 65% of New Zealanders think that it's hard to protect children from inappropriate or harmful online content.

- Only 34% of respondents agreed that websites and social media sites provide the tools and features needed to stay safe online.

- Over half of the respondents (52%) did not trust social media sites to remove dangerous, violent or harmful material.

Our engagement with young people tells us that they remain concerned about how content deals with or prepares viewers for specific subjects including sexual harrassment, sexual assault, suicide and self-harm.

Source: *Results are from questions asked in AK Research's nationwide online omnibus survey conducted in March 2023. The question set was developed by the Office. The sample size for the online survey was n=1,018.*

WHAT DO KIWIS THINK ABOUT OUR CLASSIFICATIONS?

- 61% believe that age ratings are about right.

- 20% believe age ratings are too lenient.

- 10% believe age ratings are too strict.

Among those who helped choose content for a child or young person:

- 79% said that content warnings are important (this figure was higher among women and older people).

- 74% said age ratings are important (this figure was higher among older people).

Source: *Results are from questions asked in AK Research's nationwide online omnibus survey conducted in March 2023. The question set was developed by the Office. The sample size for the online survey was n=1,018.*

The current fiscal environment

The Office receives Crown funding through Vote: Internal Affairs, fees from third parties, and more recently, annual levies from CVoD providers who are included in Schedule 4 of the Classification Act. Any shortfall in the forecast revenue is met from cash reserves.

The entertainment media industry has radically changed in the time since this Office was established. Most content is now released online or via streaming services, and cinema and DVD releases have been steadily declining over time. This has resulted in declining revenue for the Office, at a time when personnel and overhead costs have steadily increased in all industries and services.

In this context of declining revenue and increasing cost, the Office is focused on modernising our services to make them as efficient and effective as possible and to represent good value for public money. In recent years, the Board has adopted a careful planning and decision-making approach to halt the decline in cash reserves, and to bring expenditure down. We intend to invest in our strategic assets during the term of this Statement of Intent.

Organisational health and capability

FINANCIAL HEALTH OF THE CLASSIFICATION OFFICE

Declining revenue has meant that the Office was operating at a financial deficit for a number of years, with cash reserves meeting shortfall in revenue.

In 2022 the Board adopted a three-part investment and sustainability plan, and included financial sustainability as a strategic objective in the work programme. The Office has successfully arrested growing expenditure for the medium-term through reprioritisation, reduction of some overheads, closely managed leave liabilities, and clear investment strategies.

At the time of publication of this Statement of Intent, some strategic assets for the organisation have been fully depreciated; it is a priority for the Board to invest in tools and approaches that not only ensure continuity of service, but also bring efficiency to our work.

CLASSIFICATION ACTIVITY

In recent years there has been a continued decline in commercial publications being submitted for classification. This decline is most evident in reduced DVD submissions, and more recently the number of games being released as a physical product.

We now support streaming services that are specified in the Classification Act to self-rate their content for a New Zealand audience in a way that is consistent with our own ratings.

In the 2022/23 period, we classified or assessed 1,225 commerical films, series or games in total. We classified 635 commercial publications and assessed 590 commerical video on-demand publications to support streaming services in our first full year of operating that regime. These assessments are a small proportion of over 50,000 titles which have been self-rated under the self-rating regime, of which the Classification Office has oversight.

Our most challenging work is our forensic classifications. These are generally publications referred to us by DIA investigators, Police, Customs or the Courts, or the Chief Censor can 'call in' publications for classification. The issue with these publications is generally whether they are illegal or banned, and criminal charges have often been filed or are being considered. Offences under the Classification Act can result in significant penalities, including imprisonment up to 14 years. The majority of these publications depict child sexual abuse, followed by extreme violence, terrorism or violent extremism content. In the 2022/23 period, we classified 231 forensic publications.

HEALTH OF OUR STAFF

Our staff work across a range of functions, which has the benefit of maintaining capacity and flexibility within the Office while providing a healthy work balance for staff.

We are especially focused on developing our classification expertise to remain world-leading, evidence-based and responsive to modern challenges in harmful content. We are also cementing our stewardship capability to lead a system of self-rating providers that can consistently meet our classification standards.

The nature of our classification work can be distressing. We ensure our examination practices put safety and wellbeing at the centre, minimising exposure to harmful material to the extent we can. Staff receive suitable peer and professional support, and we regularly review how we can best support our team.

Integrity of the classification system

Our work requires us to strike the right balance between upholding freedom of expression and keeping New Zealanders safe from harm when they access media content.

New Zealanders must have confidence in both the integrity of the classification system, and in the Classification Office as an effective and impartial regulator.

One of the most important ways we can achieve this is by performing our core functions transparently and to a high standard. Our most recent surveys indicate that the public trusts our work and largely agrees with our classification decisions.

We continue to seek the diverse views of New Zealanders to inform our work, including through engagement with rangatahi, Māori and other communities.

Measuring our performance

Our role is to support New Zealanders to access media content in a positive way, with a particular focus on protecting tamariki and rangatahi from harm. We are tasked with doing this while recognising the diverse views of all New Zealanders and upholding the fundamental right to freedom of expression.
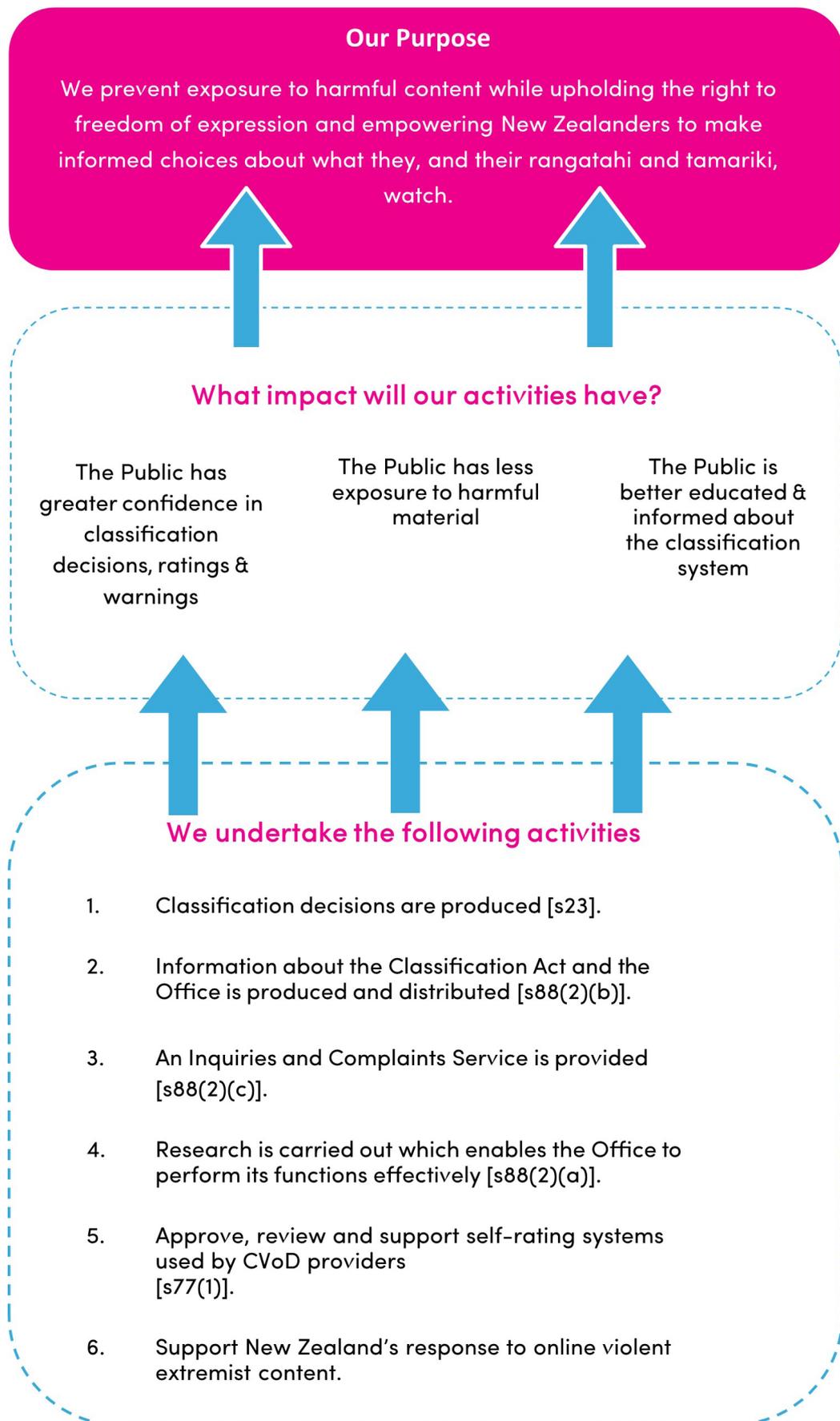
Any limits we place on freedom of expression through classifications need to be reasonable, clearly defined in law, and demonstrably justifiable in a free and democratic society.

Parliament has given the Classification Office the responsibility of using the law to determine where limits on New Zealanders' freedom of expression rest. There is often some grey area between what

is and isn't legally acceptable expression, and our classification advisors need to navigate these decisions with care.

Figure 3 shows the intended impacts of our activities and how these contribute to our purpose.

Figure 3: Performance Framework

Our Purpose

We prevent exposure to harmful content while upholding the right to freedom of expression and empowering New Zealanders to make informed choices about what they, and their rangatahi and tamariki, watch.

What impact will our activities have?

The Public has greater confidence in classification decisions, ratings & warnings

The Public has less exposure to harmful material

The Public is better educated & informed about the classification system

We undertake the following activities

1. Classification decisions are produced [s23].

2. Information about the Classification Act and the Office is produced and distributed [s88(2)(b)].

3. An Inquiries and Complaints Service is provided [s88(2)(c)].

4. Research is carried out which enables the Office to perform its functions effectively [s88(2)(a)].

5. Approve, review and support self-rating systems used by CVoD providers [s77(1)].

6. Support New Zealand's response to online violent extremist content.

Evaluation of our impact

IMPACT A: THE PUBLIC HAS GREATER CONFIDENCE IN CLASSIFICATION DECISIONS, RATINGS AND WARNINGS

The Office has investigated participants' perception of age rating and content warning information. Almost 80% said content warnings were important when they chose, or helped to choose, a film, DVD or game for a child or young person. We also asked participants to indicate how important age ratings are when they were making these choices. Our findings are set out in Figure 5.

Our survey to understand public understanding of our ratings shows a steady confidence in the system. The figures reported in our most recent survey in 2023 are not directly comparable with those in our previous *What We're Watching* reports due to different samples and methodology. We intend for future snapshots to be comparable year-on-year.

In 2022 we commissioned a nationwide survey to explore New Zealanders' views about potentially harmful content on screen and online, and about age ratings and the classification system. Of those who had recently helped to choose a movie, show or video game for a child or young person, most thought age ratings (84%) and content warnings (83%) were important.

Figure 5: Importance of age ratings in viewing decisions

% of respondents said age ratings were:	2023*
'About right'	61%
'Too lenient'	20%
'Too strict'	10%

* a small proportion (9%) of participants selected 'unsure' or declined to respond.

Indicator: 60% or more of those surveyed indicate that they are satisfied with our ratings, because they are of the view that they are neither too lenient nor too strict.

Indicator: An increasing proportion of those surveyed indicate that they use classification information when making viewing choices for children.

IMPACT B: THE PUBLIC HAS LESS EXPOSURE TO HARMFUL MATERIAL

Through our work, we aim to equip people with the information they need to make informed choices. We do this through our age ratings, content warnings, and the detailed content breakdowns we provide on our website.

Through our research, we aim to stay at the forefront of understanding how harm can be prevented or minimised, and we adapt our approaches to meet modern challenges.

We also prevent harm by banning content that is objectionable. This function supports efforts to remove illegal content from the internet and other sources, preventing injury to individuals and the public good. Objectionable publications cause harm in a number of ways, including promoting serious sexual assault, crime, terror and extreme violence. Our efforts contribute to a global effort to sever pathways to radicalisation and protect victims of child sexual abuse.

Our regular public awareness survey and annual 'heartbeat' survey of the public give us an indication of people's engagement with our work and their understanding of the classification system.

Indicator:
We survey the public to gauge their experiences and concerns about exposure to potentially harmful content, whether in commercial films and shows, or online.

IMPACT C: THE PUBLIC IS BETTER EDUCATED AND INFORMED ABOUT THE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

Through our information, education and outreach functions, our aim is to help New Zealanders think critically about media content, and to empower parents, whānau, educators and frontline services with practical advice and tools to safely navigate this space.

Young people can be particularly impacted by what they see, hear and read on digital platforms. We actively engage with young New Zealanders through our Youth Advisory Panel, Censor for a Day secondary schools programme, and social media channels.

The Classification Office also provides speakers on request to schools, other educational institutions and community groups.

We monitor the effectiveness of these activities by engagement on our website, including downloads of resources, e-newsletter subscriptions, engagement on social media, speaking requests, and informed queries from the public and industry. Some of these items are used as performance indicators at the Activity level.

Indicator:

Our annual 'heartbeat' survey of the public gives us an indication of people's engagement with our work and their understanding of the classification system.

We track the level of recognition and understanding of classification labels.

Evaluation of our activities

ACTIVITY 1 – CLASSIFICATION DECISIONS ARE PRODUCED

Description:

This activity is concerned with the examination and classification of publications in accordance with the law.

Context:

A classification is a legal statement about the status of a publication that may place limits on its availability or invoke criminal sanctions. It is essential that classifications are carried out in a robust decision-making environment to ensure that consistent, impartial and lawful decisions are made.

Classification decision-making is informed by research, expert advice and public consultation.

Quantity of classifications

The number of classifications registered varies each year, and is largely a demand-driven activity. The leave of the Chief Censor is not required for most submissions and classification is compulsory for films, DVDs and games that contain content that may need to be restricted.

Each financial year the Classification Office estimates the number of publications it expects to receive. This is done on the basis of trends in the level of activity of previous years and, where possible, discussion with submitters on the number of publications they expect to submit in the upcoming year. On the basis of this estimate, the Office establishes targets for the number of publications which will be classified. The Office expects to meet demand, where resources allow.

Quality of classifications

A representative sample of decisions is independently reviewed, to ensure the decisions are written in a style which is accessible to a range of readers and that the analysis supports the classification decision, so that the reader understands the reasoning of the decision.

Timeliness of classifications

Section 23 of the Classification Act requires the Office to examine and classify publications as soon as practicable. The Office has set the timeliness targets at the minimum level acceptable with existing resources and assumes that the numbers of submissions are within the estimated range.

The Office closely manages its queue of publications waiting examination, and scheduling of work is reviewed weekly. This includes consideration of the needs of various submitters and distributors.

The Office liaises with the Film and Video Labelling Body, distributors, Crown agencies and other submitters on scheduling matters.

ACTIVITY 2 – INFORMATION ABOUT THE CLASSIFICATION ACT AND THE OFFICE IS PRODUCED AND DISTRIBUTED

Description:

Section 88(2)(b) of the Classification Act requires the Classification Office's Information Unit to disseminate information about the functions, powers and procedures of the Office.

This activity is concerned with public engagement and the production and distribution of information about the Classification Act and the Classification Office.

Further details of these activities are discussed under Impact C on page 16.

Context:

The public good is protected when people understand the classification system, can access the information they need to make informed viewing decisions, and when the Classification Office operates in a transparent manner.

In order for this to occur, the public must understand the classification system and the potential for harm caused by the availability of such material. The public must also be informed about how to engage with the Office and the classification system.

ACTIVITY 3 – AN INQUIRIES AND COMPLAINTS SERVICE IS PROVIDED

Description:

This activity is concerned with the provision of the inquiries and complaints service required under s88 of the Classification Act.

Context:

Equitable access to information about the classification system enables people to make informed choices about the content they engage with, and their rights. There are many aspects to the system, and it can be complex. The complaints and inquiries service supports individuals and stakeholders with information and support to understand the system.

Censorship can also limit an individual's right to free expression. For this reason, it is important that people are able to register their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with it.

For each financial year the Office estimates, on the basis of previous trends, the number of complaints and inquiries likely to be received. From this estimate the Office establishes quantity targets for the number of inquiries the Office will answer. The Office expects to meet demand, where resources allow.

The Office monitors and reports both internally and externally on inquiries and complaints received.

ACTIVITY 4 – RESEARCH IS CARRIED OUT WHICH ENABLES THE OFFICE TO PERFORM ITS FUNCTIONS EFFECTIVELY

Description:

Section 88(2)(a) of the Classification Act requires the Classification Office's Information Unit to provide research services to enable the Office to perform its functions effectively.

Research that helps inform the wider public about censorship issues is published and made available on the Office's website. It is also used to inform our work, foster further research on censorship issues and provide an evidentiary base for policy making.

The research we do is rigorous, ethical, of high quality, and when appropriate, reviewed by an external expert.

Context:

Research is undertaken by the Office for one or more of the following purposes:

- To inform the wider public about censorship issues. This research assists in understanding people's attitudes and behaviours, fosters debate and provides an evidence base to censorship policy making.

- To understand the impact of content harms in modern contexts. This research assists in understanding how harm prevention or reduction efforts can be targeted.

- To inform the classification decision-making process in relation to a specific publication or range of publications.

- To provide qualitative and quantitative measurements of the impact of the work of the Office.

ACTIVITY 5 – APPROVE, REVIEW AND SUPPORT SELF-RATING SYSTEMS USED BY CVoD PROVIDERS

Description:

Section 77(1) of the Classification Act requires the Office to approve, review and support self-rating systems used by specified Commercial Video on-Demand (CVoD) providers.

Context:

Major CVoD providers listed in Schedule 4 of the Classification Act are required to display New Zealand ratings and classifications for their content.

The Chief Censor can approve providers' systems to self-rate content, and is required to assess the systems annually to ensure ongoing compliance with the classification guidance issued by the Office.

Through this function, reliable and recognisable classification information is available in people's homes and on their streaming devices.

ACTIVITY 6 – SUPPORT NEW ZEALAND'S RESPONSE TO ONLINE VIOLENT EXTREMIST CONTENT

Description:

This activity is concerned with classification of terrorist and violent extremist content, and countering violent extremism content online via research, training and education.

Context:

Following the terror attacks on two Mosques in Christchurch in 2019, the Classification Act was strengthened to enable swift responses to objectionable content online. The Office was provided with funding and a new requirement to maintain expertise in terrorism and violent extremism. This supports enforcement activity to stop the viral spread of terrorist content and prevent further acts of violence. Our team provides classification, research, education, and engagement services to New Zealand and overseas government agencies, experts, civil society and the digital sector.

Statement of Responsibility

The Statement of Intent for the Classification Office presented in this report for the years ending 30 June 2024 to 30 June 2028 has been prepared in accordance with section 38 of the Public Finance Act 1989 and the Crown Entities Act 2004.

This Statement is to be read in conjunction with the Classification Office's Statement of Performance Expectations for the relevant year, which provides specific performance measures and associated financial information.

The Chairperson of the Board of the Classification Office acknowledges, in signing this statement, that they are responsible for the information contained in this Statement of Intent.

Caroline Flora – Chief Censor

Rupert Ablett–Hampson – Deputy Chief Censor

On behalf of the Board of the Classification Office.

Dated: 30 June 2024

Classification
Office

Watch carefully.
Think critically.