Manhunt game banned
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THE federal Office of Film and Literature Classification has refused to classify controversial game Manhunt, banning it from sale in Australia. "Any existing stocks of this game held by retailers must be removed from the shelves immediately," the Office's Classification Review Board said in a statement.

Originally classified MA15+, the game was referred back to the office by Attorney General Philip Ruddock after a complaint by Western Australia Justice Minister Michelle Roberts.

The game to worldwide prominence in July after it sparked outrage in Britain, where the parents of murdered teenager Stefan Pakeerah blamed the game for the what they described as a copycat killing of their son.

In Australia, Manhunt was given the MA15+ rating in October 2003, with consumers advised the title contained "medium level animated violence".

"In the Classification Review Board's opinion, the game warrants a refusal of classification because it contains elements beyond those set out in the classification guidelines and legislation for a computer game at the MA15+ classification."

With classification refused, the game "cannot be legally sold, hired, displayed for sale or hire, demonstrated or advertised in Australia".

Penalties for doing so range from a $4500 fine and six months imprisonment in Queensland to a $24,000 fine and two years in jail in Victoria.

A spokesman said the Office was obliged to publish online its reasons for refusing classification within 28 days.

Australia is not the first country to ban the game with New Zealand banning it six months ago. It is also not the first game banned under Australian law, with the infamous Grand Theft Auto withdrawn from sale in 2001.

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