

COMPUTER GAMES

30 April 2008

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: Yesterday marked the next chapter in the violent antisocial video game known as Grand Theft Auto IV when the fourth chapter was released worldwide with much hype and controversy. I mentioned it in this place yesterday, so I thought I would elaborate on it for the interest of members and to give some detail of what the game contains.

The latest version of the game includes a lot of things that members might find interesting, including things which would be considered disorderly behaviour in public places. The game includes blood and gore, with the ability to choose body parts which you would want to shoot at or off. Famously, a previous version of the game enabled you to pick up a prostitute and then run over her after you had sex with her. One reviewer of Grand Theft Auto IV said:

‘...in-game sex offered up and drunk down like flavoured water.’

This game is directed at 15 year old kids, Mr President. Another reviewer said:

‘If you grow tired of running around town executing fellow crooks, you can spend some much needed R&R bashing cars into pedestrians.’

At higher levels, in Grand Theft Auto IV the game's protagonist called Niko Belic engages in drug running and performs gangland assassinations.

The question arises time and again why we as legislators would allow material to circulate in the public arena that encourages antisocial behaviour of this nature, particularly that which is targeted at children. At what point do we stop allowing creativity or artistic expression (so-called) and say that society expects people to adhere to certain social standards?

In the year 2000 the American Psychological Association reported on two studies of over 200 students who engaged in frequent use of violent video

games, finding that playing violent video games can increase a person's aggressive thoughts, feelings and behaviour in both laboratory settings and actual life. A University of Missouri-Columbia psychologist and his research team in 2005 found a brain mechanism that may link violent computer games with aggression.

As I said in my question yesterday, I think the government via SAPOL could easily conduct worthwhile video game research on arrested criminals, just like research on drug presence in arrested criminals. I think we would find fascinating causal connections. Surely, the teenagers involved in high-speed pursuits with police should be asked as a matter of research whether they have had exposure to these games.

Recently, in the United States a teenage gunman killed five and wounded 16 in Illinois in February this year. The gunman was reported to be 'a loner who...was obsessed with an ultra-violent video game'. The notorious shooting massacre at Virginia Tech just over a year ago in which 32 people died involved a mentally ill student who was obsessed with violent computer games, such as Counter-Strike. Just after the massacre, US psychologist Phil McGraw on CNN said:

You cannot tell me—common sense tells you—that if these kids are playing video games, where they're on a mass killing spree in a video game, it's glamorised on the big screen, it's become part of the fibre of our society. You take that and mix it with a psychopath, a sociopath or someone suffering from mental illness and add in a dose of rage, the suggestibility is too high.

These violent video games desensitise people—especially young people—to violence itself and reduce their respect for other human beings and general standards of social behaviour.

Of course it is not true for everyone, but it can be true for a minority of users. Australia does not need this game. I am glad it had to be toned down for our rating system in this market, but even watering down delivers no benefit to our society. I conclude by adding a note of congratulations to the Attorney-

General, who recently was active in restricting the access of some of these games into the South Australian marketplace, and Family First wholeheartedly applauds that. I understand that he was the lone voice at the national meeting of Attorneys-General that held that line, and if it were not for his voice it seems that such games that were restricted would be unrestricted in Australia. Credit where credit is due: we commend him for those actions.