# Disney+ draws RSPCA ire for streaming rat drowning scene cut from UK releases



Disney has faced significant backlash from animal welfare campaigners following the streaming of a controversial scene from James Cameron's 1989 science fiction film, "The Abyss." This particular segment depicts a live rat being submerged in a tank of fluorocarbon liquid, a moment that has long drawn criticism for its portrayal of animal cruelty. The scene had previously been omitted from UK screenings by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), which ruled it in violation of animal protection laws. However, its reappearance on Disney+ has reignited public outrage, with organisations like the RSPCA calling for a reassessment of the regulations governing animal welfare in film.

David Bowles, the head of public affairs for the RSPCA, expressed deep concern about the implications of such content being readily available for streaming. He noted, "The RSPCA is really concerned that a loophole currently exists allowing animal abuse scenes deemed unacceptable elsewhere to be streamed freely and legally into our homes." This sentiment underscores a growing awareness that the landscape of media consumption has evolved, yet existing legal frameworks struggle to keep pace with these changes. The BBFC’s initial verdict, derived from expert veterinary guidance, concluded that the scene inflicted undue terror upon the rat, violating the Cinematograph Films (Animals) Act 1937 and the Video Recordings Act 1984.

Despite assurances that the rats used in the production ultimately survived the ordeal, the rationale behind censoring the scene remains unchallenged. The BBFC has consistently enforced guidelines that prohibit such footage across all cinema releases, DVDs, and traditional television broadcasts. Furthermore, UK TV channels are barred from airing any material that has been cut or denied classification by the BBFC, highlighting the disparity in content regulation when it comes to streaming services like Disney+.

Bowles emphasised the need for consistency, stating, "It doesn't make sense that we have robust safeguards for animal-related content shown in cinemas, on DVDs or on traditional television channels – yet those protections could go out the window when you turn on a major streaming service." In light of this, the RSPCA is advocating for changes under the upcoming Media Act, which aims to tighten regulations governing video-on-demand services. They argue that this new framework should work towards closing the existing loophole that allows distressing animal abuse to appear on screens.

Interestingly, the BBFC has already established voluntary guidelines with several streaming platforms to maintain content standards, a move that Bowles hopes will encourage more services to adopt similar practices. The inconsistency in how animal cruelty laws are applied across different platforms raises vital questions about societal norms and the ethical responsibilities of content creators in the entertainment industry.

Disney has yet to comment publicly on this controversy, leaving many to wonder how they will address the backlash. As public awareness of animal welfare continues to grow, the conversation surrounding the portrayal of animals in media will undoubtedly lead to increased scrutiny of the standards that govern what audiences can watch at home. The cultural implications of allowing such content to go unchecked reflect a pressing need for a comprehensive approach to animal welfare in film, ensuring that ethical considerations are not merely an afterthought in the realm of entertainment.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14755525/Disney-cruelty-rat-drowning-film-animal-charity.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://filmstories.co.uk/news/the-abyss-the-bbfc-defends-again-its-decision-not-to-classify-the-film/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14755525/Disney-cruelty-rat-drowning-film-animal-charity.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.myreviewer.com/Forums/General/t188437/the-abyss-quick-question/page1), [[4]](https://censorship.fandom.com/wiki/The_Abyss)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.myreviewer.com/Forums/DVDs-and-Films/t739930/Best-version-of-The-Abyss-on-DVD/page2), [[6]](https://groups.google.com/g/uk.media.tv.misc/c/EFF-PWIned4)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://screenrant.com/abyss-cameron-rat-scene-disney-censor-uk-4k/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14755525/Disney-cruelty-rat-drowning-film-animal-charity.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://filmstories.co.uk/news/the-abyss-the-bbfc-defends-again-its-decision-not-to-classify-the-film/> - This article discusses the British Board of Film Classification's (BBFC) decision to refuse classification to James Cameron's 1989 film 'The Abyss' due to a scene involving a live rat submerged in liquid oxygen. The BBFC sought expert veterinary advice, which confirmed that the scene constituted the cruel infliction of terror on an animal, contravening the Cinematograph Films (Animals) Act 1937. As a result, the scene was re-edited in all versions of the film classified by the BBFC. The article also mentions that Disney attempted to re-release 'The Abyss' in UK cinemas but withdrew the plan due to the lack of BBFC certification. The BBFC's stance has remained consistent, and the scene continues to be omitted from UK releases of the film.
3. <https://www.myreviewer.com/Forums/General/t188437/the-abyss-quick-question/page1> - This forum thread discusses the censorship of the rat scene in 'The Abyss' for UK releases. Users mention that the original UK theatrical release and subsequent VHS release showed the rat scene in its entirety. However, after the British Veterinary Association raised concerns, the scene was re-framed and trimmed in later releases to avoid showing the rat in distress. The thread also notes that the Region 1 (US) edition is uncut and shows the scene as per the original release. The discussion highlights the differences in censorship between UK and US versions of the film.
4. <https://censorship.fandom.com/wiki/The_Abyss> - This page provides information on the censorship of 'The Abyss' due to a scene involving a live rat submerged in liquid oxygen. The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) required the scene to be cut for UK releases, as it was deemed to depict animal cruelty. The page notes that the scene was re-edited in all versions of the film classified by the BBFC. It also mentions that the uncut version of the film is available in other countries, and UK viewers may need to import the 4K Blu-ray from North America or other European countries to view the film uncensored.
5. <https://www.myreviewer.com/Forums/DVDs-and-Films/t739930/Best-version-of-The-Abyss-on-DVD/page2> - This forum thread discusses the availability of different versions of 'The Abyss' on DVD. Users mention that the original UK theatrical release and subsequent VHS release showed the rat scene in its entirety. However, after the British Veterinary Association raised concerns, the scene was re-framed and trimmed in later releases to avoid showing the rat in distress. The thread also notes that the Region 1 (US) edition is uncut and shows the scene as per the original release. The discussion highlights the differences in censorship between UK and US versions of the film.
6. <https://groups.google.com/g/uk.media.tv.misc/c/EFF-PWIned4> - This Google Groups discussion addresses the censorship of the rat scene in 'The Abyss' for UK television broadcasts. A user mentions that Channel 4 accidentally broadcast the uncut version of the film, including the rat scene, and received a warning not to repeat the mistake. The discussion also touches upon the BBFC's decision to cut the scene due to concerns about animal cruelty, despite the rat surviving the ordeal and dying of natural causes before the film's release.
7. <https://screenrant.com/abyss-cameron-rat-scene-disney-censor-uk-4k/> - This article discusses the controversy surrounding a scene in James Cameron's 'The Abyss' where a live rat is submerged in liquid oxygen. The scene was initially met with backlash for its portrayal of animal cruelty. In 2023, UK censors requested the scene's removal from the film's 4K release. The article highlights the intersection between corporate reevaluation of movies and evolving audience perceptions, leading studios to reconsider previously made decisions regarding content.