

## PROTECT OUR GAMES ACT (AB 1921)

### Game Industry and Designer Perspective

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An analysis of practical development considerations, project lifecycle realities, implementation flexibility, technical feasibility, and long-term impacts from the perspective of professional game development and project management.

Over the last decade, the game industry has shown a strong tendency toward consolidation, with a relatively small number of large companies gaining increasing influence over production, distribution, and monetisation. At the same time, the dominant revenue model has gradually shifted away from mostly front-loaded sales, where customers simply bought copies of new games, toward recurring services, subscriptions, live operations, and multiple layers of additional monetisation.

From a financial perspective, this shift makes obvious sense. A game that continues to generate revenue after launch is much more attractive to investors and large publishers than a product that earns most of its income during the first few weeks or months. However, the transformation of video games from products that customers buy into services they access has also created serious tensions. These tensions affect both developers inside the industry and players outside of it. They raise questions about creative diversity, working conditions, long-term preservation, and consumer rights.

From the perspective of creative and cultural diversity, the service-based model tends to favour specific genres, structures, and player behaviours. Games built around long-term engagement, retention, progression systems, competitive loops, and repeat monetisation are often easier to justify financially than more self-contained creative works. As a result, a large part of the available funding pool is drawn toward a narrower set of commercially proven formats. Many developers then find themselves working within established formulas, putting aside part of their own creative ambition in order to support business models that have already been validated. Over time, this can contribute to professional burnout and to experienced developers leaving the industry for other fields.

From a technical and production standpoint, online service games also require a much more complex infrastructure than traditional offline or self-contained games. A development team working on an online service usually needs dedicated backend engineers, live operations staff, infrastructure planning, security measures, account systems, database management, monitoring tools, customer support pipelines, and server hosting capacity. These requirements inflate production and maintenance budgets, while also adding complexity to implementation, game design, economy design, balancing, and long-term project management.

This is where the current debate around the Stop Killing Games initiative becomes important. Industry representatives often argue that it is not feasible to keep all online services running forever after a game has reached the end of its commercial life. On that point, they are not entirely wrong. Maintaining official servers indefinitely would be expensive and unrealistic, especially for games with small remaining player bases. However, this is not necessarily what the Stop Killing Games initiative is asking for. The core request is not that publishers should operate official servers forever, but that players and communities should have some practical way to keep games functional after official support ends, potentially at their own expense.

The truth is somewhere in the middle. The production of an online game already requires the creation of internal tools and workflows that make it possible to operate, maintain, and monitor the game's online services. That investment usually happens long before anyone asks whether the community could take over part of the infrastructure after official support ends. The real challenge is not only technical feasibility, but also legal control, security, licensing, moderation, brand protection, and long-term business strategy.

When industry representatives talk about feasibility, they are often referring to more than engineering difficulty. They may also be concerned about fragmentation of gaming communities, especially when an older online game remains playable after its sequel or successor has launched. In recent years, it has become common for publishers to sunset older titles in order to move players toward the next product, the next platform, or the next monetisation model. From a business perspective, this can be rational. From a player and preservation perspective, it can feel like a deliberate destruction of cultural and commercial value that customers already paid for.

It is also worth looking at the history of online games and at alternative approaches that have existed in the industry before. Earlier online games often relied heavily on community-run servers, which helped many of them survive long after official support had ended. Games such as Ultima Online, and many multiplayer PC titles from the late 1990s and early 2000s, benefited from a culture in which developers either provided server files, supported dedicated servers, or allowed communities to maintain their own multiplayer spaces.

Over time, the industry moved away from this model. During the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 era, many multiplayer games relied more heavily on peer-to-peer networking, with publishers often arguing that dedicated servers were too expensive to operate. Later, the industry moved again, this time toward centralised online infrastructures fully controlled by publishers and platform holders. Today, many online games require access to locked backend systems not only for multiplayer, but sometimes even for basic functionality. This means that when official support ends, the entire game can effectively disappear.

There are still exceptions. Some developers and publishers make server files available to their communities, support modding, or allow community-run servers through approved hosting partners. In some cases, communities are able to pay for their own server infrastructure through contracted providers, while the publisher still retains some control over security, branding, and commercial terms. This kind of model may represent a practical middle ground. It gives communities a way to keep online games alive after official support ends, while still allowing publishers to manage risk and potentially generate some long-tail revenue.

From a professional game development and project management perspective, the best solution is unlikely to be a one-size-fits-all legal obligation. Different games have very different technical architectures, licensing constraints, production realities, and community needs. However, the industry should also recognise that end-of-life planning is becoming a necessary part of responsible game development. If a game is sold to customers, and if its core functionality depends on online infrastructure, then the question of what happens when that infrastructure is shut down should be considered from the beginning of production, not only years later when the game is no longer profitable.

A more sustainable approach would require flexibility. Some games may be able to receive offline patches. Some may be able to support private or community servers. Some may need limited preservation access through archives, museums, or research institutions. Others may genuinely be impossible to preserve in a playable form without unreasonable cost or risk. But the current model, where a purchased game can simply stop functioning because the operator decides to end support, is becoming increasingly difficult to defend.

*For developers, this debate is not only about consumer rights. It is also about the long-term cultural value of our work. Games are not just temporary revenue streams. They are creative works made by hundreds or sometimes thousands of people. When they disappear completely, part of the medium's history disappears with them.*