

**Research report into excessive delays in release of Wii™
software by Nintendo™ in Australia and New Zealand regions**

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*If you have any questions or comments regarding the issues and topics presented in this article,
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1. Introduction

The video game industry is expanding. The video game software and hardware producer Nintendo is pushing forward with rising profits and expanded audiences with its revolutionary new game console, called Wii ([GoNintendo](#), 2007). With all these new avenues opening, there are still consumers in certain places around the world not having a fair go with Nintendo, and specifically, Wii software.

More and more often games are getting released by Nintendo, specifically for the Wii, in Australia and New Zealand months behind their North American release. It is getting to the point of causing extreme frustration for consumers in these areas, waiting unreasonable lengths of time just to purchase a highly anticipated video game title that has already been available for months around the world. Is there any reason or cause behind these delays? Is there a way to get around them? More over, who is specifically to blame?

These issues will be analyzed in the following report.

2. Video format adaptation

A possible cause for a delay of a game title between various regions could be put down to the need to adapt the title for compatibility with the different television display standards used in various locations around the world.

Predominantly around the world, two standards are used. North America uses the standard titled ‘National Television System Committee’, named after the standardization body that first adopted it ([Wikipedia](#), 2007). Also commonly referred to as NTSC, this standard is also used throughout Japan, Mexico, Canada, and some areas in South America (see Figure 1.1). The other standard commonly used is the ‘Phase Alternating Line’ type, also called ‘PAL’. PAL is the standard used not only in Australia and New Zealand, but also most of Africa, China and Europe, including the United Kingdom ([Wikipedia](#), 2007).

While there are various different types of PAL and NTSC, the main specifications between them stay reasonably consistent. However, the difference between PAL and NTSC themselves is the vital issue.

The first difference is the video resolution, or amount of picture data used in any one frame. PAL sends 576 lines of video information per image frame, where as NTSC only sends 480. This results in the PAL signal type having a slightly better still image quality. The second difference is the frame rate, or the number of times the image changes every second. PAL operates at sending 50 interlaced frames every second to update the image, where NTSC sends at a slightly higher rate of 60 frames per second.

These differences in signal type could cause a reason for the delayed release of a game; the software of the video game would have to be converted to run at both the different frame rate and resolution when being designed to use the PAL system over NTSC. This is, however, not a strong argument. Firstly, all Wii units released in Australia are capable of displaying video at both the normal PAL standard, and in 480 lines at 60 Hz – just the same as North American Wii units. Televisions supporting this standard have been extremely common in Australia for over a decade. Key titles from Nintendo in the past have also operated at this North American-like video standard only. *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes* for the Nintendo GameCube is a key example of this, as it operated at a 60 Hz signal, without any support for the PAL standard 50 Hz ([N-Europe](#), 2004). Other video game consoles are also releasing video game titles in a 60 Hz only format ([Microsoft](#), 2005). This, however, is not becoming very common, generally due to modern technology easily being able to convert from one video format to the other.

The difference in video formats around the world is not a solid enough reason to warrant any major delay of a software title being released. If anything, modern technology and the availability of multi-format television systems have made the issue nothing more than a small, often trivial matter.

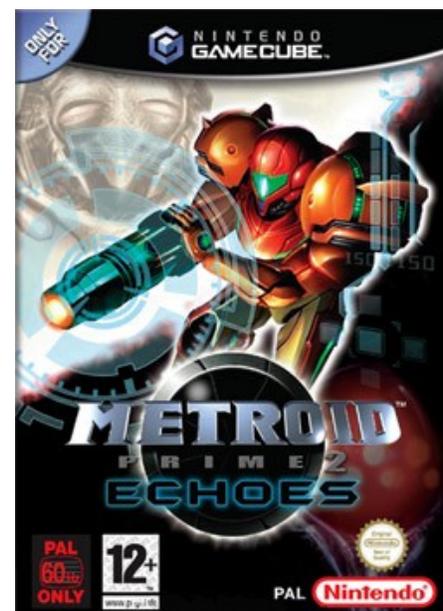


Figure 2.1: Box art displaying 60 Hz only label (N-Europe, 2004)

3. Delays – Nintendo solely to blame?

Like any other video game console, multiple developers publish game titles for the Wii. Nintendo themselves is not responsible for all games available for the Wii, with other publishers like SEGA, Konami, Atari and Activision frequently putting out software for the console ([Codename Revolution](#), 2007). With all these developers putting out games, is there a difference in the time frame of release of these titles compared to the Nintendo-published games? Let us compare

Figure 3.1: Top 8 rated Nintendo first-party published Wii games at [GameStats.com](#) as of 11 August, 2007

Game Title	North American release	Australian release	Delay time
Zelda: Twilight Princess	19 November 2006	7 December 2006	19 Days
Super Paper Mario **	9 April 2007	20 September 2007	5 Months, 12 Days
Mario Strikers Charged	30 July 2007	7 June 2007	1 Month, 24 Days earlier
Wario Ware: Smooth Moves	15 January 2007	25 January 2007	10 Days
Excite Truck	19 November 2006	22 February 2007	3 Months, 4 Days
Big Brain Academy: Wii Degree	11 June 2007	15 October 2007	4 Months, 5 Days
Mario Party 8	29 May 2007	19 July 2007	1 Month, 21 Days
Pokémon Battle Revolution **	25 June 2007	Est. October 2007	3 Months, 7 Days

*** Indicates title not currently available in Australia, using given release date in calculation*

As you can see, the majority of Nintendo-published game titles have a significant delay of over a month. While there are some titles that have a reasonably small delay, and even one title that was released in Australia before North America, these examples are clearly an exception to the overall trend. But how does it bode for future releases? With the 2007 holiday season looming, many key software titles are due to be released within the next few months in North America. Let us consider three highly anticipated titles:

Figure 3.2: Future Nintendo first-party published Wii games and respective release dates as of 11 August, 2007

Game Title	North American release	Australian release	Delay Time
Metroid Prime 3: Corruption	27 August 2007	8 November 2007 *	2 Months, 13 Days
Super Mario Galaxy	12 November 2007	No Date Available	-
Super Smash Bros. Brawl	3 December 2007	No Date Available	-

** Release estimate ([GoNintendo](#), 2007)*

Clearly, these delays are not going away. Two of the key titles of the year do not even have a clear release date, with the third having a delay of over two months. Estimates for the undated titles give the possibility of a delay into 2008, again putting them months after the overseas launch date. Based on this, it is clear these massive delays are not going away any time soon. But is this solely Nintendo's fault? Or is this situation the same for titles on the Wii console that are not released by Nintendo? Let us examine.

Figure 3.3: Top 8 rated third-party published Wii games at Gamestats.com as of 11 August, 2007

Game Title	North American release	Australian release	Delay time
Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition	19 June 2007	5 July 2007	17 Days
The Godfather: Blackhand Edition	20 March 2007	29 March 2007	9 Days
Trauma Center: Second Opinion	19 November 2006	No date available #	N/A
Madden NFL 07	14 November 2006	7 December 2006	24 Days
Rayman Raving Rabbids	14 November 2006	7 December 2006	24 Days
Dragon Ball Z Budokai Tenkaichi 2	19 November 2006	5 April 2007	4 Months, 18 Days
Scarface: The World is Yours	12 June 2007	12 July 2007	31 Days
SSX Blur	27 February 2007	15 March 2007	17 Days

Trauma Center: Second Opinion has yet to be picked up by a publisher in Australia

It is clear to see, the majority of third-party software available for the Wii is released in Australia within weeks of being available in North America, not the many months as it is with Nintendo-published titles. This statistic almost certainly proves the delays are not related to any problems with software conversions, hardware adaptations or industry wide requirements between countries. Such extensive delays between global releases have no tangible reasoning behind them what so ever. Nintendo specifically must be causing such extenuated delays to software releases.

4. Importing and Region locking

With software consistently being released earlier in areas outside of Australia, a simple resolution would be to import the version of a title released in another country. This is, however, prevented by a mechanism in consoles called region locking. Region locking is done by encoding discs and hardware to only work with games designed for that region. When the console hardware is produced, it is designed to look for a region code on any video game disc inserted into it. If the code present on the disc does not match the one present in the console hardware, it simply refuses to run the game code that is on the disc ([Wikipedia](#), 2007). This region locking system has no other purpose then to prevent consumers from purchasing software from other global regions – making it impossible to run the earlier released versions of the game on their video game consoles. While region locking has long been used in the video game industry, it has recently come into the spotlight in terms of its legality. Specifically in Australia and New Zealand, region locking has been ruled to be a violation of national legislation relating to free trade and parallel importing ([Wikipedia](#), 2007). Even with this ruling, video game consoles including the Nintendo Wii still contain this explicit region locking mechanism.

A work around for region locking exists, involving physical modification chips. Commonly called ‘mod chips’, these devices have only recently become fully legal in Australia. ([Kotaku](#), 2006). In order to function, these mod chips have to be physically soldered onto the circuit board of the console. This stops the console from checking for the region code present on a game disc, and simply proceeds to run the game software. Installing a modification chip, however, is often a very intricate task and if not done correctly can stop the console from functioning at all. Taking this into consideration, it is generally not an option for the general consumer, forcing them to wait for the often more expensive and long delayed release of a game title in there native region.

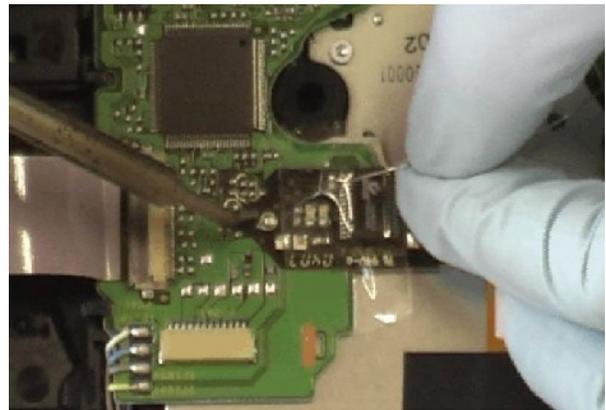


Figure 4.1: Example of installing a modification chip to bypass region locking
(MaxConsole.net, 2007)

5. Conclusion

It is coming increasingly obvious to see, consumers of Nintendo products within Australia and New Zealand are at an extremely unfair disadvantage when it comes to release dates of game software. It is clearly not an issue with adapting the game titles themselves to run at the PAL video standard, as not only can Australian Wii units output the same video signal as their North American counterparts, but modern technology has made the process of converting the software to a full PAL signal nothing more than a trivial matter. These extensive delays are not shared with other publishers releasing software for the Wii, with most third-parties releasing game titles in Australia within weeks of the North American version. The massive delays are only present when it comes to Nintendo's self-published software, and estimated release dates for the upcoming holiday season doesn't look to be any better, with gamers in Australia and New Zealand still waiting many extra months for upcoming highly anticipated titles.

Nintendo have also forcibly stopped consumers from importing the earlier released North American versions of software by implementing regional lockout mechanisms on both game discs and console hardware. These region lockout techniques serve no purpose other than to forcibly regulate the market into purchasing the long delayed and often extremely higher priced local release over the imported versions available. The legality of this region locking has come under legal scrutiny in recent times, with national court rulings stating that this region locking is breaching legislation relating to free trade and parallel importing. The region locking, however, still is retained and fully enforced in Nintendo's Wii console, and could even be considered a form of consumer bullying.

The resolution looking forward is very simple; either Nintendo of Australia should remove region locking mechanisms present in consoles, or start releasing game software in far more appropriate time frames. It is clear to see by the facts presented that the bullying and manipulation has gone on long enough. Consumers should not be placed at such an extreme disadvantage for no technical or logical reason what so ever.

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