

Media Release

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BSA finds two *Seven Sharp* items about flag referendum were not unbalanced

The Broadcasting Standards Authority has declined to uphold two complaints about two separate *Seven Sharp* items which discussed the New Zealand flag referendum. One item discussed whether celebrity endorsement of any particular flag would sway public voting in the New Zealand flag referendum. The other item featured an interview with an Australian advocate for changing the New Zealand flag.

Both complaints alleged that the items presented unbalanced coverage of the flag referendum.

In both decisions the Authority found that alternative views on the flag debate received considerable media coverage over a significant period of time and generated robust and widespread discussion among New Zealanders. In light of this the Authority found that it was reasonable to expect viewers were aware of the different points of view on the flag issue by the time of these two broadcasts.

In the first decision the Authority considered a *Seven Sharp* item broadcast on 22 February 2016, which covered the impact of celebrity endorsement of any particular flag on public voting in the flag referendum.

The Authority found 'The broadcaster was not required to give exactly equal time to each side of the flag debate, and the mention of the support for the current flag was sufficient to acknowledge this viewpoint in the context of the item'.

The Authority also noted that 'Celebrities, including programme presenters and/or journalists, are permitted to express an opinion on a controversial issue so long as this is done in a transparent and balanced way'.

In the second decision, which considered *Seven Sharp's* interview on 2 March 2016 with an Australian advocate for changing the New Zealand flag, the Authority concluded that comments made throughout the item made it clear that there had been robust debate about the referendum and that other perspectives on the issue existed. The question line of the interview in essence put forward the main arguments against changing the flag, for example, 'people don't like the design' and 'veterans fought under this flag'.

In response to the complainant's argument that in the course of the lead-up to the referendum presenter Mike Hosking had repeatedly offered his own views in support of changing the flag, the Authority said it viewed the item as an example of a style of advocacy presentation which is now utilised in some current affairs programmes, including *Seven Sharp*.

'Although this strays from traditional news broadcasting where presenters do not usually offer their own opinions on topical issues, it does not automatically follow that a current affairs item in which a presenter advocates for a certain stance will be unbalanced. The standard requires broadcasters to

make reasonable efforts to present significant points of view, either within the programme itself or within the period of current interest. We are satisfied that TVNZ made reasonable efforts to provide balance both within this programme and in the surrounding period.'

ENDS

For more information contact Nicole Hickman on 027 313 0179.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The full decision is available at <http://bsa.govt.nz/decisions/latest>

ABOUT THE BROADCASTING STANDARDS AUTHORITY

The Broadcasting Standards Authority is an independent body that oversees the broadcasting standards regime in New Zealand. We do this by determining complaints that broadcasts have breached standards, by doing research and also by providing information about broadcasting standards.

We are essentially an appeal body, which is why complaints generally go to the broadcaster first (with the exception of privacy issues and election advertisements).

The Authority Board has four members who determined this complaint – Peter Radich (chair), Leigh Pearson, Te Rau Kupenga and Paula Rose.

For more information see our website: www.bsa.govt.nz