

MEDIA RELEASE

8 December 2014

BSA declines to uphold Taranaki fracking waste disposal complaint

The Broadcasting Standards Authority has declined to uphold a complaint from Taranaki Regional Council that a *Morning Report* item about the disposal of fracking waste in Taranaki was misleading, unfair and unbalanced.

Fracking is the high-pressure injection of a mixture of water and chemicals to access oil and gas deep under ground.

The item broadcast on 17 December 2013 reported that the waste from fracking was being applied to farmland in Taranaki – an operation known as landfarming.

It also reported that the Taranaki Regional Council was misleading the public by claiming this practice was consistent with the international best practice of Canada’s Alberta Energy Regulator (AER).

The council complained that the allegations arose because the report confused drilling waste (solids such as mud and sludge) with the liquid waste from fracking.

The BSA found that the basis for any alleged inaccuracy was the language used by the council’s Director of Environment Quality, Gary Bedford.

At no stage during his 40-minute interview did Mr Bedford adequately distinguish between the two types of waste, the BSA decision said.

“If the parties were talking at cross-purposes, this was Mr Bedford’s doing and was not due to any failure on the part of the broadcaster,” the decision said.

The council also argued the terms ‘farmland’ and ‘agricultural land’ in the report were misleading because landfarms are not used, and are often unsuitable, for grazing stock.

The BSA found that while the item’s introduction referred to ‘farmland’, the body of the report made it clear that waste was not being dumped on active farmland where animals graze.

The BSA was satisfied overall that the item did not breach standards. The report was an accurate and fair reflection of what Mr Bedford told the reporter in the interview, and it is legitimate and important in our free and democratic society to challenge and criticise public bodies on matters of strong public interest.

“Public bodies need to expect to come under scrutiny and to face assertions they see as unfair, as part of our open democratic processes,” the BSA said.

Ends

The full decision is available at www.bsa.govt.nz

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