

Media Release

30 June 2015

Plunket's comments about Catton not a breach of broadcasting standards

The Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA) declined to uphold two complaints about Radio Live talkback host Sean Plunket's reaction to comments made by prominent New Zealand author Eleanor Catton.

Plunket called Catton an 'ungrateful hua' and a 'traitor', amongst other things, for comments she made earlier this year at a literary festival in India which were critical of the New Zealand Government.

The BSA received complaints that Plunket's comments constituted 'bullying' and a personal attack on Catton.

The Authority in its decision noted that 'the severity of [Plunket's] attack and the hostility and aggression of the language used... raised the question of whether this attack went too far'.

However the Authority found that Plunket's comments did not breach broadcasting standards. It said in its decision 'Eleanor Catton was powerfully exercising her right to freedom of expression and has had to suffer the responses including those from the broadcaster. Conversely, the broadcaster has exercised its right to freedom of expression and it will have suffered consequences from those who objected to what Mr Plunket said and the way in which he said it'.

The Authority considered that '...different views have been expressed and have been evaluated and those who have expressed or broadcast these views have been judged accordingly. This is how we think things are meant to work in a liberal democracy. We do not think that our society would be better off if views such as those of the radio host were staunched'.

The Authority also found Plunket's comments were within audience expectations '... in the context of a robust opinionated and sometimes provocative or challenging forum such as talkback radio'.

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 members who determined these complaints were Peter Radich (chair), Mary Anne Shanahan and Te Rau Kupenga.

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