

Media Release

16 November 2015

BSA finds *Seven Sharp* euthanasia item lacked balance

The Broadcasting Standards Authority has upheld a complaint from Right to Life New Zealand that a *Seven Sharp* item about voluntary euthanasia lacked balance.

The item was broadcast in March this year and featured the story of a terminally ill woman who is a long-standing voluntary euthanasia campaigner. It also discussed the history of attempts to legalise voluntary euthanasia in New Zealand and overseas.

The BSA found that the item did not solely approach the issue of voluntary euthanasia from the personal perspective of the interviewee. It included a wider discussion of the voluntary euthanasia debate and law reform. This meant the broadcaster should have presented more than one side of the issue.

‘The item presented three streams of advocacy in favour of voluntary euthanasia – the campaigner’s views, the discussion of legalisation overseas and the presenters’ and reporter’s comments’, said the BSA.

This meant ‘the item itself did not put forward any significant view opposing the pro-voluntary euthanasia stance; it was heavily weighted in support of voluntary euthanasia,’ the BSA found.

The BSA also found that the broadcaster could not rely on the fact that subsequent items, broadcast several months after the item subject to complaint, presented alternative perspectives on euthanasia (for example, media coverage about the Lecretia Seales case).

The BSA accepted that this was somewhat of a departure from its approach in previous decisions, but said ‘If we were to accept without question that the concept of ‘balance over time’ applied here and that TVNZ’s coverage of a different story some months afterwards saved the 17 March item, it may have

the consequence that no broadcast which discusses voluntary euthanasia (or any other long-standing moral issue) could ever be found to be unbalanced – no matter how one-sided – on the basis that the other side of the issue may be presented at some point in the future.’

The BSA did not make any order, finding that publication of the decision was sufficient.

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 this complaint were Peter Radich (Chair), Mary Anne Shanahan, Leigh Pearson, and Te Rau Kupenga.

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