

Media Release

24 April 2017

Seven Sharp 'herb thief' item unfair and broadcaster should have apologised

The Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA) has upheld a complaint that TVNZ failed to take appropriate action, following a fairness complaint from a woman featured on *Seven Sharp*.

The item followed two local residents, labelled 'herb detectives', searching for a man they believed was responsible for stealing their herbs. During the item, the pair visited the local market looking for the alleged thief, and spoke to a woman, Shunfang Shen, who was selling herbs. The item implied that Mrs Shen may have been involved in the theft, which was not the case. It was clear from the item that Mrs Shen did not speak English and could not respond to the reporter's questions or defend herself.

TVNZ upheld Mrs Shen's complaint that the item was unfair and inaccurate, and later broadcast a correction saying it did not intend to suggest that Mrs Shen was the 'herb thief'.

The Authority acknowledged that the broadcaster had taken steps to correct the item, but considered the broadcaster should have also issued an apology to Mrs Shen.

The Authority found that the item had the potential to negatively affect Mrs Shen's livelihood, dignity and reputation, particularly in her local Chinese community.

"New Zealand is a multicultural society and broadcasters should be aware of the cultural implications for individuals featured in broadcasts, particularly where [the broadcast] may be detrimental to them," the BSA said.

In response to the broadcaster's position that the item was intended to be 'light-hearted', the Authority said that, regardless of the nature of the item, principles of fair treatment still applied.

"Programmes intended to be light-hearted still have the potential to cause harm to any individuals featured or referred to, including bystanders or those peripheral to the main story. This is particularly so where the subject matter alludes to criminal or unethical behaviour".

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>.

The decision was made under the Fairness and Accuracy Standards of the Free-to-Air Television Code of Broadcasting Practice. The Code has been in force since 1 April 2016 and is available at <http://bsa.govt.nz/standards/overview>.

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.

The Authority members are Peter Radich (Chair), Leigh Pearson, Te Raumawhitu Kupenga and Paula Rose.

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