

Media Release

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BSA releases new research on public attitudes to broadcasting standards decisions on television classifications and timebands

New research has been released by the Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA) today on the public's attitudes to BSA decisions on classifications and timebands on television.

The research, conducted by UMR Research for the BSA, involved 54 members of the public from around New Zealand. Participants were invited to assess ('litmus test') five BSA decisions which considered classification and timeband issues under the Programme Information and Children's Interests standards for free-to-air and pay television.

The decisions tested were about *Criminal Minds* (a crime drama), *Grizzly Tales* (a children's cartoon), *ONE News* (footage of an assault on a store worker), a promo for *The Night Shift* (a medical drama) and Nicki Minaj's music video for 'Only'.

The majority of participants agreed with the BSA's decisions for all five programmes, and an average of 87% of participants rated the BSA's decisions as very good, good or acceptable. Some participants considered the standards themselves were too lenient, even if they agreed the standards were correctly applied by the BSA.

Themes which emerged from the research included:

- In general, older participants tended to be more disturbed by overtly sexual material or offensive language than younger participants.
- The depiction of graphic or prolonged violence during unclassified news programmes may not be appropriate for broadcast early in the evening.
- Fleeting references to sexual content may be acceptable to broadcast during timeslots classified G (General).
- There is an expectation of some degree of self-censorship by audiences.
- Most parents claimed to take steps to restrict their children's access to unsuitable content on television (such as violence, offensive language, horror and overtly sexual material). Steps included monitoring and restricting children's viewing times (for example, only allowing children to watch G-classified programmes), channels and content, and for some, use of parental locks and family safety technology.

- Broadcasting standards give parents some measure of reassurance about the suitability or otherwise of programme content.

UMR reported that consensus from the research participants was that the 'BSA is an important organisation ... that ... has a difficult job to do in a rapidly changing technological environment, and one where the public's attitudes also evolve and change.'

BSA Chief Executive, Belinda Moffat said, 'This testing is vitally important to the BSA's work, and is used by the Authority to gauge community attitudes and to assess whether BSA decisions align with public opinion. The research outcomes will be taken into consideration by the Authority in its determination of future complaints from the public that standards of broadcasting practice have been breached.'

Alongside the litmus testing research, the BSA also obtained an independent review of the same five BSA decisions by Linda Clark, Special Counsel at Kensington Swan, and former journalist and broadcaster.

Ms Clark concluded that the BSA's decisions are generally legally robust, well-reasoned, readable and clear. The review proposed a series of modifications to BSA decisions including providing a more detailed discussion of how the right to freedom of expression applies to broadcasting standards, and greater reference to the Authority's past decisions. The Authority will take into account the recommendations made in its future work.

The full Litmus Testing report 2017 is available [here](#) and the full External Review report 2017 is available [here](#).

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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 programmes).

This research tested Standard 2: Programme Information and Standard 3: Children's Interests of the Free-to-Air Television and Pay Television Codes of Broadcasting Practice.

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