

Media Release

26 September 2017

Host's provocative comments about Lions rugby team not in breach of standards

The Broadcasting Standards Authority has not upheld a complaint about provocative comments made by Mark Watson about the British and Irish Lions rugby team and northern hemisphere rugby media.

During a *Sportstalk* segment Mr Watson engaged in a heated discussion with a talkback caller about northern hemisphere rugby. He made critical comments including "I hate northern hemisphere rugby with a passion. I can't stand it," and "Good luck against the Blues, hopefully you [the Lions] get smashed."

The Authority found that in the context of a talkback sports show that focused on rugby, the host's comments did not exceed audience expectations and would have been understood to be an expression of the host's desire to see the Lion's team lose.

"The tone and delivery of the comments did not go beyond the type of sports commentary and rugby banter that is typically expected on this radio station," the Authority said.

The Authority also noted that within the sports talkback context listeners "[w]ould have understood the host's comments, including 'hopefully you get smashed', not as an encouragement for the players to become injured, but rather as an expression of the host's desire to see the Lions rugby team lose."

The Authority acknowledged the host's statements were "harsh, critical and deliberately provocative" but concluded they were not so offensive as to outweigh the broadcaster's right to freedom of expression. The Authority noted that the free and frank expression of opinions is an important aspect of the right to freedom of expression, and is valued in our society.

The Authority concluded, "[t]aking into account the opinionated environment of talkback radio and the expectation that it will provide a forum for robust and provocative debate and critique, the comments did not reach the high threshold necessary to breach standards of good taste and decency."

The Authority found that the comments made by Mr Watson were not in breach of the good taste and decency, discrimination and denigration or balance standards.

ENDS

For more information contact Catie Murray on 021 623 794.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The segment was broadcast at 5.50pm on 5 June 2017 on Radio Sport.

The full decision is available at <http://bsa.govt.nz/decisions/latest>.

The decision was made under the Good Taste and Decency, Discrimination and Denigration and Balance standards of the Radio 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), Te Raumawhitu Kupenga and Paula Rose.

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