

## Media Release

27 August 2018

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### **BSA upholds complaint about rocket launch reporting, highlighting importance of verifying content sourced from social media**

Over two evenings in January this year, *Newshub* reported on the delayed launch of a rocket from the Māhia Peninsula, incorrectly implying that a Hastings District Councillor had been in a boat in the exclusion zone around the launch site and was responsible for the delay.

The Broadcasting Standards Authority (**BSA**) upheld a complaint from the Councillor, Damon Harvey, and his partner, that these items were inaccurate and misleading, and unfair to Mr Harvey.

The BSA found that the broadcaster relied on social media content sourced from Twitter without taking reasonable steps to inform the complainants about their contribution to the programme, or to verify that the content was what the reporter claimed.

The Authority said the items were newsworthy and covered a significant current event, in which New Zealanders had a clear interest. However, while social media content may be used to keep up with real-time storytelling on social media platforms, the Authority emphasised that broadcasters have an obligation to ensure that use of such content does not cause harm.

“Broadcasters must... use social media content carefully to ensure that it is accurate and that publication does not unfairly impact on individuals,” the Authority said.

In this item the broadcaster did not take steps to verify the timing of the original tweet and photograph it used, and incorrectly reported that Mr Harvey was in the exclusion zone at the time of the proposed launch, when this was not the case.

The second item featured a brief clip from an interview with Mr Harvey in response, but the BSA found that this interview was edited in a way that was misleading and did not correct the impression given the previous evening that Mr Harvey had been responsible for the launch delay. Mr Harvey was therefore not given a fair and reasonable opportunity to respond to the allegations made against him.

In this decision the Authority cautions broadcasters about the care that must be taken when using social media. “Twitter by its nature is a very public social media platform. ... [I]n this case the content posted to Twitter was rebroadcast in a way that did not reflect the true series of events and which was likely to be damaging to Mr Harvey”, the Authority said.

Given the potential for significant reputational harm, and the broadcaster's failure to correct the misinformation in the second broadcast and to uphold the original complaint, the BSA ordered the broadcaster to broadcast a statement during *Newshub*, summarising the decision, and to publish statements online and in *Hawke's Bay Today*. It also ordered MediaWorks to pay \$1,000 in costs to the Crown and \$2,000 in contribution towards the complainants' legal costs.

ENDS

**For more information contact Catie Murray on 021 623 794.**

#### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

The items were broadcast on 20 and 21 January 2018 on Three. The full decision is available at <http://bsa.govt.nz/decisions/latest>. The decision was made under the Free-to-Air Television Code of Broadcasting Practice which is available at <http://bsa.govt.nz/standards/overview>.

The Broadcasting Standards Authority undertook research in 2017 into the use of social media content in broadcasting. The research report, *Use of Social Media Content in Broadcasting: Public and Broadcaster Perspectives*, can be found on our website [here](#).

Following the research, the BSA worked alongside broadcasters to produce a guidance note for broadcasters about use of third party content, such as social media content. This guidance highlights the issues addressed in this decision and can be found on our website [here](#).

#### **ABOUT THE BROADCASTING STANDARDS AUTHORITY**

The BSA is an independent Crown entity that oversees the broadcasting standards regime in New Zealand. The BSA determines complaints that broadcasts have breached standards, undertakes research and oversees the development of broadcasting standards in consultation with broadcasters.

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

**For more information see our website: [www.bsa.govt.nz](http://www.bsa.govt.nz)**