

Media Release

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BSA finds broadcast of a highly offensive word in the song ‘Hurricane’ by Bob Dylan did not breach broadcasting standards

The Broadcasting Standards Authority (**BSA**) has found that the broadcast of the song ‘Hurricane’ by Bob Dylan on Coast FM which uses the word ‘nigger’ did not breach broadcasting standards. The song contains the lyrics ‘[a]nd to the black folks he was just a *crazy nigger*’ [emphasis added], which the complainant considered to be ‘offensive, racist and unacceptable’.

The BSA acknowledged that the word is highly offensive and derogatory.

However, after careful consideration, it did not uphold the complaint under the good taste and decency and discrimination and denigration standards due to a range of contextual factors. These include the historical significance of the song.

The Authority stated, “The song itself has social and historical significance and tells a story of racial injustice and inequality experienced by African Americans in the 1960s. It could be argued that the song itself is an example of the power of the right to freedom of expression. The language and expressions used is integral to the narrative of the story told through the song.”

Other contextual factors include the songwriter himself, who is well-known for using his music to address issues of social injustice and inequality, and the well-established audience expectations of Coast FM.

In making this decision, the BSA acknowledged its role to reflect community standards and noted recent research showed a significant portion of the public find the use of the word in broadcasting unacceptable.

“We do not condone the use of this word in every day usage – it is powerful and offensive.”

In making this decision the BSA warns broadcasters to exercise caution and recognise that in many contexts this word may cause significant harm.

ENDS

For more information contact Catie Murray on 021 623 794.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The song was broadcast on 15 August 2018 on Coast FM. The full decision is available at <http://bsa.govt.nz/decisions/latest>. The decision was made under the Radio Code of Broadcasting Practice which is available at <http://bsa.govt.nz/standards/overview>.

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 Judge Bill Hastings (Chair), Paula Rose, Wendy Palmer and Susie Staley.

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