

4 March 2013

BSA finds 3 News breached controversial issues standard

The Broadcasting Standards Authority has found that TV3 breached the standard relating to controversial issues in an item on 3 News: Firstline about a proposed amendment to the Parole Act.

TV3 accepted that the interview with Ruth Money from the Sensible Sentencing Trust was not balanced and had not sufficiently presented alternative viewpoints.

Ruth Money's comments that the amendment did not go far enough and that parole hearings should be abolished prompted a complaint from Roger Brooking from the Howard League for Penal Reform.

Mr Brooking argued that the item discussed a controversial issue of public importance but that only the "right wing" views of the Trust were sought and presented. For example, he said the item did not explore the importance or effectiveness of the parole process and was solely about victims.

The item also suggested that it was compulsory for victims to attend parole hearings. Mr Brooking said this point would have been challenged as attendance was optional and victims did not in fact attend the same hearing as the offender, so they did not come face-to-face.

In its findings the BSA agreed with TV3's view about the complaint saying: "Given the nature of the issue, and the impression created by the item, we agree the broadcaster did not go far enough in its effort to present alternative views."

The BSA did not uphold complaints of a breach of accuracy and fairness standards saying that comments by Ruth Money were clearly distinguishable as comment or opinion and that the broadcast did not contain anything that would have created an unfairly negative impression of parole board members, prisoners or victims.

The full report is available at www.bsa.govt.nz

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