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BSA says radio host abused position by airing grievance

The Broadcasting Standards Authority has upheld a complaint against a Newstalk ZB host who it says abused his position by allegedly threatening bar staff with bad publicity and then broadcasting his grievances.

On the *Farming Show*, host Jamie Mackay told a short anecdote about his experience at The Waterfront Bar and Bistro in Queenstown where the barman refused to serve him.

The owner of the bar complained to the BSA that Mr Mackay's comments were one-sided and a distortion of the original event, and that it was inappropriate for a radio announcer to use his position to air personal grievances. It referred to security camera footage which showed Mr Mackay and his companions being refused service due to intoxication and aggressive behaviour.

The BSA said that in assessing an alleged breach of broadcasting standards it must give proper consideration to the right of freedom of expression and to assess the value of the particular speech.

"We consider that there was minimal value in the host's comments. The comments were unrelated to the *Farming Show* and were, in our view, merely an opportunity for Mr Mackay to retaliate and vent about his experience at the bar.

"We accept that it is commonplace for radio hosts to tell personal anecdotes as a means of engaging with their audience. However we think that here there was an undertone of revenge, and that the host went too far by naming the bar. He abused his position as the host of a radio programme in order to publicly criticise an identifiable business, to advance his own personal agenda.

The BSA said that due to the host's naming of the bar, and the segment's overall tone of negativity and criticism, there was real potential for the broadcast to have a detrimental impact on the bar's business and commercial interests, which was unfair.

The BSA did not impose any penalty as it felt the decision would serve as a reminder to the broadcaster and the host to ensure professional standards are maintained and broadcasting standards are adhered to.

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

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