

5 August 2013

Complaint against Michael Laws not upheld

The Broadcasting Standards Authority has not upheld a complaint against Michael Laws for saying that dementia patients are deliberately overmedicated, and then cutting off a caller who wanted to challenge his comments.

The caller alleged that the Radio Live talkback host breached standards of accuracy, fairness and discrimination and denigration.

Michael Laws was talking to a woman whose husband had been diagnosed with dementia and said that medical personnel were deliberately overmedicating dementia patients, causing them to die. He referred to the caller's husband as being destined to become a 'zombie'.

The complainant called in saying, "What you're advocating has been tried before, quite successfully in Germany in the late 1920s and 1930s". Michael Laws terminated the call.

The complainant argued that it was unfair for the host to deny callers the opportunity to express opinions that differed from his, and specifically that it was unfair to terminate his call when he tried to challenge the assertion that medical personnel euthanised people with dementia.

In declining to uphold the complaint, the BSA said they have consistently acknowledged that talkback radio is a robust and opinionated environment in which hosts and callers often put forward strong views in a forceful or provocative manner.

"Talkback listeners and participants are also likely to be aware of the presentation style of particular hosts, including how they treat callers. Mr Laws is well-known for his controversial and provocative presentation style, and in this sense, the behaviour displayed by Mr Laws in terminating the call, was, in our view, not unexpected," said the BSA.

The BSA also acknowledged that while Mr Laws' use of the term 'zombie' may have been considered harsh and offensive by some listeners, it was not expressed in a vitriolic or hateful tone and was clearly not intended as an attack against people with dementia.

The full report is available at www.bsa.govt.nz **For more information contact:** Heather Church
021 78 29 23