

4 February 2013

“Beast of Blenheim” nickname not a broadcasting standards breach

The Broadcasting Standards Authority has found that *Nightline* and *3 News* did not breach standards when referring to convicted sex offender Stewart Murray Wilson as “the beast of Blenheim”.

The complaint related to items covering the release of Mr Wilson after 18 years in prison for more than 20 sex offences against women and children over a 20-year period.

The complainant alleged that Mr Wilson was treated unfairly because the label dehumanised and stigmatised him and was a deliberate attempt to incite public hostility and animosity against him and other prisoners.

In its findings the BSA said that the label “beast of Blenheim” or “the beast” had been used for many years and had become a well-known nickname reflecting the public’s reaction to the nature of the crimes he committed.

It was used only once in each item and Wilson was also referred to by his legal name.

The complainant was also concerned that the items showed disregard for Mr Wilson’s human rights in breach of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act.

He alleged TV3 was grooming the public against Mr Wilson in collaboration with other broadcasters who hold to the same practices and ideology of separatism, hatred and contemptuous superiority.

The BSA said that this part of the complaint appeared to be directed primarily at the justice system rather than at the broadcast itself as it referred to Mr Wilson’s right to freedom of movement and his right not to be arbitrarily detained. However the BSA disagreed that the items encouraged viewers to treat Mr Wilson in a way that undermined human rights, or to break the law.

The complaint also alleged breaches of standards of good taste and decency, privacy, controversial issues, accuracy, discrimination and denigration, responsible programming and children’s interests. None of these were upheld.

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

For more information contact: Heather Church 021 78 29 23