

October 9, 2020



TE REO
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O AOTEAROA

[REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

I write in response to your formal complaint in respect of RNZ's coverage of Julian Assange. As you have lodged a "formal complaint" against our coverage, this has been considered against the Broadcasting Standards Authority's balance standard which is attached.

RNZ observes at the outset that our News service has covered progress of the extradition case against Mr Assange in bulletins in February and April this year prior to the hearings starting and then more so in September and October this year.

The gist of your complaint is that our "long form" programmes have not covered the hearings or background issues in more detail. This is not something that the standards process can fully address as the Broadcasting Act is designed to address content which has been broadcast. The fact that something has not been broadcast does not mean that we are in breach of the standards.

In any event, RNZ notes that the "period of current interest" in this topic is one which remains open and will do so for some time.

Decisions made by individual programmes as to what is included in the schedules is an editorial matter which is decided from week to week. As you may appreciate, RNZ is pitched with numerous suggestions and ideas for topics which different members of the public and organisations think should be in a radio programme. As can be expected, those suggestions generated externally as well as those that are initiated internally require constant editorial decisions to be made.

As indicated above, the period of current interest in Mr Assange's issues is still an open topic and a live one and may well be covered at some point in the future.

For these reasons, it was found that your complaint did not amount to a breach of the formal standards. Separately we note that your complaint reference parts of the RNZ Charter as well. We again observe that there are any number of topics which are not canvassed in our programmes but that does not and cannot mean to say that we are in breach of our Charter obligations.

In line with the requirements of the Broadcasting Act, this letter advises you of the reason why your formal complaint was not upheld and of your right to refer this decision for review to the Broadcasting Standards Authority, by email to info@bsa.govt.nz. A referral must occur within 20 working days.

It remains for me to thank you for bringing this matter to our attention and for giving us the opportunity to respond to your concerns.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George Bignell", with a period at the end.

George Bignell
Complaints Coordinator

STANDARD 8 – BALANCE

When controversial issues of public importance are discussed in news, current affairs or factual programmes, broadcasters should make reasonable efforts, or give reasonable opportunities, to present significant points of view either in the same programme or in other programmes within the period of current interest.

Guidelines

- 8a For the standard to apply, the subject matter must be an issue ‘of public importance’, it must be ‘controversial’ and it must be ‘discussed’ in a news, current affairs or factual programme.
- 8b No set formula can be advanced for the allocation of time to interested parties on controversial issues of public importance.
- 8c The assessment of whether a reasonable range of other perspectives has been presented includes consideration of the following, where relevant:
- the programme’s introduction and the way in which the programme was presented, for example:
 - whether the programme purported to be a balanced examination of an issue
 - whether the programme was clearly signalled as approaching a topic from a particular perspective (eg, authorial documentaries, public access and advocacy programmes, partial or politically aligned programmes)
 - whether the programme was narrowly focused on one aspect of a larger, complex debate
 - the nature of the discussion (was it a serious examination of an issue, or was the issue raised in a brief, humorous or peripheral way)
 - the nature of the issue/whether listeners could reasonably be expected to be aware of views expressed in other coverage, including coverage in other media (eg, is it an ongoing topic of debate, such that listeners can reasonably be expected to have a broad understanding of the main perspectives on the issue)
 - the likely expectations of the audience as to content
 - the level of editorial control of the broadcaster over the programme content.