

Content

Australian Story 'Listen to Me' broadcast on ABC1 TV on 20 May 2013.

Complainant

Mr Mike Carlton, media commentator, who was a participant in the program.

Relevant sections of ABC Editorial Policies (2011)

Section 4 – impartiality and diversity of perspectives

Summary of program

The subject of the program was the Sydney 2GB morning radio host Ray Hadley. An influential and controversial broadcaster who has faced bullying allegations, Mr Hadley's anger issues were a focal point of the story. In keeping with the established format of *Australian Story*, the program explored the story primarily through interviews with Mr Hadley and those close to him, with contributions from others who could shed light on his behaviour.

Complaint

Mr Carlton alleged that the program selectively edited his interview contribution in a way that was improper and unfair, and that the program overall lacked balance and presented an overly favourable picture of its subject, Ray Hadley.

Investigation

The complaint was investigated by Audience and Consumer Affairs, a unit separate to and independent of the ABC News Division, which is responsible for *Australian Story*. In assessing compliance with the ABC editorial standards for impartiality, Audience and Consumer Affairs viewed the final program and raw footage of the interview with Mr Carlton. Audience and Consumer Affairs also considered information provided by *Australian Story*.

Findings

The program included five contributions from Mr Carlton:

- His view on why Ray Hadley resonates with his audience;
- The nature of Sydney 'shock jocks';
- His view of Ray Hadley's broadcasting style;
- His experience of Ray Hadley's problems with anger, and why this was seemingly tolerated;
- His summary of the most recent bullying allegation against Mr Hadley.

The program makers did not include every point Mr Carlton made in his interview in each of the different ways that he expressed himself, and there was no obligation for them to do so. However, the program was under an obligation not to misrepresent Mr Carlton's views, not to unduly favour one perspective over another and to present news and information with due impartiality. Based on

a review of the program and the raw footage of the interview, Audience and Consumer Affairs was satisfied that these obligations were met.

It was clear from the final broadcast that Mr Carlton was critical of Mr Hadley's workplace behaviour and his broadcasting style. The program was not obliged to use grabs that expressed these points in more strident or forceful ways, and the program makers advised that their decisions around use of particular phrases were informed by editorial considerations, including those of accuracy and fairness. The program makers employed a reasoned and considered approach and the final program was not unfair in its presentation of Mr Carlton's views.

In terms of Mr Carlton's broader concerns of balance within the program and his view that it should have included more of his remarks about Mr Hadley's on-air style, *Australian Story* explained that it instead preferred to use excerpts of actual broadcasts. This was not an inappropriate or unfair choice and allowed audiences to draw their own conclusions about Mr Hadley's broadcasting style. The program explained that it considered using examples of recent comments Mr Hadley had made on-air about Independent MP Rob Oakeshott, but ultimately used a segment of an interview with Alexander Downer because it considered this to be the most egregious example of Mr Hadley's aggressive on-air style. This was a reasonable editorial judgement for the program makers to exercise and did not signal a lack of impartiality.

Audience and Consumer Affairs did not agree with Mr Carlton's view that the program barely acknowledged allegations about Mr Hadley's behaviour or his aggressive style of broadcasting. The program was very much about Mr Hadley's issues with anger and how this had impacted on his relations with others in the workplace, his wife and his family. While many of those interviewed may have been close to Mr Hadley – his wife, sister, employer and colleagues – their contributions included critical assessments that were not unduly favourable to him.

Audience and Consumer Affairs was satisfied that appropriate and genuine efforts were made by the program to invite the participation of those who have complained of being abused or mistreated by Mr Hadley in the workplace, in particular a recent 2GB complainant. There may be a range of valid reasons for those affected being reluctant to contribute, including the fact that legal proceedings were pending.

The broadcast was found to be in keeping with the ABC's editorial standards for impartiality and the complaint was not upheld.