

MEDIA MATTERS WINTER NEWSLETTER 2021

WHO MONITORS THE MONITORS?

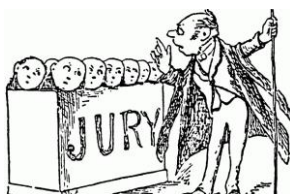


One of the top issues of the day is the future of the All Blacks funding streams and the Players Association and former All Blacks like David Kirk, have made the timely suggestion that a part of the shareholding should be allocated to the NZ public.

What a great idea, that the public have a stake in the AB's and should be represented

Exactly the same argument can be made for more representation by the public, in the affairs of our media. There are people on the Board of TVNZ who represent the Government and various interest groups, but no-one chosen by the public. The same is true of the other publicly owned entity, Radio New Zealand.

So too with those who are expected to monitor their performance. The Broadcasting Standards Authority and the NZ Media Council, while they purport to represent the readers, viewers and listeners, are not actually appointing by any public process, and a close look at their various credentials reveals that they actually represent various branches of the media itself.



SO, WHO MONITORS THE MONITORS? The complaints bodies identified above, show by their performance who they actually represent. 80 % of complaints to the BSA are rejected by that body, and in the case of the Press Council, recently re-incarnated as the Media Council, the same ratio pertains.

That doesn't mean that these appointees are not thoroughly competent people in their own way. But they cannot by any means be described as representative of the people who pay for their services, directly, in the case of taxpayer owned entities, TVNZ and RNZ. Private media also get paid by us directly through the taxpayer – funded Local Democracy Fund for sadly neglected local government news coverage.



So, the Complaints bodies themselves show a strong tendency to favor the industry against individual complainants. While some of their staff are highly efficient and thoroughly professional, these media nominated governors sit as judge and jury in their own case, which is hardly consistent with any recognizable form of natural justice. Perhaps the recently convened Governance Group, to be chaired by very competent former Minister Tracey Martin (pic) will produce some answers, though here again, they haven't made the best start, with no-one appointed to represent the public at large.

The way all this works day to day, is that RNZ can run a twice weekly programme called *Media Watch*, which regularly lays into the private media and sometimes TVNZ, but never, ever turns its attention to RNZ itself, the most prolific and widely listened to radio broadcaster in the country, perhaps because its host is an RNZ employee. The same programme, perhaps not surprisingly, never gives voice to consumer advocates like ourselves. In other words, we carry a full license to take shots at you, but don't you dare take shots at us.

Let's be fair, that RNZ actually does give voice generously to public feedback through hosts like Wallace Chapman, Kim Hill and Kathryn Ryan and that's great. And also, let's give a special shout out to the *NZ Listener*, which actually has a column for listeners and viewers – the only print publication in the country I know of which does.

They're with the play, but some of their colleagues continue to cherish and foster the outdated view that they are something special, the Fourth Estate, as they grandly refer to themselves, as if their opinions are somehow more valuable than our own. For such arrogance they surely deserve to be dumped, as their advertisers are already doing, in droves, preferring the democracy-in-action of the Social Media landscape.

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