

## **Summary of Meeting with Media Matters (John Terris) and Family First (Bob McCoskrie) in the Office of Minister of Broadcasting, The Hon. Jonathan Coleman on Thursday 30 July 2009**

We thanked Dr Coleman for the opportunity to talk through some of our concerns with him. These included:

### ***THE BROADCASTING STANDARDS AUTHORITY***

We have a particular concern about the Broadcasting Standards Authority, which we believe has an unnecessarily large and liberal interpretation of its role, and is, we feel, out of touch with mainstream thinking in NZ, as well as the sensitivities of older people and the susceptibilities of the young.

Two of many examples come to mind. About 18 months ago the BSA conducted a survey on what New Zealanders found acceptable in terms of bad language. This was a very odd undertaking because it is the appointed task of the Authority to set acceptable standards, not to seek to alter them by polling methodologies, which invariably produce the answer you want according to the question you ask.

This led to the supposed revelation that the F... word was quite acceptable to adult New Zealanders, and led directly, in turn, to an assault on the nation's standards of what is acceptable, by a particularly foul-mouthed presenter named Oliver Driver, who in the course of a single 30' late night programme on TV One, entitled "An Unauthorised History of New Zealand" used the "F..." word more than 30 times.

Public resources such as those of the BSA should not be being used to deliberately dismantle restrictions on the use of foul language which is offensive to many right-thinking New Zealanders, even if they are not the majority of those selected to take part in a poll.

A further notable example was the recent instance where TV3 advertised on Sunday mornings around the telecast of World Rugby Cup matches, in direct contravention of the law. They were found at fault, but there was no financial penalty. Such lack of action is breathtaking, given that TV3 must have been knowingly in breach, and went ahead with its law-breaking purely for the purpose of increasing revenue from advertising.

## ***THE WATERSHED***

This has been a long-standing concern, both as to its placement (it needs to be at least 9 pm) and its visibility (most regulatory regimes have a clearly marked Watershed - we do not). The BSA's own surveys show that most New Zealanders don't know what The Watershed is.

In this light, it is, we suggested, a nonsense to say that parents must take responsibility for what their children watch, while at the same time there is no indication about when and where the harmful programmes are being screened. We asked why a proposal by the BSA to review the effectiveness of Watershed a year ago, was subsequently withdrawn?

## ***VIOLENCE***

We pointed out that, given the increase in levels of youth crime, it was difficult to understand why there are not tighter restrictions on violence in such things as programme trailers and the News. Relying on complaints to draw attention to failings like these, is not sufficient when a) only a very small percentage of complaints are ever upheld and b) when the complaints process itself is such a convoluted obstacle course.

## ***CONSISTENCY ACROSS REGULATORY BODIES***

We pointed out that the gratuitous use of foul language is seldom used in newspapers because the Press Tribunal is much more rigorous than the BSA. At very least we suggest that there should be more formal consultation between the different bodies, BSA, ASA, DIA and so on, and that such consultation should involve advocacy groups like ours.

## ***COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE***

We made the point here that the media themselves make big play of the fact that the viewing public at large don't complain through the BSA process in any great numbers. We noted that the reason for this was very simple. People don't complain because the complaints system is indifferent to them. The vast majority of those who put forward complaints are rejected.

We put forward the view that there has to be a better way. Our system, now more than 20 years on, is hopelessly outdated, with the rest of the world having long ago moved to systems which are much more consumer-friendly, and capable of influencing the broadcasters. By contrast, the present complaints system in NZ, is best described as the occasional slap on the wrist with a wet bus ticket.

## ***SUMMARY***

We summarized the position as follows: That members of Family First and Media Matters were ordinary people who were bemused by official indifference to their wish to see better enforcement of existing rules. We did not advocate heavy handed censorship but simply better protection of children and young people from the harmful effects of gratuitous sex, violence and bad language. We said that we believed people with a libertarian world view on these matters appear to have taken over our broadcasting regulatory system and need to be replaced by those with a sense of what is appropriate for the preservation of foundation values and attitudes.

The meeting concluded with an indication from the officials present that we will be invited to participate in future in government Working Groups on these matters, and your representative stated that they looked forward to hearing further about opportunities to do so.