

Community attitudes to the presentation of factual material and viewpoints in commercial current affairs programs

01: Executive report

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COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TO THE PRESENTATION OF FACTUAL MATERIAL AND VIEWPOINTS IN COMMERCIAL CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMS

EXECUTIVE REPORT

Prepared for the Australian Communications and Media Authority

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BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) is currently undertaking a review of the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (the Code). This Code, introduced in September 1993, regulates the content of programs on commercial free-to-air television. The Code has been reviewed twice with revised Codes introduced in April 1999 and July 2004, and amended most recently in September 2006. It is now a requirement that the Code is updated every three years. The stations that must abide by the Code include Seven Network, Nine Network, Network Ten, Prime TV, WIN TV, Nine Perth, NBN and Imparja TV. The broadcasters are responsible for enacting and abiding by the Code in a self-regulatory manner.

As part of the current review of the Code, there is a need to investigate levels of concern among the community with the broadcasting of commercial current affairs programs. Since the Code was introduced, complaints to broadcasters and ACMA, as well as previous research, indicate there has been concern within the community about the manner in which the requirements for the presentation of factual information and viewpoints in current affairs programs have been applied by licensees. In order to understand these concerns in greater detail, ACMA commissioned this research to complement and inform the current review of the Code on the topic of current affairs programs.

1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The overall research objectives were to explore community attitudes toward the presentation of factual material and viewpoints in current affairs programs on commercial television services. The research sought to understand community expectations of the types of remedies that should apply to breaches of accuracy safeguards that apply to material on commercial current affairs programs.

The qualitative research was required to specifically:

- determine the nature of community needs, interests and expectations relating to factual material and viewpoints presented in current affairs programs;
- explore community attitudes and expectations about possible remedies that could apply when requirements for accuracy are not met by a program; and
- understand the extent to which certain circumstances may mitigate any of the concerns and remedial options identified.

The quantitative phase sought to quantify the key issues outlined in the qualitative research and to understand the extent to which these attitudes were present in the wider community.

1.1 Research Outcomes

Throughout the set up of the project, a series of research outcomes were decided upon in conjunction with ACMA. These were:

- to understand how the community regards current affairs programs;
- to explore community expectations with regard to the factual accuracy and fair representation of viewpoints of current affairs programs;
- to establish broad definitions of the types of errors and failures; and
- to examine expectations of the appropriate remedy for different errors and failures in terms of the:
 - action or response the broadcaster should take
 - action or response ACMA should take
 - most appropriate medium
 - most appropriate timescale.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Overview of Qualitative Methodology

A program of qualitative research, followed by quantitative research was designed to meet the overall objectives. The qualitative research involved 9 focus group discussions among primary viewers of current affairs programs. Each group consisted of 6-8 respondents and an even representation of males and females. The group sample was segmented by a number of factors (see Table 1). This phase of the research took place between 4-7th February 2008.

Table 1 : Group Sample

GRP	AGE	VIEWING FREQUENCY	LEVEL OF CONCERN	LOCATION	STATE
1	25-39	Regular	No concern	Metro, Parramatta	NSW
2	40-54	Occasional	Concern	Metro, Parramatta	NSW
3	55+	Regular	No concern	Metro, St Leonards	NSW
4	25-39	Occasional	Concern	Metro, St Leonards	NSW
5	55+	Occasional	Concern	Metro, Brisbane	QLD
6	40-54	Regular	No concern	Metro, Brisbane	QLD
7	25-39	Regular / Occasional	No concern	Regional, Sunshine Coast	QLD
8	40-54	Regular / Occasional	Concern	Regional, Wagga	NSW
9	55+	Regular / Occasional	Concern	Regional, Sunshine Coast	QLD

Respondents were segmented by viewing frequency. A 'regular' viewer was defined as someone who watches one of the commercial current affairs programs, *Today Tonight* or *A Current Affair*, at least three times a week. An 'occasional' viewer was defined as someone who watches one of the commercial current affairs programs, *Today Tonight* or *A Current Affair*, at least once every two weeks through to those who watch them a maximum of twice a week.

Groups were also segmented according to level of concern about information presented on commercial current affairs programs using a series of attitudinal statements during recruitment. The research was segmented according to age bands and was conducted in metropolitan and regional areas in New South Wales and Queensland.

The areas of discussion explored perceptions of current affairs programs and the community's views on factual accuracy and fair representation of viewpoints within these programs. The discussion guide is appended in Appendix A. Prior to attending the groups, respondents were sent homework DVDs containing excerpts from

commercial current affairs programs which looked at issues surrounding factual accuracy and fair viewpoints. These excerpts were used in group discussions, along with a self-complete exercise using hypothetical case study examples, which they had to match with appropriate remedies. The case study clips were taken from Today Tonight and A Current Affair and were provided by ACMA. The excerpts used are described in detail below.

Telstra Lindeman Island Event (12 October 2005)

This clip combined footage of a story explaining that Telstra staff were rewarded a holiday on Lindeman Island for providing good customer service, together with footage about members of the public complaining about Telstra's services. Today Tonight failed to present factual material accurately with regard to the numbers attending and the cost of the Lindeman Island event. However, it was not regarded as a breach of 4.3.1 because it was due to reasonable reliance on information supplied by another person (Telstra spokesman) and was considered a reasonable mistake. However, as the licensee did not remedy the failure to comply with the Code (i.e. broadcast the facts, knowing they were inaccurate), the licensee breached 1.6 of the Code.

King – Child Support Agency

This clip from A Current Affair covered a story about a man [King] who was having to pay child support for two children to whom he was proven not to be the biological father. A concluding statement by the presenter said: 'The Child Support Agency says [King] is in no position to complain about paying support for the children that are not his, because he hasn't paid enough to cover his own biological child.' This was found to be a breach of 4.3.1 as the program did not represent King's viewpoint fairly as the concluding statement raises a new allegation against King about a matter not previously mentioned. The presenter's statement was also inaccurate as it was 'sufficiently different' to what was said.

Balson - Fiji Homestay

This clip from Today Tonight covered a story about a Fiji homestay that several people had experienced. They were complaining that either they or their family had become ill due to the conditions of the homestay. The footage also included, what could be classed as, subjective interview techniques being used with the owner of the homestay business. These clips were also interspersed with footage about the importance of having travel insurance. The complainant (the women who had been on the homestay) alleged that Today Tonight did not investigate the complainant's

counter claims, but no breach was found because the statements conveyed the personal opinions of these women and could not be categorised as factual content.

Australian Chicken Meat Federation (ACMF)

This clip presented material about green chicken meat that a member of the public (known as 'T') had discovered. It contained a re-enactment of the fluorescent meat, a discussion of the safety of cooking meat, as well as a laboratory analysis of T's meat. The Australian Chicken Meat Federation (ACMF) were asked their viewpoint on the green meat. A Current Affair was found to be in breach of 4.3.1 because the program did not represent the ACMF spokesman's point of view fairly. At the time of broadcast, the program had been told by the ACMF that the green chicken was due to green muscle syndrome, but these facts were omitted. In addition, the salient fact that the lab test did not show a significant level of bacteria in T's meat was also omitted and the whole segment gave the impression that T's meat did contain bacteria.

Complaints had been made about all these excerpts and ACMA had investigated all circumstances. The excerpts were used to gain respondents' initial reactions to the way the material was presented. After initial reactions were gained, the moderator explained which parts of the excerpt were factually inaccurate or which information had been consciously omitted and respondents were asked to comment on these.

2.2 Qualitative Analysis and Reporting

Qualitative research deals with relatively small numbers of consumers, and explores their in-depth motivations, attitudes, feelings and behaviour. The exchange of views and experiences among participants is relatively free flowing and open, and as a result often provides very rich data that can be broadly representative of the population at large.

Analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis model, whereby participant accounts were analysed to find common themes and patterns, particularly in regards to participant perceptions of error and remedy. A model in regards to perceptions of error, and types of remedy that should apply was then derived from the evidence collected from the focus group discussions.

In qualitative research, the findings are not based on statistics. The research findings are interpretive in nature and are based on the experience and expertise of the researchers in analysing the discussions using a thematic model.

2.3 English Proficiency

Respondents in the qualitative groups were required to have a certain degree of proficiency in English in order to participate in group discussions. Respondents from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) were recruited as they fell naturally in recruitment as viewers of the programs. That is, quotas were not established for their inclusion. This is not considered to have impacted on the research findings. As the qualitative research was focussed specifically on perceptions of members of the community who had viewed the programs, the majority of focus group participants would speak English as either a first or second language.

2.4 Overview of Quantitative Methodology

The overarching objective of the quantitative phase was to quantify the key research issues found in the qualitative research and to understand the extent to which a number of the attitudes explored in the qualitative research were present in the wider community. This approach was intended to establish the extent to which attitudes, levels and causes of concern, and expectations about remedies for breaches of the Code are prevalent across the Australian community.

Data collection was carried out by Newspoll as part of the weekly CATI omnibus. The data was weighted to reflect the latest ABS data (2006) for age, gender, location and highest level of education attained. In total, 1,201 surveys were obtained nationally among adults. The omnibus sample frame is designed to cover the five main capital cities and regional areas of Australia in sufficient depth to allow a break down of results on this basis. The table below indicates the sample breakdown for location (see Table 2).

Table 2: Sample breakdown by location

LOCATION	CAPITAL CITY	REST OF STATE	RESEARCH SAMPLE
NSW (inc. ACT)	200	150	350
VIC	200	100	300
QLD	100	100	200
SA	100	50	150
WA	100	50	150

TAS (city and x-city)	-	50	50
Total	700	500	1201

Throughout this report a 95% confidence level has been used to indicate where sub-groups are significantly different from one another. This is indicated by footnotes to comments made about sub-group differences.

In general, a descriptive analysis of the data was undertaken with reference to demographic differences and regularity of viewing current affairs programs. Independent samples t-tests were carried out on mutually exclusive sub-groups where large percent differences were observed. Further reference to statistical reliability can be found in Appendix B.

The topics included in the questionnaire included:

- viewership of current affairs programs (commercial and non-commercial);
- factual accuracy and fairness in viewpoints; and
- expectations of errors and remedies.

The quantitative research was conducted between 17-20th March 2008. A copy of the questions used in the quantitative phase has been attached in Appendix C.

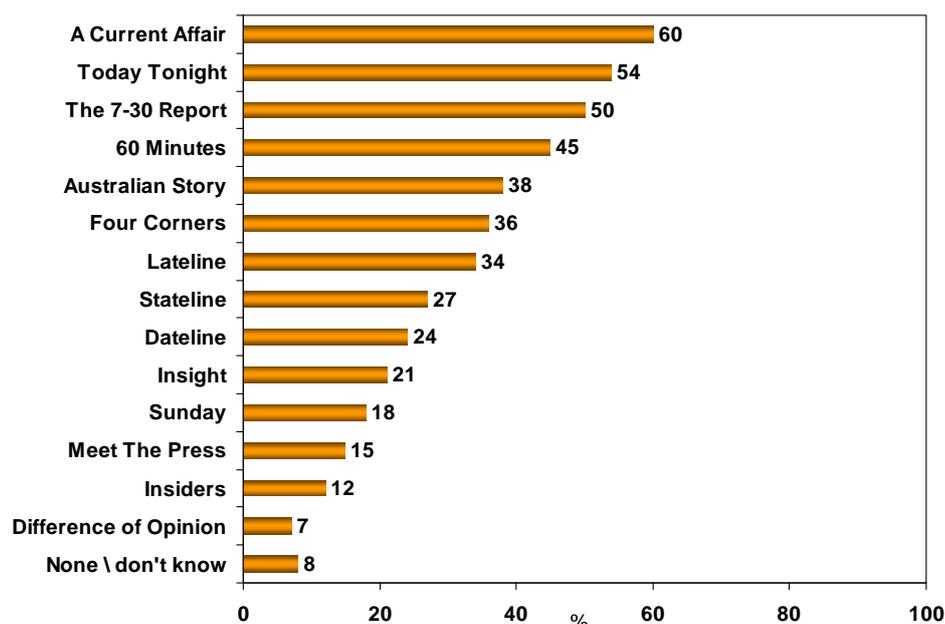
Detailed data sets for the quantitative research are available in the detailed quantitative report (under separate cover).

3 VIEWING PATTERNS AND BEHAVIOURS

3.1 Viewing Patterns and Behaviours

The quantitative research clearly showed that current affairs programs as a genre, are very popular. A large proportion of the Australian public watch current affairs programs, from both commercial and non commercial TV broadcasters. It could be inferred that given their large number of viewers, these programs have the capability to shape opinion and understanding of current issues for the Australian community. The survey results found that current affairs programs, in some form, were watched by the large majority (92%) of the Australian population at least once in the last month. Approximately three quarters (78%) of the population had watched a commercial current affairs program in the last month.

Figure 1: Current affairs programs watched in the last month (%)



Source: Newspoll Omnibus 17-20th March 2008. Total Sample: n=1,201.

The viewing of commercial current affairs programs was relatively consistent across gender and age, with those aged 35-64 and males, being only slightly less likely than other groups to watch commercial current affairs programs. Non-commercial current affairs programs tended to be viewed by older Australians.

In the survey, respondents were subsequently asked how often they had watched the main commercial current affairs programs in the last month. As shown in Table 3,

almost 1 in 5 of the total population aged 18+ reported watching A Current Affair and/or Today Tonight three or more times per week in the past month. The profile of viewing frequency amongst the total population was similar for both programs, and as the table below shows, regular viewers were much more likely to report watching both A Current Affair and Today Tonight

Table 3: Regularity of viewing commercial current affairs programs (%)

% of each viewer type who watch:		TYPE OF VIEWER				
		Total	Regular	Semi-Regular	Occasional	View commercial CA only
Frequency of watching A Current Affair (ACA)	3 to 5 times per week	18	61			18
	1 to 2 times per week	22	15	65		22
	Once a fortnight	10	8	14	21	17
	Or, less often	9	4	5	31	14
	Don't know	-		1		
	Did not watch ACA	40	13	15	48	29
Frequency of watching Today Tonight (TT)	3 to 5 times per week	19	64			26
	1 to 2 times per week	18	14	51		21
	Once a fortnight	9	2	17	18	14
	Or, less often	8	2	4	29	14
	Don't know			1		
	Did not watch TT	46	18	27	53	25

Source: Newspoll Omnibus 17-20th March 2008. Total Sample: n=1,201.

From the qualitative findings it was evident that people did not have a preference over the two most popular shows, Today Tonight and A Current Affair. Overall viewers were watching a broad number of news and current affairs programs.

4 COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS OF COMMERCIAL CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMS

4.1 Differences between News and Current Affairs Programs

The qualitative research found that as an overall genre, news and current affairs programs were regarded as a means of informing people of world news and keeping people abreast with topical news. However, the community identified clear differences between news and current affairs programs, largely in the format, content and personal impact on individuals.

4.2 Format and Content of News and Current Affairs Programs

Attitudes and opinions of what current affairs programs offer varied between respondents, particularly with regard to content. There was an expectation among viewers that both news and commercial current affairs programs provide a mix of news, information and entertainment, albeit in very different proportions. News programs were regarded primarily as a source of news *and* information, such as sports results and weather, with just a small proportion of air time providing entertainment, usually comprising a feel good story at the end. Whereas commercial current affairs programs were perceived to be primarily providing information on issues of community interest as well as entertainment, in terms of covering 'easy watching' stories. News was only seen to be a small segment of commercial current affairs programs for the majority of people. The quotes below indicate the diversity of views people have in relation to the content of commercial current affairs programs.

"It gives us a better understanding of the world we live in."

"At least it reminded people about the warnings that come with cooking chicken, but they did it in a sensationalised way."

"It's a mix of crap, space fillers and the odd insight."

"It's entertaining, it's real, and it's real life."

"Like a soap opera. It's a bit of entertainment...like reality TV."

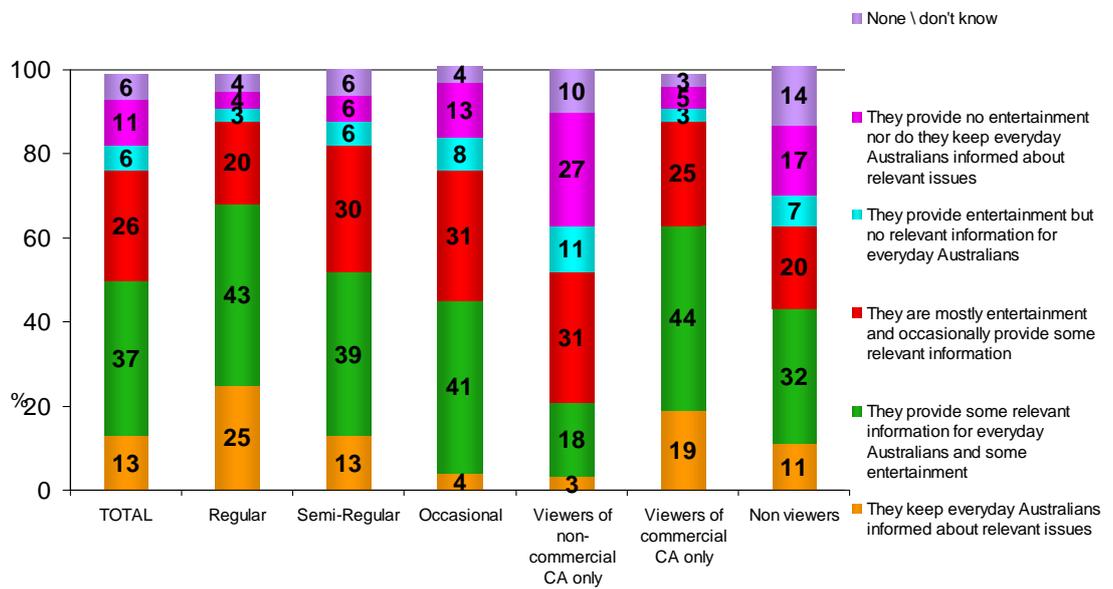
4.3 Personal Impact of News and Current Affairs Programs

Viewers felt that news programs have little immediate personal impact as they often cover stories that are far-reaching and broad, such as the war in Iraq, US elections, weather overseas and technological breakthroughs. In contrast, stories on commercial current affairs programs have more of an immediate impact on the public. At best they were regarded to be particularly relevant to the everyday person and, therefore, have more of a personal impact on viewers. Viewers of commercial current affairs programs are particularly interested in hearing about community issues, especially where tips and advice are provided, such as stories on interest rates and bank fees. At worst, commercial current affairs programs broadcast stories involving petty disputes of little consequence.

The community also believed that commercial current affairs programs give 'everyday people' a voice when discussing issues. These were often issues that they could directly relate to and included stories involving the unfair treatment of individuals by corporations. While often the stories may be about specific individuals, the broadcasters often position the program as 'protecting the little person', which appeals to the community. The community believed that these programs acted as a champion for the average Joe, as they helped to address an imbalance of power in circumstances where an individual was being given unfair treatment by a corporation. Examples of such stories involved billing practices, (e.g. Telstra) and banks' service to their customers. While it was clear that viewers preferred stories which directly impact on their own lives, many viewers also welcomed the 'entertainment' elements of these shows as they provide 'easy viewing' and are often regarded to be light-hearted.

The quantitative findings indicated that there was a wide variety of opinion regarding what role commercial current affairs programs play. Overall, three quarters (76%) of people felt that commercial current affairs programs provide relevant information at least occasionally (see Figure 2). Unsurprisingly, the more regular viewers of commercial current affairs programs believed they were providing a more information based show, with relatively few believing that they mostly provide entertainment. Those with a university level education and those on higher incomes (\$70,000+) were less likely to see the informative aspect of commercial current affairs shows.

Figure 2: Opinion of current affairs content by regularity (%)



Source: Newspoll Omnibus 17-20th March 2008. Total Sample: n=1,201.

5 EXPECTATIONS OF ACCURACY AND REPRESENTATION OF VIEWPOINTS

5.1 Emotive Reporting of Commercial Current Affairs Programs

Viewers perceived that commercial current affairs programs consciously attempt to elicit emotion from viewers in their reporting style. They saw this as being achieved through the use of specific interview techniques, such as confrontational methods, the use of emotive language and tricks used in gathering footage. The following quotes illustrate this perception:

"They want you to react... that's why they do it."

"They try to stir you up, to make you angry ... there will always be a villain and a victim."

"They're emotive, they want you to feel for the people or to get angry..."

"They let you have a good scream at the TV anyway..."

"It can make you angry seeing people being ripped off."

The community expected this emotive style of reporting in commercial current affairs programs and it was perceived to be deliberate. It was generally understood that the programs have a purpose or an agenda for their stories:

"You don't expect it to be factual or balanced ... it's not like the BBC is it?"

"Some of the stories are pretty one-sided ..."

This bias was often forgiven by viewers because of their interest in the story and often the program was seen to be biased towards helping the 'little person' or the everyday consumer. Importantly, they believed they could spot the necessary truths and leave the bias behind. They believed they understood what is fact and where the truth may have been stretched. Thus, the existence of bias could be accepted to a large extent.

"Some of it is true, some of it is not...you take out what you want."

"You know they are pushing a particular point..you just take the bits that are relevant to you."

5.2 Attitudes Towards a Failure to Present Factual Material Accurately

The qualitative research indicated that the community expected that what is shown on commercial current affairs programs is factually accurate. This is particularly in relation to numbers, expert opinions, and reports from relevant agencies. The community did, however, anticipate that all the facts may not be shown, and recognised that all sides of the story are not necessarily shown equally.

"They lie by not finding out everything first."

"It's definitely a one sided argument a lot of the time."

"They say they tried to contact the other person...but you don't really know what happened."

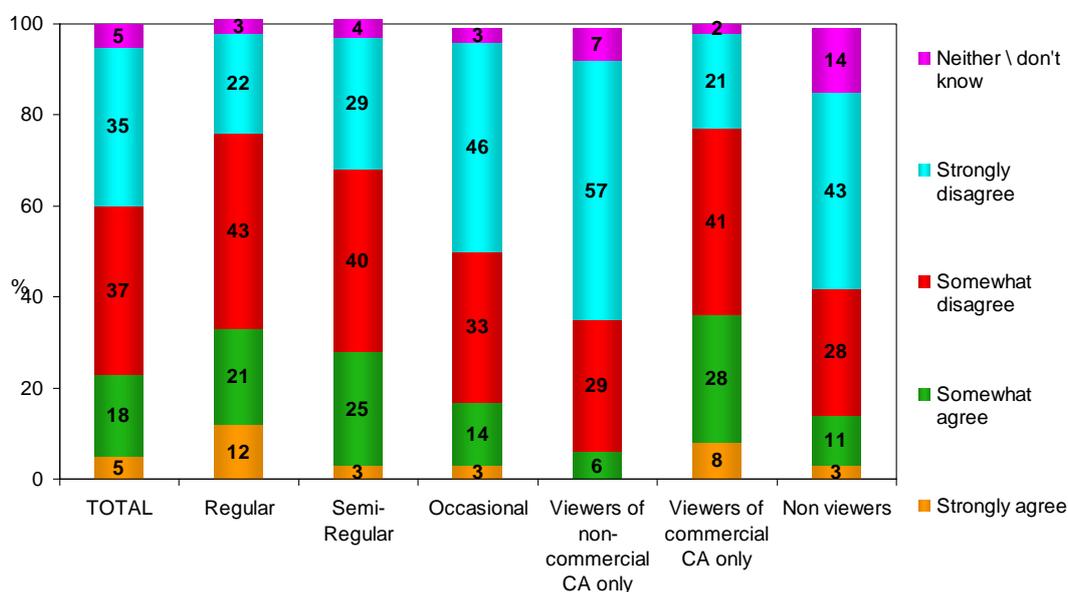
Viewers spontaneously identified that the actions of a program not providing all the facts can lead to factual inaccuracies. They believed these inaccuracies largely occurred due to a lack of thorough research from the programs or through not allowing both sides of the story to state their case in an appropriate manner. However, overall it was perceived that any facts given are accurate.

"They say they tried to contact the other person...but you don't really know what happened."

"They're always one-sided – but maybe they're not able to show both sides."

Similarly, in the quantitative survey, less than one quarter (23%) felt that the programs are *always* accurate in the facts they present (see Figure 3). While commercial current affairs programs were generally expected to be accurate, it was clear that viewers were not completely confident about the facts they present. The public understood that a certain level of 'bias' or inaccuracy exists in the content of these programs due to the fact that a broadcaster usually has an agenda within which they use the facts.

Figure 3: Current affairs stories are always accurate in the facts they present (% agree/disagree)



Source: Newspoll Omnibus 17-20th March 2008. Total Sample: n=1,201.

However, prior to attending the groups in the qualitative research, very few people considered that the programs consciously omitted facts (such as in the Telstra and Chicken Meat case study clips), or would claim that an untrue statement was made (for example, in the King – Child Support Agency). Thus, the public did not anticipate that the programs consciously omitted, distorted or fabricated material. When participants were told about the errors and the circumstances in the case studies, there were strong reactions, largely of shock and disbelief. For example, in the case of the Chicken Meat excerpt, respondents were told that information which the Australian Chicken Meat Federation had sent in writing to the broadcaster before the show aired was consciously left out to distort the story. It provoked these reactions:

"Well they sensationalised it more by omitting these facts."

"I don't think I'm going to be able to watch these programs again now."

"That's unforgivable – it's so dishonest ... it's not a bit of fun – it has an impact on a whole industry."

"I find it all really shocking because I don't know what to believe anymore ... if you can't trust the facts they present you with ..."

Likewise, in the case of the King – Child Support clip, when the moderator explained that the statement that King had not paid adequate child support for his biological child was factually inaccurate and the Child Support Agency had made no such comment, strong reactions were provoked.

“I feel really angry that the program can manipulate our emotions like that.”

“That’s shocking – where did they get it from and why did they have to say it?”

“That sucks, it’s disgusting ... it is so defamatory for that person.”

5.3 The Scale of Inaccuracy

Interestingly, the scale of the inaccuracy did not seem to change the strength of viewers’ reactions to these errors. They regarded the situation as just as serious whether the inaccuracy changed the intent of the story or if it was peripheral and did not have such an effect. Ultimately, this was because the real concern to viewers was that in some instances programs are consciously using inaccurate information and are getting away with it. Furthermore, the implications of the programs consciously presenting inaccuracies was frightening for viewers as they began to question whether they could still separate fact from fiction. Prior to attending the groups, people believed they were able to do this, but the case studies began to make them question whether they can still do this. These quotes illustrate some of the viewers’ concerns:

“What can we believe on the show then?”

“So everything you’re saying about each clip is true? Oh I didn’t realise that.”

“It just worries me about the dishonesty of it.”

Additionally, conscious inaccuracies also caused viewers to question the value they place on these programs. Many viewers see the programs as having some value and a role to play in society, particularly for members of the general public. While they may question the slant on what is shown, a conscious error is unacceptable to them as it is a betrayal of the everyday people and is an attack on those people whom the program is supposed to give a voice to.

5.4 Expectations of Fair Representation of Viewpoints

The community expects commercial current affairs programs to have an agenda for the story and viewpoints expressed by interviewees are perceived to be skewed to enhance the story. Viewers expect that the reporting techniques will be used in a manner that results in viewpoints being 'twisted', such as:

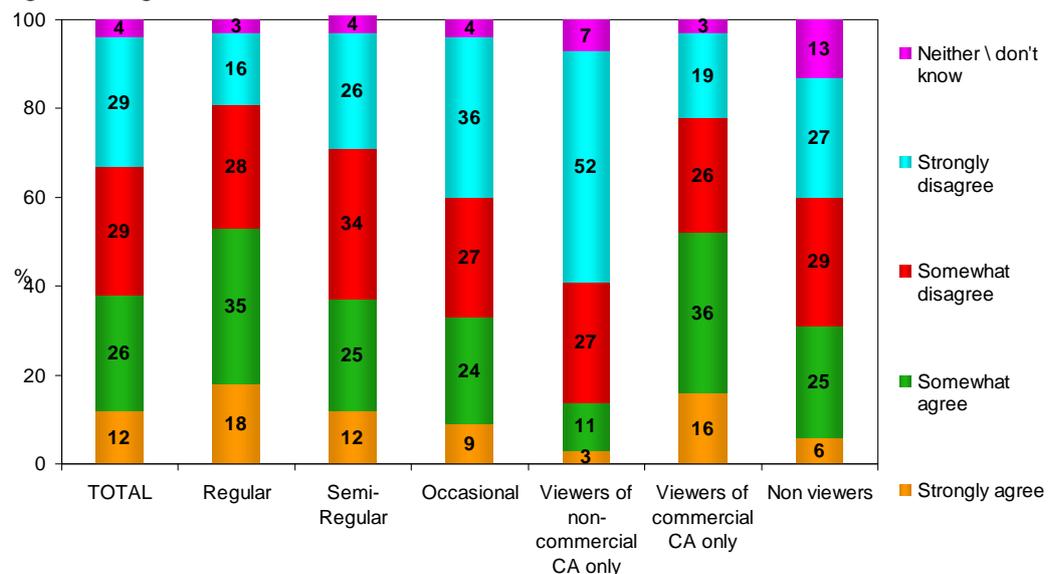
- aggressive reporting and leading questions with one party and not the other (Balson - Fiji homestay clip);
- the use of unrelated pieces of information to create the story (Telstra case study); and
- edited interviews so one side does not get the opportunity to provide all information (e.g. perceived to have occurred in the Fiji homestay clip).

"You know it's biased ... you take everything with a pinch of salt."

"The issues are relevant, it's how they sell them that is questionable."

The quantitative research found that fewer than two in five people (38%) believed that commercial current affairs programs always represent viewpoints fairly (Figure 4). Unsurprisingly, more regular viewers of commercial current affairs programs were most likely to agree that these programs always represent viewpoints fairly (53% of regular viewers either 'somewhat' or 'strongly' agree).

Figure 4: Current affairs stories always represent viewpoints fairly (%agree/disagree)



Source: Newspoll Omnibus 17-20th March 2008. Total Sample: n=1,201.

The qualitative research found that it was expected that all viewpoints shown will have some basis in fact, even if it is nominal. For example, in all the case study examples, viewers believed that there were underlying facts forming the story, yet at the same time they recognised that different techniques were used to exaggerate the story. Figure 5 illustrates the expectations among viewers:

Figure 5 – Expectations of the Fiji – homestay case study clip



5.5 Accepted Level of Exaggeration

The more a story is perceived by viewers as being a community or social interest, the more 'responsible' it was expected to be, with regard to the accepted level of exaggeration. In these instances they believed these stories should be better balanced and:

- have a greater 'base' of facts and show more of these rather than exaggerated reporting techniques;
- attempt to learn and portray both sides of the story; and
- show both sides / views of opposing parties with equal fairness and in the same reporting style.

There was less of an expectation of balance when the story has little consequence to the broader community, such as celebrity stories or stories that cause little harm to individuals such as neighbourhood disputes. However, there was still an expectation that these will have some factual basis.

6 SERIOUSNESS IN FAILURES TO MAINTAIN ACCURACY

6.1 Errors can be Judged on a Scale of Seriousness

An important objective of the research was to assess how the community regards different levels of seriousness of errors committed on commercial current affairs programs. From the qualitative research, viewers felt that failure to correct inaccuracies on commercial current affairs programs by a broadcaster could be judged on a scale of seriousness. From the analysis, three levels of errors, defined in terms of seriousness, emerged.

Level 1 Errors Caused by Conscious Omissions or Distortions of Key Facts

Level 1 errors were the 'Absolute Nots' and included those conscious omissions or distortions of key facts, as well as the fabrication of any fact. These were considered to be the most serious and were perceived as 'unforgivable' by the public, as they undermined all ethical and moral standards attached to journalism. These errors were perceived to be in breach of the social obligation that commercial current affairs programs have to have a basis in truth.

"They can't tell deliberate porkies....it's just not right."

Different types of Level 1 errors were perceived to be just as severe as each other. It did not seem to matter whether the information was integral to the intent or purpose of the story, or if it changed the impact of the story on an individual *or* the community. This was due to the fact that viewers had difficulty in accepting an act whereby the broadcaster consciously changes the information through omission, misrepresentation or fabrication. The quotes below portray viewers' thoughts:

"I find this dumfounding. I take what they say as facts ... it means I probably won't watch it anymore." (King - Child Support)

"You feel cheated – it was blatantly wrong because people believe what they say on the program." (Telstra- Lindeman Island)

"They should be made to say we deceived you ... it's not a mistake if it's an intentional deception."

Viewers strongly believed that Level 1 inaccuracies should never have been allowed to have occurred in the first place.

Level 2 Errors Caused by Sensationalist Journalism

Level 2 errors were regarded as those inaccuracies or unfair representations that were due to the reporting techniques of sensationalist journalism. Level 2 errors resulted from reporting techniques such as scripted footage, hidden cameras, file footage, re-enactments, interview techniques as well as not using credible sources. It was recognised that interviewing techniques included aggressive questioning, surprising the interviewee and not asking all the questions upfront, resulting in a skewed story. Again, they were seen as more serious if these techniques had a negative impact on everyday people.

“When it’s really serious is when it affects an individual’s business or their wellbeing.”

Level 3 Errors Resulting from Poor Journalism

Level 3 errors were considered to result from poor journalism, such as a lack of research, rather than an attempt to sensationalise or consciously distort a story. These errors included incorrect names, mispronunciation, incorrect spelling or typographical errors or reliance on an authorised spokesperson without asking for clarification of any ambiguity. They were seen as being more serious if there was a negative impact on everyday people resulting from the inaccuracy.

7 REMEDIES

7.1 Role of the Remedy

In the qualitative research, the community felt that the primary role of a remedy was prevention. They believed it should act as a deterrent to stop commercial current affairs programs allowing these errors to occur in the first place. Viewers felt that the broadcaster has a responsibility to do this and the imposition of a remedy would assist in ensuring that this occurs. The following quotes express viewers' thoughts on the role of remedies:

"It's to stop them doing it again."

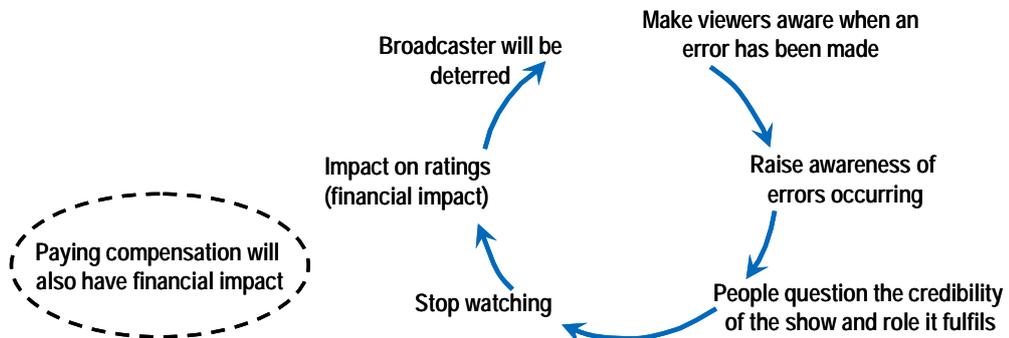
"The punishment should be sufficient to stop them from doing it again ... allow them to be sued if necessary."

The role of any action should be to make them think twice about doing it again ... and to make the public aware that this kind of thing goes on."

"They would lose credibility if they had to keep doing this all the time."

It was recognised that there are a number of other roles for remedies to fulfil if this is to be achieved. Firstly, respondents felt that a remedy should make viewers aware that an error has been made, as this will identify inaccuracies that they may not be aware of. In doing this, they also felt that this would improve the awareness among viewers that errors do occur in these programs, which may prompt viewers to change their expectations of these programs and the role they have for the community. Thirdly, viewers regarded the role of a remedy to rectify the potential harm, whether that is personal or financial, caused to an individual(s) or a company due to an inaccuracy. Figure 6 illustrates the cycle of events which may occur if a remedy is successful.

Figure 6: Cycle of events if a remedy is successful



It is through these various roles that a remedy should have that viewers felt the broadcaster may be deterred from making these errors in the first place, as it would ultimately lead to financial implications for the broadcaster. Viewers perceived that if people are made aware when an error has been made, they may begin to question the credibility of these shows and the role they fulfil, and in turn may stop watching. This would ultimately impact on ratings and, thus, financial gains for the broadcaster. Whether this cycle works however, is dependent on whether people will stop watching these shows if they are aware of the inaccuracies.

Overall, the research findings illustrated that viewers believed that inaccuracies should be rectified by strong remedies to deter broadcasters from making these errors in the first place.

7.2 Appropriate Remedies for Errors – Qualitative Research

Respondents were asked for their spontaneous opinions about the remedies or actions that should be implemented by broadcasters for errors that tend towards the extreme. The severity of the errors that were suggested spontaneously reflected the strength of the outrage and disbelief that the community felt towards inaccuracies being allowed to occur on commercial current affairs shows. Spontaneous responses to the types of remedies that could be implemented included:

- fines;
- corrections;
- retractions;
- apologies;
- compensation paid to individuals;

- disclaimers prior to the program saying that it may not be factually accurate;
- demerit points applied to licenses (a '3 strikes and you are out' rule);
- programs being taken off air either permanently or for a punishment period (like a suspension); and
- loss of licence.

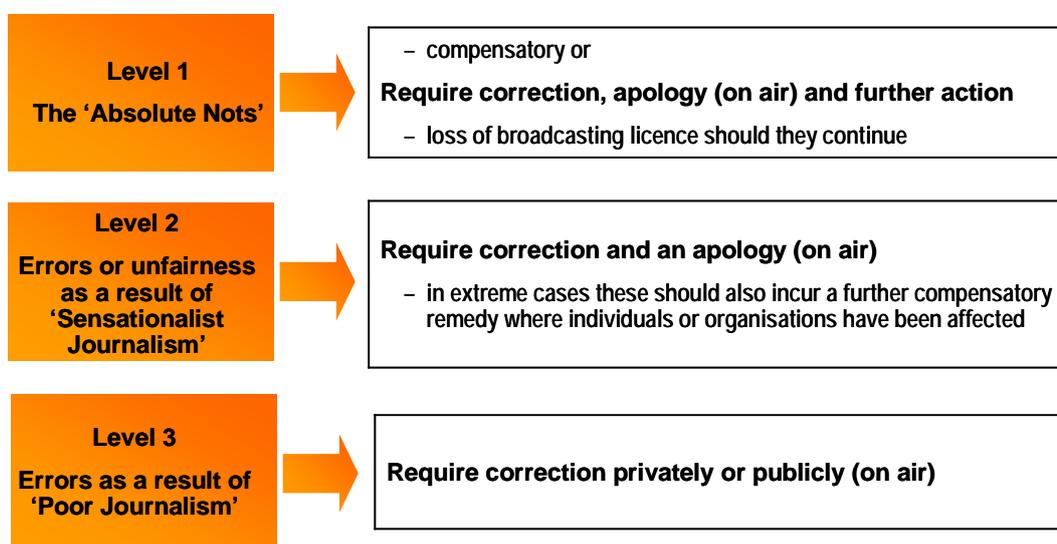
These strong reactions were the same among all viewers, although those who watched the programs mainly for entertainment based their views on their concern for the broader community, as opposed to those who watch for news and information who largely based their views on a personal concern. Regular viewers felt betrayed by the programs as they previously believed that the shows were supposed to help the everyday person like themselves, as opposed to treating them as the ignorant public. They also feared that the programs were abusing their power, as it appeared the shows can say what they like, making it impossible from them to identify fact from fiction.

7.3 Differentiating Remedies for Different Types of Breaches

It was also crucial to understand viewers' thoughts on the different types of remedies that should apply, depending on the type of breach. In order to do this, respondents were asked to fill in a self-complete exercise using hypothetical situations and were asked what the appropriate remedy should be, before discussing these as a group.

It was evident that appropriate remedies were selected according to the perceived severity of the action and the level of seriousness of the error. Figure 7 outlines the appropriate remedies.

Figure 7: Appropriate remedies for the varying errors



For Level 3 errors which were seen as the least harmful, viewers felt that at a minimum, some correction was required. If the error has some impact on the story the correction should be made publicly on air, otherwise it could be done privately through a letter. For Level 2 errors, people felt that there should be an on air correction, apology and some restitution to parties that are harmed by the inaccuracy or unfair representation. Level 1 errors were the hardest errors for the community to accept. When these errors are committed, viewers felt the remedy should include some 'punishment', and suggestions included making a public apology stating their conscious error, handing out fines, giving 'demerit points' or a loss of their license. These actions should take place as soon as a broadcaster is aware of an error.

Further to this, viewers felt that it was also necessary for programs to be punished if they present 'Absolute Not' inaccuracies as these are committed consciously and undermine the faith that viewers place in commercial current affairs programs. In these instances, the conscious presentation of an inaccuracy is considered to not

only have an impact on the individuals directly involved but also on the community. Viewers perceive that punishment would be the only deterrent.

"I don't think a simple apology is enough because they obviously keep doing it."

This was consistent whether the inaccuracy had an impact on individuals, such as in the King – Child Support case study, or on large companies, such as in the Telstra clip. The punishments that respondents thought were suitable for conscious inaccuracies are described in the viewers' quotes below:

"If you whacked them with a half million dollar fine they'd probably think twice about it."

"They should have penalty points – like demerit points, and when they receive a certain number their license is up."

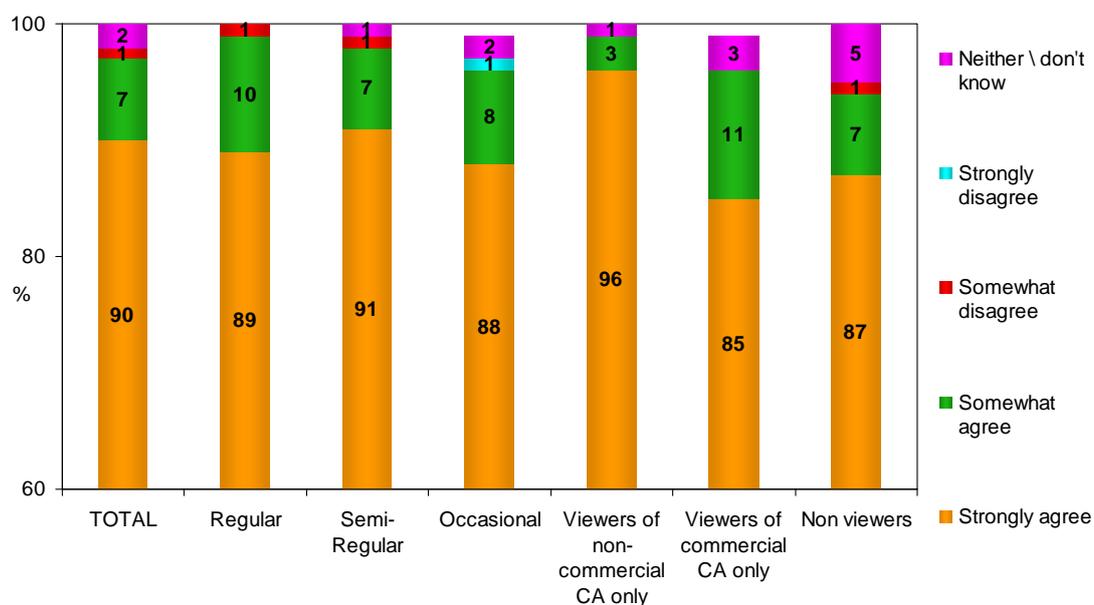
"If they do it often enough then they should have three days off the air – make it like school ... you're suspended."

"In the apology they should have to say 'we knew the truth but we lied'."

7.4 Appropriate Remedies for Errors – Quantitative Research

The quantitative findings also portrayed that viewers felt remedial action should occur as soon as the inaccuracy is proved. The survey findings showed that an overwhelming majority (97%) of the respondents felt that the broadcaster has the responsibility of making a correction as soon as they are aware an error has occurred, rather than after a government body has investigated the matter (Figure 8). Only five percent believed that they should wait until a government body had investigated the matter before acting. Overall, there was little difference across the groups of viewers, however viewers of non-commercial current affairs programs were more likely to ‘strongly agree’ than others.

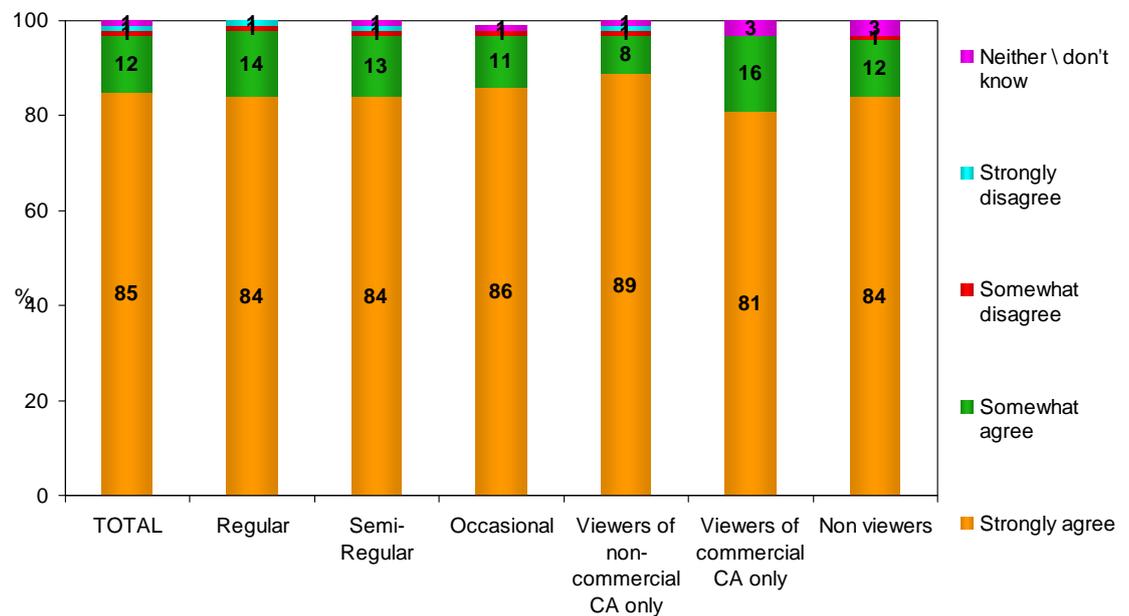
Figure 8: When an error is made the program should make a correction as soon as they are aware of the error (% agree/disagree)



Source: Newspoll Omnibus 17-20th March 2008. Total Sample: n=1,201.

The survey findings also complemented the qualitative findings with regard to the public's perceptions of errors that directly affect individuals (often level 1 and 2 errors). From the survey, viewers were of the opinion that the programs that make the error have a responsibility to apologise and, in part, correct the negative portrayal. Figure 9 shows an almost unanimous agreement (97% 'total' agree) with the statement, "when a person or company is affected due to an error in the facts presented an apology should be made".

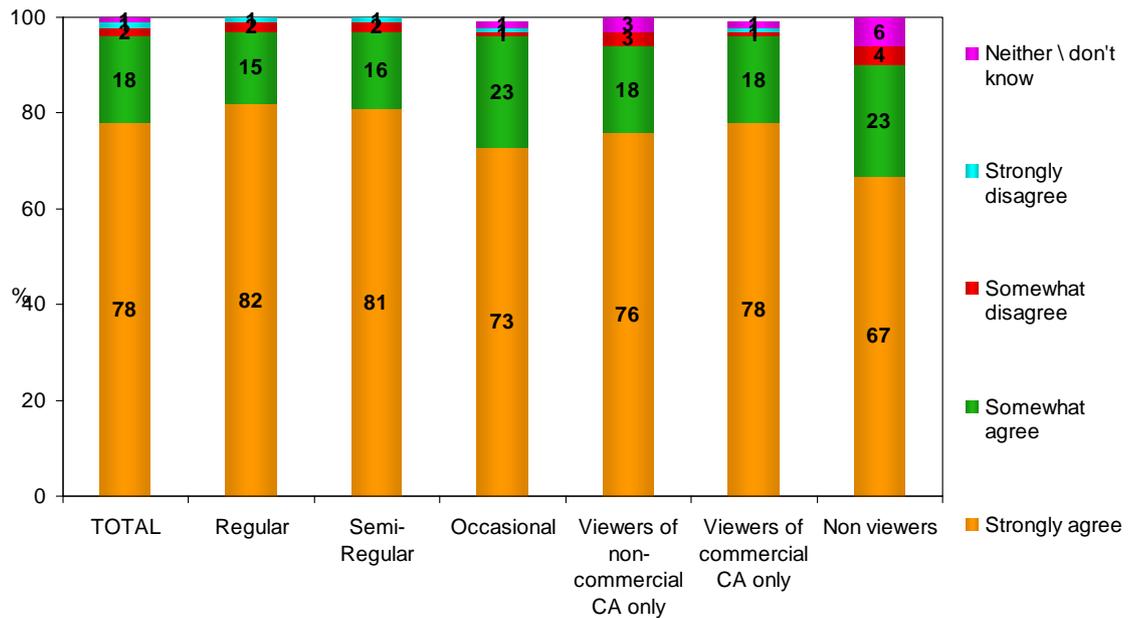
Figure 9: When a person or company is affected due to an error in the facts presented an apology should be made (% agree/disagree)



Source: Newspoll Omnibus 17-20th March 2008. Total Sample: n=1,201.

Similarly, there was almost unanimous agreement (96%) that individuals or companies should be given the opportunity to respond to allegations on air. While slightly fewer 'strongly agreed' to this statement, 'total agreement' was consistent across the viewer categories (see Figure 10).

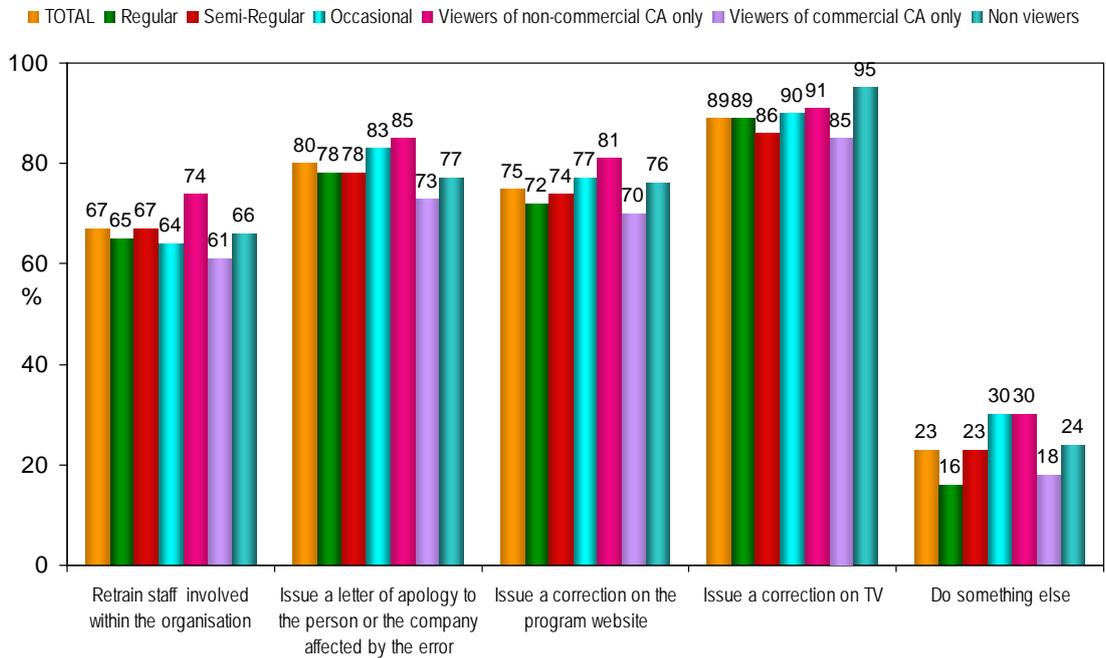
Figure 10: When a person or company is presented in a bad light in a story, they should be given the opportunity to respond on air (% agree/disagree)



Source: Newspoll Omnibus 17-20th March 2008. Total Sample: n=1,201.

The public were also asked for their opinions as to appropriate remedies for differing levels of error. The results found that the Level 1 errors evoked strong reactions. Nearly nine in ten people (89%) felt that a correction should be issued on air if 'a fact that could have changed the story is consciously left out'. In addition, large proportions of the sample also indicated that staff should be retrained, a letter of apology be issued and a correction online be issued (see Figure 11).

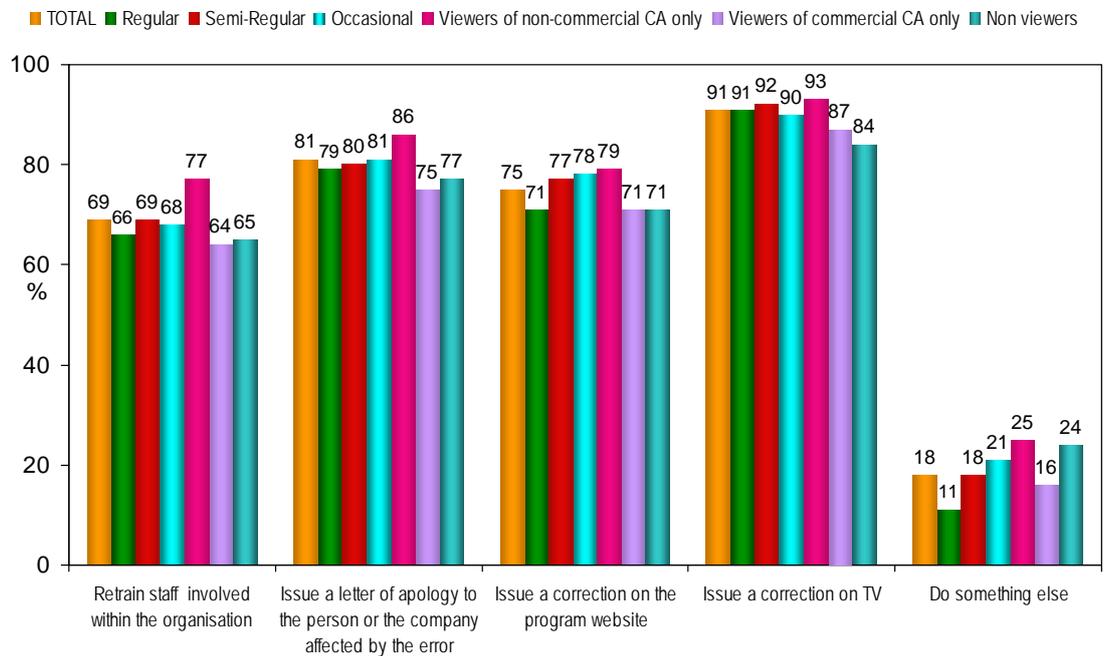
Figure 11: A fact that could have changed the story is consciously left out (%)



Source: Newspoll Omnibus 17-20th March 2008. Total Sample: n=1,201.

Likewise, a Level 2 error also evoked a similarly strong reaction, with 91% of people believing that an on air correction was required to rectify the situation (see Figure 12). As was found in the qualitative research, viewers spontaneously mentioned that they strongly felt that these programs are accountable for the material they present, and thus, most errors are seen as requiring action.

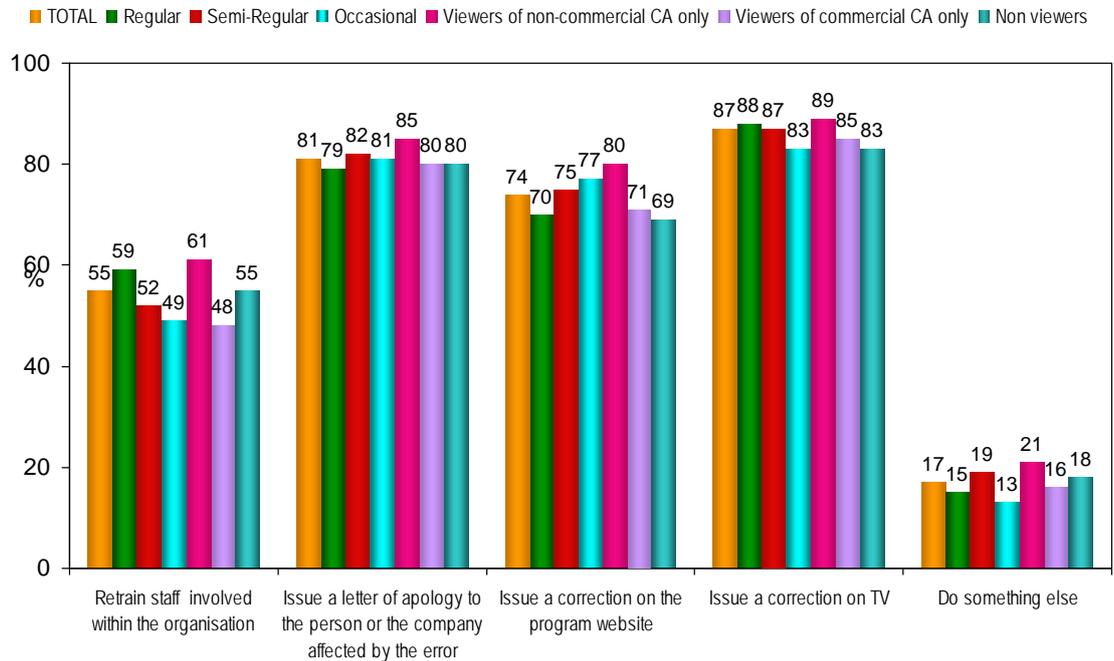
Figure 12: Unrelated or misleading footage is leading viewers to incorrect conclusions (%)



Source: Newspoll Omnibus 17-20th March 2008. Total Sample: n=1,201.

Even when presented with a minor Level 3 error scenario, the large majority of people (87%) still believed that a correction should be issued on air. Just over one in two (55%) felt that the staff involved should be retrained which was significantly fewer than for each of the other scenarios tested (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: A reporter accidentally names a person or company incorrectly (%)



Source: Newspoll Omnibus 17-20th March 2008. Total Sample: n=1,201.

The quantitative research complemented the qualitative study as it also found that viewers expected that any error, regardless of its origin, should be remedied on air because this is the medium used when the inaccuracy occurred.

Respondents in the survey were also given the opportunity to express their thoughts about additional suitable remedies for each of the errors presented. Approximately one fifth of people expressed that more extreme actions should be taken for each error. Overall, the responses were very similar for each of the types of error, with the most popular responses being, 'presenting the truth in the media or to re-issue the story' and 'fire the staff or revoke their license'. Some of the open ended responses included:

"If it's making facts up – they should be terminated – depending on the severity, whoever was involved with the final sign off should face disciplinary action within the organisation."

"If it's deliberate, they should be penalised in some way."

"Re-interview the respondent again to get the proper story on TV again. Give that person a right of reply, on TV or the same media where the mistake was made."

“Compensation for business or company affected, suspension of broadcasting license, make a corrective statement and also take future efforts to make sure a higher authority monitors it more closely, including training of staff. Also maybe introduce penalties for journalist staff that refuse to allow them to give a balanced view.”

7.5 The Regulatory Environment

When viewers were reminded that commercial broadcasters operate within a self-regulatory environment they questioned whether this should be the case. They felt that commercial current affairs programs have a social obligation to the community. It was perceived as only ethical and moral that information presented is based in verifiable fact. Thus, when inaccuracies are presented, whether they are deliberate or created through sensationalist or poor journalism, they are considered to be wrong. The community believed that these programs are breaking the social obligation that they are supposed to provide to the everyday person and undermining the influence that these programs have on the public.

Viewers felt that commercial current affairs programs were not always adhering to this obligation of self-regulation and abidance by the Code and in these instances a regulatory body should step in. They expected the regulator to play a role in deterring broadcasters from consciously presenting factual inaccuracies or unfair viewpoints.

Viewers felt that broadcasters need a deterrent in the form of a strong remedial action, to either prevent it from happening in the first place or to remedy the situation after an error has occurred. The quantitative research supports this finding, as the majority (93%) of respondents were largely in favour of current affairs programs taking remedial actions themselves, as soon as they are aware of an error. Only five per cent of people preferred that action should be taken by a broadcaster, only after a government body has investigated the matter.

8 CONCLUSIONS

The research clearly showed that the genre of current affairs programs is very popular. The commercial current affairs programs tended to be watched by a cross section of ages, whereas non-commercial current affairs programs tended to be viewed by older Australians.

Viewers expected current affairs programs to take some liberties with the presentation of factual information and the representation of viewpoints. In the quantitative research, only 23% of people agreed that programs are always accurate with the facts they present. Yet, from the qualitative research, it was evident that the community was shocked as to the nature of the inaccuracies that occur in the programs. That is, the public did not expect key facts to be consciously omitted, distorted or misused, or fabricated on commercial current affairs programs. They also felt that prior to attending the groups, they could easily determine what was fact and what was not.

Viewers felt the failure to correct inaccuracies on commercial current affairs programs by broadcasters could be judged on a scale of seriousness. Level 1 errors were the 'Absolute Nots' and were seen as those conscious omissions or distortions of key facts, as well as the fabrication of any fact. These were considered to be the most serious and were perceived as 'unforgivable' by the public. Level 2 errors were described as those inaccuracies or unfair representations that were due to the reporting techniques of sensationalist journalism. Level 3 errors were classed as those that largely occur due to poor journalism and viewers understood that these may happen sporadically. Both Level 2 and 3 errors were regarded to be more serious if they had negative implications for everyday people.

The community felt that the primary role of a remedy is prevention and a deterrent to commercial current affairs programs for allowing these errors to occur in the first place. Viewers in both the qualitative and quantitative research were of the opinion that inaccuracies needed to be rectified by strong remedies if they are to act as a deterrent. In the qualitative research, expectations of remedies were based on the level of seriousness of the error. Remedies for Level 1 errors should include some punishment, with Level 2 errors requiring an on air correction, apology and some restitution to parties harmed by the inaccuracy or unfair representation. For Level 3 errors, viewers felt that some correction is required, and this should be made publicly on air if the error has some impact on the story.

Overall, the large majority of the Australian community indicated that for any error, a correction on air is required, as this is consistent with the medium in which the error

was made. A number of additional actions were also suggested, depending on the severity of error.

Viewers believed that the regulator should play a more active role in ensuring that broadcasters are deterred from presenting factual inaccuracies and unfair representations of viewpoint. While it is generally believed that current affairs broadcasters should be correcting errors as soon as they occur, there is far less belief that this is happening in practice. The public would welcome giving more power to the regulator to prevent these errors from ever happening on commercial current affairs programs.

APPENDICES
APPENDIX A – DISCUSSION GUIDE

2769_DISCUSSION GUIDE

Introduction (10 mins)

Respondents to introduce themselves:

- Name, age, occupation
- Household, family members and so on.
- Number of TVs, whether Pay TV or not
- What news and current affairs programs they watch? How often, which ones, why

Perceptions of current affairs programs in general? (15 mins)

- How do current affairs programs differ from news programs?
- What do current affairs programs provide / have / make you feel that other programs don't?
- How important is the information they provide?
- What does the information on current affairs shows provide that others don't?
- What current affairs programs are they aware of?
- Are they all the same? How do they differ?

Focus upon TT and ACA

- Who watches TT and ACA (show of hands if not already clear)?
- Why watch one and not the other?
- What type of stories do you expect to see on shows like TT and ACA?
- For each - How would you describe this show?
- (Prompt with news? Entertainment? Something else?)
- What motivates you to watch TT/ACA?
- What are the barriers to watching these programs?
- Do you ever have any concerns about either of them? (MODERATOR NOTE: Important to understand whether each concern is about the individual program or about the genre?)
 - Probe out fully on what are concerns and why?

Introduce the code of practice here and ask for views on what is factual accuracy and fairness of viewpoints. (10 mins)

Do not allow a discussion of whether or not the code is appropriate or not, rather ensure people understand this is how programs are 'judged' and is a bench mark for the clips that follow.

- Probe for whether factual accuracy is only about facts and figures?
- What about viewpoints ? What is fair?
- Show them 4.3.11: In broadcasting news and current affairs programs, licensees must make reasonable efforts to correct significant errors of fact at the earliest opportunity
- What does this mean?
- What is a significant error'?
- What do you think 'the earliest opportunity' means?
- When this is not done, what do you think should happen then?

Moderator: You should also know that the broadcasting companies follow a Code of Practice. They are required to investigate matters when a complaint is made. If the issue is not resolved between a broadcaster and a complainant, then the matter is taken to an independent regulatory body. This body must then investigate and decide the matter. This process takes time. I want you to bear this in mind.

We will now show you some clips that will help to understand what steps should be taken or different types of errors and mistakes.

Perceptions of Facts (20mins)

SHOW TELSTRA EXAMPLE (Clip 1) IF NECESSARY

- How do you feel about the content and the persons/issues presented?
- What is it about the way that the facts, information and viewpoints were presented that makes you feel that way?

Tell Respondents - What if I told you that the event was for about 200 staff, some of whom were taking partners, not 800, and Club Med could not even host 800 people and that this means the event did not cost the \$1.5 Million as was stated in the broadcast?

- Does this change your views on how you feel about issues in the program? How? Why not?

Tell Respondents - The broadcaster originally relied on a Telstra spokesperson for the information about number of people attending.

- Do you think it was reasonable for them to do so?
- Is there anything else they could have done to check the facts on the numbers attending and how much the event would cost? What else could they have done?

Tell Respondents - What if I then told you that they were told before the broadcast that the numbers were inaccurate by Telstra and they didn't change the broadcast.

- What do you think they should have done? Why? Why not?
- What about when they do not correct a mistake that has been pointed out to them before broadcast?
 - How does that make you feel, now you know a licensee is obliged to correct a mistake at the earliest opportunity?
- What action should TT take in regards to this now it's clear the story is not accurate?
 - how should this correction happen?
 - What if the program did not correct it?

Perceptions of Viewpoints (15 minutes)

This one wasn't included in your homework exercise..... SHOW FIJI EXCERPT (Clip 2)

Note to moderator: spend less time on this case as there was no breach – and limit its use to cover difference.

Note to moderator: the broadcasters of current affairs programs – are not required to present all viewpoints. But the ones that are presented should be presented fairly.

- What did you think of the story? What was it about the way the information was presented that made you feel like that?
- Do you think the program showed both sides of the story? How?

(probe on whether the owner of the homestay had enough time to put forward his views?)

- What about the bit where they said 'the parents were sick because of where they were staying'? **Did you take that as an opinion or a fact? Why?**
- When shows are presenting facts, how is that different to when they are presenting opinions?
 - (Probe how should facts/opinions be presented?)
 - (Should the program have said it was the woman's opinion and not a fact that her parents were sick as a result of the place they stayed)
- Would you expect the reporter to have checked the facts of the story?

Scale of errors and remedies (35 minutes)

SHOW CHILD SUPPORT CLIP (ESPECIALLY THE END) IF NECESSARY

- Do you remember the clip?
- How do you feel about the persons / issues presented?
- **What is it about the way that the facts, information and viewpoints were presented that makes you feel that way? SHOW CLIP**
- What did that statement at the end make you think towards Mr M?
- How did it make you feel about the legitimacy of his claim in regards to the other children?

Tell respondents - What if I told you that the child support agency made no such comment and that the statement that Mr M had not paid adequate child support for his biological child was factually inaccurate.

- Does knowing this change your feelings on how you think of Mr M? What about if you found out he actually had paid child support for that child? Does that change your views? why / why not?
- How would you feel if you were the man involved?
- What should be done about this?
- What is the appropriate remedy?

SHOW CHICKEN MEAT IF NECESSARY

Show excerpt (depends on timing can stop soon after the ACMF representative says his bit about what the heck is that)

- How do you feel about the content, the persons / issues presented?
- **What is about the way that the facts, information and viewpoints were presented that makes you feel that way?**
- What do you think was the impact of this program? How would you feel if you were a chicken producer?
- Would people stop eating chicken meat? What about any impact on people's health? On the economy?

Tell Respondents - What if I told you that the man from the chicken meat federation sent a letter to ACA saying that the green meat was due to green muscle syndrome – a condition that occurs in some chickens, and was not bacteria. This information was provided to ACA before the show aired. But the program did not acknowledge receiving any information from the chicken meat federation. Also the meat was tested and no bacteria was found. This information was available to the broadcaster before the show aired but it was left out.

- Do you think that it should have been incorporated?

- How would this have impacted your opinion if you had had the information?
- So, you're saying you think the story wasn't completely accurate and they didn't correct it, so what do you think should have happened?

Based on what you've seen so far...

- Are all the errors/ inaccuracies the same?
- Are some more serious than others? Why?
- Out of the clips you have seen (Telstra, Child Support, Chicken), which would you class as the most severe error, down to the least? (NB gauge an order)
- What other things do you think would be classed as a serious error?
- What would be a small error? Why?

Attitudes towards and expectations of remedies that should apply under different circumstances (25 mins)

- **What is the role of the remedy?** Gain spontaneous responses. Then prompt. (Key question)
 - To deter broadcaster from making same sort of errors
 - To remedy the potential harm done to one person / one company?
 - To make viewers aware that an error had been made?
 - To improve the awareness of ordinary viewers on the possibility of errors in these programs?
- How should remedies differ depending on the seriousness of the error? To what extent do they feel there is a hierarchy of errors and to what extent do they see them of equal seriousness?
- What remedies or actions could be implemented? (Spontaneous list)
- Since it's the job of the broadcaster to correct the significant errors of fact first, which action do you think they can/ will take up front when they acknowledge there has been an error?
- And which actions are most appropriate after a complaint has been investigated by a regulator?

SHOW LIST OF POSSIBILITIES - ON A BOARD

- First thoughts on these? (Split into 6)

HAND OUT SELF COMPLETE with cases of different mitigating circumstances on it and ask respondent to write the number of the remedy or action they feel should apply next to each, then discuss each in turn.

- What action or remedy do you think should apply here?
- Why that one? Why is it appropriate in that situation?
(Prompt with why more severe or less severe remedies if needed).

Summary on Remedies

- How quickly after the show should these remedies be applied?
- If the correction on air / apology / other remedy has been done by broadcaster as a self-regulatory measure, would this give closure? Is that enough?
- Get respondents to imagine what it would be like if the Current Affairs programs were regularly required to make apologies and corrections on air. How would it affect their perceptions of these programs? Are consumers aware of the financial impact it would have on the broadcasters (loss of advertising revenue because of more time spent apologising...)

Note to moderators – when participants use words like ‘retractations’ – could you probe their understanding of the word eg is it similar to a correction- where do they expect to see it online / on air?...

APPENDIX B – STATISTICAL RELIABILITY

Due to the fact that a sample, rather than the entire population was surveyed, the percentage results are subject to sampling tolerances, which vary with the size of the sample and the percentage figure concerned. For this sample of 1201 Australian residents, on a question where 50% of the people respond with a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that this result would not vary more than three percentage points, plus or minus, from the result that would have been obtained from a census of the entire population (using the same procedures). Some of the tolerances that apply for our sample are given in the table below.

Table 4 : Sampling Tolerances

APPROXIMATE SAMPLING TOLERANCES APPLICABLE TO PERCENTAGES AT OR NEAR THESE LEVELS (at the 95% confidence level).			
SIZE OF SAMPLE OR SUB-GROUP ON WHICH SURVEY RESULT IS BASED	10% or 90% ± %	30% or 70% ± %	50% ± %
All respondents (1201)	2	3	3
All men (600)	2	4	4
All Victorian respondents (300)	3	5	6

APPENDIX C – QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION C -PROG NOTE: ASK ALL RESPONDENTS

THERE IS NO QUESTION C1

C2 Now thinking about current affairs TV programs. Which of the following current affairs programs have you watched in the **last month**? **READ OUT**

PROG NOTE:

- MULTI RESPONSES ALLOWED
- RANDOMISE 1-14, THEN 15 LAST
- IF CODE 1-14 SELECTED THEN CANNOT SELECT CODE 15

1	Today Tonight
2	A Current Affair
3	60 Minutes
4	Sunday
5	Meet The Press
6	Dateline
7	Insight
8	The 7:30 Report
9	Difference of Opinion
10	Australian Story
11	Lateline
12	Stateline
13	Insiders
14	Four Corners
15	DO NOT READ None \ don't know

PROG NOTE: ASK IF WATCH TODAY TONIGHT OR A CURRENT AFFAIR IE CODE 1-2 IN C2. OTHERS GO TO C3(b)

C3(a) On average, in the **last month**, about how often did you watch...? **READ OUT**

PROG NOTE:

- ROTATE A-B
- ONLY SHOW A-B WATCH IN C2
- SINGLE RESPONSE REQUIRED FOR EACH ROW

		3 to 5 times per week	1 to 2 times per week	Once a fortnight	Or, less often	DO NOT READ Don't know
A	Today Tonight	1	2	3	4	5
B	A Current Affair	1	2	3	4	5

PROG NOTE: ASK IF WATCH 60 MINS OR SUNDAY OR MEET THE PRESS IE CODE 3-5 IN C2. OTHERS GO TO C4

C3(b) On average, in the **last month**, about how often did you watch...? **READ OUT**

PROG NOTE:

- ROTATE A-C
- ONLY SHOW A-C WATCH IN C2
- SINGLE RESPONSE REQUIRED FOR EACH ROW

		Once a week	Once a fortnight	Or, less often	DO NOT READ Don't know
A	60 Minutes	1	2	3	4
B	Sunday	1	2	3	4
C	Meet The Press	1	2	3	4

PROG NOTE: ASK ALL RESPONDENTS

C4 Now thinking just about **commercial** free-to-air TV. That is, channels **seven, nine and ten**. Which **one** of the following **best** describes your opinion of current affairs programs on **commercial** free-to-air TV? **READ OUT**

PROG NOTE:

- **SINGLE RESPONSE**
- **ROTATE 1,2,3,4,5,6 AND 5,4,3,2,1,6**

1	They keep everyday Australians informed about relevant issues
2	They provide some relevant information for everyday Australians and some entertainment
3	They are mostly entertainment and occasionally provide some relevant information
4	They provide entertainment but no relevant information for everyday Australians
5	They provide no entertainment nor do they keep everyday Australians informed about relevant issues
6	DO NOT READ None \ don't know

C5 Please say if you agree or disagree with the following statements about current affairs programs on **commercial** free-to-air TV? Firstly... **UNFOLD**

IF AGREE Is that strongly agree or somewhat agree?

IF DISAGREE Is that strongly disagree or somewhat disagree?

PROG NOTE:

- **SINGLE RESPONSE REQUIRED FOR EACH ROW**
- **RANDOMISE A-F**

		Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Neither \ don't know
A	Current affairs stories are always accurate in the facts they present to the audience	1	2	3	4	5
B	Current affairs stories always represent viewpoints fairly to the audience	1	2	3	4	5
C	When current affairs stories present things that are not accurate, they usually correct them in a later broadcast	1	2	3	4	5
D	When an error is made in a current affairs story, the program should make a correction as soon as they are aware of the error	1	2	3	4	5
E	When a person or company is affected due to an error in the facts presented, an apology should be made	1	2	3	4	5
F	When a person or company is presented in a bad light in a story, they should be given an opportunity to respond on air	1	2	3	4	5

C6 On occasion, current affairs programs make errors in their programs. For each of the following situations, please say what action you think should be taken as a result. Firstly, if (PROG NOTE: INSERT A-E) do you think the program should.... READ OUT

INTERVIEWER NOTE: ONLY READ CODE 6 IF NO CODES 1-5 MENTIONED

PROG NOTE:

- MULTI RESPONSE ALLOWED FOR EACH ROW
- RANDOMISE A-E
- IF CODE 1-5 SELECTED THEN CANNOT SELECT CODE 6-7

		Retrain staff involved within the organisation	Issue a letter of apology to the person or the company affected by the error	Issue a correction on the program website	Issue a correction on TV	Do something else (SPECIFY)	Or, do nothing	DO NOT READ None \ don't know
A	A fact that could have changed the story is consciously left out	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B	Unrelated or misleading video footage is leading viewers to incorrect conclusions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C	A fact or information is not checked properly and found to be incorrect after the program goes to air	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D	A person or a company is not given an opportunity to speak, leading viewers to incorrect conclusions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E	A reporter accidentally names a person or a company incorrectly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

C7 Still thinking about occasions when current affairs programs make errors. If an error is made by a program, do you think the program should take action as soon as they are aware of the error, or, only after a government body has investigated the matter? DO NOT READ

PROG NOTE:

- SINGLE RESPONSE

1	As soon as they are aware of the error
2	Only after a government body has investigated the matter
3	Neither \ don't know

APPENDIX D – USING THIS RESEARCH

It is important that clients should be aware of the limitations of survey research.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research deals with relatively small numbers of group participants and attempts to explore in-depth motivations, attitudes and feelings. This places a considerable interpretative burden on the researcher. For example, often what group participants do not say is as important as what they do. Similarly, body language and tone of voice can be important contributors to understanding group participants' deeper feelings.

Client should therefore recognise:

that despite the efforts made in recruitment, group participants may not always be totally representative of the target audience concerned

that findings are interpretative in nature, based on the experience and expertise of the researchers concerned

Quantitative Research

Even though quantitative research typically deals with larger numbers of group participants, users of survey results should be conscious of the limitations of all sample survey techniques.

Sampling techniques, the level of refusals, and problems with non-contacts all impact on the statistical reliability that can be attached to results.

Similarly quantitative research is often limited in the number of variables it covers, with important variables beyond the scope of the survey.

Hence the results of sample surveys are usually best treated as a means of looking at the relative merits of different approaches as opposed to absolute measures of expected outcomes.

The Role of Researcher and Client

Blue Moon believes that the researchers' task is not only to present the findings of the research but also to utilise our experience and expertise to interpret these findings for clients and to make our recommendations (based on that interpretation and our knowledge of the market) as to what we believe to be the optimum actions to be taken in the circumstances: indeed this is what we believe clients seek when they hire our services. Such interpretations and recommendations are presented in good faith, but we make no claim to be infallible.

Clients should, therefore, review the findings and recommendations in the light of their own experience and knowledge of the market and base their actions accordingly.