

ACMA - Impartiality and commercial influence in broadcast news - consultation 02/2020

Issues for comment

The ACMA invites comments on the issues set out in this section.

Elements of impartiality

Regulatory mechanisms such as codes of practice use a range of terms in provisions requiring news to be impartial. Above, this paper briefly explores the meanings of and relations between these terms.

1. Considering the various elements of impartiality, such as balance, fairness, and diversity of viewpoints, do any of the elements deserve greater regulatory emphasis in the current media environment?

Regulatory approaches

Regulatory mechanisms such as codes of practice embody a range of approaches to regulating the impartiality of news. In some sectors, impartiality requirements apply to news but not current affairs.

2. Is a common understanding of, and consistent regulatory approach to, impartiality desirable or feasible? What principles and definitions would enable consistency across different sectors or platforms?
3. To what extent should the regulatory approach distinguish between news and current affairs?
4. How should the distinction between factual material and commentary or analysis be applied to hybrid programs that include, for example, news updates followed by panel-based discussions? How can this distinction be made clear to viewers?
5. What transparency measures might help to effectively and appropriately safeguard the impartiality of news? What are the practical implications of strengthening transparency measures?

Other models and additional principles

6. Are there alternative or overseas approaches to impartiality which may provide better community safeguards?
7. Are there other principles or considerations not included in this paper that the ACMA should have regard to in its consideration of regulating impartiality in news broadcasting?

COMMENT / RESPONSE:

Due to time constraints, I limit my response to just one area.

In our liberal democracy, we need the ability to access a wide variety of news, views and opinions.

(In either hard-copy or on-line) I can access and read an extreme 'left-wing' publication, and I can access and read an extreme 'right-wing' publication. And everything in-between.

BUT, the average Australian tends not to do this – rather relying on one or two 'mainstream' sources ... usually a major newspaper and a major TV news bulletin.

Where such major mainstream media presents obviously biased reporting favouring one particular ideology / philosophy, our democracy is corrupted.

Self-regulation within the commercial sector does not seem to overcome this.

In some instances, the headline and opening paragraph is sensational (in order to attract attention), then reading to the end of the article sometimes 'softens' the sensationalism and even alters the slant to a more balanced report.

But, it is the opening which people remember.

(Such 'mis-use' of media power is documented via programmes like the ABC's Media Watch and other places.)

I propose that all commercial media which covers / attracts over a certain proportion* of the available audience should be required to adhere to the same 'balance and impartiality' code as is required of the ABC. [* Say, over 50% of a given market, or similar]

Regards ~ david pocklington / Sydney