

## NEWS EDITORIAL POLICY

### PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS FOR NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS CONTENT

SCA recognises the importance of the role it plays in the gathering of news and public affairs information for our metropolitan and regional communities, and we value the responsibility of ensuring those communities are informed accurately and without bias. This policy sets out SCA's commitment to ethical practice in the creation and delivery of news content.

This Policy applies to news content produced, commissioned, or otherwise obtained by SCA for broadcast or publication by any of the following channels:

- live radio news broadcasts (FM, AM, DAB+) which are also available by digital live stream
- on-demand audio news bulletins and updates (which are available on SCA websites, apps and social media and on smart speakers)
- on-demand podcasts that deal with news and current affairs (which are available on SCA websites, apps and social media and on smart speakers)
- text articles that deal with news and current affairs (which are available on SCA websites, apps and social media)
- live television news broadcasts, which may subsequently also be available on-demand online.

In relation to linear radio news broadcasts, this policy applies in addition to the Commercial Radio Code of Practice (**Radio Code**)<sup>1</sup>, including in particular section 3 (News and Current Affairs Programs) of the Radio Code (reproduced in schedule 1 to this policy).

In relation to linear television news broadcasts, this policy applies in addition to the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (**Television Code**)<sup>2</sup>, including in particular section 3 (News and Current Affairs) of the Television Code (reproduced in schedule 2 to this policy).

The requirements and principles set out in section 3 (News and Current Affairs Programs) of the Radio Code and section 3 (News and Current Affairs) of the Television Code apply equally to SCA's news and current affairs content on other platforms. Our journalists and content producers endeavour to meet the following standards in the execution of their daily duties.

1. Serve our audience and communities to a high standard.
2. Meet our legislative responsibility on local content quotas for our commercial radio licence areas.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.commercialradio.com.au/CR/media/CommercialRadio/Commercial-Radio-Code-of-Practice.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.freetv.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Free\\_TV\\_Commercial\\_Television\\_Industry\\_Code\\_of\\_Practice\\_2018.pdf](https://www.freetv.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Free_TV_Commercial_Television_Industry_Code_of_Practice_2018.pdf).

3. Provide balanced and fair coverage, without political, ethnic, commercial or personal bias.
4. Maintain a thorough knowledge of media law and the Commercial Radio Code of Practice.
5. Avoid plagiarism and always be mindful of copyright.
6. Seek guidance from SCA legal counsel on the reporting of court and other matters that carry legal risk.
7. Deliver locally significant and breaking news stories in an engaging format that fits our brands.
8. Exercise editorial independence and accept responsibility for it.
9. Produce content with integrity and accuracy.
10. Acknowledge and correct or clarify any errors as soon as reasonably practicable, as guided by the next most senior person or SCA legal counsel.
11. When questioning editorial matter, the journalist/producer must refer the issue up to the next most senior person for advice or decision.
12. Ensure advertising is readily distinguishable from editorial content, and content selection is not influenced by SCA commercial interests.
13. Approach the reporting of graphic or confronting news events with sensitivity and respect and be mindful of key periods when children or young people are more likely to be listening to live content. For on-demand audio content, this will require inclusion of appropriate advance warnings about sensitive content.
14. Understand SCA's reputation is a valuable asset, as is the trust of our audiences and clients.

### **Complaints**

Section 10 of the Radio Code explains how listeners may complain about a matter covered by the Radio Code in relation to news or other content in a live radio broadcast. All of SCA's radio station websites have an online complaint form that may be used for this purpose.

Section 7 of the Television Code explains how viewers may complain about a matter covered by the Television Code in relation to news or other content in a live television broadcast. The Free TV website has an online complaint form that may be used for this purpose<sup>3</sup>.

If a person wishes to complain about a matter covered by this policy in relation to SCA's news content on any platform other than live television, the online complaint form on any of SCA's radio station websites may also be used for that purpose. In that case, the complainant should provide reasonable details of the relevant content, how and when they heard or saw it; and, where possible, which aspects of this policy they think have been breached. SCA will use best endeavours to respond in writing to the complaint within 30 Business Days after receiving the complaint. The Australian Media and Communications Authority does not have authority to consider or investigate complaints about matters covered by this policy.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.freetv.com.au/>.

As set out in section 10.14 of the Radio Code, complaints in relation to advertisements in news content will generally be referred for response by Ad Standards (formerly known as the Advertising Standards Bureau).

31 March 2021

**SCHEDULE 1**

**COMMERCIAL RADIO CODE OF PRACTICE<sup>4</sup>**

15 March 2017

**3. News and Current Affairs Programs**

- 3.1. In broadcasting News Programs, a Licensee must use reasonable efforts to:
- 3.1.1. present news accurately and impartially;
  - 3.1.2. present news in a way that is not likely to create public panic, or cause serious distress to reasonable listeners, unless it is in the public interest to do so; and
  - 3.1.3. distinguish news from comment.
- 3.2. In broadcasting Current Affairs Programs, a Licensee must use reasonable efforts to ensure that:
- 3.2.1. factual material is reasonably supportable as being accurate;
  - 3.2.2. factual material is clearly distinguishable from commentary and analysis; and
  - 3.2.3. viewpoints expressed to the Licensee for broadcast are not misrepresented or presented in a misleading manner by giving wrong or improper emphasis on certain material or by editing material out of context.
- 3.3. In broadcasting News Programs and Current Affairs Programs, a Licensee must not broadcast material relating to a person's personal or private affairs, or which invades an individual's privacy, unless it is in the public interest to do so, or the person has provided implied or express consent for the material to be broadcast (or in the case of a person under 16, a parent or guardian has given implied or express consent).
- 3.4. A Licensee must make reasonable efforts to correct or clarify significant and material errors of fact which would be readily apparent to a reasonable person in the Licensee's position or which have been demonstrated to the Licensee's reasonable satisfaction in a timely manner.<sup>5</sup>
- 3.5. There will be no breach of the accuracy requirements at 3.1.1 or 3.2.1 if:
- 3.5.1. the Licensee can establish on the balance of probabilities that the news or factual material is accurate; or
  - 3.5.2. a disputed fact was not a material fact; or
  - 3.5.3. a correction, which is appropriate in all the circumstances, is made within 30 Business Days of the Licensee receiving either a Code Complaint, or notice of a Code Complaint being referred to the ACMA (whichever is later).

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<sup>4</sup> Capitalised terms are defined in the Definitions section of the Radio Code.

<sup>5</sup> For the avoidance of doubt, a Licensee will not breach this provision by failing to correct errors of fact which are of a trivial or minor nature.

- 3.6. A correction under this section 3 may be made in one or more of the following ways:
- 3.6.1. during a later episode of the relevant Program or a comparable Program;
  - 3.6.2. on the Program's website, the station's home page or the Licensee's main website as appropriate; or
  - 3.6.3. in any other way that is appropriate in all the circumstances.
- 3.7. For the purposes of 3.2 above, a contribution made to a Current Affairs Program by a talkback participant will not be considered factual material, unless it is factual material that is endorsed or adopted by the Presenter. 'Talkback participant' means a member of the public who contributes to open-line discussions via the Licensee's dedicated talkback line or by other communication methods accepted by the Licensee.
- 3.8. Nothing in this section 3 obliges the Licensee to allocate equal time to different points of view, nor to include every aspect of a person's viewpoint, nor does it preclude a critical examination of, or comment on, a controversial issue as part of a fair report on a matter of public interest.
- 3.9. Current Affairs Programs are not required to be impartial and may take a particular stance on issues. However, a Licensee must provide reasonable opportunities for significant alternative viewpoints to be presented when dealing with controversial issues of public importance, while the issue has immediate relevance to the community.<sup>6</sup>
- 3.10. Compliance with 3.1 and 3.2 must be assessed by taking into account all of the circumstances at the time of preparing and broadcasting the material, including:
- 3.10.1. the facts known, or readily ascertainable, at that time;
  - 3.10.2. the context of the material within the News Program or Current Affairs Program in its entirety;
  - 3.10.3. the time pressures associated with the preparation and broadcast of News Programs and Current Affairs Programs; and
  - 3.10.4. in relation to a Current Affairs Program, the format and style of the Current Affairs Program.

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<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this provision, 'reasonable opportunities' can be accommodated within the same Program or a similar Program. The requirement does not impose an obligation on Licensees to allocate equal time to different points of view, nor to broadcast all viewpoints expressed to it.

**SCHEDULE 2**

**COMMERCIAL TELEVISION INDUSTRY CODE OF PRACTICE**

1 December 2015

**3. News and Current Affairs**

**3.1 Scope and Interpretation**

3.1.1 Except where otherwise indicated, this section applies to news Programs (including news flashes and updates) and Current Affairs Programs.

3.1.2 Compliance with this Section 3 must be assessed taking into account all of the circumstances at the time of preparing and broadcasting the material, including: a) the facts known, or readily ascertainable, at that time; b) the context of the segment (or Program Promotion) in its entirety; and c) the time pressures associated with the preparation and broadcast of such programming.

**3.2 Material which may cause distress**

3.2.1 In broadcasting a news or Current Affairs Program, a Licensee must:

- a) not include material which, in the reasonable opinion of the Licensee, is likely to seriously distress or seriously offend a substantial number of viewers, having regard to the likely audience of the Program, unless there is a public interest reason to do so; and
- b) include a spoken warning before a segment that contains material which, in the reasonable opinion of the Licensee, is likely to seriously distress or seriously offend a substantial number of viewers having regard to the likely audience of the Program; and
- c) not broadcast reports of suicide or attempted suicide unless there is a public interest reason to do so, and exclude any detailed description of the method used, and exclude graphic details or images; and
- d) exercise sensitivity in broadcasting images of or interviews with bereaved relatives or people who have witnessed or survived a traumatic incident; and
- e) have regard to the feelings of relatives and viewers when including images of dead bodies or people who are seriously wounded, taking into account the relevant public interest.

**3.3 Accuracy and fairness**

3.3.1 In broadcasting a news or Current Affairs Program, a Licensee must present factual material accurately and ensure viewpoints included in the Program are not misrepresented.

3.3.2 Clause 3.3.1 applies to material facts and material misrepresentations of viewpoints only.

3.3.3 Licensees must make reasonable efforts to correct or clarify significant and material errors of fact that are readily apparent or have been demonstrated to the Licensee's reasonable satisfaction in a timely manner.

3.3.4 If a Licensee makes a correction in an appropriate manner within 30 days of a complaint being received or referred to the ACMA (whichever is later), then the Licensee will not be in breach of clause 3.3.1 in relation to that matter.

3.3.5 A correction under clause 3.3.4 may be made in one or more of the following ways: a) during a later episode of the relevant Program; b) on a Licensee's news website; c) on the official website of the relevant Program; or d) any other way that is appropriate in the circumstances.

### **3.4 Impartiality**

3.4.1 In broadcasting a news Program, a Licensee must: a) present news fairly and impartially; b) clearly distinguish the reporting of factual material from commentary and analysis.

3.4.2 Nothing in this Section 3 requires a Licensee to allocate equal time to different points of view, or to include every aspect of a person's viewpoint, nor does it preclude a critical examination of or comment on a controversial issue as part of a fair report on a matter of public interest.

3.4.3 Current Affairs Programs are not required to be impartial and may take a particular stance on issues.

### **3.5 Privacy**

3.5.1 In broadcasting a news Program or Current Affairs Program, a Licensee must not broadcast material relating to a person's personal or private affairs or which invades a person's privacy, unless:

- a) there is a public interest reason for the material to be broadcast; or
- b) the person has provided implicit or explicit consent for the material to be broadcast (or in the case of a person under 16, a parent or guardian has given implicit or explicit consent). Note: The broadcast of material that is publicly available or recorded in a public place will generally not be material relating to a person's personal or private affairs or an invasion of privacy.

3.5.2 For the purposes of clause 3.5.1, a Licensee must exercise special care before broadcasting material relating to a Child's personal or private affairs in a report of a sensitive matter concerning the Child.

### **3.6 Program Promotions for news and Current Affairs Programs**

3.6.1 In broadcasting a Program Promotion for a news or Current Affairs Program, a Licensee must comply with this Section 3 as far as practicable, having regard to its brevity.

3.6.2 A Licensee is not required by this clause to portray all aspects or themes of a Program or Program segment in a Program Promotion, or to represent all viewpoints contained in the Program or Program segment.