

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED] [@peakelegal.com.au](mailto:[REDACTED]@peakelegal.com.au)
Subject: Complaint about Four Corners broadcast on 13 September 2021 on ABC [SEC=OFFICIAL]
Date: Monday, 4 July 2022 11:25:00 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[image002.png](#)
[image003.png](#)
[image004.png](#)

ACMA reference BM-10715

Dear [REDACTED],

RE: Complaint about *Four Corners* broadcast on 13 September 2021 on ABC

Thank you for your correspondence, received by the ACMA on 13 May 2022, on behalf of Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses (Australasia) Limited, Watchtower Bible & Tract Society of Australia and Jehovah's Witnesses Congregations, about the compliance of the *Four Corners* episode, 'Bearing Witness', with the ABC Code of Practice 2019 (the Code). I appreciate your patience while the ACMA has considered your clients' complaint.

We have reviewed the complaint and note that, in summary, it expressed concerns relevant to Standard 2 (Accuracy), Standard 4 (Impartiality), Standard 5 (Fair and Honest Dealing) and Standard 7 (Harm and offence) of the Code.

I appreciate that this matter is of concern to your clients, and I thank you for taking the time to raise it with us.

When we receive a complaint about a broadcast, we weigh up a number of factors to help us decide whether to investigate further.

We have undertaken a detailed assessment of the complaint, a copy of the broadcast, the broadcaster's response and the relevant rules in the Code. Based on those assessments, we have concluded that there were no issues that raised fundamental concerns with the ABC's compliance with the Code and we have decided to take no further action. A summary of the ACMA's reasoning is below.

Standard 2 of the Code requires the ABC to make reasonable efforts to ensure that material facts are accurate and presented in context (Standard 2.1) and that it not presents factual content in a way that will materially mislead the audience (Standard 2.2).

Your clients alleged that the program inaccurately presented Jehovah's Witnesses' practices and teachings; its handling of allegations of abuse (including child sexual abuse) amongst its congregations; its response to the Royal Commission on Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the Royal Commission); and its ownership of real estate. We note that the statements referred to were largely either expressions of personal opinion or experience, or argument for the audience to evaluate; were imprecise and open to different interpretations; or were unlikely to be statements of material facts within the context of the program.

Standard 4 of the Code relevantly requires that the ABC gathers and presents information with due impartiality (Standard 4.1); that it presents a diversity of perspectives so that, over time, no significant strand of thought or belief within the community is knowingly excluded or disproportionately represented (Standard 4.2); that it does not misrepresent any perspective (Standard 4.4); and that it does not unduly favour one perspective over another (Standard 4.5).

The focus on the Jehovah's Witnesses' responses to internal allegations of sexual abuse and to the Royal Commission was a legitimate subject for examination by the program and within that context it was likely appropriate that the program included the sources that it did, presented them in the way that it did, and that a diversity of perspectives representing the significant viewpoints was included, with no one perspective being unduly favoured.

Standard 5.3 requires that, where allegations are made about a person or organisation, the ABC should make reasonable efforts in the circumstances to provide a fair opportunity to respond. We note that the Jehovah's Witnesses were given opportunities to participate and written responses that were provided to questions from the ABC were included in the broadcast.

Under Standard 7.7, the ABC is required to avoid the unjustified use of stereotypes or discriminatory content that could reasonably be interpreted as condoning or encouraging prejudice. While critical coverage of the Jehovah's Witnesses may have encouraged negative audience sentiment, and that this was subsequently expressed on social media, such responses were clearly made within the context of a legitimate examination of an important and sensitive issue in the Australian community (child sexual abuse), an issue about which individual members of the audience might be expected to form strong opinions.

Although we have decided not to take further action in relation to this matter, your clients' complaint has been logged to help identify potential recurring or systemic issues with legislation, codes of practice and standards. You can find out more about our approach to broadcast investigations on the [ACMA website](#).

If you have concerns about the ACMA's decision, you can contact the [Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman](#) or seek independent advice.

Thank you again for bringing this matter to our attention.

Your sincerely,


Content Investigations Section

Australian Communications and Media Authority

 [@acma.gov.au](mailto:acma@acma.gov.au)
acma.gov.au



The ACMA acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, culture and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.