

INDEPENDENT EXTERNAL REVIEW OF RNZ EDITORIAL PROCESSES

To review the circumstances around the inappropriate editing of wire stories discovered in June 2023, identify what went wrong, and recommend areas for improvement.

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William Ake
Linda Clark
Alan Sunderland

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Introduction

Ko te tūāpapa o te manapori pakari, whakahonohono anō o Aotearoa ko tētahi pūnaha pāpāho e ora pai ana, e kanorau ana anō, e whakamārama ana, e whātui ana anō i te iwi mā ētahi puna mōhiotio e whakaponotia ana.

The strong and cohesive democracy in Aotearoa is underpinned by a healthy and diverse media ecosystem that keeps people informed and connected through a range of trusted sources – RNZ Annual Report, 2021-2022

- 1 At a time when misinformation and disinformation are on the rise and trust in the news media is declining around the world, Te Reo Irirangi o Aotearoa Radio New Zealand (**RNZ**) is regarded as the [most trusted](#) media organisation in the country. This is underpinned by its long history of reporting in the public interest, its [Charter](#), which commits the organisation to providing comprehensive, independent, accurate, impartial and balanced news and current affairs, and a set of editorial policies designed to ensure adherence to the highest standards of strong and accountable public interest journalism.
- 2 In June 2023 RNZ faced widespread criticism after it emerged the organisation had published overseas wire stories on its website which had been deliberately edited to include unattributed statements that were one-sided and contested. RNZ accepts these edits were inappropriate.
- 3 On 14 June RNZ's Board commissioned this review to look into the circumstances of the inappropriate editing¹.
- 4 At the outset, notwithstanding the fact that inappropriately edited stories were published, the panel wishes to acknowledge the sustained excellence delivered by RNZ's journalists and content makers across a wide range of subjects, programmes and formats. Nothing in this review is intended to detract from that, but rather to identify ways to enhance it.

Terms of Reference

- a To review the circumstances around the inappropriate editing of wire stories discovered in June 2023, identify what went wrong, and recommend areas for improvement. This includes reviewing the handling of the complaint to the Broadcasting Minister from the Ukrainian community in October 2022.
- b To review the editorial controls, systems, and processes for the editing of online content at RNZ, assess their effectiveness, and recommend improvements.
- c To review RNZ editorial policy and practice and recommend improvements based on any relevant findings.
- d To advise the board on options for ensuring RNZ has processes in place to safeguard against misinformation or partiality in its news and current affairs content.
- e To advise the board on any other related matters that warrant further consideration.

¹ One of the panel members, Linda Clark, is a former board member of NZ On Air. Subsequent to her appointment to the panel, Ms Clark was appointed as a Board member of TVNZ. Any issues relating to a potential conflict of interest were flagged with Treasury prior to the TVNZ appointment being confirmed. The potential conflict has been declared to both the panel and TVNZ.

Review in Brief

- 5 Stories were published on RNZ's website which breached editorial standards relating to balance and accuracy. These stories, all versions of overseas wires stories, were edited inappropriately. For example, the editing included adding a pro-Russian perspective on the invasion of Ukraine and excluding words that could be read as being critical of Palestinians.
- 6 Only one journalist was involved in the inappropriate editing of news reports. The panel saw no evidence suggesting others were involved.
- 7 The instances of inappropriate editing represented only a small proportion of the journalist's work, and not all of the examples of inappropriate editing identified by RNZ were found by the panel to be inappropriate.
- 8 The inappropriate editing that was identified breached both RNZ's Editorial Policy and its contractual agreement with Reuters.
- 9 The panel accepts that the person responsible for the inappropriate editing genuinely believed he was acting appropriately to provide balance and accuracy, and was not motivated by any desire to introduce misinformation, disinformation or propaganda. Despite that, inappropriate editing of the type that was identified constitutes a serious breach of trust and damaged RNZ's reputation for accurate and balanced journalism.
- 10 The way the journalist's errors were framed at the time by RNZ's leadership contributed to public alarm and reputational damage which the panel believes was not helpful in maintaining public trust.
- 11 While the inappropriate actions were those of an individual journalist, the wider structure, culture, systems and processes that facilitated what occurred and responded to it are the responsibility of RNZ's leadership.
- 12 In particular, our review finds that:
 - a There were gaps in the supervision and training of the busy, poorly resourced digital news team.
 - b Training in editorial standards across the organisation lacked consistency and effectiveness. The training materials we reviewed were basic and staff had not engaged with them.
 - c The key contracts with third party suppliers of content (including Reuters) were not easily accessible and not subject to one person's control. One of the important contracts had not even been properly signed.
 - d Staff across the organisation were not aware of the express terms of the contracts relating to editing wire content. Instead, the limitations on changing content were generally regarded as so elementary as to be taken as read.
 - e The overall organisational structure that has existed since 2016 is unsatisfactory and separates digital news team from the news team. The same Editorial Standards apply to both but under the separated model the two teams are not aligned.
 - f Effective referring up – a key safeguard in all news organisations – is impacted adversely by journalists having to refer up across two different silos (news and content), depending on where or how a story will be published.

- g Communications between the digital news team (content) and the news team (news) is hampered by both teams being permitted to use different communications tools (Slack v Teams).
- 13 Outdated technology, organisational silos and a lack of trust between the digital news team and the traditional newsroom are all cited by staff as issues of concern and the panel agrees. These factors all potentially create information and/or trust gaps and reduce effective communication and oversight of editorial standards.
- 14 The unfortunate consequence of this has been a lack of alignment between the two teams, with each often questioning the other in an unconstructive way, rather than working as a complete news team putting news reports first. We have been told that a decision has now been made that digital news and news are to be merged as one team. In our view that cannot happen soon enough.
- 15 The recommendations contained in this report (and set out in full at page 41) are designed to enhance editorial oversight and upward referral, and reduce the risk of inappropriate editorial content being published or broadcast in future.
- 16 It should not be concluded that, if all recommendations in this report are adopted, the risk of future editorial errors will be eliminated. It is not even necessarily the case that, had they been in place, the events that prompted this review would not have occurred.
- 17 News organisations around the world operate, of necessity, by investing a high degree of trust in their journalists. Regardless of how many checks and balances exist in newsrooms, there will always be a risk that the final pair of eyes on a story may introduce or overlook errors, whether deliberately, accidentally, negligently or through misguided good intentions. This risk increases when journalists work under increased pressure and in fewer numbers per shift.
- 18 However, that risk needs to be managed through a system that delivers well trained journalists, effective monitoring, systems and processes that are fit for purpose, clear and well-communicated editorial standards and working arrangements that ensure staff can do their best work. The panel considers that, in all these areas, there is room for improvement at RNZ.
- 19 In relation to the complaint of October 2022, this referred to a story first published on 26 May 2022 under the heading, '*NZ entering Ukraine conflict "at whim of Government" – former Labour General-Secretary*'. RNZ subsequently linked this 2022 story to the inappropriate editing it identified in June 2023 because it was written by the same journalist who edited the wire stories. The panel did not find anything editorially inappropriate in relation to the original story, or the later updated version, although the story was improved by the addition of a wider range of perspectives. Both versions of the story contained views which are not mainstream, but which nonetheless are legitimate if clearly attributed and sourced, which they were. The panel made no findings or recommendations in relation to the handling of the complaint, which referred to the story appearing on other news sites, not RNZ's. In any case, RNZ cannot be criticised for failing to respond to an email complaint made to the Broadcasting Minister.
- 20 During the course of the review, it was clear to us that RNZ's journalists routinely deliver a high standard of trusted, accurate and balanced news. Nothing in this report should detract from that. Overwhelmingly, RNZ continues to meet high standards in its journalism that justifies its position as the most trusted source of news in New Zealand.

- 21 The instances of inappropriate editing that prompted this review have provided an opportunity to find ways of improving in a range of areas, and the panel hopes this will ensure RNZ remains, as it is now, a source of accurate and balanced journalism.

Process

- 22 The panel spoke to a wide range of former and current RNZ staff and managers, as well as relevant third parties. We accessed and read a wide range of documents, including the stories RNZ's own audit identified as being potentially unbalanced as well as RNZ policy documents, training materials, contracts and reports. We considered the relevant standards and policies of both the New Zealand Media Council Te kaunihera ao pāpāho o Aotearoa (**NZ Media Council**) and the Broadcasting Standards Authority Te Mana Whanonga Kaipāho (**BSA**), and examined policies and practices at a range of other public broadcasters around the world. We also referred as appropriate to the RNZ Charter and Editorial Policy, and to other relevant sections of the Radio New Zealand Act 1995 and other broadcasting legislation.
- 23 It should be noted that, although guided at all times by the principles of natural justice, this review is not a formal inquiry.² The panel has no special powers and therefore relied on the cooperation of those involved. Every person we asked to participate, did so.
- 24 We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who cooperated so willingly and helpfully with this review, including the management of RNZ, who promptly provided us with any and all information requested.
- 25 Our inquiries closely followed the terms of reference as outlined above, while noting that there was inevitably some overlap between the various terms. As a result, the body of this review follows what we found to be the most logical and useful sequence: identifying and describing the inappropriate editing that occurred, and then looking in turn at the processes, training, technology, working arrangements, culture and standards that may have contributed to the issue, and where changes may reduce the risk of problems recurring. The specific terms of reference are referred to where relevant.
- 26 Importantly, it is necessary to point out what this review does *not* do.
- 27 It is outside the scope of this review to investigate or propose any actions in relation to the journalist at the centre of the inappropriate editing.
- 28 As a result, we have adopted a policy of avoiding the use of names wherever possible, while accepting that, at times, specific individuals may be identifiable. Wherever this is the case, those individuals have been provided with an opportunity to see the review prior to finalisation, in order to raise any concerns or identify any inaccuracies. Their responses have assisted in improving and refining parts of this review. However, the panel members themselves take full responsibility for the contents and the language of the review.

Background

- 29 Early in the morning of 9 June 2023, a post on Twitter from a user in the United States raised concerns about a Reuters story about the war in Ukraine running on the RNZ website. Under the by-line of a Reuters reporter, the story contained elements which the Twitter user [described](#) as 'utterly false Russian propaganda'.

² As defined by the Inquiries Act 2013.

- 30 A short time later, having been alerted to the story, a representative of Reuters emailed RNZ pointing out that the story ‘contained language that was not in the original article and distorts the editorial meaning of the story’. He asked for it to be restored to its original wording immediately.
- 31 During the course of 9 June 2023, the story was identified by RNZ management, restored to its original version and an investigation begun into what had happened and who was responsible.
- 32 One individual digital journalist was identified as the author of the changes to the story³. We note that from the first time he was asked about the copy, the journalist accepted that he had made the changes and did not seek to deflect any responsibility for his actions.
- He said, his words were ‘I’ve sparingly and appropriately edited copy my entire journalistic career’ at RNZ and at [.....] prior. And I think he believed that, and then he said ‘and I stand by the facts that I’ve put in the copy’.*
- 33 In the days following 9 June, RNZ commenced an internal audit into other stories edited by the same journalist which identified he had similarly edited other stories over a significant period of time. The journalist subsequently resigned.
- 34 The results of this audit were [posted online](#) and regularly updated. The audit concluded in late July 2023, with 49 corrections issued after 1319 stories were examined.
- 35 Management at RNZ took immediate steps to inform both kaimahi and the wider public of events and on 14 June 2023 the RNZ Chair announced the formation of this panel, to undertake a ‘[robust and comprehensive](#)’ review of RNZ’s editorial processes, including examining ‘factors and warning signs which led to international wire stories being subedited with inappropriate content, and then published’.
- 36 In responding to the developing issue publicly, RNZ’s Chief Executive described the edits as ‘[pro-Kremlin garbage](#)’, while the Chairman said that [public confidence](#) in RNZ had been eroded after the alterations.
- 37 From the many submissions the panel received, the documents examined and the wide range of people spoken to, two contrasting propositions emerged.
- 38 The first was that the inappropriate editing was the result of a ‘rogue actor’, who made a decision to abuse the trust placed in him and take actions that were well understood to be contrary to editorial standards. Many who held that view felt that there was likely to be little that any responsible news organisation could do to prevent such actions.
- 39 The second view was that the inappropriate editing was inevitable because of significant structural, procedural and policy failures by RNZ, and that these failures had created the opportunity that ensured something like inappropriate editing to occur.
- 40 The panel does not hold to either of these contrasting views. What we found was a journalist who acted in breach of both editorial standards and RNZ’s contract with Reuters *and* an organisation that facilitated the conditions for a journalist to do so.
- 41 We note this review was prompted by a series of social media tweets published offshore after an overseas wire services reporter noticed copy had been changed. RNZ’s existing systems

³ We set out the changes later in this report.

and oversight failed to identify those changes and, absent the controversy, possibly never would have.

Inappropriate Editing

- 42 The first term of reference for this review was “to review the circumstances around the inappropriate editing of wire stories discovered in June 2023”. In order to do that, the panel considered it necessary to determine the nature and extent of ‘inappropriate’ editing that took place.
- 43 We do not intend to exhaustively replicate the [audit](#) of stories carried out by RNZ, or to pass judgement on each and every example provided. However, it was necessary for us to satisfy ourselves that there was indeed inappropriate editing.
- 44 The panel considers that there are two relevant measures of inappropriateness.
- a whether the edits breached the terms of the licence that RNZ has with Reuters⁴ for the use of their content, and
 - b whether the edits breached RNZ’s own [Editorial Policy](#).
- 45 To be clear, in circumstances where the panel has formed the view that a particular story or example of editing is ‘not inappropriate’, that does not mean the specific example is beyond any criticism, could not be improved, or would not have been subject to concern by RNZ itself. It simply means that the story or the edit is reasonable as a piece of journalism and would not have been likely to breach the relevant editorial standards for accuracy, balance or other standards.

The Reuters Agreement

- 46 Clause 3.5(b) of the Reuters Agreement Master Terms reads:
- Subject to any Restrictions, you may adapt and modify the Licensed Content as necessary for you to produce finished material for your Client Properties, which may include editing or using textual Content as source material, slightly cropping or resizing still photographs, and editing video footage for length or to combine it with other content; provided that you do not alter or distort the editorial meaning of the Licensed Content. You will identify yourself as the source of any voiceover or translation.*
- 47 It is clear several of the stories identified in the audit introduced edits that altered or distorted the editorial meaning of the original Reuters content. Reuters took this view in relation to the [first story](#) identified on 9 June 2023 when it notified RNZ that the changes introduced to that story distorted the editorial meaning of it. We agree. In respect of some stories, the changes add new and often contested information, introduce significant additional material not in the original Reuters story, or in some cases remove information, changing the balance or meaning.
- 48 A range of people within RNZ said it is common practice to edit Reuters stories and other wire stories in minor ways to match local ‘house style’. This includes adjusting details such as dates, currencies, and the like to reflect a different time zone or country. Sometimes multiple wire stories are combined into a single story, especially in the case of breaking stories.

⁴ RNZ has a range of contracts for supply of content with third parties, including BBC and CNN among others. We have concentrated on the Reuters contract but similar limitations apply to all contracts we reviewed.

However, edits should not be made that would risk altering or distorting the meaning of the original story.

- 49 The journalist responsible for the edits at the centre of this review maintains that at all times he was editing stories appropriately in order to ensure balance and include appropriate context, and this was his usual practice.
- 50 He said he had never seen or been shown the relevant section of the Reuters contract (or any other contract) setting out the conditions of use, and considered that it was appropriate to make the changes he did. We confirmed that his line managers had also never seen the Reuters contract.⁵
- 51 Despite that, the panel is satisfied that, in relation to the Reuters agreement, the edits were inappropriate.

RNZ Editorial Policy

- 52 The RNZ Editorial Policy is the bedrock of RNZ's journalism and reputation. The document sets out the standards expected of all RNZ staff and ensures that, in the words of the Charter, the organisation delivers 'comprehensive, independent, accurate, impartial, and balanced regional, national, and international news and current affairs'.
- 53 For the purposes of this review, the most relevant parts of the policy are:
- a Section 1 on Upward Referral
 - b Section 2 on Accuracy, and in particular the sections dealing with attribution, opinion, personal opinion and informed analysis
 - c Section 3 on Fairness, Balance and Diversity
 - d Section 5 on Independence.
- 54 With those policies in mind, the panel reviewed the stories to identify, in general, if and where inappropriate editing had occurred. One key aspect that was critical to issues of inappropriateness was the question of balance.
- 55 As the RNZ Editorial Policy explains, balance involves '*presenting a range of voices to help the audience understand issues and events of public importance*' (Section 3, p.18). The policy goes on to explain that:
- a Balance should be achieved, where appropriate, within a single story... or otherwise within the period of current interest
 - b For long running issues... balance comes from the diversity of views over time
 - c Context is important.
- 56 The BSA issues guidance on all its standards in its Codebook.⁶ These provide an excellent starting point for all journalists and compliance with RNZ's Editorial Policy should be read in conjunction with these guidelines.

⁵ We address the extent to which any RNZ journalists were aware of the conditions of the contracts with content providers later in the report.

⁶ <https://www.bsa.govt.nz/broadcasting-standards/broadcasting-code-book-2022/the-codebook/>

- 57 There are other important aspects of journalistic balance which are not specifically spelled out in the RNZ Editorial Policy, but which are relevant. These include:
- a Balance needs to follow the weight of evidence to avoid being 'false balance'
 - b It does not require all views to receive equal time
 - c Where particular views are based on misinformation or disinformation, that needs to be made clear if the views are to be included
- 58 Covering conflict and war, and in particular a war where New Zealand is either actively involved or aligned, is one of the most challenging situations faced by news organisations. It is important to fairly and accurately reflect the views of all sides in a conflict. In doing so, however, it is also important not to be a party to misinformation, disinformation or propaganda. Claims and assertions need to be carefully attributed, context and factual information need to be added where necessary, and information should not be added or omitted purely to support the arguments of one side in a conflict. In such circumstances, strict adherence to editorial standards is vital.
- 59 In relation specifically to covering the war between Russia and Ukraine, the panel makes the following observations:
- a It is not inappropriate to refer accurately to the views and perspectives of Russia.
 - b It is not inappropriate to include claims and contested assertions from either side, provided they are properly attributed and represented.
 - c It is inappropriate to present contested or contestable statements or characterisation as facts or as if they are uncontested.
 - d It may be inappropriate⁷, depending on the context, to include material (even if attributed) that constitutes misinformation or disinformation if that material is not countered by the inclusion of factual and accurate context in order to avoid platforming inaccuracies or delivering false balance.
 - e It is inappropriate to include additional or extensive material from only one perspective, if that has the effect of creating an unbalanced or unfair story⁸.
- 60 Decisions about compliance with Editorial Policy are matters for judgement, and experienced people operating in good faith can and do disagree on where the lines are between compliance with editorial standards and a breach of those standards.
- 61 RNZ has conducted its own audit of stories edited by the journalist at the centre of this controversy. RNZ identified 49 stories it said demonstrated 'inappropriate editing' from 1319 stories audited.
- 62 The panel does not propose to provide its own views on every single instance of alleged inappropriate editing. Suffice to say, we are satisfied that the journalist made changes in a number of stories (either by adding information or editing out relevant information) which

⁷ An example of this would be a story about the riots at the Capitol in the US on 6 January 2021 that included quotes from President Biden condemning the actions as an assault on democracy, and further comments from former President Trump claiming that he won the 2020 election anyway. The inclusion of Trump's comments would be inappropriate without adding the important context that all reputable authorities have found that Biden won the election and claims of fraud have been rejected in multiple court cases. To exclude that context would be to engage in false balance.

⁸ If two opposing views are of equal validity and equal prominence, it would be wrong to write a story that suggests otherwise by extensively quoting the reasons for one and just paying lip service to the other.

changed the meaning or the balance of the original wire story. These changes are inappropriate editing and are a breach of RNZ's Editorial Policy.

63 Because determining where the line lies is a judgement call, the panel did not always agree and in some cases where RNZ has determined inappropriate editing occurred either all or some of the panel disagree with this finding.

64 Below we provide a representative sample of examples where the panel determined the journalist breached RNZ's Editorial Policy or where we disagreed with RNZ's audit findings. Each of the examples below measure inappropriateness against the editorial standards of RNZ, rather than against the Reuters Agreement, dealt with separately above.

Inappropriate editing

Increasing talk of 'war' in Russia worrying sign of escalation

65 This story, published on 9 June 2023, is a lengthy piece, published under the by-line of a Reuters correspondent. The angle of the story was that President Putin had changed the language used to describe the conflict, following a major Ukrainian drone attack on Moscow.

66 The version published by RNZ on its website contained inappropriate editing. It introduced a range of new content which was coloured, one-sided and contested.

67 The original story provided plenty of opportunity for the Russian perspective to be heard, while also including the Ukrainian perspective and adding context and analysis provided by a Reuters reporter under whose by-line the story ran.

68 The changes that were made included the insertion of the word 'violent' to describe the Maidan Revolution, the addition of 'after a referendum' to the mention of Russia's annexation of Crimea, and a statement that the Ukrainian Government 'suppressed ethnic Russians in eastern and southern Ukraine'.

69 None of this language was attributed to a Russian perspective; the descriptors and statements were added into the story as if they were uncontested facts.

70 In reality, both sides in the conflict have sharply different views on the extent of violence that occurred during the Maidan Revolution and who was responsible for it. The mention of the referendum as context did not include the important fact that the referendum referred to has been widely condemned as illegitimate and the UN General Assembly voted to declare the referendum illegal. Further, there is ongoing debate and dispute about the situation in the Donbas and the tension between the Ukrainian Government and pro-Russian elements.

71 To change the copy provided by Reuters to present one contestable perspective as factual, particularly when that perspective favours one side in a sensitive, controversial and significant conflict, is inappropriate editing.

Residents trapped as Nova Kakhovka dam's destruction wreaks havoc in war zone

72 This story, published on 7 June 2023, reported that thousands of people in south Ukraine were in danger due to flooding caused by the destruction of a major dam. At the time of publication, both sides in the conflict blamed the other for bombing the dam.

73 The version published on RNZ's website contained inappropriate editing.

- 74 The original wording of the story referred to Russia 'seizing' Crimea in 2014. This was changed to refer to Russia 'annexing' Crimea after a 'coup'. This is highly one-sided and contested language which had the effect of unbalancing the story.
- 75 As is widely acknowledged, the reference to the Maidan Revolution as a 'coup' is language used by Russia and its supporters to suggest that the events leading up to the ousting of then Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovych were not a popular uprising but rather a US-backed coup.
- 76 Without delving into the long and complex debate about the purpose of US aid to Ukraine at the time, the actions of the Ukraine Parliament in voting overwhelmingly to remove the President from office and a range of other factors, it is clearly inappropriate to characterise the events as a 'coup' without attribution or balance.

[UN again trying to evacuate civilians from Ukraine's Mariupol](#)

- 77 This story, published on 6 May 2022, reported on attempts to evacuate residents from the city of Mariupol and the besieged steel plant by the UN and International Red Cross. A leader in Ukraine's Azov Regiment was quoted speaking about the fighting.
- 78 The version published on RNZ's website contained inappropriate editing.
- 79 The journalist who edited the story inserted the following content without attribution: "The Azov Battalion was widely regarded before the Russian invasion by Western media as a neo-Nazi military unit."
- 80 The effect of this addition was to link the current actions by the Azov Regiment, the deputy commander of which was quoted in the Reuters story, with contested and complex debate about the origins of the battalion some years earlier and the extent to which they were and still are influenced by neo-Nazi elements.
- 81 While it is true that these links have been noted, reported on and debated, to include this link without further and more balanced context or attribution is inappropriate.
- 82 Given that consistent labelling of the unit as neo-Nazi has been a significant part of Russia's public statements since the war began, its uncritical and unexplained inclusion here had the effect of unbalancing the story.

[Israeli forces kill Palestinian teen in West Bank raid amid fears of escalation](#)

- 83 This story, published on 7 February 2023, deals with the death of a Palestinian teen shot in a gun battle in the occupied West Bank.
- 84 The version published on the RNZ website included editing that removed a number of key pieces of information, and was an example of inappropriate editing.
- 85 In the sentence "On January 27, a Palestinian gunman killed seven Israelis near a synagogue in East Jerusalem, a day after an Israeli raid in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin in which 10 Palestinians including eight gunmen were killed", the phrase "including eight gunmen" was removed.
- 86 Multiple contemporaneous news reports of the incident at the time clearly indicated that it was part of a fierce and protracted gun battle between Israeli armed forces and Palestinian militants.

87 The removal of the phrase in question served only to take useful context out of the story and risk unbalancing it, by making it clear that one side was armed and engaged in a gunfight while the other side may not have been.

Not inappropriate editing

25 killed in biggest Ukraine air strikes for nearly two months

88 This story, published on 29 April 2023, reported on the death of 25 civilians in a series of large scale air strikes.

89 The version published on RNZ's website expanded on Russia's claims about the reasons for the war, but it did not do so in a way that unbalanced the story. The final lines of the story included Ukraine's claims that the war was an unprovoked war of conquest and Russia's claims about a threat to its borders. Both characterisations, which contain elements that are contested and/or contestable, were properly attributed.

90 While care has to be taken to avoid false balance (where views are given false equivalence despite the weight of evidence clearly favouring one view), the panel did not consider the result of this change created an example of inappropriate editing.

Europe 'shot itself in the lungs' with sanctions on Russia, Orban says

91 This story, published on 15 July 2022, reported on the surge in gas and electricity prices as a result of the war in Ukraine, and included comments from Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

92 The extra content added to this story was appropriately attributed to the Russian perspective, and it simply served to expand in more detail on the nature of Russia's assertion, and explain why it described its actions as a 'special operation' rather than a war.

93 It did not support the Russian view or endorse it in any way; it simply described it in more detail. The panel did not consider that it resulted in an unbalanced or inaccurate story, and as a result did not view this as inappropriate editing.

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94 Looked at as a whole, some patterns emerge in relation to the inappropriate editing identified above.

95 Firstly, RNZ's audit found the vast majority of stories edited by the journalist were edited appropriately and professionally.

96 Secondly, the changes that were identified and found to be inappropriate varied widely, and the extent of the editing appears to have escalated over time. Many of the early examples involved one or two words added or changed that the journalist continues to believe were simple corrections for accuracy or context. Many of these examples would be unlikely to have caused any concern to RNZ from an editorial perspective had they been reviewed either at the time of publication or now in isolation.

97 Thirdly, the edits became more significant over time, culminating in changes which did involve the addition or removal of significant content or changes in wording which had the combined effect of creating unbalanced news stories.

- 98 Finally, it is clear that, almost without exception, the inappropriate edits involved adding information or using language which challenged the foreign policy settings of the United States and/or its allies. This could be interpreted as representing a particular political view.
- 99 This was the case in relation to the stories on the Ukrainian War, where the inappropriate editing had the effect of tending to favour a Russian perspective over a Ukrainian perspective or a US perspective.
- 100 It was also the case in relation to Middle East stories, where the edits provided a counter perspective to the Israeli position; China stories, where the edits provided content more supportive of the Chinese perspective; and stories from Latin and South America where the edits added content more favourable to left-wing governments.
- 101 In response to this observed pattern, the journalist responsible has consistently maintained that he behaved professionally and worked at all times to avoid allowing personal views or opinions of his own to influence his work. He stated that, 'I understood that my role as a journalist was to present news in a way that was fair and balanced, particularly in the context of the Ukraine-Russia conflict'.
- 102 He also said he identified a number of Reuters' stories that he considered to be 'skewed too much towards the position of the US state department' and in editing that content, his edits were consistent with the positions taken 'by many reputable international experts'. However, he said these edits did not indicate a personal view of his own, but were a result of what he saw as a pro-US bias in the original stories.

Lack of Upward Referral

- 103 'Upward Referral' is not only one of the foundational principles of the RNZ Editorial Policy, it is a common principle in newsrooms everywhere. If a journalist is in doubt about aspects of a story, or believes it contains content which is problematic, controversial, legally risky or otherwise complex, they are encouraged to upwardly refer the story to their immediate supervisor or manager for advice and/or a decision. Upward referral is a key safety net that most often protects journalists from making mistakes and media organisations from ultimately publishing incorrect or defamatory content.
- 104 In practice, stories which raise difficult or challenging issues can and often are upwardly referred in newsrooms all the time, sometimes all the way to the Editor-in-Chief (which, in the case of RNZ, is the Chief Executive).
- 105 Any journalist at RNZ with concerns about the accuracy and balance of wire copy could and should have upwardly referred those concerns to a line manager or supervisor.
- 106 Had that happened in this case, the whole issue of inappropriate editing might have been avoided, as more senior supervisors, managers and editors would have had an opportunity to reflect on the important editorial issues raised and guide the journalist about what kind of editing of wire stories was acceptable or unacceptable.
- 107 The panel has confirmed that at no stage did this occur.
- 108 The journalist involved says he did not refer up because:
- a Many of the edits, particularly initially, seemed so minor and routine as not to require upward referral; and

- b At all times, the journalist felt confident that what he was doing was improving stories for accuracy and balance, which was his job.
- 109 While acknowledging that at times he ‘didn’t feel completely comfortable making editorial decisions on my own regarding world wires copy’, he was still not prompted to upwardly refer the issue because, he said:
- a Other staff and managers in the digital news team seemed so stressed and busy at all times that it seemed unnecessary for him to bother them with issues he felt he was dealing with; and
- b He did not believe his immediate managers had the knowledge of geopolitical news events to be able to assist.
- 110 The journalist involved appeared to have genuinely held concerns about the quality of the coverage of world news at RNZ. However, rather than upwardly refer specific stories, he focussed on proposing changes to the way the digital news team covered world news. Over a period of months he made a number of proposals to his supervisors, including the creation of an additional editing position and/or a specialist international journalist for RNZ’s website. These matters are dealt with later in the review.
- 111 As noted above, the panel considers the journalist’s lack of upward referral to have been a significant failing that prevented the inappropriate editing being dealt with prior to publication of the offending stories. The decision (as he saw it) to correct unbalanced or ‘skewed’ international coverage provided under contract to RNZ by an international agency was not his to make, without consultation with and guidance from line managers or supervisors.
- 112 In that respect, managers in the digital news team have told the panel that upward referral is a crucial element of web publishing, is well understood, and is practised regularly on stories, including in the past by the journalist involved in the inappropriate editing.

Response to and impact of the inappropriate editing

- 113 The panel has no evidence before it to suggest that the inappropriate editing was part of a deliberate or malicious attempt to breach the editorial standards of RNZ or the licence agreements of Reuters and other wire services. Likewise, there is no evidence to suggest the individual intended to insert misinformation or disinformation into the stories, let alone engage in some kind of pro-Russian propaganda campaign.
- 114 On the contrary, it appears to have been an effort on the part of the journalist concerned to add what he considered to be more balance and accuracy into the stories via the sub-editing process. Clearly, our conclusions about the inappropriate nature of many of the edits indicate that we consider those efforts to be misguided and a breach of standards and practice. Given the pattern of changes made, it would appear that the journalist’s own personal perspective on international events may have influenced his actions, although he denies that this was the case. We will examine, in the rest of this review, a range of areas where we believe changes can be made to mitigate such an incident happening again.
- 115 But first, it is important to note the impact this incident has had on RNZ, its journalists, managers and the wider community.
-this particular issue is a kick in the guts for us all*
- 116 As soon as RNZ became aware on 9 June 2023 that the editing of one Reuters story was being questioned, it moved quickly to set up a wide-ranging audit of stories to identify the

- extent of the issue and the nature of the edits that had been made. This involved examining more than 1300 stories, identifying any edits that may have been inappropriate, briefly describing the nature of them and making corrections which are now published on RNZ's website.
- 117 The decision to move at speed to try to 'diagnose' the issue was the right one. RNZ's leaders needed more information to determine what action, if any, was needed.
- 118 The Chief Executive also spoke publicly on Monday 12 June, apologising for what had happened (in an interview broadcast on RNZ), describing the edits as ['pro-Kremlin garbage'](#).
- 119 In explaining his quick reaction and strong comments, the Chief Executive told the panel that his instincts were to be brutally transparent, to avoid any suggestion of a cover-up, while noting that inevitably this forthrightness and openness escalated the visibility of the issue with the public and the wider media.
- 120 We accept the Chief Executive was under pressure at the time (both from his own staff and competing media) and that his aim was to demonstrate leadership in the handling of an unfolding crisis.
- 121 However, the choice of language like 'pro-Kremlin garbage' was, in the panel's view, unhelpful in maintaining public trust. At the time these comments were made RNZ was acting on incomplete information, as the circumstances and extent of the inappropriate editing was yet to be fully considered. Listeners and others may have believed the editing had been a deliberate and orchestrated exercise in propaganda, rather than a failure of journalistic decision-making or practice. As is now evident, this panel finds the latter.
- 122 To be clear, the inappropriate editing was being labelled as deliberate propaganda before RNZ itself made any public comments. The initial concerns raised on Twitter in the US referred to the changes in Reuters copy as propaganda, as did the response of members of New Zealand's Ukrainian community quoted in the media between 9 June and 11 June. ACT Party leader, David Seymour, also issued a press release on 9 June referring to the edits as [Russian propaganda](#).
- 123 The fact that a similar characterisation was used in RNZ's own official comments on 12 June contributed, in our view, to that narrative taking hold more broadly. The reference to 'pro-Kremlin garbage' was widely covered in the media both in New Zealand and internationally, including by Associated Press, the BBC, the ABC in Australia and a range of other sources. We consider that had RNZ's own language about the incident been more restrained, the resulting coverage might have been too.
- 124 Apart from that one description, the Chief Executive's broader comments were notably more restrained, stressing that due process needed to be followed and the matter would be promptly and fully investigated.
- 125 The Chair of RNZ noted the extent of the reputational damage caused by the inappropriate editing also on Monday 12 June, saying that it had 'eroded public confidence' and the Board was 'extremely disappointed'.
- 126 In addition to the loss of public confidence in RNZ as a source of trusted news, the inappropriate editing had a significant immediate impact on the journalists and wider staff at RNZ, who are rightly proud of their hard won reputation for rigour, editorial quality and independence. The panel heard from a number of senior journalists at RNZ who were extremely distressed at what they saw was the impact on their own reputations, and the

reputation of their employer. The characterisation of the editing as propaganda did not, in the panel's view, help in mitigating that impact.

- 127 The characterisation of the actions as propaganda also had a negative impact on the journalist involved in the inappropriate editing, who told the panel the characterisation caused him great distress, led to online abuse, and severely harmed his reputation.
- 128 It also resulted in prominent critics of the mainstream media's coverage of the war, whose views were covered in an earlier story published on RNZ's website, to be labelled by association as proponents of Russian propaganda and 'pro-Kremlin garbage'. These interviewees participated in the RNZ interview in good faith, expressing genuinely held views. Until the events of June 2023 they felt they had been fairly represented.

The 22 May 2022 story and subsequent complaint

- 129 This earlier story was published on RNZ's website in May 2022 and has been included in RNZ's recent audit. This story, and a subsequent complaint related to it, is specifically mentioned in the first term of reference for this review.
- 130 The story was entitled "[NZ entering Ukraine conflict 'at whim of govt'-former Labour general-secretary](#)", being an original piece of journalism written by the same journalist responsible for the inappropriate editing of the overseas wire copy.
- 131 It featured critical comments by two senior political figures – former Labour Party general-secretary Mike Smith and former Alliance cabinet minister Matt Robson- about the Government's decision to involve New Zealand in the war in support of Ukraine. Both Mr Smith and Mr Robson spoke in strong terms about the risk of New Zealand finding itself 'on the wrong side of history'.
- 132 The original story said that the Government had been contacted for comment, but included no contrary view.
- 133 It should be noted that this original story was seen and approved by more senior editorial staff within the digital news team prior to publication.
- 134 On the day it was published, a senior RNZ news reporter (not from the digital news team) raised concerns that the story lacked balance. As a result, the story was referred back to the journalist to obtain a balancing perspective, and he sought further comment which was included in an updated version of the story. Balancing comment added came from security analyst Paul Buchanan, Professor of International Relations at Victoria University David Capie, both supportive of the NZ Government's position on Ukraine, and Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta. The story was updated, remains unchanged to this day, and was not further edited as a result of the current audit.
- 135 In the context of the June 2023 events, it was suggested to the panel that this initial 'unbalanced' story by the same journalist should have been seen by RNZ managers as a 'red flag', indicating his work required closer supervision.
- 136 This was particularly the case because, several months after the story was published, on 26 October 2022, members of the Ukrainian community in New Zealand complained directly to Broadcasting Minister, Willie Jackson, about the story. The complaint referred specifically to versions of the story that appeared on *Newshub* and the *NZ Herald* site, but these were syndicated versions of the original RNZ story and RNZ had been copied in on the complaint sent to a generic email address. No action was taken by RNZ at the time, principally because the complaint was directed to the Minister rather than to RNZ.

- 137 The panel does not consider that the May 2022 story was an obvious red flag that should have received more attention at the time based on the following factors:
- a The initial views covered in the story were a minority view, but a view expressed by two public figures. The positions previously held by both men either within the Labour Party (Mr Smith) or in the Clark-led Government (Mr Robson) mean their views were newsworthy, particularly at a time when a Labour Government is in office.
 - b Although it was important to obtain a response to those views, particularly from the Government (which was the subject of their criticism) but also potentially from others with a different perspective, it is not necessarily the case that this reaction and balancing comment needed to be included in the same story prior to publication. Both the RNZ Editorial Policy (Section 3.1) and the NZ Media Council Principles (Principle 1) make it clear that, in the case of long-running issues, balance can be achieved over time. While we accept some at RNZ News felt the views expressed in the original story required immediate balancing comment prior to publication, it is not clear to the panel that the original story would have been found to be in breach of appropriate standards in the event of a complaint.
 - c The journalist responsible for the story had properly reached out to the Government for reaction prior to the initial publication, and when contacted, he was (we are advised by all involved) perfectly happy to continue to chase that balancing comment and update the story accordingly, which he did.
 - d Even though the journalist's line managers had initially seen no issues with it, a discussion was held with the journalist following the concerns raised by News and the updating of the story for balance. It was agreed that, in future, all original reporting by the journalist in relation to political issues would be referred to the political team in News for checking. This policy did not proceed in practice as the journalist's work from then on focussed on sub-editing wire copy and stories by other journalists.
- 138 In relation to RNZ's decision not to take any action in relation to the complaint to the Minister, this was understandable given that the complaint was not made directly to RNZ and they had already satisfied themselves at the time that the updated story was appropriate and required no further editing. That remains RNZ's view and we concur.

Areas for Improvement

- 139 As noted earlier in this report, the panel heard repeatedly from some who thought this was all the fault of a single 'rogue actor' and from others who lay the blame at systems and policy failures.
- 140 Unsurprisingly, the truth lies between these two contrasting views.
- 141 RNZ has taken steps to ensure the inappropriately edited stories published by the journalist concerned are corrected on its website. This is commendable. However, there are other more substantive changes which RNZ can and should make in order to limit the risks of unacceptable content finding its way into RNZ news content in future. To this we now turn.

Structures

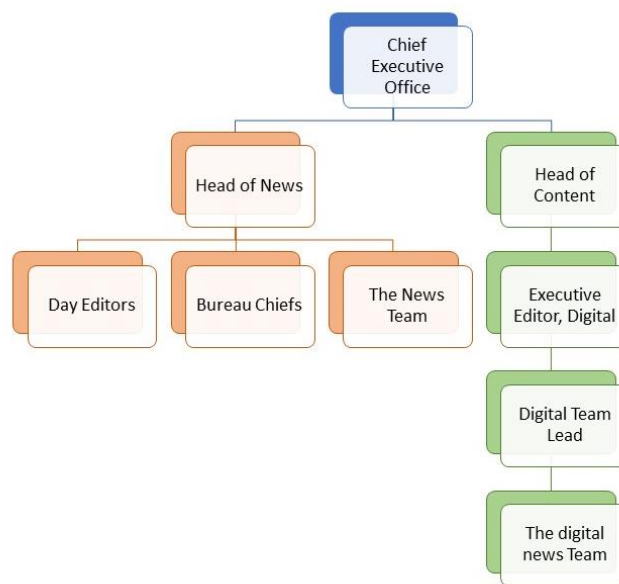
- 142 Without question, the single most common issue that was raised again and again in our interviews with RNZ staff was the structural separation that exists between RNZ's broadcast news content and its digital news content.

There is a very different culture between news and content in general and digital in particular

- 143 The inappropriate editing that took place occurred in the digital news team, (sometimes referred to internally as Webnews), which sits in the Content Division of RNZ. The rest of RNZ's broadcast news output, which was not in any way connected with the inappropriate editing, is done by a separate Division – the News Division.
- 144 There was a near universal view among those who spoke to the panel that this separation contributed to the inappropriate editing.

The issues

- 145 This simplified depiction of the RNZ organisational chart shows how the structure currently works:



- 146 For the sake of clarity, the Head of Content is responsible for a number of other areas as well across the organisation. This diagram focuses only on one of her areas – the digital news team.
- 147 There are valid historical reasons for this division, which was common in many organisations, particularly public broadcasters, in the early days of the internet. Online news was a new emerging area, requiring in many cases new ways of thinking and its own 'champions' to fight for its value and its significance. Traditional broadcast newsrooms often failed to see the value of expanding into online news. Digital journalists, initially at least, needed room to grow and establish themselves. But those days are long gone.
- 148 All of the public broadcasters around the world canvassed by the panel have their online and broadcast news operations fully integrated. This includes the BBC, the ABC and SBS in Australia, CBC in Canada, VRT in Belgium, Danish Radio in Denmark, YLE in Finland and Swedish Radio in Sweden.
- 149 Having a single, unified daily news operation ensures that editorial standards, processes and practices are consistent across all platforms. It creates one line of editorial control and maximises cooperation, communication and consistency.

150 Many of the issues we identify relate to breakdowns in training, communication and co-operation between content areas, and specifically between content teams and news teams, but the problems begin with the wrong structure; one that puts news teams in separate silos, managed separately.

151 The organisational separation of the digital news team (where the inappropriate editing took place) and the News team appears to have led to a lack of trust and confidence between the two teams, as well as a lack of awareness of how each works.

I think there is a very strong view from some members of the digital team and I think that view gets more solidified the higher up the management structure you go that news just doesn't get digital.

152 The panel heard more than one example of conflicts or differences of opinion between the digital news team and News on stories or issues being elevated all the way to the respective heads of Division to be resolved. This does not create an efficient working environment and can lead to differences in editorial approach, both real and perceived.

153 The unfortunate consequence of this has been a lack of alignment between the two teams, with each often questioning the other in an unconstructive way, rather than working as a complete news team putting news reports first.

The fixes

154 There is no perfect way to structure any media organisation. Some teams simply do not fit neatly into one definition or genre. For example, the Investigative and Longform Journalism team (which sits in the Content Division) regularly creates bulletin leading news stories and newsworthy content. Yet its journalists are not 'news' journalists and likely savour the opportunity of being outside of the demands of daily news deadlines. The panel understands this.

155 Crucially, digital or online content has no respect for programme boundaries or bulletin deadlines. It can be published as soon as a journalist can write it or record it.

156 Managing and overseeing this breadth of content is demanding. However, daily news content, at least, should be editorially managed in the News Division, to ensure consistency, better compliance with editorial standards and effective and clear upward referral.

157 A simple visual depiction of this preferred model looks like this:



158 The panel notes that versions of this idea have been under discussion at RNZ for some time, and management has advised that a decision to bring the digital news team into the News Division was made in May 2023, before the inappropriate editing was identified. The panel

believes this move should have been made some time ago and implementation of the integration should not be delayed.

- 159 In combining the two teams, the panel notes that, given the existing funding and staffing shortages particularly in the digital content side of the organisation, the change should not be seen as an opportunity to lose overall position numbers or reduce already tight staffing levels.
- 160 It is also important to ensure that the change results in the overall vision, strategy and reporting lines for news are all clearly brought into the News Division. In our view, the proposed new organisational structure would launch amid what the panel identifies as, at times, unhealthy competition and distrust between the news and digital news silos. The new structure needs to anticipate this and ensure it does not replicate or create new tension points between the different parts of the organisation. All parts of the organisation need to collaborate closely and operate as one team when it comes to news.
- 161 One further advantage of uniting online and broadcast news teams in one division is that it allows the entrenchment of a 'story first' approach, where coverage of news is based first and foremost on assessing the importance of the story itself and then developing a coverage plan that meets the needs of all platforms. This is difficult to achieve if there is a perception that the vision for content across platforms is being ultimately controlled by a different area.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

- 162 The digital news team should be moved across to the News Division without unnecessary delay, to ensure that daily news is consistently managed and editorially controlled through one clear line of accountability.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

- 163 Any structural changes should ensure that the vision and strategy for news coverage across all platforms is clearly the responsibility of news management.

Processes

- 164 A key area for investigation is how news content that was inappropriately edited managed to be published on regular occasions without being picked up by the normal checks and balances that are in place in an effective and well-run newsroom.
- 165 This section of the review deals with the editorial processes in the digital news team and the Content Division only. Neither this analysis nor the recommendations that flow from it relate to the News Division, where we were reassured separate editorial processes exist and no inappropriate editing or other editorial issues have been identified⁹.
- 166 None of this should be taken to suggest that editorial errors do not occur across both news and digital news team. The digital news team has indicated that they identify and fix mistakes in news stories. The panel has no doubt that, like all media organisations, mistakes can and do occur across the board from time to time. However the following comments relate to an

⁹ The panel did briefly examine the editorial processes in place in relation to the recently established [Asia Unit](#) within RNZ News, given the risks associated with publishing news content in languages other than English. The panel was advised that a high level of editorial checks take place in relation to content, with both original and translated stories in Chinese being subject to three separate editorial checks prior to publication. In addition to this oversight, RNZ is in the process of making arrangements with an external provider to check translations on a regular basis, and is also planning to recruit an external advisory group from the relevant community to review content and provide feedback. The panel suggests that the Board may want to review these arrangements in 6 months' time to ensure all the planned editorial protections are in place.

examination of specific editorial processes within the digital news team where the inappropriate editing occurred.

- 167 News copy is processed and approved in RNZ's digital news team as follows:
- a News stories (including overseas wire stories provided under contract to RNZ) are placed in a queue ready to be sub-edited
 - b Digital journalists take stories from the queue in the order in which they appear, sub-edit them, and then place them in a new queue ready for publication
 - c Those stories are then published under the supervision of the Home Page editor, who is the final check before publication
 - d There are Home Page editors rostered on during weekdays from 6am to 10pm, and on weekends from 10am to 6pm. Outside of those times, other staff are approved to publish copy to the website without the final check by a Home Page editor.
- 168 Broadly speaking, this process accords with normal journalistic practice, in that the accepted professional standard is the 'two sets of eyes' principle, which means every story should be seen by a second pair of eyes before publication or broadcast.
- 169 At a minimum, that means the reporter writes the original story, and it is then 'subbed' by a sub-editor, who checks it for accuracy, balance, style, and so on before approving it for publication.
- 170 In most cases, there may also be a third set of eyes in the form of a senior editor who approves a final version before publication.
- 171 In the case of wire copy from approved providers like Reuters or the BBC, the wire copy has already been written, subbed and approved before it reaches a client like RNZ, and so normal practice is that it would then be selected, checked and adjusted as necessary by a sub-editor, and approved for publication. In other words, the RNZ sub-editor or journalist is the second (or third) pair of eyes on that story.
- 172 This is the process followed by the digital news team at RNZ. At certain times on weekends and overnight, staff other than home page editors will publish content directly, but only after they have acted as the second pair of eyes for that content.
- 173 To see this process in action, we consider again the [story that led to the initial complaint](#). In this case:
- a The original Reuters story was placed in the queue for sub-editing at about 7pm, following a brief discussion between the home page editor and the journalist responsible for the queue. It was agreed the story was newsworthy.
 - b The story was then edited (inappropriately, as it turned out) by the journalist rostered on to the sub-editing shift, and placed into a new queue ready for publication.
 - c The home page editor then looked over it briefly, but has advised that he 'did not compare the copy to the original Reuters file', as he 'had no reason to suspect anything had been changed', and he trusted the wire copy from Reuters.
- 174 The inappropriate edits were not picked up because the 'second pair of eyes' did not compare the edited version to the original and, it appears likely, did not read it closely.

- 175 This does not strike the panel as unusual. As stated, the Reuters wire copy had already been written, subbed and approved by Reuters and then subjected to a second sub-editing by the New Zealand journalist to ensure it conformed to RNZ's own house style.
- 176 The panel notes that, since the inappropriate editing was identified, RNZ has put in place an upgraded process to ensure that each piece of wire copy is checked by a minimum of two sets of eyes at RNZ. While this will add a further level of scrutiny, it will add pressure to an already busy and lightly-staffed newsroom, and it is not clear whether, by itself, it will ensure small inappropriate edits will be identified in future.
- 177 The fact that one final brief check by the home page editor did not identify any issues can be attributed to the fact that the main focus and general thrust of the story were not changed. The inappropriate editing related to the wording of the seventh paragraph of the story, where new and additional 'contextual information' was added.
- 178 The failure to identify this was also a matter of trust. All news organisations rely on their journalists to follow editorial standards or, if in doubt, to refer up. It is not the job of an individual journalist to make changes to the meaning of international wire stories. As previously discussed, to do so is a breach of the contract with Reuters (or other agencies).
- 179 In respect of editing wire copy, a range of staff and managers at RNZ told the panel that it is well understood by RNZ journalists that wire copy is never materially changed. It can be adjusted in minor ways to conform to local style (names, dates, currencies, spelling). Also, multiple wire stories are often combined into longer stories during times of breaking news, but otherwise they are not substantially rewritten.
- 180 We found that knowledge of how to edit wire copy seems to be largely assumed knowledge. Those we spoke to at RNZ had never read or been shown a copy of actual contracts (like the Reuters contract) nor had their attention been drawn to the specific terms of use. We find this surprising. Any journalist expected to handle overseas wire copy should have the limitations of what they can or cannot do with the copy fully explained to them. It is not satisfactory to assume this is information they already know and understand. As is apparent, all news reporting and editing is a matter of judgement. Journalists need guidance and mentoring as to how that judgement should be applied.

The issues

- 181 The picture that has emerged from the pattern of inappropriate editing that took place is that a RNZ journalist made a series of material changes to Reuters news stories to provide additional context and opinion or at the very least contestable assertions, to change the wording of the context and background that previously existed, or to omit information altogether. The journalist believed those changes were necessary because the original story was in some way inaccurate or lacking in balance, and denies any suggestion that they involved the insertion of opinion.
- 182 If similar changes were being made to an original story by an RNZ reporter, it was accepted by the journalist concerned and others that there would first be consultation and discussion with the reporter who wrote the original story. It should be noted at this point that more than one RNZ reporter advised us that they do not get as much of this kind of consultation, feedback and engagement on their stories from the digital news team (who are responsible for publishing these stories online) as they do from their own editors in News (who oversee broadcast of the stories on air). In any event, in relation to wire copy, this is not possible for obvious reasons.

- 183 In those circumstances, where a journalist/sub-editor considers editing is required on overseas copy provided to RNZ under contract to correct inaccurate or unbalanced copy, it should be standard practice for that matter to be upwardly referred.
- 184 RNZ has no foreign correspondents of its own, and therefore it relies on the editorial quality of material provided to it by third parties, including Reuters. If that material is regularly considered not to be meeting RNZ's guidelines for fair, factual and balanced reporting, this would be a serious concern for senior management. In any case, Editorial Policy specifically recommends that it be upwardly referred.¹⁰
- 185 The upward referral process also relies on suitably trained and experienced line managers and supervisors being available to exercise judgement and provide guidance. The digital news team is small, extremely busy and while it is responsible for publishing international news on RNZ's website its senior staff are not specialists in international news.
- 186 Earlier this year the journalist responsible for the inappropriate editing had proposed the creation of a specialist world news role in the digital team. The idea has not progressed and we identified no enthusiasm for it within the digital team's leadership, at least partly due to a lack of resources.
- 187 In the News division, the small specialist Worldwatch team is primarily responsible for international news copy and focuses solely on international coverage.
- 188 As specialists, the Worldwatch team should be familiar with the rules and practice around the editing of wire copy, but also with the background to global events and the language used to describe those events. It is the panel's view that such journalists would be more likely to identify errors introduced into the coverage of significant, long-running international stories, whether those errors were the result of human error or (as here) a deliberate decision made by an individual working alone.
- 189 Finally, it would seem that these editing and checking processes, while fine in theory, are often compromised by the pressures of a small team working to tight deadlines with large numbers of stories to process. The best system in the world breaks down if there are not sufficient well-trained staff to operate it. We address this further later in this report.

The fixes

- 190 If News and the digital news team are combined in one division, as we recommend, it should be possible to ensure complete consistency of approach in relation to all news copy, regardless of whether it is for broadcast on air or an online platform.
- 191 This includes ensuring that any international copy is sub-edited by a team with a consistent approach, a high level of experience, a firm understanding of the specific rules around the editing of wire copy, and the ability to communicate and share issues among themselves as they arise, and upwardly refer if necessary.
- 192 The panel has been advised of a strong existing culture of upward referral within News, with examples provided of situations where complex or challenging stories are regularly upwardly referred. Managers in the digital news team have also told the panel that there is an equally strong culture of upward referral within their team as well, with numerous instances on a daily basis where this takes place. Nevertheless, a lack of upward referral was a key element of the inappropriate editing, and it is apparent to the panel that there have been other situations

¹⁰ RNZ Editorial Policy, p.8. "Upward referral also applies to any item that may not meet RNZ's guidelines for fair, factual and balanced reporting..."

where upward referral was lacking. It is important that this fundamental practice is reinforced, encouraged and extended across all areas.

RECOMMENDATION 3

- 193 All journalists should receive refresher training on how and when to refer up and all line managers, duty editors and bureau chiefs should receive training on how to encourage and manage upward referrals.

RECOMMENDATION 4

- 194 The way world news and international wire service stories are managed and edited should be consistent between online and broadcast content, ensuring that it is overseen by journalists with appropriate experience and knowledge.

Systems and technology

- 195 When errors of judgement and mistakes occur, it is relevant to examine the technology and systems that staff working in the area use, to identify any problems or issues that add to the pressure and difficulty of the work.
- 196 The panel received a wide range of feedback in two key areas – the software and systems used to process and publish news copy, and the communications channels used for messaging between team members.
- 197 While there is nothing to suggest that technological or systems issues directly contributed to the inappropriate editing, the more time staff spend working on systems that are inefficient or time-consuming, the less time is available for sub-editing, checking, reviewing and quality control.

The issues

- 198 The main system used for writing and editing news stories at RNZ is iNews. Once stories are created and edited in iNews, they are transferred to a system called ELF for online publication. Audio is edited and managed using a third system, called CoStar.
- 199 All three systems have been in use for many years. The panel was repeatedly told that they were less than optimal in many cases and introduced inefficiencies, particularly in relation to preparing wire copy.
- 200 To give just one example, the simple creation of an external link in a web news story requires the use of a slow and cumbersome process involving the insertion of a code.
- 201 A further issue with iNews was the difficulty in easily managing version control as stories are changed, edited, updated and published across the day. The panel experienced this issue first hand when requesting copies of different versions of published stories for this review. What struck us as a simple request proved to be complex and time consuming.
- 202 The panel was informed RNZ has plans to update its technology platforms.
- 203 On a separate matter, the panel was advised that the digital news team and the News team use two completely different software programs for much of their internal communication across the day. The digital news team principally communicates using Slack, while the News team uses Microsoft Teams.

204 Both systems no doubt have their advantages and disadvantages, and management in the Content Division have advised that Slack is more suited to digital publishing, faster and more intuitive. But the fact that the two teams are not on the same system is an unnecessary barrier to regular and effective communication and the sharing of information. The panel has been informed that Microsoft Teams has been identified as the preferred software for communicating across all teams at RNZ, and the digital news team is already communicating in Teams as well as Slack, but it is clear this shift is still only partial. There is no good reason for RNZ to operate two communications systems simultaneously and no reason we can identify as to why this has been allowed to continue.

205 All the more so at a time where many staff spend at least some time working from home and news operations are spread over several geographic locations, the ability to quickly and easily share information, ask questions and make decisions is essential. Artificial and unnecessary barriers to communication can reduce or prevent timely communication altogether.

The fixes

206 RNZ needs to ensure that, to the extent its budget permits, it is working with the best possible tools to do the job. In particular, the demands of a modern public media organisation where content is published and broadcast across multiple platforms requires technology suited to that task. The software and systems need to be fit for purpose.

207 In addition, common and consistent forms of communication should be adopted to facilitate the maximum possible cooperation between teams working in similar areas.

RECOMMENDATION 5

208 Priority should be given to updating the software and systems used to write, edit and publish news content to ensure they are fit for purpose, efficient and effective. The Board should take steps to satisfy itself that technology improvements underway and/or under consideration will lift the efficiency and responsiveness of the organisation.

RECOMMENDATION 6

209 The News and digital news teams should immediately adopt Microsoft Teams as the communications software for all staff. To the extent that this is already the preferred approach, it should be implemented and enforced without further delay.

Staffing and Resources

210 A consistent issue that arose during the course of this review was the workload of the digital news team, and the pressure this put on everyone.

211 As was the case with the section on processes, this section deals specifically with the digital news team in the Content Division of RNZ and not the wider broadcast news team in the News Division.

212 Tables 1 and 2 below show the basic shift patterns of the digital news operation (excluding social media content makers) across a typical week.

TABLE 1: STAFFING OF THE DIGITAL NEWS TEAM ON WEEKDAYS	
ROLE	DUTIES
Morning shifts	
Morning Home Page Editor	Oversee the news website for the first half of the day and approve the final publication of stories

Morning Queue Shift	Select stories and place them in the queue for editing, assist with editing stories
Morning Newsletter Shift	Create content for and produce the daily news newsletter
Morning Sub-Editor	Sub-edit stories from the queue and place them in the 'ready' queue for publication
Day shift	
Politics Day Shift	Based in the press gallery, covering politics for the news website
Afternoon shifts	
Afternoon Home Page Editor	Oversee the news site for the second half of the day and approve the final publication of stories
Afternoon Queue Shift	Select stories and place them in the queue for editing, assist with editing stories
Afternoon Sub-Editor	Sub-edit stories from the queue and place them in the 'ready' queue for publication
Evening shift	
Afternoon/Night Shift	A late evening shift sub-editing stories and preparing content for the following day

TABLE 2: STAFFING OF THE DIGITAL NEWS TEAM ON WEEKENDS	
ROLE	DUTIES
Morning shifts	
Morning Sub-editor	Sub-edit and write stories for the news website
Day shift	
Home Page Editor	Oversee the news website and approve the final publication of stories
Day sub-editor (when available)	Sub-edit and write stories for the news website
Afternoon shifts	
Afternoon sub-editor	Sub-edit and write stories for the news website

- 213 Those shifts are staffed by a digital team consisting of just 9 permanent full-time positions, 3 permanent part-time positions and 4 casual staff.
- 214 Digital team managers reported that the budget for casuals was regularly over-spent, especially if there were a need to employ cover for illness, staff working away from the desk, leave or breaking news.
- 215 The panel was advised that, on a typical day, more than 60 news stories would be published on the RNZ site. These stories are selected, written and/or edited, reviewed and published by no more than 4-5 people on any given shift, and at times (over weekends or evenings, for example) as few as one or two.
- 216 The staffing of the team is so tight that the manager (the Digital Team Lead) works three days a week as one of the Home Page Editors, leaving only two days to manage the team, engage in rostering and planning, and act as a manager providing guidance, performance management and the other myriad tasks associated with leading a news team.
- 217 This can only affect the quality of the work produced and we were told it is already having a material effect on young reporters, in particular.

I just worry that as a junior journalist my stuff just gets published as is and there is no way that my writing is perfect....I think the quality of my journalism will – can only improve from getting feedback like that but I don't get that feedback from the web team.

- 218 Managers in the digital news team told the panel they were confident the team was producing high quality content with its current staffing, but indicated that better resourcing would allow them to do more 'engaging content that captures our audience's needs'.
- 219 The picture that emerges is of a small team which is under constant deadline pressure to publish stories as quickly as possible.

The issues

- 220 Tight staffing ratios inevitably affect the team's ability to deliver the standard of journalism RNZ expects and the organisation's Editorial Policy requires. For example, some digital news team members, including the journalist responsible for the inappropriate editing, said that they were aware of editorial training sessions but were unable to attend either due to the pressure of work or the fact that they were not rostered on when sessions were held.
- 221 On the question of upward referral, the fact that everyone was always so busy and under pressure to turn out stories was mentioned as a reason why either formal upward referral or more informal conversations about tricky or challenging editorial issues did not take place as often as they should.
- 222 On two separate occasions, the journalist responsible for the inappropriate editing suggested that additional positions be created to assist with the workload and improve the editorial quality of online news content. One was the creation of a 'check sub' – a sub-editor who could assist with final oversight and editing of content before publication. The other was the creation of a specialist world news journalist, who could oversee all international coverage. In both cases, one of the key factors cited in not proceeding with these roles was a lack of funding and resources.

The fixes

- 223 The panel does not have the expertise or information available to it to recommend what a suitable staffing level is for a busy digital newsroom.
- 224 Nevertheless, it seems evident that current staffing levels and workloads are placing significant stress on staff in the digital news team, potentially also interfering with the ability to take up training opportunities, find time for meetings and editorial debriefs about significant news coverage, and ensure that stories are given appropriate levels of oversight and checking prior to publication. A one person roster, even if only in the weekends, is inherently risky.
- 225 The integration of digital news with news, as recommended, should provide more flexibility for rostering and opportunities for collaboration between the two. However, if RNZ is committed to growing its digital presence (while also retaining its broadcast audience) it will be self-defeating if its plans for future staffing simply involve reorganisation of existing journalists rather than adding to the combined news team.
- 226 In considering these issues, the panel notes that RNZ has been under significant budgetary pressure for an extended period, which has inevitably impacted its ability to fund new activities and new platforms. Although RNZ recently received a funding increase, prior to that it suffered an extended funding freeze resulting in limited employment opportunities that led to job cuts and new activities, including digital content, needing to be established within existing funding.

227 We see public service media as an essential part of a free and democratic society such as Aotearoa New Zealand. While not specific to our terms of reference, an underlying theme that has emerged in our review is the need for RNZ to be properly funded so that it fully complies with its obligations under its Charter for the benefit of all New Zealanders.

RECOMMENDATION 7

228 RNZ should consider undertaking a formal review of staffing levels, budgets and workload in its digital news team as part of the process of moving it into the News Division, and ensure it is appropriately staffed and resourced.

Policies and Contracts

229 When considering the inappropriate editing that took place, the panel has already indicated that it had two key documents in mind – the RNZ Editorial Policy, and the licence agreement with Reuters.

230 The RNZ Policy reflects, in its standards, the principles and standards of both the Broadcast Standards Authority and the NZ Media Council.

231 In relation to both the Editorial Policy and the licence agreement, there are improvements that can and should be made.

The issues - the Editorial Policy

232 The Editorial Policy is a comprehensive and clear policy that covers all key editorial values, including accuracy, fairness, balance and diversity, respect and decency, and independence.

233 There is one, area, however, where the panel believes the policies can be expanded to be more informative and more useful to staff.

234 In November last year, during the planning for a potential merger of TVNZ and RNZ, a review was conducted into the editorial policies of both organisations. One of the panel members participated in this review. While the assessment of the RNZ Editorial Policy was essentially very positive, there was one area identified for further action.

235 The pre-merger report identified that RNZ had not provided detailed guidance in its policies on the nature of journalistic balance and how to achieve it. The relevant excerpt of that report reads as follows:

- a The notion of balance is represented, but one crucial aspect of it which is either absent or downplayed is the importance of that balance being subject to the weight of evidence and other factors.
- b If this is not clearly spelled out, there is a risk that a form of 'false balance' will be tolerated or even encouraged, where all views are given equal weight regardless of the significance and fact-based nature of those views.
- c The RNZ policy focuses strongly on the need to achieve 'balance' without going into any detail on what constitutes journalistic balance...
- d There are a number of ways that appropriate balance (or "due" impartiality in terms of determining the weight to be attached to differing perspectives) can be achieved. These include:
 - i Balance that follows the weight of evidence

- ii Open-mindedness in considering all views
 - iii Considering the degree of contentiousness of a particular story or issue
 - iv Determining how representative or widely-held key views are
 - v Ensuring that particular views are not over-represented or under-represented
 - vi Considering what is adequate and appropriate for different content types – news bulletins, current affairs, panel discussions, interviews, satirical shows and entertainment programming, depending on the extent to which these different formats are included in the agreed editorial principles for the new entity.
- e It would be advisable to expand the details of what ‘balance’ means for the new entity.

236 Although this advice was provided in the context of potentially creating new editorial policies for a merged TVNZ/RNZ, the panel believes this recommendation remains important, particularly given the role balance and/or different views about balance played in the inappropriate editing identified for this review. Additional clearer guidance in this area can only assist future newsgathering and publication.

237 As important as it is to ensure the Editorial Policy is clear and comprehensive, it is equally important to make sure those standards are taught, understood and followed. We address this later in this report. However, the panel was not convinced that the Editorial Policy is consistently understood and/or applied across the organisation or that reporters felt fully equipped to comply with them. Addressing this should be a priority.

The issues - the Reuters Agreement

238 In relation to the Reuters Agreement, it is clear that there remains a degree of confusion and interpretation about what editing is permitted and what constitutes a breach of the licence. This is unsatisfactory.

239 As already said, the contract allows ‘*editing or using textual Content as source material ... provided that you do not alter or distort the editorial meaning of the Licensed Content*’.

240 There is no explanation anywhere at RNZ that the panel has been able to locate to explain where the line is drawn between editing material and distorting its meaning. While there may be little opportunity for RNZ to renegotiate or clarify those terms in the licence itself (since the master terms would appear to be consistent across all Reuters contracts) the meaning of that clause – as RNZ intends it to be applied – should be spelt out to staff so they have a guide to follow. As already noted in this report, we could find no evidence the limitations imposed under the content contracts have ever been explained to staff. Instead, we were told staff ‘just knew – it was journalism 101’. The panel does not accept this. RNZ employs journalists in all stages of their careers and with a wide range of previous experience and training. It is risky to assume they will all have common knowledge about any aspect of journalism, all the more so about editing wire copy provided under contract.

241 A more significant problem in relation to the Reuters Agreement (and, indeed, other contractual arrangements with other news providers, including the BBC) is that there is also no evidence that these various agreements were collected and managed in one central location.

242 It surprised us that these key documents were not easily accessible and not subject to one person’s control. Indeed one of the important supplier contracts had not even been properly

signed. This indicates a concerning 'hands off' approach from those who have previously been charged with managing the various contracts. And as we have said, neither the journalist involved in the inappropriate edits nor his line managers had ever seen the Reuters contract nor were aware of its important terms as related to editing.

The fixes

- 243 In relation to the Editorial Policy, the provisions relating to balance should be expanded and updated and then communicated to staff. At the same time, RNZ should take the opportunity to remind all journalists that the Editorial Policy is format neutral; the same standards about balance, accuracy and fairness apply to both online and on air content.
- 244 In relation to the Reuters contract and the other external contracts, these contracts should be more actively managed and controlled. At a corporate level, all procurement contracts should be maintained in a way that makes them easy to locate and refer to, with accurate, signed master copies available at all times. In addition, the panel notes that the News Division now has a competent and proactive partnership manager who is acting as a central point of contact and communication around the various arrangements RNZ has for the use of its news content by other third parties. While it makes sense to ensure that all contracts are held in a single location at a corporate level, this news role could easily be expanded to include responsibility for holding copies of contracts with news providers as well, and providing information on the rules and conditions of use for those contracts to journalists.

RECOMMENDATION 8

- 245 The RNZ Editorial Policy should be updated to include more guidance on notions of balance.

RECOMMENDATION 9

- 246 All contracts that RNZ has for the use of news content from external suppliers and for the use of its own news content by third parties should be gathered, stored and managed centrally by the News Division in addition to any copies held at corporate level.

RECOMMENDATION 10

- 247 Clear information about the various restrictions that apply to the use and editing of news material provided under contract from third parties should be provided to all relevant staff and made easily accessible.

Training

- 248 The panel has reviewed a wide range of RNZ training materials, including induction training delivered to staff when they first commence work, and ongoing training made available to staff during their time at the organisation.
- 249 This includes training in the editorial policies, but also a wide range of other technical and craft skills including the use of specific technology and software, writing skills and house style, and editorial processes.
- 250 Our focus is on the availability of regular, effective editorial staff training to ensure that journalists and content makers understand and can implement editorial policy.

The issues

- 251 Based on the information provided to us, while new staff are provided with in person training in technology systems and processes, including time observing programmes and bulletins being produced and aired, it would appear the only formal editorial policy training for new staff is an emailed link to the “New Starters” page, which provides links to the RNZ Editorial Policy and Social Media Policy.
- 252 This is a bare minimum. Ideally there should be a more comprehensive and detailed session (either in person or online) that inductees must complete before being rostered to work.
- 253 In 2022, a decision was made to create a more in-depth and comprehensive series of editorial training sessions (for existing staff) covering nine different topics:
- a Accuracy
 - b Defamation
 - c Respect & Dignity
 - d Copyrights and rights
 - e Independence
 - f Interviewing
 - g Fairness, balance and diversity
 - h Privacy
 - i Editorial and Social Policy Review
- 254 In September 2022, when the training began, staff were advised it was ‘compulsory for anyone in editorial roles to attend one of each session’. The sessions were recorded and made available online for those who could not attend in person. Despite this, take up of the sessions appears to have been patchy.
- 255 In February 2023, a further email went to staff acknowledging this, saying “I know many of you were unable to attend’. Staff were alerted to the fact that all nine sessions were now available in a newly launched learning portal, and a further reminder was issued that ‘all editorial staff need to have attended or watched one of each session.’
- 256 When the panel began this review, we asked for information on precisely how many staff (in both news and the digital content area) had fulfilled their obligations to attend all of the editorial policy sessions. We were advised that the system wasn’t configured to provide exact data, but overall somewhere between 45 and 120 staff had dialled into at least some of each session – an average take-up of around 70 per session.
- 257 We were advised it would be a massive logistical exercise to provide a further breakdown of those figures for the panel, to indicate how many of those attending the training were from the News Division and how many from the Content Division.
- 258 Of the editorial staff spoken to during this review the panel found no one who had attended all of the sessions. Some people we spoke to could not recall attending any of them. In many cases, the reason cited was the pressure of work, making it impractical to carve out time to do several hours of training.

- 259 This is a disappointing outcome for vital editorial policy training that had been deemed to be compulsory for all editorial staff.
- 260 In a busy media environment, it is ambitious to expect editorial staff to find up to nine hours of available time to attend a series of training sessions, unless that time is specifically rostered. However, having made the decision that this training was compulsory, better measures should have been engaged to ensure compliance with the directive.
- 261 It should also be noted that the sessions varied significantly in terms of structure and content. Some were more formal and contained PowerPoint slides while others were more conversational. In some cases, the recorded sessions available online for those who did not attend appeared to begin mid-conversation. There were no accompanying notes or summaries available for download or later referral and follow up.
- 262 The journalist responsible for the instances of inappropriate editing that prompted this review advised that he was not able to attend any of the editorial training sessions due to a combination of work and personal commitments, and that this had been the case for other staff as well.
- 263 Finally, one aspect of training and instruction that was highlighted for the panel was the existence of 'how to' guides on iNews, which provide practical information to staff on how to perform their specific editorial roles. This includes information for the digital news team.
- 264 Feedback the panel received from staff during the review suggests these guides are incomplete and at times unhelpful.
- 265 One example of this is the three page guide entitled "Use and restrictions for world copy sources", which outlines the way in which content from various third parties can be used. This includes content from BBC, ABC Australia, AFP, AP, AAP and Reuters.
- 266 Clearly, given the issues identified in this review with the inappropriate editing of Reuters copy, a three page guide like this would be the perfect place to include reminders of the rules covering the use (and the editing) of wire copy, including Reuters copy.
- 267 However, the guide simply says "Reuters – we can use copy from the world wires – do not use copy direct from the website". This provides no useful advice on how this copy can be used, and/or the rules relating to any editing or changes.
- 268 Taken together, these factors indicate that while RNZ managers have taken steps to introduce training across the news and digital news teams there was a poor plan for implementation and little to no follow up.
- 269 Training – both when a new employee begins employment at RNZ and then throughout their employment – is a vital ingredient in maintaining RNZ's high standards for quality public broadcasting.

The fixes

- 270 For any organisation with a commitment to strong and effective editorial policies, staff need to be trained in them.
- 271 The training material should be accurate and fit-for purpose, and delivered in a format and time frame that is both practical and achievable. There needs to be a mix of content that is suitable for both inexperienced staff and experienced staff.

272 One specific area which is part of this review's terms of reference is misinformation and disinformation. There has been a notable rise in misinformation and disinformation, often for propaganda purposes in recent times, fuelled by the internet and sophisticated techniques including deep fakes. There are a range of techniques to deal with this issue, including image searches, sophisticated fact-checking and a range of other verification methods. The panel was not made aware of any advanced training in this emerging area at RNZ, and this should be a priority.

273 Best practice in training suggests that staff should be given regular opportunities to refresh their knowledge of the policies and to explore more specific and detailed issues from time to time.

RECOMMENDATION 11

274 Editorial training content should be reviewed to ensure that it is consistent, relevant to both experienced and inexperienced staff, and of a high quality.

RECOMMENDATION 12

275 Consideration should be given to developing a specific training course (or accessing one available externally) on recognising and dealing with misinformation and disinformation.

RECOMMENDATION 13

276 Compulsory editorial training should be properly tracked, logged and followed up to ensure that it is done by all relevant staff.

RECOMMENDATION 14

277 The duration and timing of editorial training should be reviewed to ensure that it is realistic and achievable, and attention should be paid to rostering and other workflow arrangements to ensure staff are provided with the time they need to attend it.

Editorial quality control

278 Any media organisation that recognises the importance of building trust with its audience understands the need for strong, transparent and effective editorial policies. This is certainly the case with RNZ, which rightly takes pride in its position as the most trusted source of news in New Zealand.

279 The Editorial Policy is crucial to maintaining that trust by setting out the standards that cover its content. However, to be effective, those editorial standards need to be 'brought to life' in an organisation. They need to be more than mere words on a page.

280 Editorial policies only become effective when they are properly embedded in the daily work of the organisation. They need to be understood, referred to and kept front of mind when content is being made. They need to be turned to as a yardstick on those occasions when an organisation falls short of its own standards.

281 There are three aspects to this process of bringing editorial standards to life, namely that:

- a editorial staff are properly trained in them
- b they are front of mind and used in day to day work and

- c there is accountability– an organisation’s adherence to the standards it sets for itself is regularly checked either as a result of investigations into external complaints, or via an internal process of quality control.

282 The issue of training has already been addressed earlier in this review, and the issue of complaint handling will be addressed later.

283 This section looks at ways of ensuring editorial standards are used in day to day work at RNZ, and adherence to standards is proactively reviewed separate to any complaints processes.

The issues

284 As noted earlier in this report, the panel is not convinced editorial standards are either consistently understood across RNZ or evenly applied. That this misalignment has been allowed to occur is product of organisational design, personalities and time pressures. But that it has not been addressed is a product of lack of oversight.

285 The panel notes that, following a recent study trip aboard, the RNZ Chief Executive emphasised precisely this point – the need for a concerted cohesive plan to build and maintain trust with the public. He put forward the idea of establishing an Impartiality and Standards Subcommittee of the Board. This would be a useful step in ensuring good governance in the area of editorial standards, but there is more that can be done.

286 Many public broadcasters around the world employ roles to ensure that editorial standards are constantly front of mind when work is being done, and there is an independent source of advice and assistance on editorial matters.

287 A few examples:

- a At the BBC, the [Director, Editorial Policy & Standards](#) is responsible for the overall development of editorial policy and standards, but also provides advice to program makers and journalists on compliance with editorial standards.
- b At ABC in Australia, the position of [Editorial Director](#) fulfils a similar role, providing advice both to the Board and to the staff on editorial policies, as well as overseeing editorial training.
- c Others, including [CBC](#) in Canada, [NPO](#) in the Netherlands or [VRT](#) in Belgium, have an Ombudsman role to oversee editorial complaints and review news content.

288 Whether it is a role focussed on working with editorial staff to advise on compliance with standards, working with the public to build trust by investigating alleged poor performance or a combination of the two, such roles play an important part in making editorial policy more than just words on a page. RNZ has no such role and therefore no such oversight.

The fixes

289 RNZ has, in the past, had an editorial manager position with a degree of responsibility for overseeing editorial standards and performance. That position no longer exists.

290 More recently, the proposed executive reset currently underway at RNZ envisages the creation of a new senior editorial role at some unspecified time in the future called an Editorial Ombudsman. The role of Head of Trust has also been mentioned.

291 RNZ’s adherence to editorial standards, its journalists and its reputation would all benefit from having a senior manager, removed from daily deadline pressure but with a mandate to focus

on maintaining standards and high quality public broadcasting. That position should be focussed on working with editorial staff to provide pre-broadcast and pre-publication advice, encourage regular consideration of editorial issues and regular reviews of editorial performance. The role could also assume oversight of editorial training and editorial complaints handling. The role should advise the Chief Executive (as Editor in Chief) but be independent of him. It could also report to the Board on a regular basis, or to the proposed Impartiality and Standards Subcommittee of the Board.

- 292 Such a position would ensure that editorial policies are given the focus they deserve both at an executive level and among editorial staff at the coal face.

RECOMMENDATION 15

- 293 RNZ should create a senior editorial role with responsibility for overseeing editorial performance across the organisation, advising programme and content teams on standards , encouraging a culture of editorial integrity and reporting regularly to management and the Board.

RECOMMENDATION 16

- 294 RNZ should regularly assess aspects of its editorial output against its editorial policy through the use of targeted pro-active reviews.

Complaints handling

- 295 Proper editorial complaints handling is an essential element of accountability and trust building for any media organisation, but particularly for a public media organisation. The RNZ Charter specifically requires the organisation to include in its annual reporting 'an assessment of the extent to which its performance fulfils its Charter'. Adherence to editorial standards is an important part of that.
- 296 During the course of this review, the panel received several submissions from members of the public with concerns about the RNZ editorial complaints process.
- 297 In most cases, this related to specific complaints that had not been upheld by RNZ, including some that had been dismissed by RNZ only to be later upheld by either the NZ Media Council or the BSA. The concern was raised that RNZ was too dismissive of complaints and/or too defensive about them.
- 298 The panel does not intend to re-investigate specific complaints or seek to form any views on whether those complaints should have been handled differently.
- 299 Our comments in this section are limited to the way in which best practice complaints handling relates to matters raised in the terms of reference, including having appropriate and effective editorial controls and safeguarding against misinformation and partiality.

The issues

- 300 Earlier in this report the specific complaint made by members of the Ukrainian community about a story published in May 2022 is discussed. That complaint concerned the publication by other media outlets of versions of the original 2022 RNZ story, and the complaint was directed to the Broadcasting Minister rather than to RNZ itself. We do not intend to consider this matter any further here. Our focus is on whether the internal process for editorial complaints handling is appropriate.

- 301 As is the case with other news organisations, complaints about editorial breaches must first be made directly to RNZ, and if complainants are not satisfied with the response they can then complain to the BSA (in the case of broadcast content) or the NZ Media Council (in the case of published content).
- 302 The RNZ process is that:
- a Complaints that are upheld by either the BSA or the NZ Media Council are reported to NZ On Air and other stakeholders on a regular basis and are also publicly disclosed in the RNZ Annual Report.
 - b These upheld complaints, together with any internally upheld complaints, are also discussed internally and followed up with relevant staff members and managers.
 - c Clusters of complaints around specific issues are also examined, and sometimes form the basis of editorial training and advice.
- 303 RNZ does not publicly report the overall number of editorial complaints it receives and investigates each year, or the number of those complaints that it upholds. This is in contrast to a number of other public broadcasters the panel reviewed.
- 304 TVNZ, for example, includes this information in its Annual Report (it can be found on page 21 of its [latest report](#)), as does the ABC in Australia (on page 118 of its [Annual Report](#)) and the BBC in the UK (page 123 of its [Annual Report](#))
- 305 That information indicates that TVNZ reported that it had upheld approximately 1.45% of complaints in 2022 and 3% in 2021. In the same period, the ABC upheld 5.8% of complaints, and the BBC 3.5%.
- 306 This contrasts significantly with the upheld rates at RNZ, based on internal information provided to the panel. Over the past three years, RNZ received and internally investigated a total of 1860 complaints, of which 7 were upheld. This equates to an uphold rate of approximately 0.37%.
- 307 It is not possible to say whether this is due to a substantially better editorial performance by RNZ when measured against other public broadcasters or differences in the way editorial breaches are recorded and reported. At the very least, though, it raises questions about whether the complaints process is sufficiently rigorous. The wider circulation of these statistics, both internally and externally, would allow for close examination of the situation.
- 308 Turning to the complaints process itself, information on how to make a complaint about RNZ content is provided at a dedicated page titled "[Formal Complaints](#)" on the RNZ website. The page directs complainants to the appropriate standards for published and broadcast comments, and provides an online form for complainants to complete. Anyone complaining is advised that they will receive a formal response within 20 working days in the case of an on-air complaint and 10 working days in the case of an online complaint.
- 309 While this information is transparent and accessible, other broadcasters often provide more information about their complaints processes, and that a higher level of transparency can be important in building trust with audiences and the wider public.
- 310 Examples can be found at the [CBC](#) in Canada, which also provides direct links at the bottom of [every news story](#) for anyone wishing to report an error; the [BBC](#) in the UK and the [ABC](#) in Australia, which also provides specific advice and assistance for those who have difficulty in lodging a complaint due to language, literacy or other additional needs.

The fixes

- 311 Best practice complaints handling serves two purposes – it builds trust with the public by being transparent about editorial performance, and allows breaches of accuracy, balance and other key standards to be identified and followed up.
- 312 RNZ can improve its own practice in this area by reporting, both publicly and internally, on the complaints processes it runs itself and the outcomes of those processes, in addition to breaches identified by the relevant regulators.
- 313 This will allow for better identification of any and all instances of misinformation or partiality, and for an exploration of any areas where RNZ has dismissed complaints that have later been upheld.
- 314 It can also provide more visibility on editorial breaches and more information on how complaints processes work.

RECOMMENDATION 17

- 315 The Board should take steps to satisfy itself that RNZ's internal processes for responding to complaints is fair and accessible.

RECOMMENDATION 18

- 316 RNZ should publicly disclose statistics on the number of editorial complaints received, and the outcome of those complaints as a matter of course.

RECOMMENDATION 19

- 317 RNZ should circulate information about internal complaints investigations and any internally upheld complaints, including to the Board, to allow consideration of any issues raised by this data.

RECOMMENDATION 20

- 318 RNZ should review its communications about how members of the public make complaints and how complaints will be managed and ensure that these are accessible, easy to follow and provide sufficient information to complainants.

Working arrangements

- 319 Lastly, a number of people spoken to for this review raised the issue of remote working as a possible contributor to the inappropriate editing incidents. The proposition put to the panel was that a journalist working exclusively from home, in a location far removed from any of RNZ's main bureaus was potentially at risk of being disconnected to the organisation and its working norms.
- 320 There are two specific elements of RNZ staff working arrangements that the panel considers are relevant to this review.
- 321 The first is whether health and safety issues are being adequately monitored and managed, in light of the publicly disclosed health issues experienced by the journalist at the centre of the inappropriate editing.

322 The second is the prevalence of working from home, and whether this in any way contributes to compromises in the effectiveness of editorial processes and standards.

The issues

323 The digital journalist whose editing errors are the subject of this review has publicly disclosed his own health challenges and the impact this has on his work. He also expressed the view to the panel that he had received insufficient support in managing this, and that more could be done at RNZ to monitor and support staff with health issues.

324 In response, management advised that they had supported the journalist in a number of ways, including long phone calls, roster changes, extended sick leave, care packages and follow up communication.

325 For privacy reasons we do not intend to discuss this in any detail. Suffice to say, we consider that these issues had no bearing on the issue of inappropriate editing and did not themselves signal any concerns about the quality of his work as a journalist.

326 Turning to the wider issue of working from home (**WFH**), the panel recognises that it has become a common and accepted working arrangement in all industries, driven to a large extent by the impact of the Covid pandemic and changing work patterns in the pandemic's wake.

327 As restrictions and mandates imposed by the pandemic have eased, WFH continues to be a significant part of working arrangements across the board, and RNZ is no exception.

328 A range of RNZ managers confirmed that these arrangements can work well both for the organisation and for staff. However, there was also a view that for certain kinds of work there were real advantages in staff coming together regularly and working collaboratively as a team in the same location. This was certainly the case with the digital news team, where there were real advantages observed when staff were working in close proximity with each other and with the journalists (including news journalists) whose work they were sub-editing and producing.

329 This becomes particularly relevant when considering the situation of the journalist responsible for the inappropriate edits. The journalist advised the panel that he was hired on the explicit understanding that he would work remotely, and at all times up until the audit of his work he had received consistently positive feedback on his work. For a range of reasons known to his managers (including the Covid pandemic and staff leaving in his area) he spent less time at the RNZ bureau. As a result, the panel considers that he did not gain the benefits of working in close proximity to experienced colleagues on a regular basis, and was only rarely visited by supervisors. More could have been done to ensure appropriate standards were being maintained.

330 During a site visit to the RNZ bureau in Auckland, where most of the digital news team is based, it was clear that the News and the digital news teams are seated next to each other to allow for easy communication.

331 The panel has been told that, in recent months, managers in the digital content area have made a concerted effort to encourage digital news staff to spend more time in the office rather than working semi-permanently from home. This has included specific invitations to staff to attend the office on particular days to facilitate group discussions and other events. This is in no way designed to eliminate or undermine the value of WFH, but to provide a more effective balance for particular teams. It was not clear to us that these initiatives have had much effect

to date. Other journalists reported not knowing members of the digital news team because they 'tended' to WFH.

The fixes

- 332 As a starting point, the panel considers that journalists, particularly young journalists, work better in the company of other journalists. Stories are improved and standards more easily maintained by journalists working in a collaborative and energetic workplace where stories can be easily discussed, angles developed and editing seamlessly completed. Young journalists benefit from working alongside more experienced seniors and closer contact makes referring up easier and more common.
- 333 WFH provides flexibility, gives RNZ the opportunity to have reporters working in remote locations and, in a civil emergency, it allows RNZ's journalists to continue to work and provide content. But it has drawbacks which potentially impact on RNZ's ability to deliver high quality public broadcasting.
- 334 To mitigate this requires very active management from line managers and bureau chiefs. Where any journalist is WFH and dealing with on-going health issues the onus on line managers is greater still.
- 335 While WFH is and will remain a valid and valuable working arrangement both at RNZ and more broadly across all industries, firm decisions and clear instructions need to be provided on when particular teams need to spend time in an office environment together to allow for the benefits that flow from face-to-face contact, communication and collaboration.

RECOMMENDATION 21

- 336 The Board should satisfy itself that the current WFH policy, which was an initiative arising from the Covid pandemic, remains fit for purpose. This includes consideration of the level of editorial supervision that takes place in such circumstances.

RECOMMENDATION 22

- 337 Where it is deemed operationally necessary, work teams at RNZ should be provided with firm and clear advice and direction on the number of days they need to work from the office so that effective communication and collaboration can take place.

Full list of recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1:

The digital news team should be moved across to the News Division without unnecessary delay, to ensure that daily news is consistently managed and editorially controlled through one clear line of accountability.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Any structural changes should ensure that the vision and strategy for news coverage across all platforms is clearly the responsibility of news management.

RECOMMENDATION 3

All journalists should receive refresher training on how and when to refer up and all line managers, duty editors and bureau chiefs should receive training on how to encourage and manage upward referrals.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The way world news and international wire service stories are managed and edited should be consistent between online and broadcast content, ensuring that it is overseen by journalists with appropriate experience and knowledge.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Priority should be given to updating the software and systems used to write, edit and publish news content to ensure they are fit for purpose, efficient and effective. The Board should take steps to satisfy itself that technology improvements underway and/or under consideration will lift the efficiency and responsiveness of the organisation.

RECOMMENDATION 6

The News and digital news team should immediately adopt Microsoft Teams as the communications software for all staff. To the extent that this is already the preferred approach, it should be implemented and enforced without further delay.

RECOMMENDATION 7

RNZ should consider undertaking a formal review of staffing levels, budgets and workload in its digital news team as part of the process of moving it into the News Division, and ensure it is appropriately staffed and resourced.

RECOMMENDATION 8

The RNZ Editorial Policy should be updated to include more guidance on notions of balance.

RECOMMENDATION 9

All contracts that RNZ has for the use of news content from external suppliers and for the use of its own news content by third parties should be gathered, stored and managed centrally by the News Division in addition to any copies held at corporate level.

RECOMMENDATION 10

Clear information about the various restrictions that apply to the use and editing of news material provided under contract from third parties should be provided to all relevant staff and made easily accessible.

RECOMMENDATION 11

Editorial training content should be reviewed to ensure that it is consistent, relevant to both experienced and inexperienced staff, and of a high quality.

RECOMMENDATION 12

Consideration should be given to developing a specific training course (or accessing one available externally) on recognising and dealing with misinformation and disinformation.

RECOMMENDATION 13

Compulsory editorial training should be properly tracked, logged and followed up to ensure that it is done by all relevant staff.

RECOMMENDATION 14

The duration and timing of editorial training should be reviewed to ensure that it is realistic and achievable, and attention should be paid to rostering and other workflow arrangements to ensure staff are provided with the time they need to attend it.

RECOMMENDATION 15

RNZ should create a senior editorial role with responsibility for overseeing editorial performance across the organisation, advising programme and content teams on standards and encouraging a culture of editorial integrity

RECOMMENDATION 16

RNZ should regularly assess aspects of its editorial output against its editorial policy through the use of targeted pro-active reviews.

RECOMMENDATION 17

The Board should take steps to satisfy itself that RNZ's internal processes for responding to complaints is fair and accessible.

RECOMMENDATION 18

RNZ should publicly disclose statistics on the number of editorial complaints received, and the outcome of those complaints as a matter of course.

RECOMMENDATION 19

RNZ should circulate information about internal complaints investigations and any internally upheld complaints, including to the Board, to allow consideration of any issues raised by this data.

RECOMMENDATION 20

RNZ should review its communications about how members of the public make complaints and how complaints will be managed and ensure that these are accessible, easy to follow and provide sufficient information to complainants.

RECOMMENDATION 21

The Board should satisfy itself that the current WFH policy, which was an initiative arising from the Covid pandemic, remains fit for purpose. This includes consideration of the level of editorial supervision that takes place in such circumstances.

RECOMMENDATION 22

Where it is deemed operationally necessary, work teams at RNZ should be provided with firm and clear advice and direction on the number of days they need to work from the office so that effective communication and collaboration can take place.

Glossary of terms

AAP	Australian Associated Press, the major provider of news copy for syndication in Australia
ABC	The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Australia's largest public broadcaster
AFP	Agence France Presse, a major international provider of news stories, based in France
AP	Associated Press, one of the world's major providers of international news stories, based in the USA
BBC	The British Broadcasting Corporation, the UK's public broadcaster
BSA	The Broadcasting Standards Authority, the regulator overseeing broadcast standards in New Zealand
CBC	The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Canada's main public broadcaster
CoStar	The software system used by RNZ to process audio
Copy	The generally accepted industry term to refer to news stories
Home Page Editor	The journalist responsible for the overall content and look of the main page of a website, and for approving the publication of stories to the site
house style	The language and style conventions of a particular news source, including such issues as how dates and times are expressed, use of honorifics, etc...
iNews	The software system used by RNZ to write and edit news content (text) for both broadcast and publication
ELF	The software system used by RNZ to publish content to their website and other digital platforms
Media Council	The self-regulatory body funded by New Zealand's news media to oversee standards in online content
NPO	The public broadcaster of the Netherlands
NZ On Air	Formerly the Broadcasting Commission, the independent commission responsible for funding support for broadcasting and creative works
queue	In iNews, 'queues' refer to the place where stories are found. There is a queue where stories are placed when they are ready to be sub-edited, and a separate 'ready' queue where stories are placed ready for publication once they have been sub-edited.
RNZ	Radio New Zealand, one of NZ's two public broadcasters
SBS	The Special Broadcasting Service, one of Australia's two public broadcasters
Slack	A communication software tool, one of two in use at RNZ

Subbing/sub-editing	The process of editing a story to ensure it is fit for publication, including improving writing style and phrasing, editing for length, checking for compliance with editorial standards and ensuring it is up-to-date, readable and newsworthy
Teams	A communication software tool, part of the Microsoft suite of software, and one of two in use at RNZ
TVNZ	Television New Zealand, one of New Zealand's two public media organisations.
Upward referral	The process whereby journalists who have any concerns or editorial questions about a news story they are working on refer it to their line manager or other senior person for advice or decision
VRT	The Belgian public broadcaster
Webnews	The team in the RNZ digital content division that is responsible for creating, editing and publishing news content. It sits separately to the news team responsible for broadcast news content and is not part of the News Division.
WFH	Working from home
wire copy	This refers to any news content which is provided by third party news providers for use under licence. This is typically international news provided by dedicated wire services like Reuters or Associated Press, but can also be news provided under licence by other broadcasters or news sites including the BBC, ABC or other New Zealand news providers.
Worldwatch	The dedicated team inside the RNZ news division that edits international stories
YLE	The Finnish public broadcaster

APPENDIX 1

RADIO NEW ZEALAND CHARTER

The Radio New Zealand Amendment Act received Royal assent from 1 April 2016. The legislation makes some amendments to the Radio New Zealand Charter. The updated Radio New Zealand Charter is below.

The Charter is an important document which sets out our operating principles.

It defines what we do so that everyone – staff, listeners and other stake-holders – can easily understand our objectives and what we are expected to provide for the New Zealand taxpayer.

The Charter is reviewed every five years. [Radio New Zealand Amendment Act 2016](#).

Charter and Principles of Radio New Zealand

Purpose

- (1) As an independent public service broadcaster, the public radio company's purpose is to serve the public interest.
- (2) Freedom of thought and expression are foundations of democratic society and the public radio company as a public service broadcaster plays an essential role in exercising these freedoms.
- (3) The public radio company fosters a sense of national identity by contributing to tolerance and understanding, reflecting and promoting ethnic, cultural, and artistic diversity and expression.
- (4) The public radio company provides reliable, independent, and freely accessible news and information.

Delivery

- (5) In achieving its purpose, the public radio company must endeavour to provide services of the highest quality, which—
 - (a) are predominantly and distinctively of New Zealand:
 - (b) inform, entertain, and enlighten the people of New Zealand:
 - (c) are challenging, innovative, and engaging:
 - (d) foster critical thought, and informed and wide-ranging debate:
 - (e) stimulate, support, and reflect the diversity of cultural expression, including drama, comedy, literature, and the performing arts:
 - (f) stimulate, support, and reflect a wide range of music, including New Zealand composition and performance:
 - (g) reflect New Zealand's cultural identity, including Māori language and culture:
 - (h) provide awareness of the world and of New Zealand's place in it:
 - (i) provide comprehensive, independent, accurate, impartial, and balanced regional, national, and international news and current affairs:
 - (j) provide programmes which balance special interest with those of wide appeal, recognising the interests of all age groups:
 - (k) contribute towards intellectual and spiritual development:
 - (l) include an international service to the South Pacific in both English and Pacific languages:
 - (m) take account of services provided by other broadcasters:
 - (n) take advantage of the most effective means of delivery:
 - (o) preserve and archive broadcasting material of historical interest.

8A Principles of operation

- (1) The public radio company must, in fulfilling its Charter, exhibit a sense of social responsibility by—
 - (a) having regard to the interests of the community in which it operates; and
 - (b) endeavouring to accommodate or encourage those interests when able to do so.
- (2) The public radio company must, in fulfilling its Charter, ensure that it is not influenced by the commercial interests of other parties.
- (3) The public radio company must, in fulfilling its Charter, ensure that it operates in a financially responsible manner and, for this purpose, that it—
 - (a) prudently manages its assets and liabilities; and
 - (b) endeavours to ensure—
 - (i) its long-term financial viability; and
 - (ii) that it acts as a successful going concern.

8B Commercial-free broadcasting

- (1) The public radio company must, in fulfilling its Charter, provide its services in a commercial-free manner.
- (2) Subsection (1) is subject to subsection (3).
- (3) The public radio company may provide 1 or more of the services specified in subsection (4), if the provision of the service or services—
 - (a) is consistent with its role as a public broadcaster; and
 - (b) does not impact adversely on the provision of its services under its Charter; and
 - (c) is a fair and appropriate use of public funds.
- (4) Subsection (3) applies to the following:
 - (a) providing media services to countries outside New Zealand, other than Radio New Zealand International or any radio services that might replace, in whole or in part, Radio New Zealand International;
 - (b) authorising other providers of media services (whether by sale or licensing) to broadcast or publish content that has already been broadcast or published in a commercial-free manner by the public radio company;
 - (c) arranging for providers of delivery platforms to provide access to live broadcasts of the content of the public radio company, but only if—
 - (i) the content is free to access on the public radio company's services; and
 - (ii) the content is commercial-free, whether or not the delivery platforms are free to access; and
 - (iii) any advertising or sponsorship on the delivery platforms is not expressly or impliedly presented as advertising or sponsorship carried or endorsed by the public radio company (other than announcements of the public radio company's own services).
- (5) In this section,—

commercial-free

 - (a) means—
 - (i) free to access; and
 - (ii) without advertising and sponsorship; but
 - (b) to avoid doubt, does not include announcements by the public radio company of its own services

delivery platform—

 - (a) means any method of transmitting audio, visual, or audiovisual content; and
 - (b) includes (but is not limited to) Internet sites, applications, and software.

8C Review of Charter

- (1) The House of Representatives must periodically review the Charter.
- (2) The first review must be undertaken and completed as soon as practicable after 5 years after the commencement of the Radio New Zealand Amendment Act 2016.
- (3) A subsequent review must be undertaken and completed as soon as practicable after the fifth anniversary of the later of the dates specified in subsection (4).
- (4) For the purposes of subsection (3), the dates are—
 - (a) the date on which the select committee that reviews the Charter presents its report to the House of Representatives;
 - (b) the date on which any subsequent legislation that amends the Charter comes into force.

8D Reporting

- (1) The public radio company must include in its annual report required by section 150 of the Crown Entities Act 2004 an assessment of the extent to which its performance fulfils its Charter.
- (2) In making the assessment, the public radio company must take into account—
 - (a) research relating to a representative selection of members of the public (including persons who are not members of its current audience); and
 - (b) the measures, if any, it has taken as a result of the research.
- (3) For the purposes of subsection (2)(a), the public radio company must undertake or obtain the research on a regular basis, but at least once a year.

APPENDIX 2

RNZ EDITORIAL POLICY EXCERPTS

ON UPWARD REFERRAL:

Put simply, if in doubt, refer up. RNZ has a high level of credibility and trust among its audience. We need to zealously guard this. When there is potential for damaging errors or material breaching our standards to be published, established practices should ensure that these are checked and eliminated or, at minimum, the proper level of risk understood. It is essential therefore that all staff with editorial responsibility understand the principle of upward referral where responsibility lies with the individual to verify accuracy, fairness and safety (in ethical or legal terms). If this is not possible or questions remain, then the decision to publish, or not, must be taken by someone more senior. If an item is controversial or likely to have an extraordinary impact the most appropriate senior manager should be consulted in advance, irrespective of whether editorial advice is being sought. Throughout this document are examples of circumstances when you need to refer up. Any output which may place RNZ at legal risk, such as contempt of court or defamation, must be referred upwards. If doubt remains it must then be referred to the senior manager responsible, so the matter can be considered and any further necessary legal advice sought. Upward referral also applies to any item that may not meet RNZ's guidelines for fair, factual and balanced reporting or issues involving language, violence, privacy or poor taste. This includes on-air trailers, publicity material, and information shared via our digital platforms. None of this should be misread as implying RNZ will shrink from seeking out issues of controversy or taking justifiable risks. Decisions to publish in the public interest, in the face of legal or other threats, may be considered by senior managers with the approval of the Chief Executive and Editor in Chief.

ON EDITORIAL VALUES:

Editorial policies translate RNZ's Charter and legislative responsibilities, services, standards and expectations to the workplace to help staff make reasoned, timely and consistent decisions. Much more than just the mandated requirements of RNZ, they incorporate values concerned with social responsibility, ethical considerations and a sense of fair play and decency. They inform and guide our professional judgments, but also reassure the people to whom we are accountable, our audience, that their trust and expectations are not misplaced. This document has changed from earlier editions in that you will find it groups the majority of guidelines under the values we hold most dear: Accuracy, independence, fairness, balance and diversity; respect and decency.

Accuracy

Factual work must conform to reality, be in context and not in any way misleading or false. Staff should be enterprising and questioning in perceiving, pursuing and presenting issues. This demands thorough research and a disciplined use of language and production techniques. For other content, i.e. comedy, drama and entertainment, the due accuracy required will likely not be at the same level and will vary according to whether the content is factual, fictionalised, historical, etc.

Fairness, balance and diversity

If we get this right, the rest will follow. It is about openness and straight dealing by reporting the relevant facts and significant points of view. This has to be done through fair, ethical and balanced treatment of issues, events, people and their experiences, institutions and audiences. We must treat interviewees, sources and contributors justly and fairly. Our target audiences in New Zealand and the Pacific represent a broad diversity of cultures, interests and opinions. Our work should reflect and draw on this diversity to present relevant views and material across the spectrum.

Respect and decency

This does not imply weakness. It's about valuing the relationships we build as part of our work. Respect for the rights of others may call for careful handling of sensitive issues such as violence, sex, grief, trauma, privacy, gender, religion and taste. We need to avoid stereotypes and other prejudicial content. Interviewees and all others we deal with in the course of our activities must be treated with due respect and decency.

Independence

This is central to our integrity and credibility. It demands that staff not be influenced by pressures from political, commercial or other sectional interests or by their own personal views or activities. There must be no external interference in the presentation or content of our work or any improper influence brought to bear internally. RNZ alone has the legal and editorial responsibility for what it publishes.

ON PERSONAL OPINION:

RNZ needs to offer the audience an intelligent and informed account of issues that enables them to form their own views. Staff will have opinions of their own, but they must not yield to bias or prejudice.

To be professional is not to be without opinions, but to be aware of those opinions and make allowances for them, so that reporting is judicious and fair.

- Audiences should not be able to detect a presenter or journalist's personal views.

ON INFORMED ANALYSIS:

Some staff, including those with specialist knowledge, are able to offer analysis of events or opinions in which the event or opinion is placed in a wider context and the listeners given a clearer idea of the significance of the issue. But we draw the line at the expression of prescriptive comments, i.e. saying whether things are good or bad or telling the listeners what opinion they should hold.

APPENDIX 3

BROADCASTING STANDARDS AUTHORITY EXCERPTS OF STANDARDS

ON BALANCE:

When controversial issues of public importance are discussed in news, current affairs or factual programmes, broadcasters should make reasonable efforts, or give reasonable opportunities, to present significant viewpoints either in the same broadcast or in other broadcasts within the period of current interest unless the audience can reasonably be expected to be aware of significant viewpoints from other media coverage.

ON ACCURACY:

Broadcasters should make reasonable efforts to ensure news, current affairs and factual content:

- is accurate in relation to all material points of fact
- does not materially mislead the audience (give a wrong idea or impression of the facts).

In the event a material error of fact has occurred, broadcasters should correct it within a reasonable period after they have been put on notice.

The requirement for factual accuracy does not apply to statements which are clearly distinguishable as analysis, comment or opinion, rather than statements of fact. However, broadcasters should still make reasonable efforts to ensure analysis, comment or opinion is not materially misleading with respect to any facts:

- referred to; or
- upon which the analysis, comment or opinion is based.

APPENDIX 4

MEDIA COUNCIL EXCERPT OF PRINCIPLES

1. Accuracy, Fairness and Balance

Publications should be bound at all times by accuracy, fairness and balance, and should not deliberately mislead or misinform readers by commission or omission. In articles of controversy or disagreement, a fair voice must be given to the opposition view. Exceptions may apply for long-running issues where every side of an issue or argument cannot reasonably be repeated on every occasion and in reportage of proceedings where balance is to be judged on a number of stories, rather than a single report.

2. Privacy

Everyone is normally entitled to privacy of person, space and personal information, and these rights should be respected by publications. Nevertheless the right of privacy should not interfere with publication of significant matters of public record or public interest. Publications should exercise particular care and discretion before identifying relatives of persons convicted or accused of crime where the reference to them is not relevant to the matter reported. Those suffering from trauma or grief call for special consideration.

3. Children and Young People

In cases involving children and young people editors must demonstrate an exceptional degree of public interest to override the interests of the child or young person.

4. Comment and Fact

A clear distinction should be drawn between factual information and comment or opinion. An article that is essentially comment or opinion should be clearly presented as such. Material facts on which an opinion is based should be accurate.

5. Columns, Blogs, Opinion and Letters

Opinion, whether newspaper column or internet blog, must be clearly identified as such unless a column, blog or other expression of opinion is widely understood to consist largely of the writer's own opinions. Though requirements for a foundation of fact pertain, with comment and opinion balance is not essential. Cartoons are understood to be opinion. Letters for publication are the prerogative of editors who are to be guided by fairness, balance, and public interest. Abridgement is acceptable but should not distort meaning.

6. Headlines and Captions

Headlines, sub-headings, and captions should accurately and fairly convey the substance or a key element of the report they are designed to cover.

7. Discrimination and Diversity

Issues of gender, religion, minority groups, sexual orientation, age, race, colour or physical or mental disability are legitimate subjects for discussion where they are relevant and in the public interest, and publications may report and express opinions in these areas. Publications should not, however, place gratuitous emphasis on any such category in their reporting.

8. Confidentiality

Publications have a strong obligation to protect against disclosure of the identity of confidential sources. They also have a duty to take reasonable steps to satisfy themselves that such sources are well informed and that the information they provide is reliable. Care should be taken to ensure both source and publication agrees over what has been meant by "off-the-record".

9. Subterfuge

Information or news obtained by subterfuge, misrepresentation or dishonest means is not permitted unless there is an overriding public interest and the news or information cannot be obtained by any other means.

10. Conflicts of Interest

To fulfil their proper watchdog role, publications must be independent and free of obligations to their news sources. They should avoid any situations that might compromise such independence. Where a story is enabled by sponsorship, gift or financial inducement, that sponsorship, gift or financial inducement should be declared. Where an author's link to a subject is deemed to be justified, the relationship of author to subject should be declared.

11. Photographs and Graphics

Editors should take care in photographic and image selection and treatment. Any technical manipulation that could mislead readers should be noted and explained. Photographs showing distressing or shocking situations should be handled with special consideration for those affected

12. Corrections

A publication's willingness to correct errors enhances its credibility and, often, defuses complaint. Significant errors should be promptly corrected with fair prominence. In some circumstances it will be appropriate to offer an apology and a right of reply to an affected person or persons.