

POLISH COMMUNITY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

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REVIEW OF SBS' CODES OF PRACTICE

**SUBMISSION ON BEHALF OF THE POLISH COMMUNITY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA
& NEW ZEALAND**

This submission seeks to address two areas of activities as set out in **Code 1 Part 7 2.1 PREJUDICE, RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION** and **Code 2 Part 12 2.4 NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS**.

These two areas, in our view, need to be defined more precisely, as it is in the second that the breaches of the first usually occur. Although the **SBS SERVICE CHARTER** is laudable, some aspects of it are noted more for their breach than compliance. It is particularly evident where news and current affairs are obtained from sources outside the SBS; sources that are not bound by the SBS Codes of Practice; particularly in some documentaries screened on SBS TV.

Whilst where news is telecast in languages other than English, SBS identifies their sources and carries a disclaimer that **“it does not endorse their content”**, no such disclaimer is made before screening news and current affairs in English, although some items are drawn from sources outside the SBS, which do not necessarily comply with the SBS Codes of Practice.

If the SBS, as stated in **Code 1 Part 7 2.1**, *“seeks to counter attitudes of prejudice against any person or group on the basis of their race, ethnicity, nationality...”* and in **Code 2 Part 13**, *“Accuracy is the highest priority of news and current affairs and SBS will take all reasonable steps to ensure timely acknowledgment and corrections of any errors of fact.”* it often fails to apply these principles evenhandedly to all national or ethnic groups so as not to cause offence. Australia is a multicultural society where some ethnic groups are more numerous and better established than others, and therefore are more influential. These groups are less likely to be subjected to discrimination by media. If they are, their protests or complains are readily listened to and any misinformation rectified. Some even have the recourses to litigate with the media. But surely, the multicultural policy is based on the premise that all ethnic groups are equal.

The discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity and nationality could be avoided if the relevant Code carried specific instruction, to the journalists, to verify their sources of information and, where applicable, their historical accuracy. Discrimination in the media can be perpetrated, equally by omission (where certain well known events or news items are deliberately or through ignorance omitted), as well as by commission. The Polish community in Australia has been regularly and frequently maligned and discriminated against, in both instances, by the Australian media, and that includes the SBS, on the grounds of nationality. As this submission is not made in the form of a complaint, which is not subject of this review, we shall not refer to specific programs, times and dates. However, frequent use of terms such as “Polish Concentration Camps”, “Polish Death Camps” “Nazi Death Camps in Poland” (which implies that the Poles were the Nazis), is discriminatory as they are totally untrue. This is sometimes explained as “journalistic shortcuts”. But is it a journalistic shortcut, or a journalistic sloppiness, ignorance or plain malice? Yet, when referring to Concentration Camps on German or Austrian territory, they are referred to as “Nazi Concentration Camps”, not German or Austrian. We do not suggest that SBS should malign the German or Austrian nation - only that a greater attention should be paid to the truth in commentary on historical events. The **Principles of Service** state, inter alia, “*Ensure that feedback from audiences is communicated to people who make programming decisions*”. Our experience shows that this principle is not adhered to because the item which has been proven to be discriminatory and offensive, and for which an apology from SBS Management has been received by the complainant, is repeated over and over. It suggests that the information is not passed by the Management “down the line” to people responsible for the production of programs by so called “political correctness”. Some historical source material, generally and readily available, has been written by authors hailing from large and thus more influential nations, sometimes with imperialistic past. They tend to stereotype smaller, often conquered nations, in a negative light. Present day media, especially SBS, must not perpetuate this attitude.

SBS is probably less “guilty” of discriminating on grounds of nationality than other media, notably the ABC, nevertheless it sometimes is. This discrimination is also notable in some slanted documentaries, or even comedy. It could be avoided if: 1. The Code of Practice was more specific; 2. if it was strictly enforced; 3. if the journalist misusing it were disciplined, by management.

This submission does not propose to restrict the freedom of expression. It is a right which must not be taken away, but it must be exercised responsibly. If used irresponsibly or maliciously, it is discriminatory. If the SBS espouses the principles of multiculturalism, as appears from its **Code of Practice**, it should be a force uniting all ethnic groups, not dividing them. Often the latter seems to be the case. In reviewing the Code of Practice, attention should be given by SBS Management to reckless and irresponsible culture that permeated the staff producing some programs. This is reflected in the treatment of some races, ethnic groups, nationalities, and religions more favorably than others.

Dr Janusz Rygielski

President