

Media Release

4 April 2019

Newstalk ZB's Heather du Plessis-Allan found to have breached broadcasting standards with Pacific Islands comments

The Broadcasting Standards Authority (**BSA**) has found comments made by Newstalk ZB host Heather du Plessis-Allan, referring to Pacific Islands as leeches, breached broadcasting standards.

It has ordered the broadcaster, NZME Radio Ltd, to broadcast a statement during *Wellington Mornings with Heather du Plessis-Allan*, summarising the BSA's decision and to pay \$3,000 in costs to the Crown.

The decision and order relates to a talkback discussion about the Prime Minister attending the Pacific Islands forum in Nauru, during which Ms du Plessis-Allan said: "I mean, it's the Pacific Islands. What are we going to get out of them? They are nothing but leeches on us. I mean, the Pacific Islands want money from us. We don't need money from them."

In a follow-up broadcast, Ms du Plessis-Allan attempted to clarify her comments saying: "[s]ome chap... from the Green Party said I 'casually dehumanised our Pacific peoples'. Oh my gosh. Did I? Or did I say the Pacific Islands? I don't know, confusing people with islands?"

The Authority determined that the comments breached the good taste and decency and discrimination and denigration standards as they were inflammatory, devalued the reputation of Pasifika people within New Zealand, which includes New Zealanders of Pacific origin and had the potential to cause widespread harm.

In acknowledging the important role talkback radio plays in cultivating discussion and debate about controversial ideas and opinions, the BSA noted this "does not mean anything goes or that the host is able to offend without censure."

"[O]n this occasion we found the severity of the comments and their significant potential to cause harm, through distress and denigration, justified the upholding of these complaints and the restriction of the broadcaster's right to freedom of expression. We consider that even in the talkback context these statements went too far."

The Authority also found Ms du Plessis-Allan's attempted clarification in the second broadcast did not remedy the breaches or mitigate the harm caused by her earlier comments. In making orders the Authority determined that the additional comments in the second broadcast "inflamed the distress caused". The Authority considered Ms du Plessis-Allan was disingenuous in subsequently arguing that she had been referring to the Pacific Islands as leeches, rather than the people themselves.

"Countries are not just plots of land. They are the land and their people," the Authority stated.

In making this decision, the BSA noted the public condemnation of Ms du Plessis-Allan and acknowledged the Authority's responsibility to reflect the values and attitudes of New Zealand.

ENDS

For more information contact Catie Murray on 021 623 794.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The segments were broadcast on 4 and 11 September 2018 on Newstalk ZB. The full decision is available at <http://bsa.govt.nz/decisions/latest>. The decision was made under the Radio Code of Broadcasting Practice which is available at <http://bsa.govt.nz/standards/overview>.

ABOUT THE BROADCASTING STANDARDS AUTHORITY

The BSA is an independent Crown entity that oversees the broadcasting standards regime in New Zealand. The BSA determines complaints that broadcasts have breached standards, undertakes research and oversees the development of broadcasting standards in consultation with broadcasters.

The Authority members are Judge Bill Hastings (Chair), Paula Rose, Wendy Palmer and Susie Staley.

For more information see our website: www.bsa.govt.nz