

Dear Mr Cooney

Thank you for your email regarding the 2 April interview with Chris Schuringa of the Goongera Environment Centre on ABC Radio Melbourne's *Afternoons* program with Jacinta Parsons. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding.

In keeping with the ABC's complaints handling procedures, your correspondence has been considered by Audience and Consumer Affairs, a unit separate to and independent from the content making areas of the ABC. Our role is to review and, where appropriate, investigate complaints alleging that ABC content has breached the ABC's editorial standards. The ABC's Code of Practice can be found here: <http://about.abc.net.au/reports-publications/code-of-practice/>.

Audience and Consumer Affairs have sought information from ABC Radio Melbourne management and assessed the interview against the ABC's editorial standards for impartiality which state, relevantly, in part 4.1: *Gather and present news and information with due impartiality*.

Audience and Consumer Affairs note that as an environmentalist, Ms Schuringa's viewpoint is relevant to canvas on matters relating to the Regional Forestry Agreements (RFAs). However, the interview lacked rigour and at no point was Ms Schuringa challenged about her claims. During the interview, Ms Schuringa made a number of contentious statements including that the RFAs will allow logging in the "*last remaining fragments of unburnt forests*" which are essential for the survival of a number of threatened species.

Audience and Consumer Affairs understand that the program had made no plan to gather or present any other relevant perspective prior to the interview going to air. Following your contact with ABC Radio Melbourne, the program makers recognised that a response to Ms Schuringa's claims was required and they contacted the Minister's office requesting an interview to go to air on Friday 3 April. There was no response from the Minister's office until the program followed up on 21 April; a statement from the Minister in response to Ms Schuringa's claims was subsequently read out on air on the *Afternoons* program of 22 April. With regard to your interview request to the program, in Audience and Consumer Affairs' view, the AFPA are undoubtedly a principal relevant viewpoint on the RFAs, and there are a number of other stakeholders who could also have been approached for comment by the program in the event that the Minister was unavailable.

The RFAs are controversial, particularly in the wake of the devastating bushfire season, and an obvious matter of current public policy and debate in Victoria. This significant degree of contention around the RFAs means that the ABC's requirements for *due* impartiality are necessarily high. Audience and Consumer Affairs have concluded that the lack of rigour in the interview with Ms Schuringa, combined with the fact that more was not done to ensure a timely response to her claims, was in breach of the ABC's requirement for *due* impartiality. Please be assured that this finding has been discussed with ABC Radio Melbourne management, and in keeping with our normal processes for upheld complaints, a summary will shortly be published on our website (<https://about.abc.net.au/talk-to-the-abc/editorial-complaints/upheld-complaints/>).

Thank you again for providing the ABC with an opportunity to respond to your concerns. If you are dissatisfied with this response, you may be able to pursue your complaint with the Australian Communications and Media Authority (www.acma.gov.au).

Yours sincerely

Denise Musto

Investigations Manager
Audience and Consumer Affairs