

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Budget Estimates May 2017

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 125

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Written, 29/05/2017

Topic: 7.30 Broadcast

Senator Reynolds, Linda asked:

1. On 20 March, the ABC broadcast allegations from a man they presented as a whistle-blower speaking in fear of his job. It took a full month for 7.30 to acknowledge the fact that that the man had only worked for Aerocare for eight weeks - nine months prior to his interview. Even then, 7.30 has refused to concede that it was unreasonable to suggest he was risking his job. Do you think 7.30 has demonstrated a commitment to integrity, accuracy and responsibility in this matter?
2. Are you concerned that 7.30 itself has been involved in the falsification and manipulation of key aviation safety documents, shown on screen to support an extraordinary and unsubstantiated accusation that such documents were “irregularly doctored” by Aerocare?
3. Why did it take 1 month for 7.30 to broadcast any acknowledgement that it had breached ABC editorial standards for accuracy?
4. Has Aerocare received a response from the ABC concerning the complaints raised in relation to 7.30’s second story broadcast on 20 April?

Answer:

1. 7.30 has broadcast two stories about Aerocare. Aerocare has submitted complaints to the ABC about aspects of both of these stories, and these complaints were formally investigated by the ABC. These investigations found that two clarifications of fact were required for the first story. Neither clarification detracts from the story or the integrity of the reporting.
2. The program has advised that it had multiple sources for the claim that Aerocare workers regularly doctored important information. During the course of the story 7.30 presented illustrative material to convey this allegation. The program also included Aerocare’s denial that official paperwork was altered, and its statement that the company passed 180 audits, some of which included site inspections.

7.30 has advised that it used an original flight file as the base of a graphic illustration to accompany the reporter’s narrative about the doctoring of files. The ABC has reviewed this material and concluded that it was presented in such a way that it signalled to viewers that these documents were mock-ups, and not original source material.

3. These were complex and detailed complaints which involved the company providing substantial amounts of documentation in support of their complaints. Due process meant that all of this material needed to be carefully reviewed and considered.

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The first Aerocare story aired on 7.30 on 20 March 2017 and the complaint was received on 27 March. After an initial investigation, an online clarification and editor's note was published on 5 April. The second story aired on 20 April and this included an on air clarification in regard to the story broadcast on 20 March.

4. Yes.