[IE] Broadcasting Authority rejects a number of complaints about the Rose of Tralee

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The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) has rejected five complaints concerning separate comments made by two contestants on the Rose of Tralee programme broadcast on RTÉ One in August 2016. The Rose of Tralee is a light entertainment television programme featuring young women of Irish descent from around the globe who take part in the competition to be selected as the 'Rose' for the coming year. The BAI's decision was notable for considering the issue of entertainment programmes featuring unplanned discussion of matters of public debate, and its consequence for broadcasters' duties.

The complaints were submitted under the Broadcasting Act 2009 and various sections of the BAI Code of Programme Standards and the BAI Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs. The complaints centered on two concerns: first, an interview with the North Carolina Rose and her comments in relation to attending Mass while in Ireland, and secondly, an interview with the Sydney Rose and her comments on Ireland's 8th Amendment to the Constitution concerning abortion.

In her interview with the presenter, the North Carolina Rose stated that Mass was "really holy" and the "act of sitting down and standing up was like going to a gym and being given a 'biscuit' at the end", to which the presenter retorted, "was it gluten free?" One complainant argued that the conversation allowed the contestant to "ridicule, make fun of, and generally rubbish the Irish Roman Catholic Mass". RTÉ defended the exchange as "giving a light-hearted, humorous and respectful account of her attendance at mass", and deemed that there was "nothing blasphemous, nor was there an abuse of religions". The BAI rejected the complaints, stating that, while the comments were "irreverent and humorous" and some audience members may have been offended, participants in the programme have the right to their views and the right to frame their own experiences in their own words". The BAI were of the opinion that the comments "were not of a nature that they would cause widespread offence".

The BAI also rejected two complaints regarding an interview with the Sydney Rose "who was allowed to air her views on the 8th Amendment to the Irish Constitution and who also asked the Irish people to support the repeal of this amendment." According to one complainant, the comments "constituted an unwarranted

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interference in the internal affairs of the Irish democracy”.”

RTÉ stated that the “personal view on the 8th Amendment to the Constitution expressed by the Sydney Rose in a live, unplanned, unscripted and unforeseen supplement to her answer on a question about her work with survivors of domestic violence, certainly related to a topic of public debate”. However “the brief articulation of a personal opinion did not, in the view of RTÉ, generate current affairs content from what is essentially human interest entertainment.”

In its ruling, the BAI found that the comments were the Sydney Rose’s “personal opinion, made in the context of a light entertainment interview whose focus was on her character and her interests”. The Committee also found that the presenter “did not specifically elicit her views on the topic of Ireland’s abortion laws nor did he pursue this topic further”.

Accordingly, the BAI rejected the complaints.

Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, Broadcasting Complaint Decisions, 31 January 2017, pp. 15-31

http://www.bai.ie/en/latest-broadcasting-complaint-decisions-published-3/

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