

Broadcasting Authority rejects complaints regarding investigative programme on Ireland's Greyhound Industry

IRIS 2020-3:1/14

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On 30 January 2020, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) rejected nine complaints regarding *RTÉ Investigates: Running for their Lives*, a current affairs programme broadcast on RTÉ One on 26 June 2019. The investigative programme focused on welfare issues within the Irish greyhound industry and examined, in detail, the implications of an expert report, commissioned by the governing body for greyhound racing in Ireland, the Irish Greyhound Board (IGB). The programme reported that the expert report detailed that up to 6 000 dogs may be culled per year because they do not perform on the racetrack, and that ten times more dogs are bred each year than are needed to sustain the industry. The programme also featured undercover footage recorded at “knackeries”, and revealed how these facilities were willing to put down/euthanise greyhounds for between EUR 10 and EUR 35.

The complaints were submitted under the Broadcasting Act 2009, section 48(1)(a) (fairness, objectivity and impartiality in current affairs) and various sections of the BAI Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs (section 4, rules 4.1, 4.2). The complaints, including one submitted on behalf of the IGB, centred on a number of concerns including that the programme “was neither objective nor impartial and constituted an attack on the Irish greyhound industry.” One complainant claimed that the programme “contained several inaccuracies, including accusations regarding the number of greyhounds culled each year, the racing lifetime of greyhounds, the use of the performance-enhancing drug Erythropoietin (EPO) and the number of countries which still support greyhound racing.”

In response to the complaints, the broadcaster, RTÉ, asserted that the programme was “a comprehensive, factual investigation into practices in the greyhound industry” and was of the view that the programme was in the “public interest”, which was evident from the fact that “the programme had led to follow-up investigations by the IGB, the Department of Agriculture and the Marine and National Parks and Wildlife Service.”

The BAI's Compliance Committee, having considered the broadcast and submissions from the complainants and the broadcaster, noted that sections 4.1

and 4.2 of the BAI Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs require that content is “fair to all interests concerned and that the broadcast matter is presented in an objective and impartial manner and without any expression of the broadcaster’s own views.” The Committee noted that “a wide variety of sources were cited throughout the programme” such as the report commissioned by the IGB and the footage obtained through undisclosed recording. The Committee was of the view “that the information and footage were presented in a factual manner, and that the sources were clearly identified” and in this regard, the Committee found “that information was presented with due accuracy and did not consider that the programme was misleading to viewers.”

The Committee also had regard to some complainant’s views that the programme “omitted some key information and failed to refer to many of the positive elements of greyhound racing.” The Committee noted that there is no requirement in the Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs for a broadcaster to include all possible viewpoints on a matter, and the principle of fairness does not require the broadcaster to achieve an artificial balance or give equal airtime to all views. In the Committee’s view, “the programme contained a variety of contributors and the audience was given access to a wide range of viewpoints” and accordingly, “the subject matter was explored in a fair and impartial manner.”

The Compliance Committee did not find evidence in the programme to support the complainant’s views that greyhound racing was presented solely in a negative manner or that the content could be considered as an attack on the industry. Moreover, the Committee found that “the programme was a comprehensive exploration of the topic in a factual manner which was fair, objective and impartial.” Accordingly, the Committee did not consider that the programme infringed the Code in the manner outlined by the complainants and therefore rejected all the complaints.

Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, Broadcasting Complaint Decisions, 30th January 2020, pp. 14 -40

<http://www.bai.ie/en/download/134721/>

