



INDEPENDENT MEDIA COUNCIL

Determination

Dawn Lowe and The Countryman

On 24 February 2022 the Countryman newspaper published an article under the heading “Farmers slam MacTiernan over ‘disturbing’ Animal Welfare Advisory Committee”.

The essence of the article and source of the complaint are to be found in its first paragraph, which reads:

“WA’s peak farming bodies have blasted the State Government for not including any livestock producers on its ‘dangerous’ new Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, despite appointing two members with connections to notorious animal rights groups.”

The article was a balanced report of the views of both the farmers groups and the Minister as to the composition of the committee, other than in one respect – the use of the word ‘notorious’.

The complainant, Dawn Lowe, leads an animal welfare organisation known as Animals’ Angels. It specialises in compliance with animal welfare legislation. In the article the Minister described her as having “probably the best knowledge in the State of livestock standards and regulations”.

Dawn Lowe objects to the article linking her and her organisation with ‘notorious animal rights groups’. She asserts that the article is inaccurate as neither she nor her organisation are known for their bad actions or deeds.

Dawn Lowe also objects to the use of the word ‘disturbing’ in the headline and text of the article. However, it was a direct quote from one of the peak farming groups, as was the word ‘dangerous’. As such, it was part of a robust exchange of views accurately reflecting the point of view of one side of the argument.

That cannot be said of the use of the word ‘notorious’.

Contemporary use of the word carries negative connotations.

The Oxford dictionary defines notorious as ‘famous or well known, typically for some bad quality or deed’. The Cambridge Dictionary puts it more succinctly as ‘famous for something bad’.



The Independent Media Council Code of Conduct requires that publications take all reasonable steps to ensure reports are honest, accurate, balanced and fair. Further, where a report disparages any person or organisation, all reasonable steps must be taken to provide a contemporaneous right of reply.

We have not been provided with any material to suggest the Dawn Lowe or Animals' Angels are other than of good repute, or that there was any justification for the negative inference in the article.

Nor was any attempt made to provide a right of reply to Dawn Lowe after the linkage with 'notorious animal rights groups' impugned her integrity.

For these reasons we uphold the complaint and direct that this determination be published in the Countryman in a position as close as possible to the offending article.

Handwritten signature of Peter Blaxell in black ink.

Peter Blaxell
Chairman
**Independent Media
Council**

Handwritten signature of Jim McGinty in blue ink.

Jim McGinty
Member
**Independent Media
Council**

Handwritten signature of Cheryl Edwardes in black ink.

Cheryl Edwardes
Member
**Independent Media
Council**