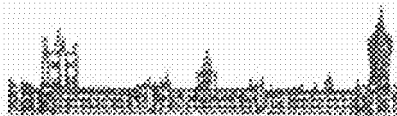


Tom Watson MP



House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Culture, Media & Sport  
2-4 Cockspur Street  
London  
SW1Y 5DH

24 January 2011

Dear Jeremy,

In light of recent revelations I write to ask you to commission a further report from Ofcom, concerning the bid for BSkyB by Rupert and James Murdoch's News Corp.

As you know, the News Corp proposal was investigated by Ofcom under the public interest provisions of the Enterprise Act 2002. There are three sub-clauses: 'plurality', 'range of broadcasting' and 'commitment to broadcasting standards'. The original referral only looked at 'plurality'.

I would like the transaction investigated under the 'broadcasting standards' category.

Section 58 of the Enterprise Act 2002 provides the Specified Considerations of which 2 C specifies:

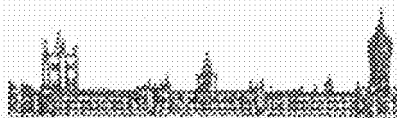
"The need for persons carrying on media enterprises, and for those with control of such enterprises, to have a genuine commitment to the attainment in relation to broadcasting of the standards objectives set out in section 319 of the Communications Act 2003".

Section 319 of the Communications Act contains the Ofcom code.

Paragraph 2 a) states "that persons under the age of 18 are protected".

Paragraph 2 b) of the code states "that material likely to encourage or to incite the commission of crime or lead to disorder is not included in television and radio services".

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Paragraph 2 d) of the code "that news included in television and radio services is reported with due accuracy".

The investigation is entitled to study whether the acquirer has shown evidence of bad practice in its other media companies.

In terms of generally criminal conduct; you will well know of the News of the World's industrial use of material acquired by illegal phone-hacking. Two individuals formerly employed by the News of the World have been imprisoned for offences related to this practice and two current employees are suspended following material obtained by civil actions against the newspaper. The police have re-referred the matter to the CPS. There is no doubt that there is much more yet to come to reveal the extent of the activities.

In terms of criminal activity in addition to phone-hacking, in the Max Mosley trial it was noted by Mr Justice Eady that the News of the World's [redacted]

[redacted] committed blackmail in trying to coerce stories from the women involved. Mr Justice Eady expressed shock that the Editor Colin Myler had not deemed it fit even to discipline [redacted] for this serious criminal offence.

In other News of the World stories, such as those involving Edward Terry (John Terry's father) and John Higgins, the snooker player, journalists have demonstrated that entrapment and inciting criminal activity is an integral part of their standard modus operandi. This approach is directly contrary to the requirement in 2 b) of the Ofcom code.

The continued payment of legal fees to the convicted private investigator Glenn Mulcaire and the enormous sums paid to settle and keep confidential civil actions raises further questions of News Corp's ongoing conduct in this matter and its commitment to revealing the truth.

The convicted phone hacker, Clive Goodman, was paid a substantial severance fee linked to a confidentiality agreement, despite being guilty of a criminal offence that would constitute gross misconduct. I refer you to the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee report on Press Standards, Privacy and Libel published last year and in particular the responses of the News International staff upon these issues. It was made clear in those investigations that the settlement of civil cases were approved at the very highest level including by James Murdoch personally.

In relation to paragraph 2 a) of the code, you may recall the coverage in the Sun newspaper in February 2009 concerning the 13 year-old alleged father Alfie Patten and his 15 year-old girlfriend Chantelle Stedman and the paternity of their child. The sensationalist coverage included a front-page photograph. These three children were not protected; they were exploited by News International.

Paragraph 2 d) of the code concerning accuracy does also not bear scrutiny when considering News Group Newspapers. The News of the World was one of a number of newspapers which had to pay damages for the falsehoods it published about the parents of Madeleine McCann. The same newspaper published a front page article "revealing" a kidnap attempt on the Beckham family which turned out to be little more than the construct of the journalists concerned. Other damages payments for false stories have been paid out to footballers such as Wayne Rooney and Ashley Cole and actors Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt.

It has long been clear that journalists employed by newspapers in the News Corp group are licensed to show complete contempt for their own professional requirements (set out in the PCC Code, obviously infringed on each of the above occasions). Now News Corp's equally disdainful approach to the criminal law is being revealed by phone hacking, blackmail and other unlawful acts.

There is scarcely a provision of the relevant parts of these Acts - be it accuracy, the protection of children or complicity in crime and disorder - which News Corp is not serially, intentionally and disdainfully breaching.

So egregious are these breaches that I am surprised that you have not already commissioned Ofcom to test News Corp's commitments to broadcasting standards. I request that you do so now as a matter of urgency.

I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely



Tom Watson  
Member of Parliament for West Bromwich East